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#Sponsored? An Investigation into the Antecedents and Consequences of Scepticism towards Brand Related User Generated Content

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#Sponsored? An Investigation into the Antecedents and Consequences of Scepticism towards Brand Related User Generated Content

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May 2020

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Abstract

User Generated Content (UGC) is being hailed as the "holy grail" of marketing due to its extensive influence on brand attitude and purchase intention. This study explores the darker side of UGC by empirically establishing the negative effects of consumer scepticism towards UGC and its antecedents. To address the research objectives the study used a sequential complementary research design consisting of an exploratory quantitative content analysis and two between-subject design experiments.

The exploratory content analysis narrowed down the content-related factors that could influence consumer scepticism that were identified in the literature. The resulting variables (media type, brand prominence, plot relevance and tone towards the brand) were further tested to establish the scepticism-mediated relationships between the identified antecedents, attitudinal (brand attitude, brand authenticity) and behavioural outcomes (purchase intention, information search intention, eWoM intention) through two between-subject design experiments: a 2x2 with brand centrality (high vs low) and UGC type (image vs text), and a 3 cell one with tone towards the brand (positive vs neutral vs negative) and goal seeking behaviour as a control variable, both experiments also highlighting humour as a moderator.

The main findings indicated that 1) centrally placed brands elicit more scepticism; 2) content with a positive tone towards the brand causes a decrease in scepticism; 3) text UGC is subject to more scepticism than images. Additionally, the findings of the first experiment indicate that humour is a moderator between content characteristics and scepticism, while the second experiment found high levels of humour led to a decrease in scepticism. Most importantly, consumer scepticism has a negative impact on all the examined outcome variables.

The study recognises a sophistication in consumer information processing by applying scepticism as a different lens to the effectiveness of UGC and makes important contributions to UGC literature. The study contributes to knowledge on UGC effectiveness by considering the impact of content-related and consumer-related factors. It is seminal in establishing a causal relationship between consumer scepticism towards UGC and key marketing outcomes.

The study provides important insights for brands allowing them to more effectively use UGC. The results indicate that brands should encourage positive reviews to increase purchase intention. Further, when collaborating with influencers or launching UGC campaigns they could consider less centrally placed brand inclusions to reduce consumer scepticism. Further, it provides a basis for evaluating the impact of UGC that consumers are sceptical towards which can contribute to brand social listening efforts.

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Glossary of Terms

UGC – User Generated Content

WoM – Word of Mouth

eWoM – Electronic Word of Mouth

ELM – Elaboration Likelihood Model

UGT – Uses and Gratification Theory

GSB – Goal Seeking Behavior

Chapter 1 – Introduction

The proliferation of social networking sites has created almost limitless opportunities for consumer-to-consumer communications. Within the scope of this new communication paradigm, User Generated Content (UGC) provides the basis of major changes to marketing practice, often leading to companies incorporating UGC into their marketing strategies. In order for brands to best leverage UGC, it is essential that companies effectively monitor, respond and use UGC (Yi et al 2019). This study aims to examine the antecedents and consequences of consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC. This will address important literature gaps and provide insight into the most efficient ways to employ brand related UGC.

This chapter will provide an outline of the background of this study. It will present the relevant context and how contemporary issues have shaped the current market. It will also detail the second paradigm shift in marketing taking place due to the increased sophistication of online communication methods. It will discuss how and why UGC influences consumers. Further, it will briefly present the gaps identified in literature, the main research questions and discuss the importance of the study in the current context as well as the potential contributions.

1.1. Marketing Paradigm Shift

Marketing focus has shifted over the years from focusing on transactions to consumer relationships (Christodoulides, Jevons, Blackshaw 2011). Evidence of this initial emphasis can easily be found in early mass communication theory; most models (Lasswell 1948; Shanon and Weaver 1949; DeFleur 1970) at the time featured a linear structure and barely accounted for the concept of "feedback". This was referred to as the "bullet communication model" because marketing communications were viewed as bullets or arrows that companies shot into consumers' minds, the nomenclature portraying how one-sided marketing communications were perceived to be. This shift in marketing focus towards consumer relationships is also embodied in mass communication theory where the emphasis has shifted from studying message and format effectiveness towards studying consumer response (Aitken et al 2008). Relationship marketing represents the degree to which "a company engages with developing a long-term relationship with its consumers" (Tse et al 2004:1162). Its goal is to ensure marketing activities are geared towards consumer interests in order to increase consumers' feelings of belonging (Luu 2019).

Currently, another paradigm shift is underway. Marketing is moving away from consumer relationships towards consumer engagement (Pansari and Kumar 2017). Consumer engagement represents consumers' interactions with brand content (Labrecque and Swani 2020). It extends beyond the cognitive and emotional aspects that form the basis of relationship marketing and includes important behavioural components (Oh et al 2017). Consumer engagement now represents a "central concept within marketing" (Marbach et al 2019:6) as it elicits intimate bonds between brands and consumers and is imperative for organisational performance (Read et al 2019). Hollebeek and Macky (2019) identify digital content marketing as one of the main sources of consumer engagement. This is being achieved largely through the use of social media (So, King, Sparks 2014).

1.2. Web 2.0 and Social Media

The term Web 2.0 was popularised by O'Reilly (2005) and is often used to refer to this new generation of websites and content based around interactivity and collaboration. Although interactivity and collaboration are by no means exclusive to the concept of Web 2.0, it has brought about an increase in mediums where these prosper. With the increased popularity and accessibility of the internet, a new type of website also appeared – Social Networking Sites. These allow users to connect regardless of geographical distance and so a content creation revolution was created.

 "Marketing is evolving into true participatory conversations" (Muniz and Schau 2011:1). The advent of Web 2.0 placed more power in the hands of users. Consumer-to-consumer and consumer-to-brand communication suddenly became easier and more accessible. Social media websites and online stores with integrated consumer reviews created the opportunity for dialogue (So, King, Sparks 2014). Two-way communication in an industry where the standard used to be "talking at" consumers (Hoffman and Novak 1996) shifted how marketers and customers approached consumption and communication.

Social media use is becoming an increasingly important part of consumers' everyday lives. According to ONS (2019), 93% of UK households have internet access and 87% of adults use the internet daily or almost every day, around 67% of adults use social networking sites. Such a large percentage of internet and social media users creates important opportunities for brands.

"Audiences, empowered by these new technologies, occupying a space at the intersection between old and new media, are demanding the right to participate" Jenkins (2006: 24). These instances of "audience participation" have given rise to new respect towards consumers, some have now dubbed them "prosumers" or "co-creators" (Fuller 2010, Burmann 2010). The content consumers create and post online is widely known as User Generated Content (UGC).

1.3. User Generated Content (UGC)
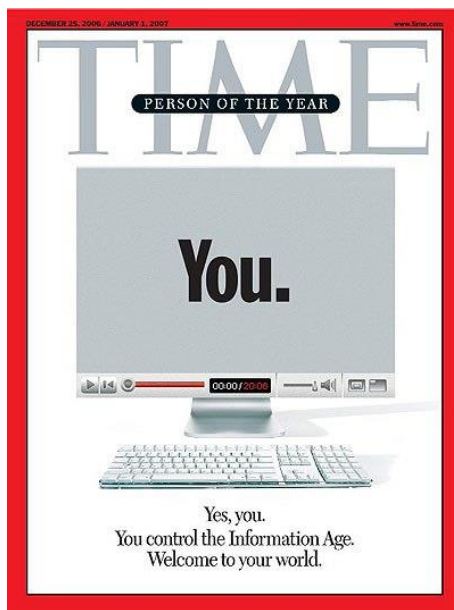
Figure 1 Cover of Time Magazine December 2006

Almost 15 years ago, in 2006 Time Magazine acknowledged a revolution in content creation by declaring "YOU" the person of the year, with the caption "YOU – Yes, you. You control the Information Age. Welcome to your world." This served to show how powerful consumers had become in making their voices heard online. UGC can take a variety of forms and be hosted on a variety of platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter etc.) and it is often used to opine about products or services.

However, one must acknowledge that not all or even most consumers are active content creators. Some estimates place the number of active content creators at 1% of users. This trope has been so widely accepted it has become known as the 1% rule (Huang et al 2019, Arthur 2006). Van Dijk (2009) reports a significant increase in these numbers with around 13% of consumers creating content in online communities. Further, according to ONS (2019) figures, 35% of internet users have shared content they created online in the past year. This last figure solidly disproves the 1% rule and shows that consumers have dived headfirst into content creation. Daugherty et al (2008) found that consumers were much more likely to create content than simply consume UGC, which in and of itself is a very strong indication of the participative culture that is emerging.

The concept of consumer-to-consumer communications is by no means new. However, the advent of social media has increased the reach to a dramatic degree and has made UGC a valued resource for consumers' decision-making process (Nam et al 2020).

1.4. UGC's Influence on Consumers

Due to the increased influence of UGC on consumers numerous websites dedicated solely to reviewing products, services and brands have appeared, such as TripAdvisor, TrustPilot, or Yelp. Most, if not all, online shopping websites now also have dedicated sections for consumer reviews and questions. The transition to online communication increased the reach and added permanence to the message but decreased some of its effectiveness (Nielsen 2015) due to the diminished interpersonal relationship between sender and receiver.

UGC is both a blessing and a curse to marketers. Its influence is greater than that of marketer generated content (Muller and Christandl 2019). UGC informs consumer purchases (Chen et al 2011), acts as both a predictor and driver of sales (Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006, Amblee and Bui 2011), influences stock price (Tirunillai and Tellis 2012), increases consumer engagement (Lee et al 2018) and is also an important contributor to achieving numerous other marketing outcomes (Cheung and Thadani 2012, Christodoulides et al 2012).

Companies have started noticing a growth in UGC and have already found ways to use this type of content to their benefit. Through integrating customer reviews into shopping pages, consumers are reassured about the products they are purchasing (Ludwig et al 2013). Creating communities around brands where consumers can interact with each other and the brand helps maintain loyalty (Brodie et al 2013). From a marketing perspective "UGC is a key source of rich, timely knowledge in business" (Cuomo et al 2020:578) and helps the brand understand consumer experiences and identify potential issues (Abbasi et al 2019).

Despite the growing number of studies identifying the positive aspects of UGC, there are also drawbacks. Consumers create content to praise companies as well as vent their frustrations. Negative UGC has a greater impact on consumers than positive UGC (Cheung and Thadani 2012, Pan and Chiou 2011, Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006). It can decrease product attitude and purchase intention (Chang et al 2013). Surprisingly, it is not only negative UGC that can have a detrimental impact on consumer attitudes. In one of the few studies on how extremely positive UGC may negatively impact consumer behaviour, Yi et al (2019) found that in some circumstances extremely positive UGC can harm consumer purchase intention. This is attributed to consumer scepticism towards content that is perceived as being "too" positive, while the basis for the effects discussed above is the trust consumers place in UGC.

1.5. Consumer Trust and Scepticism

Consumer trust and scepticism are two very important concepts for UGC. The effectiveness of UGC on consumers stems from the trust consumer place in the source of the content: other consumers (Kozinets 2002). The lack of perceived commercial intent of UGC is usually enough to elicit trust from those who view it.

Even though consumers are engaging with brands more online, their attitudes towards advertising online are mostly negative (Tsang et al 2004). Most consumers no longer trust advertising claims and tend to avoid advertising messages both online and offline (Cho and Cheon 2004). To compound that the internet is also viewed as the least trustworthy medium of communication when compared to others such as TV, radio or print (Nielsen 2015). This effect is felt at all levels of online communication, including consumer to consumer and marketing communications. Thus, internet communications are subjected to an increased amount of scrutiny and scepticism from consumers.

With the advent of fake news scandals, consumers have been prompted to be more vigilant about the information they are exposed to. This vigilance is increased in online spheres such as social media while traditional media formats are less affected (Chahal 2017). A recent study (Jang and Kim 2018) found that consumers believe themselves and their peer groups are less likely to believe fake news, perceiving other individuals as being more vulnerable to media effects than themselves. Despite these views, however, a study by the Pew Research Centre found that 23% of respondents had shared at least one item of fake news on social media (Barthel, Mitchell and Holcomb 2016). This indicates that quite a large percentage of consumers are affected by this phenomenon. Its media coverage only serving to increase consumer awareness.

Scepticism towards traditional marketing efforts has been thoroughly established in literature, however, there are fewer studies that examine the impact of consumer scepticism on UGC. Reimer and Benkenstein (2016) and Yi et al (2019) both proposed the idea of scepticism towards UGC. They found that when consumers are sceptical of UGC there can be negative consequences for brands. However, little is understood about the full scope of the impact of consumer scepticism towards UGC.

1.6. Contemporary Issues in Online Marketing

Two trends are currently being observed in consumers: increased knowledge about persuasion methods, as well as a preference to engage with brands in encounters of their choosing. To illustrate this further the banner ad, the predominant form of online advertising, has declined in efficiency and engagement rates (Manjoo 2014). This is due to what has been termed as "banner blindness" (Burke et al 2005) where consumers consciously or unconsciously avoid looking at adverts they encounter online. While it seems contradictory that consumers are both distracted by and ignore advertising, online studies have shown that when adverts of this type are very hard to ignore (i.e., flashing images, pop-ups) consumers will still experience very low recall (Burke et al 2005). This avoidance has become so ingrained consumers often ignore legitimate and informative website banners (Benway 1999).

The above-mentioned dislike and avoidance of advertising online eventually resulted in the creation of various ad-blocking programs for PCs and mobile phones. The first online ad-blocking program came about in 2006 (i.e., AdBlockPlus). Around 25% of the UK population is now using ad blocking software (IABUK 2019). These applications allow users to filter out advertising everywhere online and across multiple platforms.

Now armed with the ability to bypass advertising completely with the use of ad-blocking software consumers are no longer at the mercy of advertisers and can choose how and with whom they interact with online. This indicates that companies need to focus on engaging consumers in a conversation rather than continuing with traditional methods. The recognition of this need is also reflected in the paradigm shift discussed earlier. While traditional advertising methods are by no means obsolete, their efficiency is only likely to further decline so other more effective means of communication to be employed. The existence of resistant consumers is by no means catastrophic: they can be regarded as constructive challenges for marketers to create new ways of engaging with consumers (Kozinets and Handelman 2004). Companies are now looking for other ways to communicate with consumers to keep pace with both changing attitudes and technological advancements.

Because of the distrust and increase in both mechanical (channel switching, skipping advertising, use of ad blocker software, Tivo etc.) and behavioural advertising avoidance, consumers have turned to each other for sources of product information. UGC has rapidly

advanced as being one of the most trusted sources of product or service information for consumers (Nielsen 2015). Consumers are now less likely to be exposed to push marketing and will most often engage in pull marketing (acquiring the information they require from their preferred sources), which are not always those of company origin. This has made both marketers and academics interested in the phenomenon with studies being focused on UGC consumption, creation and effectiveness.

Several studies have explored the negative brand related outcomes arising from negative brand related UGC (Wakefield and Wakefield 2018, Park and Lee 2009, Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006). However, marketer actions can lead to negative outcomes from positive UGC as well (Yi et al 2019). The practice is known colloquially as "shilling" or "astroturfing" and academically as Viral Stealth Marketing, posing/posting as satisfied consumers online. While decried by as unethical, it is still being employed and rising in popularity (Liu et al 2019). This can serve to provide companies with fake positive reviews to sway customers into purchasing the product or service or to disseminate brand related UGC to achieve other marketing goals. A recent study found that 72% of consumers want standards put in place to combat fake reviews (Skeldon 2020). These findings come on the heels of several recent scandals involving companies' practices of having employees post fake reviews for their product or service (Elassar 2019, BBC 2019, Jones 2019).

Consumers are becoming more knowledgeable about marketer tactics and have become more sceptical of UGC. However, with the internet being the perfect environment for such manipulations the temptation to resort to such tactics is high. The internet is a relatively anonymous medium (Ku et al 2012), and Nam et al (2020) identify anonymity as being one of the defining characteristics of UGC. Online anonymity also ensures that consumers have no way of gaining definitive proof about whether a content creator is a genuine supporter or a "shill" (Ayeh et al 2013). This is supported by findings from Dellarocas (2003) and Smith et al (2005) who found that UGC is less trusted than traditional word-of-mouth due to the absence of source cues online. This may be one of the reasons why many have continued with the practice. However, misuse of these tactics can have disastrous consequences for the brand as consumers can feel like they have been tricked and lied to (Kaikati and Kaikati 2004). A study (Skeldon 2020) found that 78% of UK consumers that suspect a product has fake or fraudulent reviews will avoid using the brand ever again. This highlights the steep cost of consumer scepticism towards UGC but does little to clarify how consumers make the determination and

become sceptical. While research has identified some of the consequences of uncovering stealth marketing (Campbell and Kirmani 2000, Wei et al 2008), none have dealt with what influences consumers to identify certain instances of content as being untrustworthy.

The following section will identify the aims of this study by articulating the research questions it will endeavour to answer.

1.7. Aims and Research Questions

The purpose of this research is to determine the antecedents and consequences of consumer scepticism towards UGC. Content-related antecedents are examined to determine how they impact consumer scepticism and how that influences attitudes and behaviours towards the brand.

The study proposes an innovative approach to scepticism literature by applying in the context of UGC. Extensive information is available on the antecedents and consequences of UGC trust. The concept of scepticism, while widely applied to advertising, has scarcely been considered in this context before.

To clarify the aims of this thesis as well as their importance relating to existing literature the three main research questions are presented below.

1. **What content characteristics impact consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC?**

This research question aims to address the two major gaps in UGC literature: the lack of diversity of UGC examined and the lack of understanding of how content characteristics contribute to the impact it has consumers.

Most of the research on brand related UGC uses stimuli that are evaluative in nature (ratings and reviews) (Muller and Christandl 2019) and tends to relate directly to the brand or product (Smith et al 2012). However, content where the brand is presented peripherally or not being evaluated exists. Roma and Aloini (2019) give the example of YouTube videos in which brands can be briefly present. Previous studies in the area of product placement have indicated that

similar content is still effective (Russell 2002), however similar studies have not been conducted in a UGC context.

The main research in the area of content characteristics is concerned with tone towards the brand and focuses on how consumers respond to differences in tone in ratings and reviews (Tang et al 2014). Other characteristics have not been explored in depth. The importance of addressing this gap is high given current social media trends. Adweek (2017) found that consumers prefer images to text when it comes to UGC. This is also reflected in the increased popularity of primarily visual social media such as Instagram and Snapchat (Nanne et al 2020). As such, understanding the differences in effectiveness between various types of UGC would be an important contribution to knowledge.

Another consequence of these gaps is the applicability of existing research. The variety of brand related UGC being created has increased so there is a distinct need for research that accounts for a wider array of content. Further, results observed for one specific type of UGC may not apply to the whole range (Muller and Christandl 2019). As a result, this study aims to examine how content characteristics impact consumer scepticism of brand related UGC and by doing so would address two important gaps in existing research and contribute to literature on UGC effectiveness.

2. How does consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC affect brand related attitudinal and behavioural outcomes?

The third gap identified in literature relates to the impact of scepticism on brand related UGC. Previous research has established that consumers can have sceptical reactions towards a variety of marketing messages such as advertising (Panic et al 2013), product placement (Cowley and Barron 2008), sponsored content on social media (Boerman et al 2017) and have identified a series of negative consequences in terms of brand attitude and purchase intention. However, this concept has not been considered in the context of brand related UGC. Zhang, Ko and Carpenter (2016) state that current studies into UGC tend to assume that consumers implicitly trust brand related UGC. A more recent study by Yi et al (2019) acknowledges the impact consumer scepticism could have on the effectiveness of UGC but does not directly explore it.

Addressing this research question would provide important contributions to scepticism literature. Empirically examining the impact of scepticism towards brand related UGC in terms

of both behavioural and attitudinal outcomes would also expand the scope of outcomes that have been examined in relation to UGC.

3. What are the dynamics between content characteristics, consumer scepticism and attitudinal and behavioural brand related outcomes?

This research question aims to establish the types of relationships between the constructs being examined in the previous research questions. The thesis will empirically establish the types of relationships between the antecedents and consequences of consumer scepticism of brand related UGC and propose a conceptual framework. Because the scepticism has not been considered in this context before the study must establish the nature, direction and strength of the relationship between it and its antecedents and brand related outcomes. This highlights another methodological gap in consumer scepticism literature. Most studies that examine the phenomenon of consumer scepticism in different areas of marketing use disclosures to ensure consumers are aware of the persuasive intent of the content (Boerman et al 2017, Wei et al 2008, Campbell and Kirmani 2000). Consumer scepticism is analysed as an antecedent to changes in brand attitudes, rather than an outcome resulting from consumers' reactions to the content. This study builds on the findings of Muller and Christandl (2019) which was one of the only studies to evaluate what influences consumer scepticism.

These findings would have a significant impact on both UGC and scepticism literature by clarifying the existing relationships as well as addressing an important methodological gap. Interest in how content characteristics impact consumer scepticism is increasing among researchers. Recently, there have been a few studies examining how executional factors of online branded entertainment or UGC impact consumer scepticism (Choi et al 2018, Muller and Christandl 2019). However, this area of research is in its infancy and this study could bring valuable contributions to the field.

Figure 2 below illustrates the identified research questions and proposed relationships between the constructs being examined.
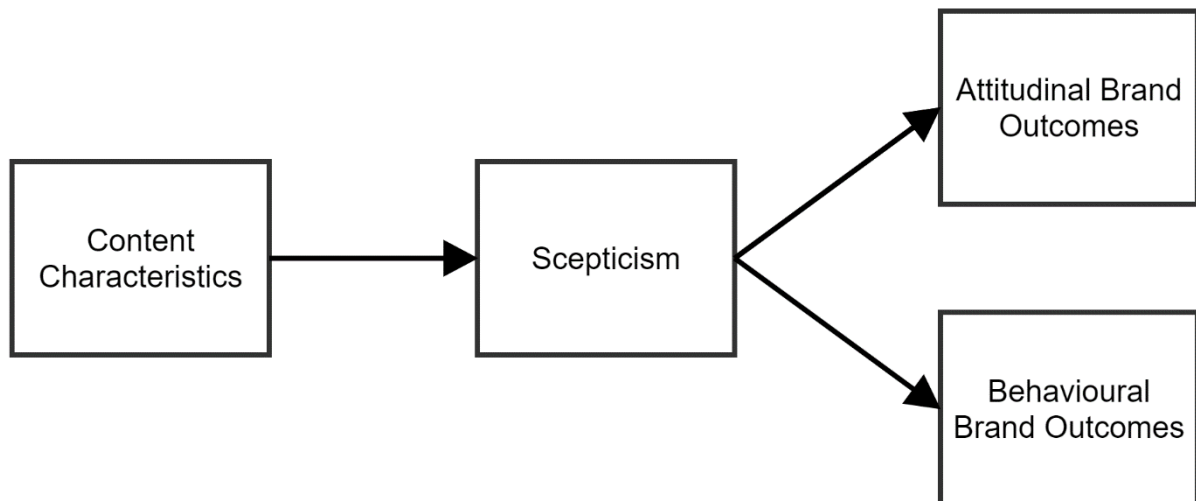
Figure 2 Initial Theoretical Framework

The following section will discuss the study importance in terms of marketing practice by reflecting on how the potential findings could aid brands in their marketing efforts.

1.7.1. Study Importance

> *"A major challenge in utilizing UGC, however, lies in the sheer amount of*
> *UGC available and the difficulty in identifying the more valuable pieces*
> *that are likely to make a real impact on businesses and other consumers"*
> *(Liu-Tompkins and Rogerson 2012:71)*

The study will address some important gaps in existing literature and provide important insight for marketing practice. The contributions to theory were discussed in the expounding of the research questions. This section will highlight how the findings of the thesis will contribute to marketing practice.

Two main methods through which brands leverage UGC are by integrating it into marketing campaigns and using it for insight into what consumers are thinking about the product, brand or service. The results of this study would aid both these purposes.

Starbucks' White Cup Contest is one of the most well-known UGC based campaigns. In 2014 they encouraged customers to draw on Starbucks drinks cups and post the images online (Starbucks 2014). The winners of the contest would have their design featured on a limited-

edition cup. Similar campaigns where brands encourage their consumers to produce UGC are commonplace, especially through the use of hashtags. However, these types of campaigns can also backfire, one more recent example is Adidas' #DareToCreate campaign in 2019. It was launched on Twitter and encouraged users to create content with their hashtag after which the official Adidas UK tweeted a picture with a customised shirt with their Twitter username. Because of the lack of oversight, several users with offensive usernames took advantage of it and the official Adidas Twitter account which was performing these actions automatically ended up creating several extremely offensive tweets (Hickman 2019). The campaign was suspended shortly afterwards.

UGC trust literature identifies source-based cues as the basis of the formation of trust (Pan and Chiou 2011). There is a lack of understanding concerning how content-related factors could impact this relationship. When leveraging UGC for campaigns the source-based cues could be lost (Smith et al 2005). This means that consumers often have to rely solely on the content to make their judgements, thus having an understanding of how content-based factors would impact scepticism would allow also for more reliable decision making.

This study would provide important insight into how the characteristics of UGC can impact how consumers respond to it. The results would allow brands a better understanding of what types of content are the most effective. These could provide guidance to brands into what types of UGC to encourage consumers to create or which type of UGC to feature more prominently. This addresses an important industry need, 50% of consumers have stated that they would like guidelines from brands when creating brand related UGC, but only 12% of brands provide these (Adweek 2014). A better understanding of how content characteristics affect consumer responses would provide brands with actionable insight.

In terms of social listening Liu, Jiang and Zhao (2019) identify four main methods UGC is used: competitor identification, sentiment analysis, consumer attitude analysis and competitive advantage analysis. Further, Schweidel and Moe (2014) state that companies use UGC in order to make significant changes to their product offering. For example, Oreo decided to reduce the amount of trans fats in their products after analysing UGC. The study will aid with better quantification of the impact of consumers scepticism towards brand related UGC because it will consider a wider variety of outcome variables, both attitudinal and behavioural. This will extend current understanding of the impact of UGC and aid social listening efforts as well as

allow for better forecasting of consumer behavioural change based on UGC inclusion in campaigns.

To better understand how the thesis will address the proposed research questions the following section will detail how the thesis is structured.

1.8. Thesis Structure

The thesis is structured into nine chapters as follows:

Chapter 1 discussed the relevant **background** information and situated the study in the current context. It discusses the aims of the study and the research questions and provided a brief overview of the theoretical and practical contributions.

Chapter 2 presents the relevant extant literature. The **literature review** is structured into three main parts. The first discusses UGC literature from a more general perspective. It discusses the conceptualisation of UGC in literature, its taxonomy, consumer motivation for UGC creation and consumption, the impact of UGC on consumers and its applications in marketing practice. The second part will discuss the theoretical background of the study. It establishes the relevance and applicability of information processing theory, trust, and scepticism literature. Lastly, it draws parallels between other streams of research in order to identify potentially relevant antecedents to scepticism in this context. The third part identifies the significant gaps in knowledge based on the previous analysis, proposes a theoretical framework based on the examined literature, explains the relationships between the proposed variables and reprises the research questions.

Chapter 3 outlines the research design and **methodology** adopted for the study. It discusses the research philosophy, research approach, research strategy and ethical considerations.

Chapter 4 discusses the exploratory **content analysis** (study 1). The chapter presents a detailed content analysis methodology, data collection procedure, data analysis and discussion of results. Lastly, it highlights the relevant content characteristics identified for inclusion in the following experiments.

Chapter 5 articulates the **conceptual framework and hypotheses.** It presents a more in-depth discussion on the proposed relationships between variables and briefly reprises the relevant literature in order to formulate hypotheses.

Chapter 6 discusses the **methodology for the two experiments** being conducted (study 2 and 3). It discusses experiment design methodology in detail, the study division, operationalisation of variables, and data collection.

Chapter 7 provides the **analysis** of the results of the two experiments conducted. It is divided into two main parts each corresponding to one of the experiments and is structured based on the proposed hypotheses.

Chapter 8 discusses the **results** of study 2 and 3 in the context of the proposed research questions and content analysis results. It addresses how the findings of the three studies address the identified research questions. Secondly, it analyses the validity of the proposed conceptual framework.

Chapter 9 presents the **conclusions**, provides a thesis summary, analyses the key contributions of the study to research and practice, discusses the limitations of the study and the directions for further research.

1.9. Conclusions

In conclusion, this chapter has established the importance of UGC for both consumers and brands. It has highlighted how the contemporary context has exacerbated consumers' scrutiny of information they are exposed to online. This scrutiny manifests itself in a variety of ways, however, in the context of UGC is poses a novel set of challenges. Consumer scepticism towards UGC has been tangentially referred to in a small number of studies but none have conducted an in-depth investigation of the phenomenon in this context. Establishing the antecedents and consequences of scepticism will contribute to the existing literature on UGC and scepticism addressing important gaps in knowledge. Further, it will assist brands by clarifying how to best leverage UGC in their marketing efforts either through co-creation efforts or marketing communications integration.

The following chapter will present a review of the existing literature in order to better situate the study in the current context and analyse how the research questions have been addressed in other studies.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

The previous chapter presented relevant background information. It discussed how the proliferation of social media and UGC determined another marketing paradigm shift. Moreover, it explored the impact of UGC on consumers and how brands can leverage this type of content. Further, it identified how other contextual factors have impacted how consumers interact with UGC. Lastly, it presented the research questions and study aims while also detailing the contributions to research and practice.

This review of existing literature aims to enable establishing a more detailed theoretical framework illustrating the antecedents and consequences of consumer scepticism towards UGC. In order to aid in doing so it will discuss a variety of studies that are directly and indirectly relevant to the research questions proposed in the earlier chapter. Because the concept of consumer scepticism has not been extensively examined in this context in addition to UGC literature the study will consider other streams that could provide insight into the mechanism and relationships being examined.

This chapter is structured into three main parts. **The first section** will discuss UGC more broadly. It will present and critique existing conceptualisations of UGC and propose a much-needed marketing specific definition and taxonomy in light of current disagreements as to the definition of UGC (Christodoulides et al 2012). It will analyse how other studies have categorised UGC in order to establish which, if any, would be relevant in the context of consumer scepticism. UGC consumption will be analysed from the perspective of Uses and Gratifications Theory to provide a clearer picture of how consumers interact with UGC. Consumption of UGC is inextricably linked with its creation (Shao 2009). As such, analysing motivation for UGC creation will provide valuable insight into the phenomenon and will also clarify how scepticism towards UGC can lead to content creation. Lastly, to highlight how

brands are leveraging UGC the section will discuss UGC based marketing strategies, the impact of UGC on consumers, and its potential drawbacks.

The second section will analyse the related constructs that form the study's theoretical background. It will discuss theories in communication research, focusing on information processing frameworks to explain how consumers process UGC. Information processing theories being analysed are the ELM framework (Petty and Cacioppo 1986), encoding and decoding theory (Hall 2001) and other non-cognitive routes to persuasion. Understanding how consumers process information will highlight the various mechanisms which can explain how consumer attitudinal and behavioural changes are achieved in the case of brand related UGC. These will provide a deeper insight into the impact of UGC and be used to support the proposed relationships in the theoretical framework.

Further, it will analyse literature on consumer trust and scepticism as they constitute central elements of research questions. Consumer trust represents the basis of UGC effectiveness (Chari et al 2016). Scepticism is a novel lens that has not been frequently applied to brand related UGC. However, in light of the contemporary context detailed in section 1.6, it is a very relevant concept that can provide important insight into consumer behaviour and challenge the frequent assumption that consumers inherently trust brand related UGC (Zhang, Ko and Carpenter 2016). Establishing how trust and scepticism formation takes place will assist in identifying the antecedents of scepticism that have already been discussed in literature.

Lastly, this section analyses other methods currently employed to reduce consumer scepticism towards marketing communications. This will allow for the identification of potential antecedents explored in related literature that have not yet been applied in a UGC context. Because little research has been done into the executional factors that determine UGC effectiveness (Liu-Tompkins and Rogerson 2012), parallels need to be drawn from other streams of literature such as product placement, native advertising and influencer marketing. While brand related UGC is not wholly equivalent to either of the abovementioned concepts, they share important commonalities. The main difference between them is the fact that the commercial intent is most often disclosed allowing consumers to more easily identify instances of persuasion, as opposed to brand related UGC where consumers have to make their own judgements about the trustworthiness of the content (Muller and Christandl 2019).

The third section will discuss the relevant answers to the research questions uncovered in the literature review and the identified gaps in both research and methodology. To this end, it will present the key constructs that were derived from the literature examined.

To clarify and simplify the above discussion on the structure of the chapter the following diagram will illustrate the structure of the second chapter.
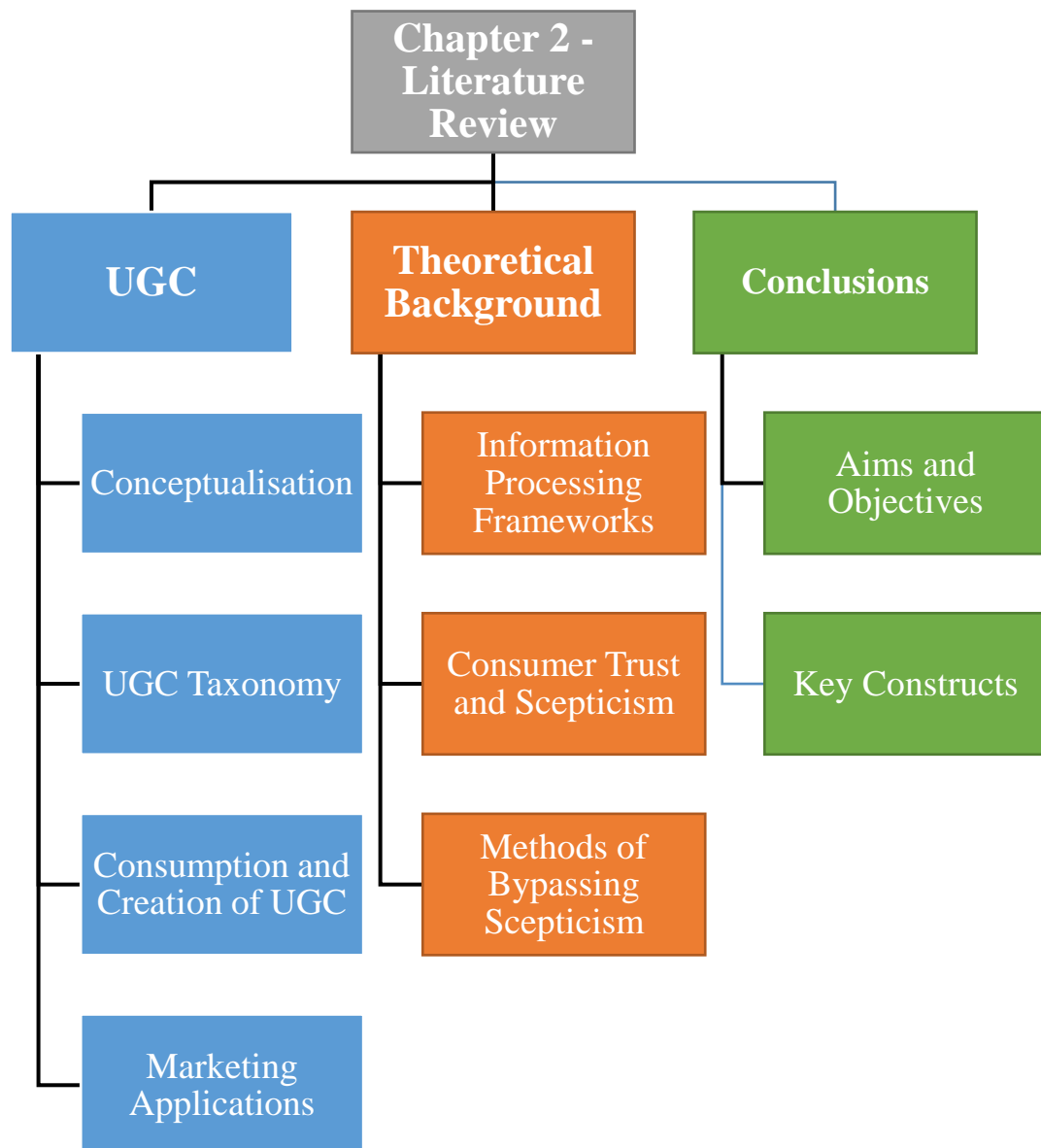
Figure 3 Chapter 2 Structure

The following section will discuss the research questions proposed in the introduction and address which streams of extant literature are being covered to answer them and provide a relevant context to the study.

2.2. Research Questions

This section will restate the research questions and highlight how the literature being analysed contributes to providing answers and insight that will be used in the primary data collection.

This study aims to determine the antecedents and consequences of consumer scepticism towards UGC. Content-related antecedents are examined to determine how they impact consumer scepticism, how scepticism influences attitudinal and behavioural marketing outcomes and the nature of the relationships between these constructs.

What content characteristics impact consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC?

To identify which content related variables impact consumer scepticism will require merging several literature streams. Existing literature on UGC has only examined the impact of a small subsection of potentially relevant characteristics. A more detailed examination will be achieved by also analysing literature on product placement, native advertising and humour appeals and extrapolating the findings to a UGC context. It will also discuss studies on consumer trust and scepticism in order to determine if any other relevant factors can be identified. Unifying a variety of literature streams will allow for a more comprehensive approach to identifying the potential variables that will constitute the basis for further analysis in the primary data collection.

How does consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC affect attitudinal and behavioural outcomes?

Understanding the impact of a sceptical reaction towards brand related UGC is an important aspect for both theory and practice. To understand how consumer scepticism impacts attitudinal and behavioural outcomes the literature review analyses extant studies on UGC, trust and scepticism. UGC literature will provide a more detailed analysis of the effect of UGC in terms of brand related outcomes. While studies on trust and scepticism will allow for an understanding of how they relate to the identified outcomes. As such analysing findings from a variety of other related topics will allow for a wider scope of outcome variables to be identified and examined.

What are the dynamics between content characteristics, consumer scepticism and attitudinal and behavioural brand related outcomes?

After identifying the antecedents and consequences of consumer scepticism, this study aims to clarify the relationship between them. This will be addressed in the literature review through the proposal of a theoretical framework, which will be empirically established through the primary data collection. To articulate the theoretical framework the study will consider exiting literature on information processing methods.

The next section will delve into the central concept of this research: User Generated Content. This will establish a solid base of understanding of both the theoretical and methodological gaps in existing research as well as present its current uses and studied effects.

2.3. User Generated Content

This section will critically analyse extant studies relating to User Generated Content (UGC). It will discuss the definitions currently found in academic literature as well as propose a new marketing-oriented definition. Secondly, it will examine UGC taxonomy detailing aspects relating to characteristics, format, tone, and message. Further, it will analyse consumer motivations for creating and seeking out UGC. Lastly, it will discuss the advantages, disadvantages, and current integrations in marketing practice of UGC.

2.3.1. Conceptualization of UGC

As discussed in the introduction chapter UGC evolved from the initial concept of Word of Mouth. Currently, there is no universally accepted definition for UGC (Christodoulides et al 2012). As a result, table 1 below illustrates various definitions that have been proposed in the literature.

Table 1 Definitions of UGC in Existing Literature

Definition	*Source*
"media content created or produced by the general public rather than by paid professionals and primarily distributed on the internet"	Daugherty et al. (2008:1)
"Is content that is created outside professional routines and practices"	Smith et al (2012:2), Roma and Aloini (2019)
"Content made publicly available over the Internet, which reflects a certain amount of creative effort, and is created outside of professional routines and practices"	Christodoulides et al (2012:55)
"refers to media content created by users to share information and/or opinions with other users"	Tang, Fang, Wang (2014:1)
"refers to any material created and uploaded to the Internet by non-media professionals, whether it is a comment posted on Amazon.com, a professional-quality video uploaded to YouTube or a student's profile on Facebook"	Presi et al (2014)
"any material that is created outside professional practices, reflects effort and is publicized online"	Chari et al (2016:1072)

While the definitions presented above are diverse in their description of UGC, this is due to the wide array of formats in which it can manifest and purposes it can serve, as highlighted by Presi et al (2014) in their definition. There is a wide breadth and little accord about what exactly constitutes UGC (Christodoulides et al 2012). These definitions, despite being presented in marketing-related papers, define the wider concept of UGC from a media perspective ignoring the role brands play in this context. As a result, they define the phenomenon in its entirety rather than just the subcategory that is of interest to the marketing industry. This acknowledges the existence of areas of UGC which do not include commercial

references. However, in marketing research, a narrower definition would be better suited for understanding the scope of research being conducted.

The central characteristic that is considered defining for UGC as established in the above definitions is the source: this type of content must be created by someone independent of the company's platform. However, we posit that from a marketing perspective there are several "layers" of UGC based on the level of commercial relevance which Figure 4 below exemplifies.

As evidenced in most of the definitions above, UGC refers to a broad encompassing of artefacts created by consumers. This can include anything from blogs, images to websites. This is the level most definitions of the concept stop at, as such, it is a broad all-encompassing term. To further narrow the area of interest, brand related UGC refers to content that makes explicit reference to a brand[1]. As such the difference between the two layers is firmly delineated. If UGC features any brand signifiers, then it can be termed as brand related. In this case, these brand signifiers could merely be included, and the content does not have to be evaluative in nature. Ratings and reviews constitute content that is overtly evaluative. The difference between brand related content and evaluative content is that for ratings and reviews their purpose is solely to provide an assessment of the brand, brand related UGC may have a variety of purposes such as entertainment, conspicuous consumption, or even inadvertent inclusion. As such while research in the area of UGC focuses on ratings and reviews the wider area of brand related UGC is worthy of exploration. This gap is also highlighted by Muller and Christandl (2019) where they state that there is an overabundance of research relating to reviews, but little in terms of other forms of UGC.

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[1] This can be a product, service, company, person etc.
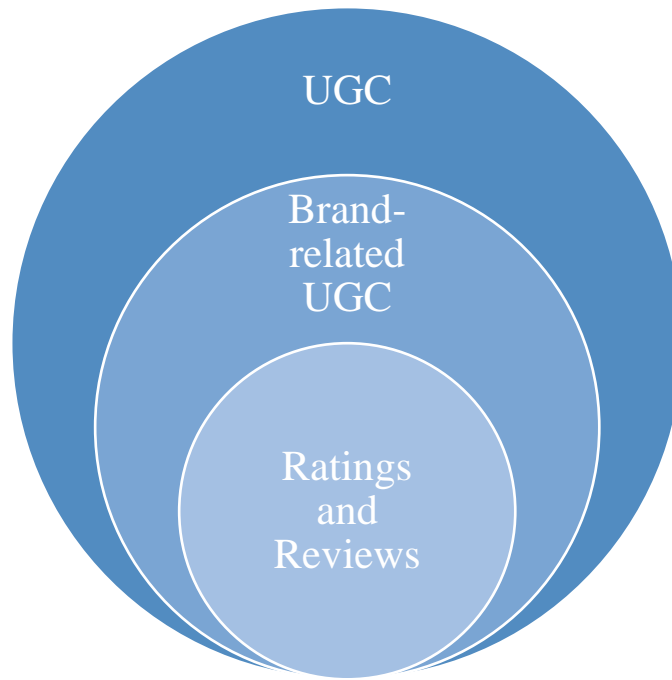
Figure 4 Proposed Categorisation of UGC

To clarify the differences between these three layers of UGC Figure 5 provides some examples created by the author. For example, a YouTube video which provides a review of a product is quite different from another that features it in the background or among several other brands. The differences between brand related UGC and ratings and reviews are evident. Most research focuses on UGC that includes evaluative aspect as their impact on consumers is easier to determine. However, analysis of brand related UGC can also provide valuable insights, especially since this type of content is becoming increasingly popular (Nanne et al 2020).
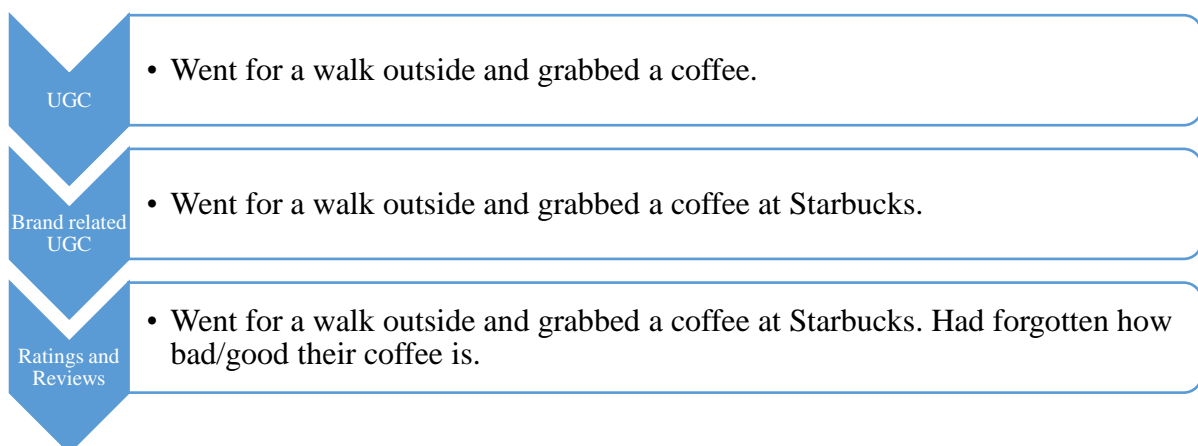
Figure 5 Textual exemplification of the different layers of UGC

The importance of distinguishing between different types of UGC is related to the applicability of existing literature. A clear marketing-related definition, as well as clear categorisation based on the level of brand involvement in the content, can assist in differentiating the level of generalizability of existing studies. For example, findings in studies that have specifically analysed ratings and reviews may have limited applicability in terms of the wider scope of brand related UGC.

The study aims to encompass a wider selection of brand related UGC than previously used. Instead of focusing on the overanalysed subcategory of ratings and reviews, it will include a wider variety of content that is less evaluative in nature.

The following section will present a definition of what constitutes brand related UGC to provide clarity of scope for both this study and existing literature.

Proposed Conceptualisation

In conclusion, due to the wide variety of UGC currently being created, it is impossible to underpin a concise, exhaustive definition for the phenomenon. However, a marketing-focused definition is necessary to establish a starting point for research. For this study, the definition elaborated refers to the elements that correlate with marketing practice. As the paper aims to look at what prompts negative reactions from viewers in content featuring or referring to brands the definition for brand related UGC being proposed is:

"Any artefacts created and uploaded to the internet created by the public that either explicitly or implicitly refers to one or multiple brands[2]"

To provide further clarity on the variations and subcategories of UGC these will be further studied in the following subsections.

2.3.2. UGC Characteristics

Many systems of classifying UGC have been proposed (Smith et al 2012, Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006). This chapter will present some of the research undertaken in characterising and categorising UGC. The purpose of this analysis of classification methods is to discuss

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[2] This can be a product, service, company, person etc.

differences observed in efficiency of UGC based on its characteristics and will serve as a basis for selection of UGC executional variables which will be included in the studies being conducted.

Smith et al (2012) identify six characteristics that can be used to categorise UGC: (1) promotional self-presentation, (2) brand centrality, (3) marketer-directed communication, (4) response to online marketer action, (5) factually informative, and (6) brand sentiment.

In order to better distinguish between how these characteristics operate, this study proposes the following classification: motivation-related factors (1,3,4), brand related attributes (6) and message-related characteristics (2,5). In addition to the six presented characteristics by Smith et al (2012), this section will also discuss media type, message type and quality as components of the message-related factors category.

2.3.2.1. Motivation Related Factors

Promotional Self-Presentation refers to consumers' efforts to express a certain identity to others online. The ease with which content can be shared means that consumers can engage in UGC creation almost instantly if they judge it to reflect the characteristics they wish to reinforce to themselves or others (Schau and Gilly 2003). This type of content can be seen as an online representation of conspicuous consumption. As such, there is also an element of performativity involved in the creation and consumption of UGC (Smith et al 2012). Thus, consumers create and interact with UGC online to not only construct an identity for themselves but also a façade for others. They strive to present a carefully curated image of themselves to others through the creation of UGC, similar to how conspicuous consumption is used offline to attain prestige and status (O'Cass and McEwen 2004).

Marketer Directed Communication refers to the type of content that is sent directly to the company/brand in hopes of starting a conversation between the consumers and the company. The main type of UGC in this category is constituted by queries and complaints (Naaman, Boase and Lai 2010). Similar to the promotional self-presentation, this characteristic relates more to consumers' motivation for creating UGC rather than executional UGC characteristics.

Response to Online Marketer Action represents content that is a reaction to messages received from official brand sources online. Marketer actions online usually consist of news, event announcement, or questions to consumers (Roma and Aloini 2019). This category also includes

content that results from brand encouragement, such as UGC competitions, hashtags. This type of content is not always positive as was evidenced by the Adidas example presented in the introduction. Further, this type of content does not have to be exclusively addressed to marketers but can also be directed towards other consumers.

While these characteristics are important to the examination of what motivates consumers to create UGC and provides valuable insight for brands, they are outside of the current scope of the study. There is extensive literature on what motivates consumers to create UGC that will be discussed in section 2.3.4 of this chapter. Content that falls into these categories will not be excluded from the study, however, the content will not be analysed from this perspective.

2.3.2.2. Brand Related Factors

Tone towards the Brand

Tone towards the brand is also referred to in literature as brand sentiment (Smith et al 2012, Roma and Aloini 2019). It refers to the sentiment being expressed towards the brand in the content, rather than the overall tone of the UGC. This distinction is less apparent for reviews where the product/brand is the subject of the content, however, it becomes more important when considering a wider range of UGC where the brand may not be the main focus of the content. For example, while the overall tone of the content may be positive the tone towards the brand may be negative or vice versa.

This categorisation has been used primarily to distinguish between types of ratings and reviews because most research in the area of tone has focused on this area (Tang et al 2014). it is also relevant for a broader scope of UGC.

Positive tone towards the brand

Positive reviews have an undeniable effect on sales (Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006). Improvement in reviews leads to an improvement in sales. Positive UGC, more generally, leads to similar effects as positive reviews (Scholz et al 2018) leading to an increase in sales, purchase expenditure and firm value (Sonnier et al 2011, Goh et al 2013). More explicit endorsements of brands in UGC lead to more persuasive messages and increases in purchase intent (Packard and Berger 2017).

To capitalise on the effectiveness of positive content brands have started incorporating reviews and other forms of consumer endorsements into their marketplace, it allows consumers to have information reinforced by their perceived peers. Thus, it makes purchases be perceived as less risky for consumers (Delarocas 2003). Some e-commerce websites such as e-Bay or Amazon will even allow users to sort or exclude products based on previous consumer ratings. This feature only serves to increase the effect positive reviews have on purchase decisions (Goes, Lin and Yeung 2014).

However, Shimp et al (2007) found that when asked or incentivized by companies to write testimonials customers tended to exaggerate product or service benefits, even though the reviewers themselves did not realise this. While this does not inherently seem problematic, upon closer examination it creates a cycle of disappointment for future consumers by unrealistically raising their expectations. It does so by raising the level of expected satisfaction from a product or service and while the product may perform adequately or as described by the company the consumers may still be disappointed due to the positivity of the reviews. Delving deeper into the consequences of overvaluation in reviews, Shimp et al (2007) have proved that consumers who found reviews not to be in accordance with their own experience had negative feelings not only towards the brand or product but also transferred it to similar methods of communication. Once a consumer experiences a negative outcome as a result of trusting a review, they will not only dislike the company but also be more cautious of following such recommendations in the future. A more recent study (Yi et al 2019) provides valuable insight into how positive reviews can actually have a negative impact on consumers. They find that extremely positive reviews can cause scepticism in consumers and decrease make them less likely to follow their recommendations.

In conclusion, positive UGC can be very impactful when leveraged correctly by companies, however, it does not come without its drawbacks.

Neutral tone towards the brand

Tang et al (2014) identified two types of neutral reviews – neutral-mixed and neutral-indifferent. Neutral mixed reviews contain both positive and negative aspects of the product or service and are not skewed one way or the other. Neutral indifferent reviews only discuss neutral aspects. These have different effects, neutral mixed amplifies tone of existing reviews while neutral indifferent attenuates it (Tang et al 2014). Neutral tone towards the brand has not

been extensively studied, however in a brand related UGC context it becomes much more important. For example, in content where the brand is merely included in the background or just mentioned, its presence can still have an impact on consumers. Van Reijmersdal (2009) argue that even when brands are included in subtle ways, they still have an impact on brand preference and brand choice.

Negative tone towards the brand

Negative reviews have been found to have a much greater impact on sales than positive ones (Wakefield and Wakefield 2018). Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006) found that 1* reviews had a much greater impact on sales than 5* reviews. One explanation for this is rooted in impression formation literature, stating that people place more importance on negative information (Skowronski and Carlston 1989). Homer and Yoon (1992) also suggest that negative information is more likely to grab the attention of viewers. Negative UGC has been found to dissuade consumers from a purchase by increasing uncertainty and fear (Park and Lee 2009). This effect is magnified for services as they are more difficult for consumers to assess before purchase (Park and Lee 2009). Duhachek (2005) suggests negative UGC can be created as a way for consumers to cope with negative brand experiences. Consumers are more likely to express themselves negatively online, as opposed to face-to-face (Wakefield and Wakefield 2018), as such negative UGC is more prevalent than negative WoM.

As described above tone towards the brand has an impact on a variety of marketing outcomes, but research in the area is focused on product and service reviews, rather than a broader scope of UGC. As such further examination of this factor would make an important contribution to literature.

2.3.2.3. Message Related Factors

Brand Centrality

Brand Centrality refers to the role the brand plays in the content. Similar to variables used in product placement, there are various levels of prominence the brand can be depicted in. This spectrum of roles was encouraged by the types of social media available to consumers. Smith et al (2012) argue that certain platforms such as YouTube are more prone to low brand prominence than Twitter and Facebook. This is due to the longer format of YouTube videos, as opposed to the shorter content present on other social media. Twitter, for example, has a 240-character limit which enables brand mentions to stand out more. However, a subsequent

study by Roma and Aloini (2019) proves that due to the increased prevalence of image content, there is now an equal likelihood of encountering centrally placed brands across all social media channels.

A very relevant observation made by Smith et al (2012) is that in previous studies of UGC brand centrality is often assumed despite evidence of variables levels of brand centrality. This highlights the methodological gap that was identified in the conceptualization section. Because the subject of most UGC studies have been ratings and reviews, which are inherently-brand centric, there is not an abundance of literature that discusses how brand centrality impacts how consumers respond to UGC.

Interestingly, this concept is present in a more elaborate manner in product placement research. This stream of literature distinguishes between how easily identifiable a brand is in the context is it placed in (**Brand Prominence**) and how connected it is to the story being told (**Plot Relevance**). Both have been shown to have an impact on product placement effectiveness (Karrh et al 2003) in terms of brand recognition, and attitude change (Russell 2002).

Brand prominence has been conceptualised in a variety of ways across multiple studies. Some considered the size of product or logo, placement location, placement frequency or duration on-screen (Choi et al 2018). High brand prominence in product placement leads to higher recall rates, but in certain circumstances, it can lower brand attitude (van Reijmersdal 2009). In support of these findings, Yoon et al (2011) argue that high brand prominence does not immediately result in negative outcomes and consumer reactions depend on how the brand is integrated into the plot.

Plot relevance or plot connection represents instances where a brand makes a significant contribution to the story. High plot relevance leads to an increase in recall and brand attitude, while lower plot connection decreases consumer persuasion (Russell 2002).

Based on both Smith et al (2012) and Roma and Aloini (2019) definitions and operationalisation of brand centrality, it can be argued that this variable is a combination of both brand prominence and plot relevance. However, studying the impact of these variables separately can provide more valuable insights and address a wider spectrum of UGC characteristics. As the study aims to be as exhaustive as possible in its study of the impact of UGC characteristics it will integrate brand prominence and plot relevance as separate variables in the theoretical framework.

Factually Informative Content

Factually Informative Content represents the type of UGC that presents objective information about the company offering (Smith et al 2012). Reviews often fall into this category as they provide information about the functionality and suitability of a product. One aspect that has not been considered in this categorisation that is directly connected to this characteristic is brand related UGC that is created for entertainment. Smith et al (2012) also highlight the lack of studies on entertainment-focused brand related UGC, although this is a growing trend and one of the primary reasons for consumption of UGC (Shao 2009).

This connects to the previously identified methodological gap relating to the scope of UGC that has been analysed. The effectiveness of product placement is based on the fact that consumers are more open to persuasion attempts when consuming media for entertainment (Cowley and Barron 2008). King et al (2014) argue that UGC consumption is often a leisure activity for consumers. As such there may be considerable differences between brand outcomes based on whether the content is meant to inform or entertain, and consumers may display less scepticism towards content that is meant as entertainment.

Quality

Quality has not been thoroughly examined in relation to UGC. This characteristic has been extrapolated from an analysis of the definitions of UGC presented in the previous section. As discussed, the essential characteristic of this type of content is the fact that it is user created. Consumers often do not have access to the same resources or are subject to the same standards as marketing professionals it is entirely conceivable that the quality of brand related UGC is inferior to that of marketer generated content. Liu-Tompkins and Rogerson (2012) support these views and further found that UGC production quality did not influence its diffusion because consumers are more lenient when judging its quality and do not expect professional production quality.

In terms of UGC lower quality could serve as an indicator for viewers that it was created by other consumers and not marketing professionals and decrease the likelihood of a sceptical reaction. It is possible that content that features typing or punctuation mistakes or low-quality photography could encourage consumers to trust the content more while higher quality content could increase scepticism.

Media Type

User Generated Content can take many forms. As a result, it can be categorised based on **media type**. It can be in the form of images (photographs, drawings), videos and GIFs (traditional or animations), text (blogs, reviews), ratings (stars, x out of 5) or audio (podcasts, music).

As has been argued in previous sections, the current research is skewed towards ratings, reviews and viral videos, while other areas have not been extensively studied. Nielsen (2010) has found that images that contain relevant information are very attractive to readers, many spending more time looking at the image than reading the associated text. However, this study was aimed at assessing the usefulness of images alongside written content, so while it may be applicable in terms of asserting consumer preferences for this type of medium it does not provide definitive proof of preference of one over the other as both media were used in tandem, rather than individually. In a study on print advertising, Rayner et al (2001) found that consumers spend more time analysing text than images, findings which directly contradict the previous study. One resolution to this contradiction could be found in Law and Braun (2000) study which also had contradictory results, finding that visual placements had a greater impact on product choice, but were the least recalled. This seems to indicate that while consumers prefer images they are processed more shallowly and are not deeply embedded in memory. This could indicate that consumers would be more likely to notice brands in text, but brands embedded into images would be more effective.

Current trends in social media networks also depict a preference for visual content. Users are leaving Facebook and migrating towards image dominated websites such as Instagram, Pinterest and Snapchat. Even more text-based social media (Twitter and Facebook) have shifted towards more visual content (Vilnai-Yavetz and Tifferet 2015). Adweek's (2017) findings also seem to support this conclusion, as they have found that in terms of UGC, 75% of millennials and 50% of baby boomers prefer images to any other type of content.

These trends and findings create a strong argument for further study of visual UGC and for the comparison of consumer reaction to image versus text UGC.

2.3.2.4. Conclusions

This section discussed the UGC characteristics proposed by Smith et al (2012) and Roma and Aloini (2019) and other additional characteristics that could impact consumer scepticism. It

must be acknowledged however that both studies do not consider how these characteristics impact consumer reactions to UGC or its effectiveness. Currently there is a significant gap in literature relating to how UGC characteristics impact consumers. Based on product placement literature it can be assumed that consumer would react differently depending on what type of UGC they encounter.

Nevertheless, this classification provides important insight and a strong basis for elaborating the theoretical framework of the study. One of the research questions this study aims to address is how content related factors impact consumer scepticism and based on the review of characteristics presented above brand prominence, plot relevance, tone towards the brand, factually informative content versus entertaining content, and quality will be analysed.

Based on the earlier discussion about how consumers react differently to persuasion attempts when viewing content for entertainment purposes the following section will discuss how consumers use brand related UGC in their day to day lives.

2.3.3. UGC Consumption

In the context of this study, the Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) is relevant because it explains how and why consumer interact with brand related UGC. It also further clarifies the gap in the scope of UGC that has been studied. Because the focus of research in UGC has been around consumer reviews and ratings (O'Connor 2008; Dhar and Chang 2009; Tirunillai and Tellis 2012; Tang, Fang and Wang 2014; Ayeh et al 2013; Amblee and Bui 2011; Cehvalier and Mayzlin 2006 etc.), rather than other forms of UGC it is important to establish how and why consumers interact with a broader array of brand related UGC. There is a lack of knowledge around brand related UGC used as entertainment (Smith et al 2012).

Shao (2009) lists 4 main reasons why consumers are attracted to user-generated media: it fulfils their informational, entertainment and mood-management needs, as well as integrating and enhancing social encounters. Katz et al (1974) were the pioneers of the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT). They posited that viewers actively seek out the media that fulfils their needs and expectations, stating that media consumption is primarily goal oriented. This means that all viewers have distinct and specific goals they must accomplish through their consumption of media. A similar categorisation is made by Wang et al (2012). They posit viewers consume UGC to satisfy their (1) emotional needs (fun/entertainment) (2) cognitive needs (information),

(3) social needs and (4) habitual needs (habits/background noise), but their findings indicated that UGC primarily impacts entertainment and cognitive needs of consumers. This categorisation is very similar to that of Shao (2009) discussed earlier, but it also accounts for the consumption of UGC that arises from habituation or routine.

In a more focused study, Nam et al (2020) identify several reasons for eWoM consumption: brand or product comparisons, seeking negative information, reducing cognitive dissonance, identifying other consumers with similar interests, fun or intrinsic enjoyment.

The accessibility and control given to viewers are also important drivers of UGC consumption popularity. It allows viewers easy access to a wide variety of content and gives them virtually unlimited time to view it at their convenience. Considering the specific goal-oriented viewership, it is easy to understand why User Generated Media has benefited from steady traffic growth since its inception. In 2009 YouTube, an online video platform, was the top website for online video streaming, having more views than all the other top 10 websites combined (Nielsen 2009).

In conclusion, consumers' goal seeking behaviour (GSB) drives them to engage with a variety of brand related UGC. Having established that consumers can have a variety of goals when engaging with brand related UGC, the three main motivations (information, social interaction and entertainment) presented in existing literature will be discussed to clarify how they apply to the context of brand related UGC and this study specifically.

Consumption for information

This motivation for UGC is perhaps the most straightforward, viewers seek either specific or general information and choose UGC as a source (Wang et al 2012). Brand related UGC has become an increasingly important source of information for consumers (Goes et al 2014). Most studies linked to UGC specifically look at ratings and reviews (Muller and Christandl 2019) they intrinsically restrict themselves to consumers who use the medium for this purpose. By broadening the scope of brand related UGC that is analysed, this study will also include a larger proportion of those who use it for different purposes.

Social Interaction and Community Development

There are two main ways consumers derive social benefits from UGC: directly (through interaction) or indirectly (social surveillance) (Heinonen 2011). Social surveillance refers to

consumers that only observe others interacting with or around UGC. In terms of direct interaction, two types are identified by (Shao 2009) consumer-to-content and consumer-to-consumer. Because of the facility with which participation and interaction occur online, consumer-to-content interaction is frequent. This represents any interaction between consumers and content such as saving an image found online, sharing an interesting news story, and commenting or liking a brands' update on Facebook. Consumer-to-consumer communication builds social connections within communities and it allows people to congregate around shared interests (Shao 2009).

Consumption for entertainment and mood management

Consumption of UGC can be viewed as a leisure activity (King et al 2014). This category of motivations is considered the most popular in terms of time allocation and proportion of users. Viewers in this category can also be more prime to the introduction of persuasion (Cowley and Barron 2008). This is reflected in practice by the proliferation of native advertising (advertising that mimics content on the platform it is employed). Native advertising is the practice of integrating advertising into a context such as social media by making it very similar to the regular content on the channel being viewed. "The line between promotion and entertainment has often been blurred or obliterated." (Abhijjit and Chattopadhyay 2010:71). Companies have taken advantage of this trend and started creating "advertainment". The purpose of this type of advertising is that it provides both for the needs of entertainment of consumers as well as persuasion.

As was evidenced above there is a discrepancy between the most popular reasons for viewing UGC (entertainment and mood management) in contrast to the motivations that fall under the purview of most studies (informational). While determining a certain ratio between these motivations is not under the scope of the study, the inclusion of media that is viewed for more varied purposes will provide richer and more reliable results that are in line with contemporary uses for UGC. The study will endeavour to include a wider variety of content to ensure the entertainment motivation is appropriately represented and consequently address the identified methodological gap.

Shao (2008) argues that consumption, participation and production of UGC are intrinsically linked, but based on their personal needs consumers may in engage in one or more of these aspects. The following chapter will look at what drives consumers to create UGC. In

conclusion, based on consumers' goals they will consume a specific type of brand related UGC. The importance of this chapter lies more in understanding how consumer scepticism can be influenced by consumers' goal seeking behaviour when consuming UGC. The following section will discuss what motivates consumers to create UGC.

2.3.4. UGC Creation

The literature on consumer motivation for creating UGC has evolved and deepened its understating of the phenomenon. The initial assumption was that creation was solely due to brand attachment or monetary incentive (Muniz and Schau 2011).

The table below illustrates the antecedents of UGC creation based on existing literature.

Table 2 Motivations for Creation of UGC

Motivations Identified	Author
Social, economic, concern for others, enhancing self-worth	Hennig-Thurau et al (2004)
Intrinsic enjoyment, self-promotion, change perceptions	Berthon et al (2008)
Rational (knowledge sharing and advocacy) and emotional (building social connections and entertainment)	Krishnamurthy and Dou (2008)
Self-expression and self-actualisation	Shao (2009)
Co-creation, empowerment, self-concept, community	Christodoulides, Jevons, Blackshaw (2011)
Enjoyment, self-enhancement, self-efficacy, reciprocity, altruism, sense of belonging, reputation, moral obligation	Cheung and Lee (2012)
Social, ego-defensive, knowledge, utilitarian, value-expressive	Daugherty, Eastin and Bright (2013)

Self Enhancement, Altruistic, Economic, Vengeance and Venting	Presi et al (2014)
Autonomy, enjoyable hobby, altruistic, social relatedness, competence, egotistic-helping, fairness, advocacy	Mathwick and Mosteller (2017)
Self-presentation, information dissemination, intrinsic enjoyment, community participation and social interaction	Koivisto and Matilla (2018)
Self-involvement, other-involvement, product-involvement, message involvement	Nam et al (2020)

As can be seen from table 2 above several authors have delved into studying what motivates consumers to express themselves online. However, their findings are quite distinct and an increase in research sophistication can be observed over time. More recent studies consider a wider variety of factors and increase their specificity.

Each study shares some commonalities with the others, but little accord exists in terms of a full list of motivations. Each has studied a small subsection of motivations in specific circumstances. A more recent review of literature about motivation for UGC creation (Nam et al 2020) categorises the motives identified in previous literature into six main categories: enjoyment, altruism, attachment, utility, product involvement, and message involvement. Their findings show that while most studies do not discuss all six categories, they all appear with regular frequency across several studies into the topic.

One important aspect that is not highlighted in the above list is identified by Muniz and Schau (2007). They explore the concept of vigilante marketing through UGC within a community of users of Apple Newton (PDA device). Using netnography it was discovered that long after the product was discontinued users continued to congregate and generate content both positive and negative, remaining the only source of marketing or updated information about the product. This indicates another important reason that is often not discussed in terms of motivation is brand love or brand loyalty.

Presi et al (2014) is one of the few studies to have identified specific motivations linked with the creation of negative eWoM highlighting that consumer can create UGC as a result of their

need for venting or vengeance. When consumers perceive they have been exposed to covert marketing rather than genuine content they feel cheated and betrayed (Kaikati and Kaikati 2004). To clarify, if consumers become aware an attempt at persuasion is happening, they may react negatively towards the brand. We posit that if consumers have a sceptical reaction towards brand related UGC a similar process will take place and they may be more likely to experience a negative change in terms of brand attitude.

Having discussed what motivates consumers to create UGC, the following section will discuss how brands can best make use of this content as part of a brand communication strategy, and its positive and negative impact.

2.3.5. UGC Applications in Marketing Practice

UGC is a powerful marketing tool. Some of the potential uses of UGC have already been touched on in the introduction chapter, in order to further understand its potential uses this section discusses how UGC can be used in marketing efforts and discusses how it can impact marketing outcomes. This section aims to highlight how the findings of this study would contribute to marketing practice based on how UGC is currently employed in the industry and how it impacts consumers.

2.3.5.1. UGC as a result of Brand Encouragement

Companies and brands can ask, incentivise, or create platforms to inspire their consumers to create such content. Encouragement is often one of the leading factors that can lead to UGC creation (Muniz and Schau 2011). It can range from e-mail alerts to brands organising competitions or giving away prizes for the most interesting content. Amazon and many other online platforms will often e-mail customers asking them to write reviews on recent purchases. Other websites such as TripAdvisor or Google even provide badges and rankings based on the number and quality of reviews left by their users (King et al 2014). Thus, consumers may be responsible for UGC creation, but often they are spurred to do so by the companies themselves. While this area is not of specific interest to the study it is important to understand this use of UGC as its results will be applicable in this context. 50% of consumers have stated that they would like guidance from brands in terms of creating UGC, while only 12% of brands provide such information (Adweek 2014). Liu-Tompkins and Rogerson (2017) state that one of the most important challenges for marketers currently is knowing which content would be most

effective. By understanding which content characteristics contribute to scepticism, companies can elaborate instructions to their consumers and allow them to create more effective content. This constitutes an important managerial implication for the study.

2.3.5.2. User Generated Branding

Burmann (2010) is the first to introduce the concept of User Generated Branding, but a similar concept of "open-source branding" was discussed by Garfield (2005). A case is made that the stimulation of UGC creation is a very effective branding tool. This stance is supported by Berthon et al (2008:3) who define brands as "collective possessions in the minds of multiple constituents", thus arguing that UGC often may be equivalent to consumer-generated advertising. This argument is also reinforced by Christdoulides (2009) who argues that in a post-internet era, branding strategies need to and have been adapted to facilitate and share UGC. Further, UGC can also be used as a barometer to assess the efficiency of branding efforts. If UGC being produced is in line with the brand image being transmitted it stand to reason that marketing communications are having their intended effect and consumers are correctly identifying the messages being transmitted.

Due to the increased credibility of UGC if its message is congruent with branding messages it can solidify brand image (Burmann 2010). Further, Muniz and Schau (2011) posit that harnessing UGC can lead to achieving long-term marketing objectives. However, some risks come with UGC in terms of branding such as a certain loss of control over the message being transmitted.

2.3.5.3. UGC Use in an Advertising Context

Brand related UGC is often integrated into advertising campaigns. This practice has become so widespread that a cottage industry has emerged with the sole purpose of creating systems to more efficiently integrate UGC into brands' online advertising (Adweek 2015). Capitalising on the increased popularity of this type of content and the trust consumer place in it, many brands have chosen this strategy. Such campaigns have been so popular they have also made their way to offline advertising (Adweek 2014). However, there is little known about what executional variables make UGC more effective. The literature largely focuses on source cues which would be lost in these types of situations so having a better understanding of the types of UGC that generate the best results would be invaluable when running these types of campaigns.

2.3.5.4. UGC impact on Marketing Outcomes

This section will analyse how UGC has been found to impact various marketing outcomes and discusses how consumer scepticism could affect already established relationships.

Brand Attitude

Brand Attitude represents an "individual's internal evaluation of the brand" (Mitchell and Olson 1981: 318). However, more recent studies have highlighted issues about this definition; while it captures two main characteristics: its evaluative nature and the presence of an object (in this case the brand) it ignores aspects such as endurance and impact. As such Spears and Singh (2011:55) propose a new definition "attitude towards the brand is a relatively enduring, unidimensional summary evaluation of the brand that presumably energizes behaviour". Some of the additions made are entirely supported by existing literature. Attitudes are relatively stable over time and can be used as a predictor of consumer behaviour (Mitchell and Olson 1981; Solomon 2016). However, emerging research may suggest that post-purchase brand attitude declines (He, Chen and Alden 2016). As a result, exposure to content that solidifies, or decays brand image post-purchase may shift how fast this attitude decline takes place.

However, there are strong debates relating to the constituting elements of brand attitude. Some view it as unidimensional (Spears and Singh 2004, Machleit et al 1993), while others propose multidimensionality (Percy and Rossiter 1992; Solomon 2016) in various forms. Solomon (2016) proposes a distinction between how consumers feel, think, and act towards a brand (affect, cognition, behaviour).

Interestingly, Wei et al (2008) found that when exposed to stealth marketing (the participants believed the positive content was genuine, not a result of marketer action) and then informed of their exposure consumers tended to have negative reactions towards the featured brand. Because they made use of explicit disclosures (warning before or after the programme had ended) their results are not directly comparable to the current study. The object of their study was to ascertain post-disclosure effects, while this paper aims to look at whether consumers arrive at the idea of scepticism on their own. As such it can be assumed that those who will feel sceptical towards the content will have a more negative view of the brand afterwards, however, the extent of this change is as yet unknown.

Brand attitude has important financial ramifications as it is a constituting element of brand equity (Aaker 1991). It has been found that through focusing on the components of brand equity rather than the concept itself is more relevant and yields better results (Faircloth et al 2001). Further brand attitude has been unequivocally linked with purchase intention (Spears and Singh 2004). As such changes in brand attitude have an impact on the measurable financial aspects of a brand, not just the intangibles.

Brand Authenticity

Brand authenticity has been defined as "a subjective evaluation of genuineness ascribed to a brand by consumers" (Napoli et al 2014:5). Brand authenticity is considered the "cornerstone of contemporary marketing" (Brown, Kozinets and Sherry 2003:21), it is central to brand status equity and corporate reputation (Beverland 2005, Gilmore and Pine 2007).

One of the main aspects of brand authenticity is integrity, a sense of moral virtue, with a commitment to quality rather than profits (Napoli et al 2014). While not traditionally used in this context, a sceptical reaction from consumers towards brand related UGC could impact consumers' perception of brand authenticity. Because brand authenticity has components relating to both integrity and credibility (Morhartet al 2015) the perception of being deceived would create a negative reaction making consumers view the brand as dishonest (Kaikati and Kaikati 2004).

eWoM Intention

eWoM intention represents consumers' willingness to spread information about their experiences with brands and products. eWoM intention can depend on a variety of factors: level of interest (Chen and Berger 2013), usefulness (Wojnicki and Godes 2017), and accessibility (Lovett, Peres and Shachar 2013). eWoM can also be leveraged by consumers as a means of social bonding (Berger 2014) through its conversational value (Bastos and Brucks 2017).

Consumers often use eWoM as a form of impression management (Li et al 2019), a practice that constitutes an attempt of making others view them in a way they desire (Ham and Vonk 2011) by proactively managing their image (Berger 2014). Engaging in eWoM after positive experiences can serve as an indication of the consumers' expertise (Wojnicki and Godes 2017)

or motivation to attain status (Yang and Mattila 2017) or engage in digital conspicuous consumption (O'Cass and McEwen 2004).

Information Search Intention

The internet is being used both when consumers are looking for specific information about a purchase and when they are looking for more general information. (Shim et al 2001)

Information search behavioural intention is linked with the theory of planned behaviour which argues that the intention to perform a certain behaviour is the cause of such behaviour (Ajzen 1991). So, while behaviour itself cannot be measured in this instance behavioural intention is the most common way of assessing the likelihood a consumer will engage in certain behaviour. (Peterson and Merino 2003). Moran et al (2014) talk about so-called "Moments of Truth" that represent encounters between consumers and brands or branded content online. They argue that these moments of truth if positive can stimulate consumer curiosity and further information search behaviour. As such exposure to brand related UGC can create behavioural intention to engage in information search. Conversely, a sceptical reaction that reflects badly on the brand may dissuade consumers from further engaging with the brand.

Purchase Intention

Research has found that UGC exerts a stronger influence on purchase behaviour compared to producer or marketer generated content (Goh et al 2013, Gupta and Harris 2010). Goldsmith and Horowitz (2006) posit that eWoM is more influential and important than advertising with consumers.

Not only does positive eWoM and UGC boost sales (Amblee and Bui 2011), Dhar and Chang (2009) have found that it has predictive value as well. It was found that the volume of UGC correlated with future sales volume. This means that companies who monitor the tone and volume of UGC associated with their offerings can better predict sales volumes and prepare more adequately. Tirunillai and Tellis (2012) found that stock prices can be positively or negatively impacted by UGC. This signifies a deeper impact on brand equity.

Discussion or display of products on social networks can impact purchase intention (Li et al 2019). UGC has a stronger impact than company created media (Gomez, Lopez and Molina 2019) on consumers' purchase decisions (Goh et al 2013). By influencing a consumer's purchase probability, it increases retailers' conversion rates (Ludwig et al 2013).

These findings only solidify the influence UGC has on brands. Its consequences are not solely limited to abstract concepts such as brand attitude, brand authenticity, eWoM intention, information search intention and purchase intention.

2.3.5.5. Challenges of UGC

In addition to the many advantages being discussed previously, UGC also poses some challenges for brands. This section will investigate some of the more prominent ones in addition to the ones discussed in section 2.1.3.6.

Lack of control

As opposed to traditional marketing efforts, UGC is completely out of the company's hands. They have no control over the content and little over the distribution of material. Blackshaw (2011) posits that it evens out or shifts the power asymmetry between consumers and corporations. However, companies are not letting go of control easily or willingly. Many have filed lawsuits or DMCA complaints against this type of content in an attempt to control the narrative associated with their brands.

 An excellent example of this is the IKEA Hackers[3] community. It consisted of a crowdsourced blog featuring potential changes to Ikea furniture and other DIY projects created from their products. It became a popular place for people to share their projects and ask others for advice to create the modifications they wanted. The blog owner was contacted by the company's lawyers and urged to shut down the website due to the use of the company's intellectual property in their website name. However, as is often the case now when firms take such heavy-handed approaches, the community fought back and eventually the website owner was made an IKEA collaborator and the blog allowed to continue in the existing format (Stone 2014). Jules, the web site's owner is now invited to exclusive events and continues both blogging about her love of IKEA and maintaining the IKEAHackers website.

Other examples of similar practices can be found around consumer-generated parody ads. Volkswagen sued the creators of the parody ad "Small but Tough" despite its huge internet popularity (Brook 2005). The advert[4] featured suicide bombers detonating from inside the car which miraculously contained the blast followed by the strapline "Polo. Small but tough". The

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[3] Website can be found at http://www.ikeahackers.net/
[4] Which can be viewed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VSSWeGBkf9o

company sued because they considered the advert both insensitive and not in line with their brand image.

Another interesting practice resulted as a response to the proliferation of UGC and lack of control is the need for increased transparency. Companies with unsavoury practices can no longer hide them from the public with the availability of mass communication methods. "In social media, an organization cannot just look good; it has to be good'' (Aula 2010: 3). What this means that with the investigative power now at the disposal of consumers and the means of publicizing the information brands need to adopt CSR practices in a way that becomes deeply ingrained in the fabric of companies.

Further, this gives consumers much more choice across product categories allowing them to opt for products that match their expectations in terms of production methods, ingredients, and social costs. Adams (2014) even argues that this will lead to fully conscious consumption. Brands must provide extreme transparency about their business operations and supply chains to gain consumers' trust and acceptance.

Lack of congruence

Diluting brand image is another concern that grows from the increasing popularity of brand related UGC. Companies craft their identities carefully and do everything possible for them to be correctly transmitted to their consumers. Despite their efforts, their brand image does not always correspond to their brand identity. One area where this practice is very frequent is oppositional loyalty (Thompson et al 2008); where one group defines itself as the opposite of the consumers of another and often create derogatory UGC as a result. This type of content serves a dual purpose: to solidify status through opposition, but also to disparage the other group. An excellent example can be seen in the PC vs Console Gamers or the Apple vs Android communities who frequently direct insulting content at each other.

In platforms, such as e-commerce websites and social media, consumers looking for information will be able to access both UGC and MGC. Cases in which those two are in opposition may damage brand image and reputation (Goh, Heng, Lin 2013).

Corporate Reputation Risk

The online medium has provided consumers with powers they did not possess offline (Kerr et al 2012). Their ability to globally congregate and discuss creates both opportunities and threats.

One of the biggest threats created by UGC is that to a company's reputation which stems from the accessibility and speed of diffusion of information.

Consumers are not passive receivers of information; they elaborate and interpret messages that are received from a variety of sources and reach their own conclusions. UGC is a medium for these reinterpretations (Hirschman and Thompson 1997). Thus, an audience who frequently follows UGC will have access to more content and have distinct brand attitudes and behaviours as a result.

One key finding in this area is the fact that social media acts as a multiplier of stakeholder reactions (Pace et al 2014). Those exposed to negative brand messages online have much more negative reaction than those exposed through traditional media.

Customers have extended their role as co-creators of brands and this leads to a much higher attachment to brands. These stakeholders are the most reactive, meaning they are more likely to be impacted by negative content (Hatch and Schultz 2010). This suggests crises involving brands with devout followings may much easier spiral out of control. This assertion is also supported by Gruen et al (2006) who found that in brand communities it is often the most devout who engage in negative eWoM quickest. This study's findings would allow brands to better quantify how consumers would react to brand related UGC based on its characteristics and could provide valuable insight for social media managers.

Anonymity and Deception

As has been previously highlighted UGC creates opportunities for manipulating consumer opinions online. Online advertising is decreasing in effectiveness and reach due to the popularity of ad blocking software. As a result, many brands have been turning to digital influencers for their promotional efforts (Bond 2016). A study conducted by the UK Advertising Standards Agency (2019) has highlighted that consumers have trouble differentiating when content posted by influencers is an ad and that ads must be labelled as such to protect consumers. In recent years many celebrities and influencers have received warnings from the ASA for not properly disclosing sponsored content (Bond 2016). One prominent example is footballer Cristian Ronaldo which had been using his social media platforms to promote Nike, a company with which he had a sponsorship deal, but not disclose the commercial nature of the posts. Other celebrities accused of similar tactics are Kim Kardashian West and Kylie Jenner.

Moreover, sellers and book publishers have manipulated product reviews to boost sales (Chen et al 2011). Many websites such as Tripadvisor (BBC 2019a), Facebook (Jones 2019), and Amazon (BBC 2019b) have serious issues with the number of fake reviews present on their platforms. King et al (2014) also discuss that companies can sponsor online discussions without identifying the commercial nature of the source. They further highlight that all these deceptive practices decrease consumers' trust in UGC.

Creating Opportunities for Detractors

In the anti-capitalist and anti-consumption background, a new sceptical consumer has been created. Anti-brand communities have been the focus of much research (Hollenbeck and Zinkhan 2006; Kucuk 2008; Lee et al 2009; Johnson and Matear 2011). The reasons of their members are not always connected to the products or services acquired, many object to brands based on ethical or environmental concerns as well (Holenbeck and Zinkhan 2006). As such it is evident that consumers can take issue with other aspects of a brand. Kerr et al (2012) discuss how controversial advertising can often lead to boycotts or negative word-of-mouth. It is reasonable to assume that some consumers may take issue with brand related UGC. Even in the case of genuine content due to the lack of transparency of the medium, it is difficult if not impossible to ascertain the motives of strangers Those who when faced with brand related UGC become highly sceptical of both the message transmitted and the credibility of the poster. Due to the increasing popularity of "shills", consumers have become wary of attempts to influence them online. Even content that is not necessarily very brand centred has become a target.

It can be argued that spontaneous instances of detraction may be encountered more frequently than organised anti-brand communities. As detracting comments or content can happen whenever a particular brand is mentioned, while these types of communities are something consumers need to search for to find.

The problem in this situation is not just the presence of detracting messages along those of a positive or neutral nature but also the fact that these types of comments act as a trigger for other consumers. Campbell et al (2013) found with disclosure of covert persuasion it almost always corrects the improvement in attitude created by the original content, with post-exposure disclosure leading to the best corrective results. These findings are also supported by Wei et al (2008) who found that after exposure to covert advertising and disclosure in some situations brand image was negatively impacted after disclosure not simply normalised. However, both

these studies used official disclosures and did not account for a medium in which consumers have no concrete evidence of falsehood. In the case of anonymously posted brand related UGC, users must rely on different clues to evaluate whether the poster is being disingenuous and whether to trust the content. Based on previous research in stealth marketing, product placement and UGC it can be posited that several factors may influence consumers' propensity to trust this type of content.

The following section will present the gaps that have been identified in the existing literature and how this study aims to address them.

2.3.6. Conclusions

This section of the literature review has provided a broader view of existing UGC knowledge to identify research gaps and address some of the research questions.

UGC is a very diverse medium of expression for consumers and can take a wide variety of shapes. Consumers are drawn to it for both its utilitarian and entertainment values. It can fulfil a variety of roles in an integrated marketing communications plan, but it can also derail marketing efforts. Based on the review of extant studies several gaps in knowledge have been highlighted throughout and are reprised below.

Identified Research Gaps

Gap 1 – Conceptualising UGC

The section on UGC conceptualisation highlighted the lack of a cohesive definition for UGC. This was attributed to the broad scope of UGC that exists and the fact that researchers had attempted to define the phenomenon in its entirety as opposed to the subsection relevant to marketing study.

This gap was addressed through the proposal of a marketing-focused definition for brand related UGC and a categorisation based on the role the brand has in the content. The study proposes that brand related UGC is a much broader term than the cross-section present in extant studies. Addressing the gap relating to the conceptualisation of UGC highlighted another methodological issue that the study aims to address.

Gap 2 – Scope of UGC – Methodological Gap

Based on both the conceptualisation and categorisation section it became evident that the scope of UGC that has been analysed in the extant literature is not representative of the breadth of the phenomenon. The focus on evaluative content and content in the form of text has left a large section of UGC unaccounted for. This raises issues of applicability of previous research in the contemporary context where visual content is predominant.

In order to address this methodological gap, the study aims to encompass a wider variety of brand related UGC to ascertain how existing theory applies in this context.

Gap 3 – Impact of Content Characteristics

A third gap that has been identified in the literature is how content characteristics impact consumer reactions to brand related UGC. Existing studies attribute UGC effectiveness to its source: other consumers. However, as discussed in the previous section the source is often difficult to identify or assess and is often lost when this content is integrated in other marketing contexts by brands. As such, there is a distinct need to understand how content-based cues impact consumer reactions to brand related UGC.

This study aims to close this gap by analysing how content characteristics impact consumer scepticism and ultimately behavioural and attitudinal brand outcomes, through analysing the potential moderating effects.

Gap 4 – Scepticism and its effects

Few studies exist that acknowledge that fact that consumers can be sceptical of brand related UGC. However, given the current climate of information scrutiny and distrust prompted by the proliferation of fake news, consumers are more vigilant about the information they are exposed to online. This could also impact brand related UGC and have long-lasting implications for brands. While trust has been discussed in this context, scepticism has scarcely been considered.

To address this gap the study will analyse whether consumers display scepticism towards brand related UGC and what the impact is on behavioural and attitudinal brand outcomes.

To ensure a wider understanding of the phenomena surrounding brand related UGC's success the following section will delve into some other key areas of literature. It will discuss how the persuasive nature of UGC (theories in communication research) is achieved and the reasons

why consumers trust or are sceptical of content. Lastly, it will discuss literature in areas similar to brand related UGC to establish a theoretical basis for some of the executional and outcome variables being considered in the study.

2.4. Theoretical Background

This section will highlight are relevant areas of literature than have been identified. It will analyse some of the existing communication theories detailing the evolution of communication frameworks and discuss how information processing theories play a role in how consumer interact with brand related UGC. Information processing theory will be used to justify the scepticism formation and examine what processes impact its formation. Building upon this the second section will discuss existing theories on trust and scepticism to crystalise how these affect brand related UGC. Lastly, it will discuss what other methods have been employed in marketing to bypass consumer scepticism in order to draw parallels between those and brand related UGC.

2.4.1. Theories in Communication Research

This section will focus on communication theory and marketing communications and relate existing concepts to UGC. It will present the evolution of communication frameworks and how they reflect the increasing sophistication of consumers and advancements of media. Secondly, it will analyse relevant information processing theories which are used to help establish the causal relationships proposed by the study. The aim of this chapter is twofold, firstly to provide an overview of marketing communication theory and its evolution, as well as discuss some information processing theories that support the arguments made in favour of the effectiveness of a wider scope of UGC.

2.4.1.1. Definition

"Communication is the process by which individuals share meaning" (Holm 2006:29). This more modern definition of communication reflects the evolution of the concept that will be discussed in the next section. Communication can take many shapes. Based on who the audience is, who the transmitter is, what is the channel, and what is the purpose of the massage.

2.4.1.2. Frameworks

This section will present various frameworks elaborated for understanding the act of communication and discuss their suitability. Initial frameworks for marketing communication were centred on the idea that consumers were passive receivers of information. The traditional
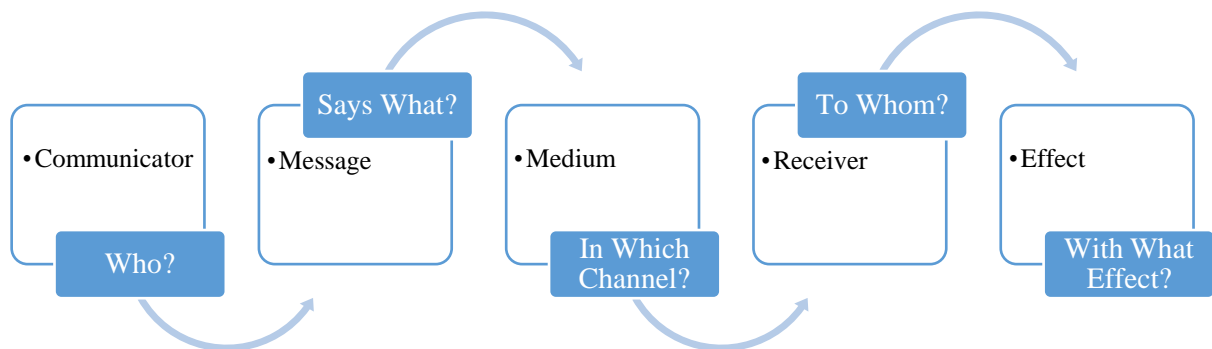
Figure 6 Lasswell Communication Model 1948 (adapted by author)

mass communication model elaborated by Lasswell (1948) describes an act of communication by posing the following questions: "Who? Says What? In Which Channel? To Whom? And With What Effect?" (Lasswell 1948:216).

This framework was coined as the "linear communication model" also known as the "bullet communication model". These terms implied little to no participation from the receiver. They were viewed as passive actors that received information being "shot" at them as well as a symbol for the power of the media (McQuail and Windahl 1981). It was heavily criticised and expanded on to shift focus towards the receiver of the message focusing on their perceptions and reactions to the message. This was in line with other similar developments in marketing, where the emergence of service-dominant logic as well as recognition of dual communication methods.

The understanding of communication was deepened by introducing new elements to this initial structure of questions. The idea of "Noise" was later introduced by Shanon and Weaver (1949), but they still featured a largely linear model. DeFleur (1970) in his bid to develop Shanon and Weaver's (1949) model discusses how there is a transformation from meaning to message that exists in all communication and because of this conversion the message transmitted is often

not "perfectly" decoded by the receiver. As a result of this admission, DeFleur (1970) introduces feedback into the framework as well as introducing a cyclical model to address some of the major criticisms of earlier frameworks by Lasswell (1948) and Shanon and Weaver (1949).

Figure 7 DeFleur's Communication Model (1970)

Schramm (1971) started moving away from this initial linear communication framework. While he did not completely renounce the "encoder-message-decoder" model he started describing communication as "a relationship, an act of sharing rather than something which someone does to someone else" (Schramm 1971:8). This marks the shift in perspective in communication studies and the acceptance of a receiver as an important participant in the communication process. Figure 8 represents one of the most widely used communication model based on Schramm's model. It is considered the seminal communication model in marketing communications.

Figure 8 Schramm's Communication Model (1971)

Fiske (1990; in Duncan and Moriarty 1998) categorises the emerging schools of thought in marketing communication theory as functionalist (focusing on the linear act of transmitting information) and interpretative (focusing on the interpretative aspect on the side of the receiver). Holm (2006) also focuses on the importance of the interpretative approach while highlighting that most marketing texts still use a linear or transactional model, chief among which is Schramm's illustrated above (Figure 8)

Castronovo and Huang (2012) argue that there is a need for a distinct communication model from those previously employed to encompass the differences arising from social media. As a result, an important development in Marketing Communications is the framework for communication online (Smith and Taylor 2004). It is represented as a radial diagram with one message multiple receivers and many interconnections between these receivers. These connections represent the development in communication online, the feedback is now directed towards other receivers as well, either intentionally or unintentionally due to the way this medium functions. Because most content remains, unless specifically deleted, it gains a permanence not encountered in traditional WoM communications. Further, content is indexed by search engines so there is a high likelihood that others interested in the subject will be able to find the content regardless of their social relationship with the poster. Both these factors exponentially increase the reach of UGC as opposed to traditional word of mouth.

2.4.1.3. Information Processing

Initially, information processing theory was developed to provide a more meaningful contribution to consumer behaviour theory. They sought to provide a more measurable framework for assessing consumer behaviour and provide actionable insights for marketing strategy (Tybout et al 1981). Initially, the basis of information processing theory was rooted in information storage and information retrieval. When information is stored certain connections between stimuli are made and subsequently added to and when it is retrieved a variety of stored stimuli gathered from a plethora of sources are also brought forward.

This area has been subject to numerous advancements. Due to the complex nature of consumer behaviour, many factors have been slowly introduced to account for the variation of responses between individuals. While initially, the focus was on cognition above all to provide a more stable basis for information processing, other non-cognition aspects were considered (MacInnis and Jaworski 1989). Examples of these non-cognitive routes to persuasion that may apply to UGC are mood, mere exposure and preconscious processing.

Elaboration Likelihood Model

External information is the main driver of attitude change (Bhattacherjee and Sanford 2006). The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) was first articulated by Petty and Cacioppo (1986) to better understand how attitude change takes place in consumers. It unified previous academic theories relating to persuasion in one framework. The ELM proposes two major ways in which persuasion and attitude change occur: central and peripheral. Both being anchoring points at opposing ends of a continuum (Kitchen et al 2014). The difference between these two is the amount of cognition (i.e., elaboration) a receiver does when processing a message. A message takes a central route when its message is processed using extensive consideration and active involvement from the receiver and the resulting attitude change is more permanent. A message is processed peripherally when the receiver uses various heuristic cues to make simpler inferences about the information and the resulting attitude shift is likely to be temporary (Kerr et al 2015).

The ELM framework argues that the amount of elaboration used by receivers to decode a message depends on a series of factors: the amount and nature of the message, willingness and ability to engage with the message, and motivation When receivers have high abilities and

motivation, they are more likely to develop their attitudes through the central route, receivers with low ability or low motivation are more likely to use the peripheral route (Zhou et al 2016).

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Source: Petty & Cacioppo (1983, p. 6)

Figure 9 ELM framework

Some critics of the ELM model question its effectiveness as a predictive tool and its relevance in the current context (Kitchen et al 2014). In a study by Kerr et al (2015) they were unable to fully replicate the effects of the ELM model in a more contemporary context. Despite the criticism, it remains one of the most widely used frameworks in marketing (Kitchen et al 2014).

This framework is relevant for the study of UGC as it allows a better understanding of how persuasion is being achieved when consumers view brand related UGC. When consuming brand related UGC consumers can either process it centrally or peripherally. For example,

when viewing brand related content as a precursor to a purchase they may consider the information contained more carefully taking a central route to persuasion; when viewing brand related content for entertainment they may not dedicate the same amount of cognition to the brand's presence and take a peripheral route. When processing takes places centrally, they may be more likely to react sceptically towards the content and form negative attitudes towards the brand, as opposed to peripherally where positive attitudes towards the brand may be formed through the non-cognitive routes to persuasion discussed in the following sections.

When analysing what motivates consumers to process messages in other marketing context studies have focused on source attractiveness, grammar, advertising executions, number of copy points, message repetition (Areni 2003), product involvement, information utility (Matthes and Wonnberger 2014), concrete and abstract messages (Aguirre-Rodriguez 2013). This study aims to broaden the scope of content related factors that motivate consumers to process the message in the context of brand related UGC.

Mood

Mood is a strong influencer of persuasion, when viewers are in a positive mood, they are more receptive to persuasion (Wegener et al 1994). However, mood pre-exposure is not the only influencer. The use of emotion in advertising is also a way of using mood to activate persuasion (Smit et al 2006). If the brand belongs to a low involvement category the attitude towards the advert can transfer towards the brand (Shimp 1981; Ray and Batra 1983). Keeping in tune with the storage-retrieval framework it can be posited that emotions stored will influence mood at the time of retrieval. This is a very current concern with the increase in popularity of "advertainment" as well as UGC as a means of entertainment. If the tone of brand related UGC is one that induces happiness and amusement the persuasive effects of brand inclusion may be magnified. In terms of the area of study, these findings are also important. If consumers experience scepticism and lack of trust towards brand related content, then this mood may persist and impact future decisions and long-term opinion about the brand.

Mere Exposure and Preconscious Processing

Mere Exposure and Preconscious Processing theory are important indicators of the effectiveness of brand related UGC beyond ratings and reviews. They are the basis of product placement effectiveness and account for some of the changes in brand attitude post-exposure (van Reijmersdal 2009) In the same way, they support product placement effectiveness, it can

be argued that they also apply to brand related UGC. In product placement, both are used to explain the positive effects generated from exposure to product placement despite it lacking a persuasive element traditionally found in advertising. Product placement in this sense can be compared to UGC. As they both represent the inclusion of brand related artefact in what is an entertainment medium.

Zajonc (1968) was one of the first to discuss the attitudinal effects of mere exposure in an advertising context. What this theory implies is that simply being exposed to a stimulus can cause improve consumer attitudes towards it. Janiszewski (1993) builds on this basis and finds that the consumer does not even have to specifically recollect the exposure for it to affect their attitudes. This theory was the basis of justifying initial product placements and can serve to substantiate the effectiveness of brand related UGC. Even if the consumer does not receive any information other than mere exposure it can cause an improvement in brand image. This finding only goes on to solidify the justification of studying this subsection of UGC which until now has been neglected by literature in favour of its more obvious counterparts. However, this strand of research also emphasizes some interesting pitfalls to be aware of for UGC. Petty and Cacioppo (1979) found that repeated exposure to the same stimulus may cause tedium and increase scrutiny. What this implies for UGC is that if the same brand is repeatedly mentioned consumers may become fatigued and develop negative emotions towards the brand in certain circumstance. If one looks at how these types of UGC conversations about brands spread, tending to be repetitive and sometimes even ever-present it may become oversaturated making users more likely to develop negative feelings towards it.

Preconscious processing takes the process of mere exposure to an even higher degree. This refers to the effect of stimuli the viewer does not even consciously notice (Janiszewski 1988). This suggests that consumer attitudes can be modified without them even being aware that a change is taking place. These findings are supported by van Reijmersdal (2009) who argues that recall of brand placement is not necessary for a change in brand attitude to occur. Consumers may not remember being exposed to the brand placement, but a change in attitude can still be observed.

One reason why information processing theory is useful in understanding the effects of scepticism is that it explains attitude formation based on factors other than information about the brand. While the information can be logically refuted by consumers, information processing theory posits that the effects remain post-exposure (Tybout et al 1981). This is supported by

another concept presented in Persuasion Knowledge literature that states that a persuasion attempt does not necessarily need to truly occur, only be perceived as such for consumers to undertake correction strategies (Williams et al 2004, Friestand and Wright 1994).

Encoding and Decoding Theory

Encoding and decoding theory presents an alternative framework for information processing. It accounts for individual differences that will create differences in message interpretation. One of the more important contributors to this area is Stuart Hall with his work on encoding and decoding (1974, 1980, 2001), the framework elaborated is presented below. Despite its apparent symmetry, both Hall (2001) and Wren-Lewis (1983) discuss how the two ends of the process can be very different due to the varying meaning structures and frameworks of knowledge. They imply that, due to differences between those who encode the messages and those who decode, the message that is sent is not always the message that is received. Further, Wren-Lewis (1983) argues that there is often actually not a single encoding, in addition to the encoding done by the sender, the medium of transmission also brings its signifiers and codes which may further alter the message.

This framework is important from the perspective of the current study as it highlights the exact differences in interpretation it aims to uncover. While its focus is based around personal frames of reference, the current study wishes to uncover if certain characteristics of the content will prompt viewers towards a certain kind of response or interpretation.

Figure 10 Hall's communication framework (2001)

Similar to the transition of focus in communication theory research in advertising effectiveness has historically moved forward from researching advertising types to focusing on the process of reception and its role in individuals lives and beliefs (Aitken et al 2008). By focusing on the "receiver" as a key factor, researchers have been better able to understand how they receive and decode messages. This shift in focus is also found in other areas of increasing interest in marketing such as service-dominant logic (Vargo and Lusch 2004), consumer culture theory (Arnould and Thompson 2005), even brand communities (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001) and has important implications for co-creation of products and advertising, as well as User Generated Content.

To understand how and why consumers choose to decode messages a certain way the interpretative theory is of paramount importance. It is the first to acknowledge how cultural and contextual factors play a role in decoding messages while being exposed to the same message two or more consumers can interpret it differently. While cultural factors do play an important role in message decoding the variations and intricacies of this concept render it the complex for the scope of this study. While its applicability is in no means questioned its sheer vastness precludes its inclusion.

Hall (1974) suggest there are different types of position from which decoding can occur: dominant, professional, negotiated and oppositional. Ultimately, their professional position was incorporated within the dominant code leaving only three main types of decoding (Hall 2001). These determine how a message is understood and processed by the receiver as well as the strength or presence of effects.

Dominant Code

This situation refers to times when the audience and transmitter inhabit the same dominant ideology and a result the preferred meaning is accepted. Put simply it means that the audience understands and accepts the message that is being transmitted in its entirety. This is considered the optimal situation or a "perfectly transparent situation" (Hall 2001:210) from a marketing perspective as the message being transmitted is consistent with the message being received and accepted.

Negotiated Code

Negotiated code refers to a mix of acceptance and rejection. While the dominant message is acknowledged, it is not completely accepted, and some elements are replaced or rejected. This

type of code is based on differences in context. Decoding within the negotiated version contains a mix of adaptive and oppositional elements.

Oppositional Code

Oppositional code does not imply misunderstanding the message. Rather it means understanding the code being employed and the message being transmitted but rejecting it. By interpreting it in a globally contrary way they reject the veracity of the dominant code

Further, Cho and Hong (2009) found that other external factors can also impact the type of decoding that occurs. Their study examining responses to articles about CSR found that, even in a heterogeneous group of respondents, certain actions triggered increased oppositional code use. Donations of money from companies and CSR actions taken during a company crisis created the highest amount of oppositional code.

Guerrero and Corduneanu (2009) argue that oppositional decoding is intrinsically linked with trust and context. Their qualitative study of media viewers' responses to news found that if they perceived the information as being objective, of good amount and quality, and was presented by a trustworthy figure oppositional decoding was less likely.

Oppositional code interpretations are exactly what this study will be focusing on. In this case, the study will be looking at what triggers viewers to reject the proposed message of the content they encounter and act with scepticism. It accurately represents the area of study, as the paper aims to analyse what content related characteristics can lead to unfavourable consequences for the brand being featured. This view is supported by the findings of Yi et al (2019) who found that when consumers are sceptical of brand related UGC they are more likely to decode it in an oppositional manner and act contrarily to the message of the content. To illustrate, they found that in certain circumstances when consumers were exposed to extremely positive reviews, they would actually lower the consumers' purchase intention. This was attributed to the fact that consumers were sceptical of messages that were too positive.

2.4.1.4. Overarching Theories

In order to frame this study encoding and decoding theory and the ELM model will be used. Encoding and decoding theory provides an important lens for how consumers respond to content often wilfully choosing to ignore the intended message in favour of an alternative meaning. This helps clarify how consumer scepticism functions in relation to brand related

UGC. Because of this type of content's anonymity, consumers have to rely on their own judgements to determine whether its message should be received as intended or whether it constitutes an attempt at manipulation and should be interpreted in a negotiated or oppositional manner. While a certain message is sent to consumers their frames of reference ultimately determine its interpretation. Scepticism and trust play an important role in the decoding of brand related messages as they help determine what interpretation will be used. While encoding and decoding theory provides an explanation for the formation of consumer scepticism, ELM theory solidifies the mechanism through which content characteristics can lead to negative changes in brand attitudes. Prior research has discussed how some executional aspects of advertising can motivate consumers to process these messages, but the variables identified are limited and often not applied directly to a UGC context. As such this study will contribute to ELM research by expanding its scope of application and understanding of what content related factors can motivate consumer to process the message in a way that leads to negative attitude change.

Further, the literature on non-cognitive routes to persuasion supports the identified methodological gap discussed in the previous chapter. It justifies the choice to include brand related content meant for entertainment rather than information because it establishes that it can also have an impact on brand attitudes.

2.4.1.5. Conclusion

Marketing communications have evolved significantly to account for the development of new media as well as the increasing power of consumers. Communication models have changed throughout the years to reflect this.

This chapter has analysed literature on a variety of information processing concepts and theories in order to establish how brand related UGC leads to persuasion and consumer attitude change.

As stated above, whether consumers trust or are sceptical towards UGC plays an important role in how they react to content. As such, the following section will detail the role of trust and scepticism in interactions between consumers and brands. It will explain the differences between advertising trust and UGC trust to establish how these impact consumers. Moreover, it will detail how scepticism has been addressed in other contexts such as advertising and apply the construct in a UGC context.

2.4.2. Trust and Scepticism

2.4.2.1. Introduction

This section aims to discuss the concepts of trust and scepticism from a marketing perspective. It will present relevant definitions and frameworks developed to assess the components and sources of trust and scepticism as well as their effects. There are various areas of trust that have an impact on this research. Aspects such as trust in advertising can be used to further explain the move towards relying on UGC for purchase decisions trust online is also an important factor that compounds with trust in advertising and UGC. Moreover, trust in UGC is important to discuss as certain characteristics and antecedents are unique to this type of content. Secondly, this section will delve into the definitions of scepticism, how it relates to trust, what frameworks and models exist around it. By gaining a deeper understanding of scepticism its determinants and consequences will uncover what unique issues arise from applying the concept of scepticism to a UGC context and allow for an initial formulation of the research framework.

Every business interaction involves a certain amount of uncertainty, consumers will often inhibit some behaviours because of fear (Gefen 2000). One of the best ways to manage these negative aspects is to create trust (Olivero and Lunt 2004). Berry (1996:42) states that trust is potentially "the single most powerful relationship marketing tool for a company". It is also recognised as an important creator of customer loyalty (Reichheld and Schefter 2000).

Obermiller and Spangenberg (2005) posit that a certain amount of scepticism in consumers is not only to be expected but that it also plays an important role in the market. It is caused when consumers experience dishonesty, and it is an important basis for marketing ethics.

2.4.2.2. Consumer Trust

Trust is "a psychological state that comprises the intention to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations of the intentions or behaviours of another party" (Bleier and Eisenbeiss 2015) and consists of cognitive and behavioural aspects (Chari et al 2016). The cognitive aspects represent consumers' beliefs about the source, while the behavioural components represent the consumers' willingness to act or rely on the information provided. Hollebeek and Macky (2019) offer a slightly different perspective on trust articulating it in terms of cognitive

(credibility – the brand can be relied upon) and emotional components (benevolence – belief that the brand will act in their best interest).

Trust in brands is usually built incrementally over time (Goh et al 2013). Lee and Turban (2001) state that there are a variety of types of trust that play a role in marketing: person-to-person trust, organisation-to-organisation trust, people-to-organisation trust, and people-to-computing systems trust. This illustrates the consumer trust in UGC is an amalgamation of trust on a variety of levels. For example, consumer trust in TripAdvisor reviews is influenced by a consumer's trust in the internet as a reliable source of information in general, the platform (TripAdvisor), the reviewer, and the actual message (Lee and Turban 2001). Due to the way information can be easily manipulated online consumers are constantly searching for cues of trustworthiness for content (Pan and Chiou 2011).

Per Nielsen (2015), trust in advertising is still strong with half of their respondents saying they completely or somewhat trust advertising. However, traditional media advertisements (television, radio, newspapers etc) still outperform online adverts indicating a higher level of scepticism towards the internet as a communication medium.

 In terms of brand related content, Xu (2014) explains that consumers use reviews as decision-making aids, only when they trust the reviewer. However, in many online contexts, consumers have to judge the trustworthiness of content based on initial impressions without substantial interpersonal interaction (Xu 2014) which means consumers have to infer trustworthiness based on the scant observable attributes such as the profile picture of the reviewer and other reputation cues present. Due to the scarcity of source-based cues online even small disclosures of personal information in reviews can lead to increased consumer trust (Banerjee et al 2017, Forman et al 2008). This indicates that the lack of information about the author of brand related UGC creates a significant barrier for trust formation. Shan (2016) explains that as a result of this consumers also rely on content-related variables to judge the trustworthiness of content. They found that argument quality, which was conceptualised as the persuasive strength of arguments in an information message, influences credibility.

In terms of UGC, Pan and Chiou (2011) identify perceived social relationship as an important factor in trust, the more consumers can identify with the reviewer or creator of the content the more likely they are to trust the content. Interestingly, Cheong and Morrison (2008) found that when consulting online reviews consumers tend to attribute opinion leader status to those who

post them. This implies that consumers may place those who create UGC on a higher social rung that they truly are. Essentially, they view creators as more influential than they are in an attempt to assuage their perceived risk.

In Europe, recommendations from friends are viewed as the most trustworthy, followed by consumer opinions posted online (Nielsen 2015). This indicated that at least part of what constitutes brand related UGC is viewed quite highly in terms of consumer trust. The explanation for this increased trust can be easily identified by the lack of commercial incentive present (Kozinets 2012). To simplify, consumers trust reviews because they believe them to be impartial.

As can be seen from this section a great deal of attention has been given to the sources of consumer trust in UGC and what the effects of this trust are. However, the idea that consumer scepticism may be directed towards UGC has not yet been extensively considered in the existing literature.

The next section will detail what many consider to be the opposing side of the coin: scepticism. This will allow for further understanding of how these concepts operate and relate to each other as well as establish a clearer picture of the consumer psyche in the present.

2.4.2.3. Scepticism

This section will detail research into scepticism, frameworks established for assessment, the current academic debates related to the relationship between trust and scepticism and the unique issues that arise when this concept is applied in a UGC context.

There are two acknowledged types of scepticism (Obermiller and Spangenberg 1998): advertising scepticism which refers to a general predisposition towards all advertising and consumer scepticism that refers to a state of mind induced momentarily towards a certain stimulus. As such both concepts are similar, but one refers to a lasting attitude towards the industry and the second refers to circumstantial feelings of disbelief. This distinction is important to note as consumer scepticism towards UGC that constitutes the main purpose of this study.

Advertising scepticism refers to certain predisposition in processing advertising messages (Boush et al 1994). Sceptical consumers are more likely to disbelieve advertising claims

(Obermiller and Spangenberg 2005). This disbelief is one-way consumers deal with persuasion attempts (Friestad and Wright 1994). Obermiller and Spangenberg (1998) state that it is strictly linked with advertising and that the concept would not apply to scepticism in other areas. However, a more recent study (Zhang, Ko and Carpenter 2016) has proposed eWoM scepticism as a similar concept based on their initial iterations.

The framework presented in Figure 11 represents the framework elaborated in the same article (Obermiller and Spangenberg 1998) that explains how advertising scepticism impacts a single instance of advertising. As detailed in the definition chapter there are two types of scepticism: advertising scepticism which represents an enduring belief and consumer scepticism in general which only plays a role situationally. As such this framework is a useful basis for the elaboration of the theoretical framework in a UGC context. It identifies similar antecedents to the current study linked with executional factors (type of appeal) and proposes effects at various attitudinal and behavioural levels.

Figure 11 Scepticism Framework Developed by Obermiller and Spangenberg (1998)

Criticism of Obermiller and Spangenberg (1998) model argues that consumer scepticism is only defined conceptually and is actually composed of multiple elements (Rozendaal et al 2011). Boerman et al (2012) add to this debate by defining consumer scepticism as being conceptual and attitudinal. This view is shared by Muller and Christandl (2019) who define the conceptual aspect of consumer scepticism as recognising a persuasion attempt and

understanding that it has a specific source and audience targeting method, while attitudinal consumer scepticism represents how consumers react to the persuasion attempt. It can range from "scepticism or dislike of the message to other critical attitudes like assessing the message as less trustworthy and honest" (Muller and Christandl 2019:48). They further argue that when consumers can not entirely be sure of the commercial nature of a message, they activate attitudinal consumer scepticism and when they can identify some form of disclosure (i.e. sponsored tags, product placement warnings) of persuasive intent they also engage conceptual consumer scepticism. In essence when a disclosure is present conceptual consumer scepticism also occurs in addition to attitudinal consumer scepticism.

While Obermiller and Spangenberg (1998) did not overtly discuss this differentiation, they do acknowledge that consumers merely need to perceive an interaction as a persuasion attempt to be sceptical, a verifiable attempt at persuasion is not necessary for consumers to react as such. While not explicitly discussing the dual nature of consumer scepticism in their work, they have acknowledged the possibility of such.

The differentiation between attitudinal and conceptual consumer scepticism of relevance to the study. Because the study aims to analyse brand related UGC which is not commercial in nature disclosures of commercial intent will not be present. This indicates a likelihood that only attitudinal consumer scepticism will manifest in respondents.

Evans and Park (2015) further developed on Obermiller and Spangenberg's work when they applied it to a covert marketing scenario. Interestingly, while Evans and Park (2015) do not mention the similarity of their framework to the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) the two frameworks are strikingly comparable. They theorise that as a result of covert advertising exposure, based on whether or not consumers recognise it as a persuasion attempt (the instantiation of advertising schema), two ways of processing the information are possible. Consumers can either respond by through scepticism and activation of "coping skills" that result in increased scepticism and negative attitudes, or they can use other schemas to decode the message and no changes in attitude occur. These two options correspond to the two paths present in the ELM framework (which have been further elaborated on in section 2.4.1.3.) with peripheral processing corresponding to the instantiation of other schemas and central processing with the instantiation of an advertising schema. This can be further confirmed when analysing the proposed outcomes of the two branches of Evans and Park's (2015) framework which propose no significant change in brand outcomes for the selection of a non-advertising

schema to apply to the message and increased scepticism and negative attitudes when consumer scepticism is present. It could be concluded that the framework developed by Evans and Park (2015) is a practical example of how the ELM can be applied in a covert marketing scenario. The similarities between the two frameworks serve as further justification for the choice to use the ELM as a framework for the present study.

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Figure 12 Cover Advertising Persuasion Knowledge Model (Evans and Park 2015)

One area where the proposed framework presents an interesting view on consumer scepticism is their acknowledgement that consumer scepticism does not always lead to negative attitudinal outcomes. These suppositions are supported by the results of Wei et al (2009) and Campbell et

al (2013) studies. Evans and Park (2015) acknowledge that negative attitude formation must not always occur as a result of consumer scepticism and other factors such as brand familiarity, placement attitudes, consumer involvement and placement congruency can affect how consumers process the covert persuasion attempt.

In the specific context of consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC, Verhellen et al (2013) discuss that most content on consumer generated media platforms such as video-sharing websites is perceived as being by other internet users. As a result of this, the commercial intent behind brand inclusions such as sponsorships is often perceived as positive word of mouth. These findings are echoed by the UKAB (2019) which has found that even despite sponsorship disclosures consumers fail to identify the marketing intent behind these messages. These findings highlight the need for further research into what aspects do influence consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC. One of the main consumer related factors that impacts the likelihood of consumers identifying and reacting to a persuasion attempt is consumer persuasion knowledge. A concept that is inextricably linked with consumer scepticism (Obermiller and Spangenberg 1998, Friestad and Wright 1994).

Further, several studies suggest that consumer scepticism will elicit disbelief and mistrust towards the message (Boush et al 1994, Campbell and Kirmani 2000), ultimately resulting in negative outcomes towards the featured brand (Yi et al 2019, Muller and Christandl 2019). The negative impact of consumer scepticism on brand outcomes has also been discussed previously, in section 2.3.5. UGC Applications in Marketing Practice where the potential drawbacks of consumer scepticism have been considered alongside the impact of brand related UGC on brand outcomes.

Consumer Persuasion Knowledge

Consumer persuasion knowledge represents the knowledge consumers have amassed about persuasion. It includes consumers' theories about marketer motives, strategies, tactics and effectiveness and appropriateness. They use these to "cope" with persuasion attempts. It is a schema that "hovers in readiness" until triggered (Friestad and Wright 1994:10).

Boush et al (1994) link consumer scepticism with their persuasion related knowledge, they also investigated the link between advertising scepticism and the effectiveness of interpersonal influence. While results were inconclusive, evidence suggested a negative correlation between advertising scepticism and peer recommendations' influence.

This is further exemplified in by Friestand and Wright (1994) in their development of the persuasion knowledge framework. Based on their understanding of current marketing tactics consumers can choose how they react to persuasion attempts. Consumer persuasion knowledge represents the total knowledge an individual has about marketing practices which allow them to identify instances of persuasion.

At first glance, this idea seems to only apply to traditional marketing tactics. However, an important aspect of the framework created is the idea that a measurable and verifiable persuasion attempt does not need to occur to arouse consumer scepticism (Friestand and Wright 1994). If consumers perceive a persuasion attempt is taking place, regardless of the veracity of this belief, they can react negatively and respond with scepticism. Based on this admission, it stands to reason, that brand related UGC may be met with scepticism by certain consumers. As well as being supported by literature, this reaction can also be observed online. In conclusion, the applicability of scepticism theory towards UGC is supported from both theoretical and practical perspectives.

Its implementation in literature, however, has only been using disclosures rather than self-assessments (Campbell et al 2000, Campbell et al 2008, Wei et al 2008). As such literature has been unable to determine under which circumstances consumers choose the use this knowledge when persuasive intent is not verifiable.

However, this concept important because it acknowledges that activation of persuasion knowledge can happen even without the existence of persuasive intent. Essentially the triggering of persuasion knowledge amounts to an instance of consumer scepticism.

Relationship with Trust

The definitions of trust and scepticism are the first indicators of their relationship. One describes a positive belief towards the future actions of a company while the other a negative one. Rodgers and Harris (2003) identify scepticism as a manifestation of lack of trust. As such they place trust and scepticism on the opposing end of a spectrum. Obermiller and Spangberg (1998), while not overtly referring to trust in their study, also support this claim by identifying similar determinants for both concepts.

However, Soh et al (2009) argue that advertising scepticism is a distinct concept from advertising trust. Their argument is based on the view that trust is a multidimensional concept

that comprises both attitudinal and behavioural components, while they view scepticism as solely cognitive. This argument does not stand up to closer scrutiny. Consumer scepticism towards advertising can impact brand attitudes as well as purchase intention (Albayrak et al 2011; Chen and Leu 2011) clearly demonstrating the presence of a behavioural component.

In the same way, trust makes consumers more likely to act upon advertising, scepticism will make them more likely to question the veracity of claims and decrease the likelihood of purchase. In conclusion, it can be said that scepticism and trust are opposing concepts.

The following section will analyse some relevant methods used to bypass consumer scepticism in marketing practice. This section will present relevant theory that will highlight both contextual aspects relevant to the study as well as theoretical issues which could be applicable in a UGC context.

2.4.3. Methods of Bypassing Scepticism

To bypass consumer scepticism and increase advertising effectiveness a variety of methods can be employed. This section will present three main advertising tactics that employ some element of disguising persuasive intent: product placement, native advertising and influencer marketing, and humour. These will allow a discussion on relevant theories to scepticism towards UGC as well as a contextualisation of the phenomenon in order to better understand the mind-set of consumers.

2.4.3.1. Product Placement

Due to the overabundance of messages, consumers are exposed to through traditional advertising and the ubiquity of advertising blocking methods both offline and online brands have turned to product placement as an effective alternative (Guo et al 2019). The popularity of this method has been steadily increasing in recent years (Karrh, McKee and Pardun 2003). Product placement represents a planned and deliberate integration of a brand for money or other considerations in an entertainment medium to unobtrusively deliver a persuasive message (Cowley and Barron 2008). Some aspects of product placement characteristics have already been briefly discussed in section 2.3.2. and this section will provide further detail into how those characteristics impact consumer responses.

Product placement can be categorised in a variety of ways. The prominence with which is brand is displayed is one of the key factors in determining placement effectiveness. Russell (1998) distinguished between three types of placements: visual, auditory and level of plot connection that considered together constitutes prominence. Visual placements represent the inclusion of the brand in background or foreground without making specific reference to its existence. These types of placements are quite frequent, for example in the movie the Social Network Mark Zuckerberg is often depicted carrying a VAIO laptop however no other overt reference is made to the brand. One excellent example of plot-relevant brand placements can be seen in the movie Castaway, where the Wilsons Sporting Goods volleyball essentially becomes a main character in the movie.

A later study (Russell 2002) found that after being exposed to a prominent placement brand attitude improved, further, they argued that auditory placements were more effective than visual placements because they were perceived as being more meaningful and attention-grabbing. Further, they introduce the notion of congruency where it is argued that certain combinations of modality and plot connection are perceived as being more acceptable and thus yield better results than others. Visual placements because they are perceived as being less meaningful than auditory information (for TV) and as such are congruent with lower plot connections. Auditory high plot connected placements performing best in terms of memory and attitude change. Essentially Russell (2002) argues that the fit between how the brand is integrated (visually or aurally) and the brand's involvement in the storyline is essential to ensure product placement effectiveness, with the most effective combinations being low plot involvement visual placements and high plot involvement auditory placements.

Brand prominence has been found to influence consumer response to product placement (Cowley and Barron 2008). It has been conceptualised in a variety of ways such as the size of the product or logo, amount of screen time, number of mentions etc. Lower prominence placements may only include the brand in the background, while higher prominence ones may include explicit mention of the brand and repeated appearances throughout the content. Higher prominence placements are more effective at triggering brand recall; however, lower prominence placements were found to also affect brand attitude and choice through the mere exposure effect discussed earlier in the chapter (Law and Braun 2000).

As can be seen from the above discussion brand prominence and plot connection have an impact on a variety of marketing outcomes. Based on these findings it could be asserted that

when brands are either more prominently visible or connected to the "plot" of UGC there could be measurable differences in consumer reactions. Russell (2002) raises important points regarding the modality of placement (audio vs visual) which could also easily be adapted to a UGC study by looking at the difference in outcome variables based on the type of media the brand is integrated into. Further, the interaction effects observed between placement modality and plot relevance highlight the potential of a similar relationship being observed between UGC media type, brand prominence and plot relevance and supports the consideration of the factors in the context of this study.

The following section will discuss more contemporary applications of product placement principle online looking at a variety of strategies employed by brands to advertise to consumers.

2.4.3.2. Native Advertising and Influencer Marketing

Native advertising, also known as sponsored content or covert marketing, is "any paid advertising that takes the specific form and appearance of editorial content from the publisher itself" (Wojdynski and Evans 2016:157). Examples of this phenomenon can be found across a variety of social media. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and many others often present advertising in a manner in which consumers could easily mistake it for content from other uses. This is often only differentiated from regular content through small, unobtrusive acknowledgements that it represents sponsored content.

Because consumers have learned to ignore traditional forms of online advertising, they no longer pay attention to areas of the website where advertising is usually found exhibiting what is known as "banner blindness" (Burke et al 2005). Native advertising overcomes this hurdle for brands and allows them to engage with consumers, this is achieved by mimicking the format of UGC with the hope that it will not be overlooked by consumers. Wojdynski and Evans (2016) studied how disclosure placement impacted consumer attitudes. An interesting aspect that resulted from the study was the on average consumers rarely identify sponsored content as advertising with an average of 7% correctly identifying it as advertising with some variation based on the type of disclosure. Boerman et al (2014) found that disclosing the inclusion of paid promotion has a negative impact on brand attitude as opposed to no disclosure being present. However, sponsored content results in positive changes in purchase intention, product quality and consumer responsiveness, as it may be more likely to be processed by consumers using a central route to persuasion (Becker-Olsen 2003).

Online influencers represent individuals with large social media followings which are strong opinion leaders. Influencer marketing is a very popular method of social media marketing (Phua, Jin and Kim 2017). It has proven to be more effective than other traditional forms of advertising (Colliander and Dahlen 2011). While influencers are required to clearly disclose sponsored content, this does not always happen (Kozinets et al 2010). Social media influencer feeds now consist of a mixture of non-commercial and sponsored content (Stubb and Colliander 2019). Consumers often cannot tell the difference between sponsored and non-sponsored content (Wojdynski and Evans 2016). Some influencers have even started explicitly stating that certain items are not sponsored to assure consumers who may suspect undisclosed sponsorships. These generated higher source and message credibility (Stubb and Colliander 2019), however, if consumers are linked directly towards the product their brand attitude and purchase intention are reduced.

In conclusion, brands are attempting to seamlessly integrate persuasive message in a way that is unobtrusive and appears more natural in the context in which it is being received. This allows for increased effectiveness and better marketing outcomes. While most consumers have difficulties identifying these instances of content as advertising, it has made some consumers more vigilant about the type of content they are being exposed to. One area research has been focusing on is the impact of disclosures on consumer attitudes so there is a gap in brand related UGC literature that examines what aspects of the content generate a sceptical reaction from consumers.

2.4.3.3. Humour

 "A humour appeal is an advertising approach that is designed to evoke feelings of amusement" (Voss 2009:27). Humour is one of the prolifically used advertising devices, nearly 20% of television adverts featuring humorous appeals (Eisend 2009). Numerous studies on the effect of humour have found that it impacts a variety of marketing outcomes. It positively influences attitude towards the ad (Eisend 2009, Speck 1987, Weinberger and Gulas 1992), affects (Eisend 2009, Sternthal and Craig 1973), attention (Eisend 2009, Duncan 1979, Madden and Weinberger 1984), and recognition (Madden and Weinberger 1984). These widespread positive effects of humour are often attributed to its evocation of positive affect that is then transferred to the product being advertised (MacKenzie and Lutz 1989). However, not all are in agreement about the effectiveness of humour (Weinberger and Campbell 1991), some even

attributing a distracting effect that prevents clear communication of the message (Bryant et al 1981).

The posited impact of humour holds true with similar research (Goldberg and Gorn 1987, Karrh et al 2003) where programme mood has been found to influence recall and effectiveness. Strick et al (2009) found that humour in advertising enhances product liking and product choice. Humour has also been found to "break resistance" to the influence of advertising and decrease negative advertising associations (Strick et al 2012:1). However, Zhang and Zinkhan (2006) found that humour motivates processing of an ad. In the context of brand related UGC, this may impact the triggering of scepticism, as increased processing leads to higher levels of scepticism from viewers (Friestand and Wright 1994). When looking at scepticism as an attitudinal variable Obermiller and Spangenberg (2005) found that highly sceptical individuals had no "disinclination" towards humour. In their study of humour as a disseminating behaviour for eWoM Hsieh et al (2012) found that it encourages positive attitudes towards the content, forwarding intention as well as disguising commercial intent.

However, it must be noted that the use of humour in UGC may be different from the use of humour in advertising. As humour in advertising is used as a device to sell a product, while in brand related UGC the product may be secondary to the humorous message (i.e., low plot relevance). As such the impact of humour may be different in this context than the impact it has on advertising.

In conclusion, humour is an interesting avenue to explore in connection with brand related user-generated content. While it may not function exactly like humour in advertising, it is reasonable to assume that it may affect consumers similarly.

2.4.4. Conclusions

Brand related UGC is an important part of consumers' online experience. It has evolved beyond a simple informational tool and now plays important roles in viewers' entertainment, mood-management and social needs. Even when it is sought out for those purposes it can have an impact on consumers' attitudes towards the brand featured. The effects and sources of the increased trust consumers place in UGC have been thoroughly discussed. However, due to increased persuasion knowledge of consumers, UGC is no longer uncontested. While

scepticism has scarcely been academically considered in this context before, in practice it can be observed amongst consumers and it can be justified based on similar research.

Due to the distinct natures of advertising and UGC trust, it can be assumed that scepticism will have different antecedents in this context as well. When consumers are sceptical of one instance of brand related UGC they de facto identify it as an instance of advertising. As disbelief or scepticism of advertising is not met with the negative emotions associated with stealth marketing, we posit that due to these negative emotions it will have different effects on brand attitudes than those documented in the advertising industry. These negative reactions have been observed in similar studies on stealth marketing and have often been described as stronger than the situation warrants (Campbell and Kirmani 2008, Wie et al 2008).

Another important aspect that has arisen from the literature is the restricted methodological approaches undertaken in relation to UGC. While most of the literature focuses on ratings and reviews, consumers have moved on, now overwhelmingly preferring images or other forms of media. As such it is important to broaden the scope of UGC included in the research.

By analysing UGC literature and other similar areas of study, such as product placement, native advertising and social media influencers, inferences can be made about how brand related UGC affects consumer attitudes. Product placement literature has offered some important insight into what executional factors could have an impact on the processing of brand related UGC and consumers' subsequent scepticism.

In conclusion, applying the concepts of scepticism in a UGC context is warranted and would yield valuable insights into consumer behaviour, UGC effectiveness and trust and scepticism literature. Further, the use of a broader range of brand related UGC is needed to address knowledge gaps in the area.

The following section will discuss the key findings of the literature review by highlighting the aims and objectives of the study, and which key constructs have been derived from the literature examined.

2.5. Conclusions

This section will summarise the main findings of the literature review while highlighting the gaps identified. Further, it discusses what key constructs have emerged in relation to brand related UGC and consumer scepticism.

2.5.1. Aims and Objectives

"Changes in technology, consumer habits, demographics, and marketplaces, however, have raised questions about the applicability of advertising theory developed in a mass-media environment to today's interactive marketplace" (Kerr et al 2015:390). The previous literature review identified several gaps in UGC literature. Firstly, it discussed the lack of a cohesive definition and distinction between terms being used in academic literature relating to this phenomenon. The study proposes a marketing-centric definition and clarifies the differences between UGC, brand related UGC and eWoM. Secondly, it identifies issues of scope in UGC research in both the variety of UGC that has been examined, previous studies focusing mainly on ratings and reviews. Thirdly, it identifies issues in UGC trust literature which has mostly only examined source cues as a basis for the formation of trust. This raises important issues about how executional related variables impact UGC effectiveness. Further, despite the abundance of literature relating to advertising scepticism, scepticism towards UGC and its impact on attitudinal and behavioural brand outcomes has not been considered.

This study aims to address these gaps and examine what UGC characteristics lead to consumer scepticism and what are the consequences of scepticism are. The effect of UGC on consumers has been studied extensively, however little is known about what the antecedents and consequences of consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC are. With consumers gaining more complex knowledge about marketing practices they also become less trusting of the content they encounter. Understanding what characteristics prompt this lack of trust, as well as its consequences, would uncover valuable information about the "dark side" of UGC. By discovering what the causes of this lack of trust are will help create a deeper understanding of how consumers evaluate and process brand related UGC.

Ultimately, this study aims to uncover what content related factors arouse scepticism in consumers, as well as what the implications are for brand attitude, brand authenticity, eWoM

intention, information search intention and purchase intention when this occurs. While these factors may not be singularly responsible for arousing suspicion, there is compelling evidence that they do at least contribute to the likelihood of a sceptical response.

The following section will detail the proposed key constructs and discuss the propositions being made as a result of the literature review.

2.5.2. Key Constructs

The study proposes that certain content characteristics will have an impact on the likelihood of consumers reacting sceptically to brand related UGC. Further, it posits that scepticism will have an impact on brand attitude, brand authenticity, eWoM intention, information search intention and purchase intention. This section provides some initial answers to RQ1 and RQ2 based on findings from existing literature.

2.5.2.1. UGC Characteristics

Media Type

Product placement literature highlights the importance of placement modality of effectiveness (Russell 2002). For example, the same study found that auditory placements were more effective than visual placements due to the increased amount of elaboration that is required to process the information. Rayner et al (2001) also found an increased amount of elaboration when consumer analysed text, as opposed to images. According to ELM theory increased amount of cognition lead to central processing of the message. This means that consumers will scrutinise the content more and the resulting attitude change will be stronger. Increased elaboration has also been linked to consumer scepticism (Hang and Auty 2011). This indicates that content that is processed more centrally is more likely to trigger consumer scepticism.

However, Law and Braun (2000) offer contradictory results, finding that visual placements had a greater impact on product choice, but were the least recalled. These findings indicate that UGC media type could have an impact on consumer scepticism. Barnhardt et al (2016) when comparing the effectiveness of text versus image product placements had mixed results. One study found that text placements were more effective than images in terms of recall, another found that placement in images had no significant increase in purchase intention.

Overall, these studies indicate that **text-based UGC would be more likely than image-based content to arouse scepticism** due to the increased elaboration required for processing.

Brand Prominence and Plot Relevance

Drawing from brand prominence literature as well as UGC brand centrality literature it is obvious that brand prominence has an impact on effectiveness (Russell 2002, Karrh et al 2003, Smith et al 2012). More prominent brand inclusions have better recall rates (Law and Braun 2000). However, in certain circumstances, prominent placements cause irritation and counter arguing (Cowley and Barron 2008), because higher prominence invites more scrutiny from viewers. This can be detrimental to trust in brand related UGC. Prominent brand inclusions may lead to higher levels of scepticism. The concept has been operationalised through a variety of measurements such as: number of mentions, size of brand related imagery included, duration on-screen, strength of placement etc. Plot relevance refers to the how strongly the brand is connected to the plot of the content it is featured in. It is categorised as high and low plot relevance. While low plot relevance is not the most effective in terms of recall (Russell 2002) it is less obtrusive so in the case of UGC, it may invite less scepticism from consumers as opposed to high plot relevance.

Based on the previous findings in literature this study posits that **brand included prominently in UGC or those that have a high plot relevance are more likely to trigger scepticism in consumers than low prominence and low plot relevance inclusions.**

Tone towards the Brand

As discussed in previously, the tone towards the brand can have an impact on consumer information processing. Content with a positive tone towards a brand is without a doubt more effective in terms of marketing outcomes (Sonnier et al 2011, Goh et al 2013) than neutral or negative toned content. While Yi et al (2019) found that extremely positive content tends to increase the level of consumer scepticism, they have also found that in general content with a positive tone towards the brand reduces the level of consumer scepticism. As such, this study posits that **positive tone toward the brand is less likely to cause scepticism, while neutral and negative tones will be more likely to create scepticism.**

Quality

One aspect that has been introduced through definitions of UGC is the issue of consumer creation. While not fully operationalised through the idea of quality, it can be an important indicator of provenance. Because of the user-created nature of this content in most instances, it can be assumed that the quality of the content will be inferior to that of marketer produced content (Liu-Tompkins and Rogerson 2012). While this gap between quality is closing with the availability of technology to the mass market, lower-quality content can serve as an indicator of provenance. Ku et al (2012) raise the issues of assessing eWoM quality, however, their research suffers from the same flaw as most others in the area of UGC, it focuses almost exclusively on reviewer characteristics, rather than the characteristics of the content itself.

To further clarify how this concept will be applied practically aspects such as image quality (resolution, focus etc.), grammar and spelling, use of jargon will be considered. As such **content of lower quality may be viewed more favourably, while higher quality content will be met with scepticism due to its similarity with marketer created content.**

Message Type

Message type has been divided into informational appeals, emotional appeals and mixed appeals. Emotional appeals display better effects on brand choice than informational ones in an advertising context (Bulbul and Menon 2010). This has also proven to be true in consumers displaying high advertising scepticism (Obermiller and Spangenberg 2005).

As such, it can be posited that **brand related UGC of an emotional nature may be less likely to trigger a sceptical reaction from consumers than those of an informative nature.**

Promotional Information

Based on Smith et al (2012) categorisation of UGC we have differentiated two variables from the concept of factually informative content. One is the message type and the second is the presence of promotional information. This has been operationalised in the study as the presence of concrete information relating to sales, prices, promotions, events and new product launches. It represents a specific subset of informational appeal.

Brand related UGC that features promotional information is more likely to elicit a sceptical response because of its similarity to marketer generated content. Robinson, Wysocka and Hand

(2007) found that the absence of promotional information leads to increased click-through rates for online advertising. This indicated that consumers respond better to messages that do not include promotional information.

This study proposes that **the presence of promotional information in brand related UGC is more likely to trigger scepticism in consumers.**

Message Type

Consumers use social media mainly for socialization, entertainment, self-status seeking and information seeking (Park, Kee and Valenzuela 2009). Based on the consumer's aims they may react differently to the inclusion of brands in UGC. Studies on product placement have emphasised that the reason for its effectiveness is the fact that when consumers are viewing media for entertainment purposes, they are less guarded and more open to persuasion (Karrh 2003).

Based on the existing literature this study proposes that **entertainment focused UGC will be less likely to create consumer scepticism.**

2.5.2.2. Humour

As discussed in section 2.4.3. humour has an important impact on information processing (Zhang and Zinkhan 2006) and is frequently used as a method of bypassing consumer scepticism in traditional advertising (Stick et al 2012).

This study proposes that **brand related UGC that is perceived as being humorous will mitigate the relationship between UGC characteristics and consumer scepticism.**

2.5.2.3. Brand Related Outcomes

Brand Attitude

It is expected that brand attitude will be influenced by the triggering of scepticism and corrective action towards brand related UGC. This expectation is based on a parallel between product placement effectiveness and persuasion knowledge literature. Similar effects have been achieved for sponsored blog posts or media by Campbell and Kirmani (2008), and Wei et al (2008) when the sponsorship was disclosed to viewers.

This study posits that **consumer scepticism will negatively affect brand attitude.**

Brand Authenticity

Brand authenticity consists of elements such as integrity, a sense of moral virtue, with a commitment to quality rather than profits (Napoli et al 2014). Because brand authenticity has components relating to both integrity and credibility (Morhartet al 2015) the perception of being deceived would create a negative reaction making consumers view the brand as dishonest (Kaikati and Kaikati 2004).

This study posits that **consumer scepticism will negatively affect brand authenticity.**

eWoM Intention

eWoM intention represents consumers' willingness to communicate their experiences with brands. As stated above, consumer scepticism could lead to negative feelings towards the brand due to the perceived deception and Presi et al (2014) identify venting and vengeance as important antecedents of eWoM creation. This indicates that consumers could create eWoM to vent or enact vengeance on the brand as a result. However, eWoM intention is higher when it relates to positive experiences (Fu et al 2015) which suggests consumers may be less inclined discuss their negative experiences with the brand online.

As a result, the study posits that **consumer scepticism will negatively impact consumer eWoM intention.**

Information Search Intention

The internet is being used both when consumers are looking for specific information about a purchase and when they are looking for more general information (Shim et al 2001). Moran et al (2014) argue that positive brand interaction can lead to information search behaviour. So, exposure to brand related UGC can create behavioural intention to engaged in information search. On the other hand, if consumers experience scepticism towards the content it may dissuade consumers from further engaging with the brand.

As a result, this study posits that **a sceptical reaction will decrease information search intention.**

Purchase Intention

As discussed extensively throughout the literature review, discussion or display of products on social networks can impact purchase intention (Li et al 2019). UGC has a stronger impact than company created media (Gomez, Lopez and Molina 2019) on consumers' purchase decisions (Goh et al 2013). By influencing a consumer's purchase probability, it increases retailers' conversion rates (Ludwig et al 2013). However, studies have shown that increased purchase intention is linked to source credibility in brand related UGC.

As such this study proposes that **a sceptical response from consumers would decrease purchase intention.**

2.5.3. Summary

This section has presented and discussed the aims and objectives. Due to the lack of specific research relating to the impact of executional variables in relation to UGC effectiveness and scepticism a wide breadth of variables was extracted from other streams of relevant literature. The proposed relationships are framed through the lens of the Elaboration Likelihood Model. The identified UGC characteristics and marketing outcomes are briefly discussed in the context of establishing research propositions. The study will analyse the impact of media type, brand prominence and plot connection, tone towards the brand, quality, message type, the presence of promotional information, engagement, humour and reasons for UGC consumption on consumers scepticism. Further, it posits that consumer scepticism will negatively impact brand attitude, brand authenticity, eWoM intention, information search intention and purchase intention.

Based on these propositions, the following chapter will discuss the methodology being used to address the research aims. It will detail the research philosophy, approach, design and relevant ethical considerations.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

3.1. Introduction

The previous chapter discussed extant literature on the topic of UGC and analysed key constructs and related research. A review of existing UGC definitions revealed a lack of cohesive understanding of what constitutes UGC. The study proposed a marketing-centric definition to clarify the scope of research and a simplified classification of UGC to clarify the scope of existing literature. As a result of this discussion, it also became clear that most UGC research has been conducted on ratings and reviews. This constitutes only a fraction of available brand related UGC and reveals a need to discuss more contemporary uses of brand related UGC in marketing activities. Moreover, when analysing UGC trust literature it became obvious that it was focused on source credibility, rather than characteristics of the content (except for research on the tone of UGC). This opens another gap in the literature, as has already been established in product placement literature, executional variables have an important impact on content effectiveness. Another contemporary issue that has not been considered in UGC literature is the fact that consumers are often sceptical of brand related UGC. While some studies have acknowledged the possibility, few have studied the impact of consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC on marketing outcomes. As a result, this study aims to address these identified gaps.

This chapter will detail and justify the methodological choices made to achieve the research objectives. Firstly, it will present the aims and objectives of the study followed by a discussion of the chosen research paradigm. The section on research design will explain the two-step research process being proposed, as well as justify its utility. Ethical considerations of the research will be discussed in addition to the precautions and measures taken to reduce risks both to the researcher and participants.

3.2. Research Questions and Objectives

This study aims to uncover is what UGC characteristics can cause consumer scepticism as well as what the implications are for key behavioural and attitudinal marketing outcomes.

The three elaborated research questions are:

1. **What content characteristics impact consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC?**

This research question aims to address the two major gaps in UGC literature: the lack of diversity of UGC examined and the lack of understanding of how content characteristics contribute to the impact it has consumers.

The associated research objectives are:

1. Identify which content characteristics are relevant to the context of consumer scepticism.

2. Empirically examine the relationship between UGC characteristics and consumer scepticism

The literature review identified several potentially relevant UGC characteristics for further analysis. However, due to the lack of research in this area, there is a need for an exploratory study to establish which of the nine characteristics (media type, brand prominence, plot relevance, tone towards the brand, quality, message type, presence of promotional information, and humour) identified are applicable in this context. Further, to establish the relationship between the relevant characteristics and scepticism an empirical analysis is necessary.

2. **How does consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC affect attitudinal and behavioural outcomes?**

The third gap identified in literature relates to the impact of consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC. This concept has scarcely been considered in the context of brand related UGC and this study is one of the first consider it in this context.

The associated research objectives are:

1. Identify which attitudinal and behavioural brand outcomes are relevant to the context of consumer scepticism.

2. Empirically establish the causal relationship between the identified relevant outcome variables and consumer scepticism.

Chapter 2 identified a series of relevant outcome variables (brand attitude, brand authenticity, eWoM intention, information search intention and purchase intention). These were based on already established relationships between UGC and the outcome variables but contextualised with the impact of consumer scepticism in mind and from other relevant streams of literature. This chapter will detail how the causal relationship will be empirically established.

3. What are the dynamics between content characteristics, consumer scepticism and attitudinal and behavioural brand related outcomes?

This research question aims to establish the types of relationships between the constructs being examined in the previous research questions.

1. Examine the nature of the relationships between the identified content characteristics and scepticism

2. Investigate the relationships between consumer scepticism and the identified behavioural and attitudinal brand related outcomes.

The theoretical framework presented in the previous chapter presented the initially proposed relationships between the identified antecedents and consequences of consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC. However, it only provides an initial steppingstone towards the analysis of these relationships. The empirical analysis is necessary to fully understand the types of relationships that occur between the selected variables.

In order to establish how these research questions will be addressed through methodology, the following section will discuss the chosen research paradigm. The next section will detail some of the available epistemological choices and their views as well as justify the selection of the research paradigm.

3.3. Research Paradigm Choice

The research paradigm represents the worldview or framework through which knowledge is filtered (Leavy 2017). It acts as a lens through which the researcher conceives and executes the research. A research paradigm is constituted by ontological and epistemological beliefs.

Ontology represents a philosophical belief system that seeks to explain the nature of the social world. There are two main opposing viewpoints: objectivism is the belief that social phenomena exist independent of social actors and constructionism which believes that social phenomena are in a constant state of flux due to their reliance on social interactions (Walliman 2006). The ramifications of ontology affect what researchers believe is knowable about reality.

Epistemology is concerned with what constitutes knowledge and what are the acceptable methods to acquire it (Leavy 2017). Empiricism states that knowledge is gained through inductive reasoning, while rationalism believes knowledge is produced through deductive reasoning. Epistemology follows logically from ontology, as ontology represents the researcher's understanding of what the world is, epistemology represents how knowledge of that reality can be obtained (Bell et al 2019).

Based on these components a variety of research philosophies have been articulated. They seek to explain, regulate and improve methods of knowledge creation (Chia 2002). However, there is significant debate within the research community concerning the categorisation and number of existing research paradigms (Bell et al 2019). Positivism and interpretivism can be considered opposing polls of the research paradigm continuum (Leavy 2017).

Positivism is based on the concept of objectivity, its main premise being that the world is knowable (Walliman 2006). It sees society as more important than the individual. This stems from the view that individuals as being results of social forces. Society and social norms determine the actions of individuals and these social forces are outside of any individual's control (NcNeill and Chapman 2005), as such study of the individual is less important for the understanding of society. Positivism supports the existence of only one truth that can be independently observed and measured (Sale et al 2002). Its proponents argue that it is possible to achieve time and context-free findings (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004). Positivism regards quantitative research as more reliable than other methods in terms of generalisability and replicability.

Interpretivism is defined by the fundamental belief that the researcher cannot be separate from the research. The reality being observed cannot be separated from the observer. The central tenant of subjectivism is rooted in the idea that multiple realities exist, and that context is an important factor in findings. While positivism seeks to explain human behaviour, interpretivism aims to understand it (Bell et al 2019).

The importance of acknowledging research paradigms stems from their impact on elaborating and contextualising information. Understanding the implications of different research paradigms allows researchers to choose the appropriate methodology.

Based on the research questions presented in the previous section the most appropriate paradigm to adopt for the context of the study is positivism. As the study aims to establish causal relationships between content characteristics and scepticism, and scepticism and behavioural and attitudinal brand related outcomes, a positivist approach is necessary. Positivism is the most appropriate philosophy because it aims to explain and predict, placing a high priority on identifying causal linkages (Hunt 1991).

To further clarify how positivism impacts methodological choices the following section will discuss the chosen research approach.

3.4. Research Approach

In terms of research approach, positivist philosophy is rooted in deductive reasoning. A deductive approach develops hypotheses based on existing theory and the proceeds to design a research strategy to test these hypotheses.

It is based on the concept of generalisability of findings. As Figure 13 below shows, deductive reasoning starts from an elaborated theory, formulates hypotheses, collects data and examines the outcomes. It is the cornerstone of establishing causal relationships.

Figure 13 Process of Deductive Reasoning (adapted from NcNeill and Chapman 2005)

Based on the literature analysed in the previous chapter, the theoretical framework formulated proposed relationships, which it will test in order to ascertain their veracity. This process corresponds to the deductive reasoning approach.

The following section will detail the methodological choice and the research strategies being employed to address the proposed research questions.

3.5. Research Design

Research Design represents the network of steps that are taken to conduct a research project. NcNeill and Chapman (2005) state that the research design is dependent on the choice of topic, theoretical preference, and practical considerations.

Methodological pluralism refers to the use of more than one method of research to ensure more comprehensive results. Due to the nature of the research questions, multiple methods would be more appropriate in this context. The first and second research questions aim to both identify and establish relationships between variables. The first research question aims to identify which UGC characteristics impact consumer scepticism, in order to do so a review of existing theory was conducted, and potentially relevant variables were selected from various streams of literature. However, because these concepts have not been considered in this context before

and due to the large number of characteristics identified an initial exploratory study would help solidify their applicability in the context of consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC.

The second research question aims to analyse the relationship between consumer scepticism and behavioural and attitudinal marketing outcomes. The identified outcome variables were identified based on existing UGC literature and consist of brand attitude, brand authenticity, eWoM intention, information search intention and purchase intention. Due to the existing links already identified in this context, this question will only need to establish a causal relationship. The third research question aims to establish the validity of the proposed theoretical framework. To address the dynamics behind the proposed relationships empirical analysis is required.

To summarise, the first research question would require additional study to establish the applicability of the selected constructs (brand prominence, plot relevance, tone towards the brand, media type, quality, message type, presence of promotional information and engagement), while the second and third research questions would be very effectively addressed through the use of experiments.

This study will use a multimethod quantitative approach. Initially, a quantitative content analysis will be conducted to establish which UGC characteristics are most likely to impact consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC. Based on the relevant variables that have been identified in the content analysis the experiments will be formulated.

By employing a sequential research design, "where one type of data provides the basis for the collection of another type of data" (Mertens 2005:292), findings are strengthened (Creswell et al 2003). This approach is also highlighted as being appropriate for areas such as marketing and other organisational research as it addresses issues more effectively (Cameron 2009).

In conclusion, the study will employ content analysis and experimental design to achieve the research objectives. Because content analysis will be used to refine the experimental design, it will fall under a complementary sequential research design category. The dominant method, in this case, being the experiments. Content analysis will be used to identify the most prominent content characteristics that trigger scepticism in consumers which will then be further tested through the use of experiments to establish an empirical relationship. Further details on the methodology of both methods will be discussed in Chapter 4 (Content Analysis) and Chapter

5 (Experiments) because the use of a sequential design means that the specifics of the experiments cannot be determined before the results of the content analysis are determined.

The following section will discuss the important ethical consideration relating to the content analysis and experiments.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

Due to the methodology being employed several ethical issues need to be addressed. The main source of ethical concerns, in this case, is the use of online sources for content analysis and the use of stimuli in the experiments.

The content analysis will focus on a social media community (HailCorporate) comprised of sceptical users whose role is to identify the content they believe is not created by other consumers or acts as advertising on the platform. A more in-depth discussion about the selected community will be provided in the following chapter.

Due to the mechanics of search engines, true anonymization of online content is impossible. To pre-empt re-identification, the research will not include quotes or material published in the HailCorporate community.

As data collected will be aggregated, results will only be presented under the form of overall frequencies of certain characteristics. This will prevent any identifiable content from being published while still presenting relevant results.

The HailCorporate community is publicly available, does not require user registration to view content. Further, communities on the website can choose to remain invitation-only, where members can request access to view content but need to be approved by the community moderators to do so. Based on the availability of this closed-community option and the universal use of nicknames across the website, we argue that this community can be classified as public. Langer and Beckman (2005) argue that publicly available websites where pseudonyms are used can be ethically used in research as long as privacy rights are considered.

In terms of stimuli used for the experiments, the issue of usage rights needs to be considered. Current UK copyright laws (Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 Art 29(1)) allows for use of copyrighted material for non-commercial research without the permission from the

owner as long as work reproduced is accompanied by sufficient acknowledgement (Intellectual Property Office 2014).

Fair dealing is the legal terms used to assess whether or not the use of material infringes copyright. Two questions need to be posed in order to establish whether or not fair dealing applies:

- Does the use affect the market for the original work? Does it act as a substitute for the original content?

As the purpose of both context in which the copyrighted works are used (entertainment and research) are vastly dissimilar it is reasonable to say that the use of the work will not constitute a substitute for the original content nor will it affect any monetisation derived from the work by the original copyright owner.

- Is the amount taken reasonable and suitable? Was the amount used necessary or are there superfluous parts?

The amount taken from each individual user will be minimal. Only one instance of content will be used per user.

In conclusion, the use of stimuli gathered is legal as long as acknowledgement is given. However, to ensure that no other issues arise from publication permission from the copyright holders will be sought before use wherever possible. This will ensure that although already operating within the letter of the law, all possible efforts will be made to ensure the copyright holders have been consulted. All these issues were considered when applying and gaining ethical approval for the study. Ethical approval certificates can be found at the beginning of the thesis and the full ethics applications have been included in the thesis appendix.

3.7. Conclusion

This study will take a positivist approach to multimethod quantitative research to uncover the causes, and consequences of consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC. Content analysis will be used to assess which content characteristics are most likely to impact consumer scepticism. The results from the context analysis will be used the narrow the list of content characteristics presented in the conceptual framework, to the most frequently encountered.

These will be used in a full factorial experimental design which will aim to uncover which combination of factors are most and least likely to cause scepticism in consumers. Further, it will assess how brand attitude, brand authenticity, eWoM intention, information search intention and purchased intention are affected by scepticism and if the initial theoretical framework is supported based on the findings.

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│     Philosophy - Positivism     │
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│      Approach - Deduction       │
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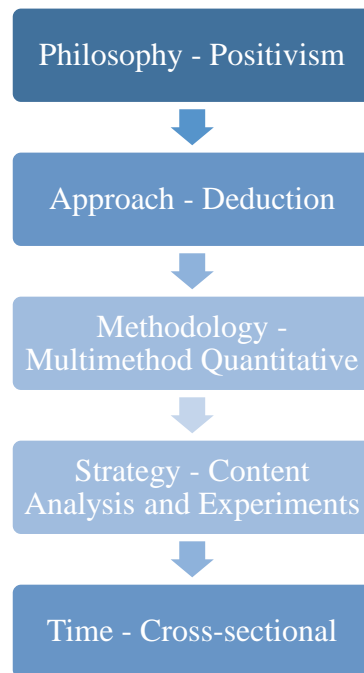
Figure 14 Summary of Methodological Choices

The following chapter will detail the content analysis methodology, data collection and results. It will discuss the appropriateness of the methodology, detail potential approaches, procedure, and operationalisation. It will provide details about the platform selected for the study and elaborate on the data collection procedure while considering aspects of reliability and validity.

Chapter 4 – Content Analysis Methodology and Data Analysis

The study aims to address three major issues in connection with brand related UGC: what UGC characteristics are more likely to induce a sceptical response in consumers (1), what effect does consumer scepticism have on behavioural and attitudinal brand outcomes (brand attitude, brand authenticity, eWoM intention, information search intention and purchase intention) (2), and what are the dynamics between content characteristics, consumer scepticism and behavioural and attitudinal brand outcomes (3).

Chapter 2 conducted an analysis of existing literature, identified several gaps in literature and methodology and articulated a theoretical framework. The first gap identified was related to the current conceptualisation of UGC and was address through the proposal of a marketing-related definition and classification of UGC based on the level of brand involvement. The second methodological gap was the lack of diversity in UGC used in academic research, with most studying ratings and reviews. Thirdly, trust literature focuses on source cues when analysing UGC effectiveness, little is known about how content related factors impact consumer reactions to UGC. Lastly, this study highlighted the lack of research into how consumer scepticism applies in a UGC context and what the consequences are for brands when consumers are sceptical of brand related UGC. Based on these gaps and the three study aims the study proposed a theoretical framework and discussed the proposed relationships between the examined constructs.

Further, Chapter 3 discussed the philosophical positioning, research approach and design. The study will use a multimethod approach rooted in positivism. A mix of content analysis and experimental design would be ideal to address the identified research questions. The content analysis provides a solid basis of inference to base the experimental design on, lending more credibility to the results and the variables chosen for the study. It aims to address the first research question relating to what content characteristics are more likely to trigger a sceptical response. It will endeavour to do so by analysing content from a community of sceptics dedicated to identifying content that they believe either is advertising or acts as advertising.

The methodology briefly discussed the choice of content analysis, this chapter will present the detailed methodological choices of the content analysis and provide an in-depth discussion on the relevant elements of content analysis. Moreover, it will discuss the data collection methods,

and present the data analysis and findings in the context of elaborating the future experiments. It will be structured into four main parts: content analysis methodology, data collection, data analysis and conclusions and implications for experiments.

4.1. Content Analysis Methodology

This section will provide a more in-depth examination of content analysis, justify its use and methodology, and discuss characteristics of text and components of this research method. Further, it will provide details about the website and specific community the data will be gathered from as well as explain the method of data collection and address issues of reliability and validity.

Content analysis is a research technique used to make replicable and valid inferences by interpreting and coding material. Research in the area of content analysis uses the term "texts" to denote the objects of study. This does not indicate that the only object content analysis can be applied on is text. It can be used on any type of media, and the term is used to refer to any variety of content the analysis is performed on. Through systematic evaluation, qualitative data can be converted into quantitative data. Its multitude of uses places it at "the intersection of qualitative and quantitative data" (Duriau et al 2007:5).

One major disadvantage related to content analysis is that it is of limited value. Its limited scope raises issues of generalisability. "It should be thought of as a necessary, but not sufficient methodology" (Bell 2001: 13). This view is also supported by Krippendorff (2004) who argues in favour of result validation due to the interpretive nature of content analysis. This requirement is being addressed in the proposed research design to ensure the validity and reliability of findings. After the results from the content analysis are established, these will be used to inform the design of experiments in the form of a questionnaire. This will satisfy the need for validating data obtained as a result of content analysis.

The next chapter will justify choosing this method as part of the research design by addressing issues relating to content analysis characteristics and contextual factors.

4.1.1. Justification for Use of Content Analysis

Content analysis was chosen as the most suited research method based on the type of community, resources available, and research objectives.

Empirical content analysis has been developed in the field of journalism (Bos and Tarnai 1999). Its aim is describing manifest content through the assigning of categories and reporting frequencies. Criticism of this method stems from its inability to address latent meanings in content. However, this method is arguably appropriate for addressing the research questions of this particular study. Because it aims to uncover which content characteristics impact consumer scepticism and uncover which of them have a stronger impact through frequency analysis. As was evidenced in the framework and discussion in the literature review, multiple potential variables influencing scepticism have been identified. However, these have not been analysed in the context where persuasive intent cannot be determined with any degree of certainty.

Because the community being analysed is based around identifying specific posts that they perceive as being covert attempts at advertising, members may be hostile towards a researcher. Researcher involvement in the community would create no verifiable advantages at this stage of the research. As such content analysis provides an unobtrusive, effective method of study. One of the other advantages of using this method is the fact that it can cope with large amounts of unstructured data. Content analysis deals with texts in a variety of formats and purposes. Simply analysing the type of content posted can provide important information about which characteristics of content are linked with consumer scepticism by comparing and contrasting frequencies and other variables.

The next section will discuss the choice between quantitative and qualitative approaches to content analysis.

4.1.2. Quantitative or Qualitative Approach

Content analysis allows for both a quantitative and a qualitative approach to be taken in analysing data. Both options have their merits and criticisms; the selection of a method needs to be made according to the research goals as well as the type of content being analysed. Initially, content analysis distinguished itself as a mostly quantitative endeavour. However,

qualitative analyses have become just as viable as research methods. Krippendorf (2004) argues that even though the two analysis types of distinct they still loosely follow the same protocol.

Qualitative content analysis uses quotes and snippets of the data to triangulate and construct parallels. This type of analysis often deals with multiple interpretations of the same text. As such qualitative research tends to focus on criteria outside of reliability and validity in accepting results as correct.

Quantitative approaches have been criticised for their rigidity often being compared to counting exercises in some instances (George 1959). Further criticism from its application in the social sciences relates to the view that not all phenomena are measurable and can be assigned into variables. Moreover, researchers can employ unsystematic approaches and attribute incorrect interpretations due to lack of appropriate contextualisation. While these criticisms are valid, they can be addressed with a rigorous methodology that strives to acknowledge context as well as choose variables that can truly be discerned from the texts studied.

Further, due to the nature of research objectives, a more quantitative approach was appropriate. Through the literature review, a series of potential UGC characteristics were identified: plot relevance, brand prominence, tone towards the brand, message type, presence of promotional information, humour and quality were identified as relevant variables to consider in the context of consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC. The aim of the content analysis is exploratory, and it aims to preliminarily identify which of the characteristics are most likely to relate to consumer scepticism. Analysing the frequency of characteristics encountered across content would achieve this more efficiently than a qualitative approach. As such content analysis is preferred over netnography which is traditionally more qualitative in nature.

The next chapter will detail the characteristics of text in order to present a more complete picture of the aspects than need to be taken into account when analysing texts.

4.1.3. Characteristics of Texts

Krippendorff (2004) describes several central characteristics of texts that need to be taken into account before undertaking research: texts have no objective, texts do not have single meanings, meanings need not be shared, meanings speak to something other than given texts,

texts have meanings relative to the context they are placed in, and the nature of texts demands specific inferences.

Texts have no objective – this means that texts do not have objectives outside of reader conferred interpretations. A message only exists when someone is engaging with it and assigns it meaning.

Texts do not have single meanings that can be "found" – somewhat derived from the above characteristics this one highlights the fact that the receiver is the one who interprets the message. Sometimes regardless of the sender's intentions, different people will interpret the same texts differently based on their own experiences or opinions. This is one characteristic that needs to be at the forefront of a researcher's mind when assigning meaning. An analyst needs to consider various possible interpretations of a text.

Meanings need not be shared – one person's interpretation may not be shared by any others, but that does not make them less valid. This is an important acknowledgement in content analysis, as only analysing content where there is superlative consensus in interpretations would restrict the area of study tremendously. As such researchers need to be mindful of how they ascribe meanings to texts and consider other possible readings to ensure accuracy or research.

Meanings speak to something other than the given text – meanings ascribed to texts are not contained in them. Communications inform, creates feelings and behavioural changes. All these indicate that reading of texts is also connected with other internal phenomena (mental constructions, past experiences, attitudes etc.) of the receiver. How one interprets a text also speaks to who they are, not only to what is being transmitted.

Texts have meanings relative to contexts, discourses or purposes – While multiple interpretations of texts are always possible, choosing a specific context or lens through which to view content can help clarify interpretations. Selection of context is sometimes up to the researcher, for example, one can choose to analyse a speech from an economic or social perspective, or a series of magazine covers from a political perspective.

The nature of texts demands the researcher draw inferences from texts – "content analysis is a method for inquiring into social reality that consists of inferring features of a non-manifest context from features of a manifest text" (Merten 1991:15 in Krippendorff 2004). Results from

the content analysis are ultimately inferences about a wider context. To validate these inferences, results need to be validated externally.

A researcher needs to be mindful of introducing their own biases into the content analysis, by making sure they have selected the appropriate context for analysis, considered a wider array of interpretations of the texts they are analysing, and ensure their findings can be validated. To avoid this in the context of this study, three intercoders are being used to ensure interpretations of texts are accurate and unbiased.

The use of three different intercoders across each variable allows for the analysis of the level of agreement for each unit of analysis and across categories. Section 4.1.7. Content Analysis Reliability will further detail the existing methods of ensuring the intercoder results are reliable and justify why the study has used percentage agreement as the most appropriate indicator of reliability in this context. Neuendorf (2016) has indicated that a value above 0.7 is acceptable for exploratory content analysis. To ensure transparency and result reliability, Section 4.3. Data Analysis will report the level of agreement across categories and signpost where or if results are inconclusive due to low intercoder reliability.

Further, removing the researcher from the coding process ensures that their biases and subject knowledge do not interfere with the results. Further, the study made use of coding instructions and a pre-test to ensure that the intercoders provided accurate and uniform assessments of the content. The coding instructions were developed based on existing literature pertaining to the variables being coded and were formulated with accessibility in mind.

In conclusion, to reduce bias the study will make use of three external intercoders, provide them with comprehensive and easy to understand instructions to ensure replicability of results, and report their reliability across the variables analysed to reduce bias and ensure study reliability. A more comprehensive discussion on the content analysis' reliability can be found in section 4.1.7.

In order to better understand the process of content analysis, the next section will discuss the steps required to carry it out successfully.

4.1.4. Content Analysis Procedure

As discussed in the research design chapter to ensure replicability and validity of content analysis detailed guideline need to be established in terms of components. This section will discuss the steps that are necessary to ensure the content analysis is conducted appropriately.

4.1.4.1. Unitizing

Unitizing represents the criteria by which segments of text are of interest to the analysis. This may occur at various stages of the analysis. One important aspect that needs to be considered when unitizing data, is where the information needed is to be found as this process discards the relationships between units. There is no universally established protocol for unitising texts as they are used for different purposes, in different contexts that may require distinct methods of unitization. For example, a speech can be analysed as a single unit, or each theme can be an individual unit or even each sentence can consist of a unit. The researcher must establish his unitization protocol based on the research design employed and the type of texts being analysed.

A unit is a whole the analyst distinguishes and treats as an independent element. This unit must not be further dived into smaller one throughout any stage of the analysis.

There are three types of units discussed in content analysis: sampling units, recording units and context units. Sampling units represent those units which can be used for inclusion in the analysis. They need to contain all the units that may be relevant to the analyst. Defining sampling units allows researchers to ensure that connections across sampling units do not create bias, and all the relevant information is contained within. To draw a parallel with primary research, a sampling unit represents all those who are relevant to the research and capable of answering the questionnaire. In the context of this content analysis sampling units will represent all existing content in the studied community.

Recording units represent those units which are selected for inclusion in the analysis. There is a certain overlap in between sampling units and recording units, they can be identical, or the recording unit is smaller than the sampling unit. The recording unit can, for example, consist of only relevant passages from a speech while the sampling unit would be represented by the

speech itself. A recording unit for this analysis will consist of one instance of brand related UGC as posted in the community and its associated title.

Context units represent the limits of the information to be considered in the description of the recording units. They represent the contextualising factor of the recording units. They allow for only the necessary information to be obtained when discussing texts. In this specific case, the context unit will be identical to the recording unit.

Units can be defined through physical, syntactical, categorical, propositional and thematic distinctions. This study will make use of both syntactical distinctions, this involved distinguishing units of analysis through looking at the natural flow of the texts. As each instance of content being analysed is distinct and does not relate with others, a distinction emerges naturally. Content on the forum is organised into separate "threads", each corresponding to one instance of content. This allows for easy identification of distinct recording units.

4.1.4.2. Sampling

Statistical sampling theory concerns attempting to estimate the characteristics of a whole based on a subset of drawn from it. A sample is considered representative if its determined characteristics are approximately the same as those of the entire population.

Sampling in content analysis is markedly different and more complex to population sampling as it involves (Krippendorff 2004). This is because texts can be read on several levels and different texts may be relevant for different types of readings. Other issues arise from the fact that often the sampling units are distinct from the recording units. The analyst decides which parts of the whole are relevant to the analysis. To further this issue even the sampling units are selected by the researcher based on their relevance. As such content analysis is less concerned with accurate representation for a population and aims to answer or generate leads towards the answer of research questions.

As in most cases, it is impossible to analyse the entire population of texts relating to a specific topic sampling and relevance criteria need to be established. When all sampling units are equally informative then sampling theory does not differ from that traditionally applied in research. However, units of analysis tend to be unequally informative, as such different sampling methods need to be considered.

The sampling technique being used is relevance sampling (Krippendorff 2014). This choice is aided by the format and features of the community. As each instance of content can be up and downvoted by others each submission has a popularity score that indicates if others feel it is interesting or relevant to the topic. As such by starting the analysis from the top-rated post in the last year the study ensures it samples texts that are seen as relevant to a wider variety of users. Using the top posts from the last year will ensure that only content the community agrees acts as advertising is analysed. By using this method, it ensures that the characteristics identified as most pervasive are not only dictated by frequency but also community agreement. Further, certain exclusion categories will be used to filter out posts that, while popular, are not relevant to the research question. For example, posts relating to other members, communities, or discussing aspects such as politics will be excluded as they do not concern the current scope of the study.

With the desired level of significance of 0.05 and an assumed probability of least likely units in the population of 0.01, the recommended sample size would be 299 in the case of equally informative units. However, in the case of relevance sampling, where units are unequally informative, the sample size is harder to determine (Neuenddorf 2016). Other research into content analysis in the tourism industry suggests that the minimum sample size for achieving relevant results is related to the number of attributes being studied. Having at least 10 responses per attribute (Lai and To 2015). As the study makes use of 14 attributes across six variables the minimum sample size is 140.[5]

Based on the above considerations, the study will use 250 units of analysis as a starting point. Similar numbers of content have been analysed for other studies (Wick and Harriger 2018, Murray et al 2016, Smith et al 2012, Smith et al 2011).

The following section will discuss the procedure for coding the content and the measures taken to ensure reliable coding.

4.1.4.3. Recording/ Coding

This process represents the transition from the original text to data and creates durable records of content (which is usually transitory).

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[5] The total number of variables is seven, however type of media was objectively observable, so it was not included in the calculation.

Content analysis research design logic is concerned with two primary qualities: efficiency (avoiding redundancies) and impartiality (not favouring one outcome over another) (Krippendorff 2004). The coding stage has a significant impact on how impartiality is achieved within a study.

Another important aspect that is relevant to the coding stage is replicability. To ensure replicability the description of content analysis methods needs to be descriptive enough to de facto constitute a set of instructions to fellow researchers (Krippendorff 2004). If the same classification framework is applied, then the results of the study should be able to be duplicated. This means that both, for the sake of impartiality and replicability coding instructions need to be exhaustive and clear.

To ensure coder training is accurate, instructions must be clear and accessible. To ensure this was true for the coding instructions used, a pre-trial was conducted before the actual coding to ensure that coding instructions were adequate and easily understandable. While coding instructions are important in all types of content analysis when it comes to user-generated content it is more difficult to assess and categorise content so exhaustive training is required (Neuenddorf 2016).

In terms of formulation, the questions the researcher must ensure that categories are exhaustive and mutually exclusive. In addition to efforts to capture most relevant answers, for ensuring that categories are exhaustive, Krippendorff (2004) indicates that introducing categories such as Not Applicable, Other, or Not Sure addresses the problem. However, these additions add little value to the study as they provide no actionable information. In this particular case, using a category for Not Sure is paramount. As a complementary sequential design, the results of the content analysis are being used to inform and help select research instruments for the experiment being conducted subsequently. As a result, identifying content that is unsuitable to be used due to its ambiguity adds value.

To facilitate the coding process, all the gathered content was uploaded to an online questionnaire that was distributed to the coders. This way content can be viewed in isolation from context and judgements are not affected by issues such as platform familiarity, content popularity, or other content. While this isolation of data is largely beneficial, there were a few instances where the separation hindered text understanding. In these situations, explanatory notes were added and actively signalled as such to explain how context influenced the meaning

of the content. These explanations were not value judgements, they were solely descriptions of the original context, so evaluations are both consistent and correct.

Three independent coders were used to categorise the content based on the variables presented. They were all given coding instructions before beginning and three test questions to assess their understanding of the coding instructions. If two out of the three answers were wrong, they were directed to reread the coding instructions.

The following section will detail the variables being coded for each instance of content.

4.1.4.4. Variables

As discussed in the previous section, individual values of a variable must be mutually exclusive to each other and provide an exhaustive account of all units. However, due to the multitude of interpretation available for a single text, it is not expected that only one value of a variable is assigned to it, intercoders may disagree on the interpretations of a text.

Variables can be either open or limited. Open variables are often represented by the information the coder needs to enter themselves while limited variables often imply choosing between several alternatives. Open variables are often defined conceptually, through a description of the type of information that needs to be recorded. Limited variables can be defined explicitly (by providing a list of all possible values), or implicitly (specifying a range good-bad) (Neuenddorf 2016).

Figure 15 represents the seven variables being used to categorise each text and their range of values. In addition to these, another two variables are also considered: name of the brand(s) present and number of brands present. Several variables were coded by the researchers because they were objectively reportable. As a result, the name of the brand, the number of brands present, and media type were coded by the researcher.

An important acknowledgement that needs to be addressed is the exclusion of humour as a content characteristic from the content analysis. Because humour is a highly subjective characteristic it is difficult to code in such a way that it is truly representative. Different individuals have different senses of humour and generalisation cannot be reliably made based on the three intercoders. However, due to the strength of the findings in literature linking

consumer scepticism and humour this variable will be assessed in the experiments to determine its effects.

Content		
	Type	Video/Image/Text
	Brand Prominence	High/Low
	Plot Relevance	High/Low
	Tone towards Brand	Positive/ Neutral/ Negative
	Quality	Amateur/ Professional
	Type of Appeal	Emotional/ Informational
	Presence of Promotional Information	Yes/No
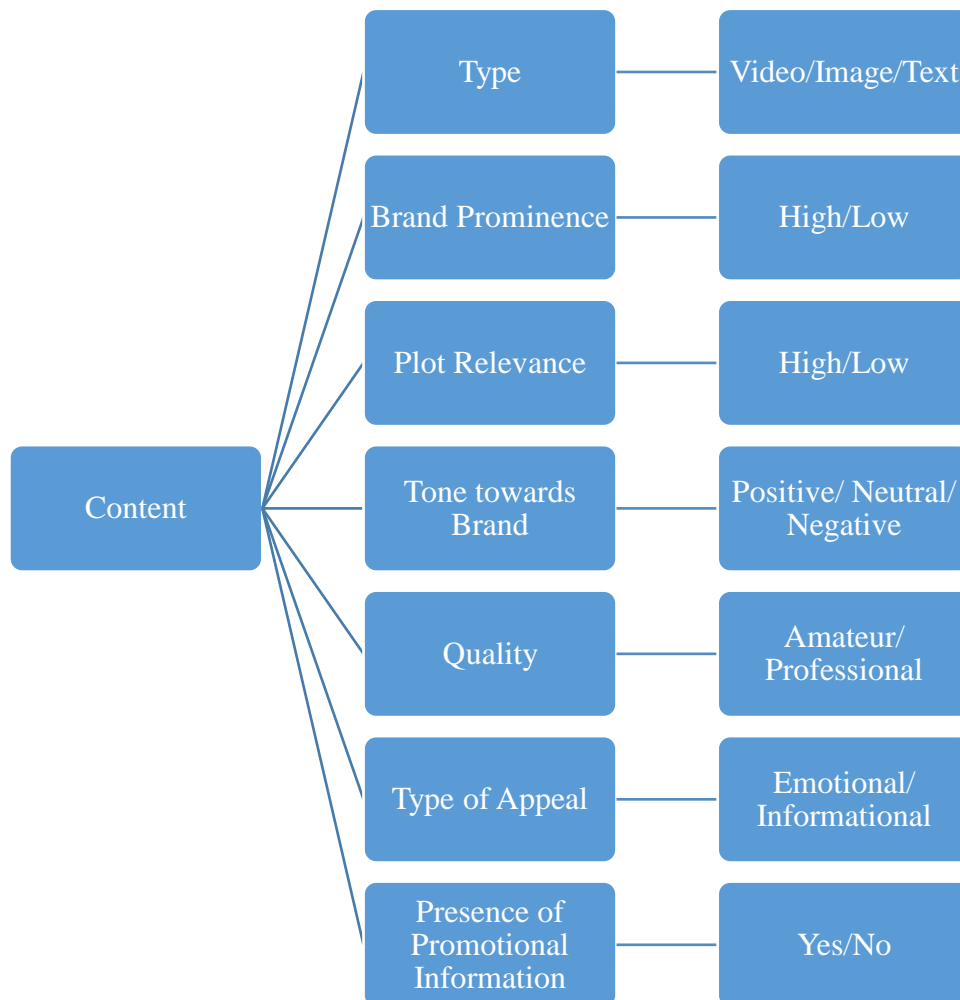
Figure 15 Variables and Values

4.1.4.5. Reducing

The purpose of reducing data is to ensure efficiency in representation. Instead of dealing with duplication, frequencies can accurately represent phenomena without extraneous information. In this particular case, data reduction was not required except in two instances where duplicate content was encountered.

4.1.4.6. Inferring

The inference step is where the analysis moves outside the given texts. This allows the analyst to present a conclusion about external phenomena based on a textual study. However, such conclusions need to be supported by additional evidence. This can be provided through analytical constructs supported by the context and validated through other existing research. In the case of this thesis, the results will form the basis of further research using experiments. This will allow the results to be supported by empirical means.

4.1.4.7. Narrating

This stage represents the answer to the research questions. It involves making the results comprehensible to others. It involves situating the results of the study in the broader literature as well as the contributions to knowledge the study makes. The content analysis aims to answer the first research question relating to which content characteristics impact consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC.

The following section will discuss how this study has dealt with acknowledging the context the content is present and how in general content analysis needs to be considered in relation to its background.

4.1.5. Operationalization of Knowledge

While knowledge operationalization may be easy to accomplish it must always be justified. This justification can arise from a variety of sources such as theory, literature or acknowledged experts. (Krippendorf 2005). Analytical constructs operationalise what the researcher knows about the context. Examples of such operationalization can range from building linguistic knowledge into a computer analysis program to simply the associations present in the analyst's mind.

It places the research in a sphere where it can be analysed correctly. In this particular case applying a marketing context to these posts through constructs such as brand prominence, tone towards the brand, plot connection to answer questions relating to their relative influence on triggering scepticism towards brand related UGC. Further, other aspects that needed to be operationalized are those relating to the website the content is found on. Several elements make the content be interpreted differently without the knowledge of which intercoders may change

their coding. For example, posts situated in a brand community if not retrieved with the surrounding context may be interpreted differently. As such, where necessary, this knowledge was articulated for the intercoders to access to ensure context congruent categorisations.

The following section will give additional details about the platform and the specific community the content analysis will focus on.

4.1.6. The platform of study - Reddit

This chapter introduces the website from which the content was collected Reddit.com and discusses how some of its characteristics make it an ideal space for data collection.

Kozinets (2002) presents 5 criteria that are relevant for consideration when choosing a platform for the study: (1) segment relevant to the research question, (2) higher traffic, (3) a large number of members, (4) more detailed data, and (5) more interaction between members. These recommendations are also a good starting point when choosing a platform for online content analysis, as the two methodologies are similar.

Due to the nature of the data being sought the choice was made based on traffic and segment relevance. The content aggregator website Reddit.com was chosen based on the criteria presented above. It currently has 430 million active unique users and over 100,000 differently themed communities (Reddit 2019). In 2019 there were 200 million posts made with 1.7 billion comments and 32 billion votes (Reddit 2019). This means that it provides access to a vast amount of content, user interaction and richness of data.

 In addition to these characteristics, it also has an invaluable rating system that allows any member of the community to approve or disapprove of any content posted. This will provide important insight into the mentality and opinions of the wider community, even if all the members do not engage in the comment sections. Content is sorted according to popularity in various time intervals. This will allow for important insight into the types of content that is popular, universally acceptable or controversial.

Several other researchers have also used the platform as a basis for their studies on eating disorders (Sowles et al 2018), e-cigarette usage (Brett et al 2019, Wang et al 2015), public affairs (Straub-Cook 2018), drivers of online discussion (Horne et al 2017).

Sussan et al (2006) have found that third party websites are the most effective in terms of hosting eWoM. This implies that a website not connected to the company or brand is the most efficient and trustworthy place for eWoM. This argument also supports the choice of platform for the study. As Reddit.com is an independent website, content that is found here will be removed from official company content. This fact coupled with the anonymity of posters means that consumers rely on their judgement in assessing the trustworthiness of the content. It is exactly this combination of factors that makes it an ideal place for achieving the research objectives.

4.1.6.1. Reddit – An introduction

Reddit is a unique take on a forum. It is made up of over 10,000 themed communities. Each has its own users, moderators and rules. The table below lists the top 20 communities (subreddits) with the most subscribers. Users can subscribe to a variety of communities that suit their interests. If a community does not exist each user is free to create one. Each community has moderators who enforce rules. The moderators are volunteers from the user base and are independent of the Reddit website owners.

No.	Community Name	Description
1	Funny	Posts of humorous content
2	Askreddit	Posts asking the Reddit community to answer questions
3	Todayilearned	Posts sharing interesting information and facts
4	Science	Posts relating to science
5	Worldnews	Posts sharing world news
6	Pics	Posts consisting of pictures and photographs

7	IAmA	Posts where celebrities or interesting people answer questions asked by the community
8	Gaming	Posts of gaming-related topics
9	Videos	Posts with videos
10	Movies	Posts about movies
11	Aww	Posts with cute animals, humans etc
12	Music	Posts about music
13	Gifs	Posts consisting of gifs (file format allowing for both animated and static images)
14	News	Posts sharing news (tends to be more US-centric as opposed to world news)
15	Explainlikeimfive	Posts ask questions relating to a variety of topics and users attempt to explain the answers in a simple, accessible way
16	Askscience	Posts ask questions and verified scientists from the domain answer them.
17	Earthporn	Images showcasing nature, landscapes etc.
18	Books	Posts discussing books, reading etc
19	Television	Posts discussing TV shows
20	Mildlyinteresting	Photos that are mildly interesting.

Table 16 Most subscribed to Reddit Communities (RedditMetrics 2017)

Posts are made to individual communities and can consist of text, images, videos, and links to other websites. Users can comment on submissions and have discussions about the content. Each user can vote up or down on each post or comment within the discussion section. Posts are displayed in order of popularity (calculated based on the number of upvotes/downvotes as well as the number of comments). The website also has a frontpage which features top posts from all the communities.

Users can either look at content by browsing individual themed communities or by browsing the front page that aggregates the top posts from all the communities they are subscribed to. In the same way, the front page of a newspaper may contain breaking news from a variety of its separate areas (entertainment, sports, politics etc.)
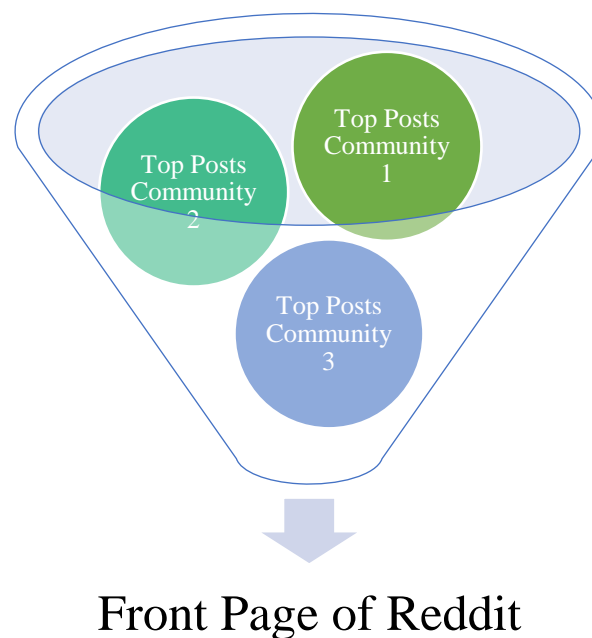
Figure 17 How Reddit's Frontpage Works

Essentially users of the website collectively decide which posts appear on the front page by voting on which content they enjoy. With the power to vote on content or comments, Reddit users are in a position of power essentially deciding and voting for the content that they wish to become popular. This creates a sort of content democracy where users have input in every aspect of the site. Points accrued by content or comments are added to each user's individual tally and is referred to as "karma". Besides the participation incentive, increasing one's karma score is also a reason for participating in the community and providing quality content.

To summarise Reddit is a content aggregator website that supports all types of content and is entirely based on user submissions. However, the anonymity of users and ease of registration has allowed many try and take advantage of the system. Several instances have already been documented of marketers posing as average users and trying to obtain sales for their products. Some operate in good faith and participate actively in their fan communities to answer questions or engage in discussions. Many authors or game developers for example regularly engage with the community in contexts that do not involve self-promotion.

Further, a specific community has been identified as worthy of study. The next chapter discusses more about its mission statement and subscribers.

4.1.6.2. Community Studied – HailCorporate

One of the many communities that exists on Reddit is HailCorporate. It was created six years ago and been progressively increasing in size since. It boasts just under a quarter of a million subscribers.

Their mission statement is presented below:

> *"Let's not make Reddit look like the outside. Where billboards, pictures of products, and company names fill the space that should be used to see the greatness and wonder in the world.*
>
> *This confusing Reddit is in large part about documenting the fact that Reddit really is used for viral and native marketing. Yet also to highlight the fact that regular people are doing the work of advertisers. Seen something on Reddit that seems like an advertisement? No matter how subtle it may seem, post it here, and watch as Reddit becomes filled with overt and despicable cowardly corporate advertising, sad shilling, voracious viral marketing, arrogant astroturfing; and general, rampant consumerism as companies harness the persuasive power of social media."*

(HailCorporate, 2017)

It is a community of self-proclaimed sceptics whose purpose is to identify the content they view as suspicious. The community consists of a mix of links to other Reddit posts that they feel fit in the community as well as discussion posts where they talk about the trends they

observe or other aspects relating to the community. For this study, only the content that directly links to other posts on Reddit will be analysed. Discussions that do not refer to a specific instance will not be included.

By studying the content posted here a better picture can be formed about what content characteristics trigger consumer scepticism. It must be acknowledged that the members of the community may be identifying any content that references a brand, because of their hyper-awareness of the phenomenon. To at least attempt to mitigate this concern the study will account for the number of votes and comments each instance of content has. Using this ranking system will allow for the selection of content that is considered relevant by the widest array of members.

Regardless, the usefulness of this research lies in refining the research instrument for the second stage of primary research. While the results from this analysis may not be immediately generalisable, it will provide a robust basis for variable selection in the experiments.

The content is being studied through the lens of an alternative interpretation. In their original context, the texts being analysed were posted from entertainment or informational purposes. However, this community has used what could be deemed an oppositional decoding method. They view these messages as an instance of advertising or as content that acts as advertising. The community of sceptics identify content to which they assign a secondary meaning than that intended by the original content poster. Sometimes this view is shared by the majority of message receivers and backlash will ensue in the initial posting, but that is not always the case. As such, it is acknowledged that the results obtained may have issues relating to generalisation, however, the findings from this study will be empirically tested with a more homogenous sample to ensure the final results are accurate.

In order to ensure results are an accurate representation of reality, the following section will discuss aspects of reliability relevant to content analysis.

4.1.7. Reliability

Reliability is defined as the extent to which a study is replicable, pursuing the same results through repeated measuring procedures (Neuendorf 2009). It is one of the most distinctive

attributes of content analysis. Reliability stems from category reliability and intercoder reliability.

Category Reliability

Category reliability represents the analyst's ability to create categories and present competent coding instructions to the coders.

In this study, category reliability is easier to assess as the categories are already established in product placement literature and UGC literature. Further, even if pre-existing categories do not exist, as long as an exhaustive operationalisation is presented and what the categories represent is made clear it can achieve category reliability (Kassarjian 1977). As such a significant amount of category reliability is already achieved. To ensure category reliability each of the three coders were given the same set of instructions detailing how to categorise the content, which was articulated based on the literature review, and after reading the instructions the intercoder were given three test questions to assess their comprehension of the instructions.

Intercoder Reliability

Intercoder reliability is pivotal to content analysis. If the coding is not reliable neither is the analysis. (Lombard and Snyder-Dutch 2002). However, the lack of systematic guidelines on ensuring and calculating intercoder reliability leads to failure to establish or report this characteristic (Kripendorff 2004). Intercoder reliability is used to denote the level of agreement between intercoders regarding the characteristics assigned to the analysed content.

As the goal of content analysis lies in recording characteristics of content in a relatively objective manner "reliability is paramount" (Neuendorf 2002:141). Further, intercoder reliability also relates to the quality of the research methods. Strong intercoder agreement denotes clear guidelines for coding have been established and ensure replicability of the study as well.

Intercoder reliability is calculated by measuring agreement between coders after they independently code content. There are a variety of methods used for calculating coder reliability however the most widely accepted are percentage agreement, Holsti's methods, Scott's Pi, and Krippendorff's alpha.

Percentage agreement is simply the indices of the percentile agreement between coders. While this method is easy and allows for assessing agreement levels across several intercoders, it does not account for chance agreements between coders. Also, this method is prone to manipulation through the introduction of categories or variables where there is likely to be little disagreement, thus increasing the overall percentage of agreement artificially. However, there are ways to mitigate this risk by presenting agreement percentages across characteristics analysed rather than overall. Another issue raised by percentage agreement is that it only calculates the level of identical results and does not account for times when ratings are close if dichotomous ratings are used this constitutes less of a concern.

Holsti's Method is a variation on the percentage agreement, but it also accounts for coders rating separate materials. Due to reporting across several variables, it has the same downside as percentage agreement as it may hide unacceptable levels of rater disagreement.

Scott's Pi is one of the variables that accounts for chance agreement. Some identify this index as being too conservative because it considers the proportion of the number of categories as well as the distribution of answers across them. Another issue with this measurement is that it is only been used for two coders. Extensions for three or more coders have been suggested in the past (Craig 1981), however, have not yet been applied.

Krippendorff alpha (Hayes and Krippendorff 2007) is proposed as being a more complete variable to assess reliability. It was developed specifically to address the issues that arose from the use of other reliability indexes discussed above. In terms of practicality, it also allows for measurement even with missing categories or data points, an aspect which cannot be accounted for in the other indices (Hayes and Krippendorff 2007). One of the ways it addresses the pitfall of other indices is that Krippendorff and Hayes (2007) have produced an easily accessible SPSS test-code to measure it. By doing so they have addressed one of the only criticisms brought to it by Lombard et al (2002). In addition to the advantages discussed above the issue of accessibility and convenience add further weight to the decision of using this reliability coefficient. In terms of popularity of usage, it is second only to the percentage agreement method (Lombard et al 2002). Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that even this method is not free of statistical error.

The content analysis will use percentage agreement to express intercoder reliability. This method is appropriate as the disadvantages associated with it are minimal in the context of this

study. It will minimise issues of manipulation by the researcher by reporting intercoder agreement across each variable rather than as a whole. Because the variables analysed are largely dichotomous, this addresses the second main concern associated with this method. A value above 0.7 is acceptable for exploratory content analysis (Neuendorf 2016).

The following section will discuss how validity is being ensured in the context of content analysis.

4.1.8. Validity

Content analysis validity represents the quality which "compels one to accept scientific results as evidence" (Krippendorff 1980:71). It is the extent to which an instrument measures what it is supposed to measure, also referred to as construct validity. The content analysis was designed to identify the most frequent content characterises found in content identified as suspicious in the context of a particular website. Through frequency analysis, it aims to narrow a much wider list of characteristics that could impact scepticism and select the most prevalent for further testing through experiments.

The following section will examine how the data collection was carried out and the exclusion criteria that were applied.

4.2. Data Collection

As discussed in the sampling chapter the aim was to collect 250 data points. As such 399 instances of content have been collected and yielded 250 valid units of analysis. It is important to note that the data collected was sorted by popularity in the timeframe of one year. As such an exact replication of content used is difficult as new posts emerge and the ones used start to fall outside the timeframe. The rankings and numbers were correct on 29/12/2017. Subsequent newer content or ranking changes have not been addressed.

Through content analysis and the use of 3 intercoders, each unit of analysis was categorised according to the six categories established in the literature review: plot relevance (high/low), brand prominence (high/low), tone towards the brand (positive/neutral/negative), type of appeal (emotional/informational/both), quality (amateur/professional) and promotional

information (present/absent). Objectively measurable qualities such as the brand featured, number of brands present, and type of media were coded by the researcher.

The units of analysis were, in some cases dived, if there were multiple relevant brands present. Intercoder responses were gathered multiple times from the same unit of analysis if multiple brands were present and deemed relevant. As such one instance of content resulted in multiple units of analysis. In total 17 were identified and created. As such there are 267 total recorded units of analysis.

4.2.1. Exclusion Criteria

To ensure a relevant sample is gathered several exclusion criteria have been established. From a thematic perspective, posts relating to politics, meta-discussion or satirical posts have been excluded. Further any posts where the original content was no longer available were also excluded. Videos and gifs longer than one minute were not included due to the difficulty presented by measuring aspects such as brand prominence in longer formats. Posts in which the initial poster had been identified as an actual agent for the brand were not included, as well as posts which were self-promotional Q&As.

Further, posts in which brands were not immediately identifiable, or did not have any branding elements, were excluded. Content that is not in English has also been excluded. Posts that refer to others' reactions to content, rather than the content itself have also been excluded.

Limitations

Before analysis, it is important to acknowledge that the data was collected from what can reasonably be categorised as a highly sceptical community. As such the results presented here, while valuable for furthering the present research, cannot be generalised to the whole population without further verification or corroboration. Another aspect that needs to be addressed is the inferential reasoning used in content analysis. Because content analysis measure observable phenomena and uses logic, contextual evidence, and existing literature to make conclusions from what has been observed findings are not generalisable without further validation. Because a leap is required between what the data show and what can be assumed it means. An increased frequency of a certain characteristic can be objectively reported, however, the link between that increased frequency and triggering scepticism is where the inferential

logic comes into play. As there are no direct indications of the fact that increased frequency also equals increased scepticism, it may seem like the best explanation however definitive proof cannot be provided without further study.

As such the conclusions reached in the study will be preliminary. The content analysis results will be used to establish the basis for the experimental design which will be able to empirically establish a causal relationship. The following section will describe how the analysis has been conducted in order to determine how the conclusion will be reached.

4.2.2. Method of Analysis

The analysis will be conducted via 2 main methods: frequency analysis and mean rank comparison. With 267 total units of analysis each being categorised, frequency analysis will look at the frequency of some characteristics over others. For example, if higher brand prominence brand related UGC is more common it may be inferred that it triggers scepticism more than low prominence brand related UGC.

Because the data were gathered from a forum where voting is possible, for the data collection the posts were organised through a function that displays the top posts in the past calendar year. Inside the forum, they are ranked based on an algorithm accounting for user engagement (number of votes and comments). As the purpose of the forum is to "document times people act as unwitting advertisers and what appear to be legitimate adverts via native advertising" (HailCorporate 2018), and votes (either up or down) are used to indicate content that contributes to the community (Reddit2018), the number of positive votes indicates the number of users that agree that a particular instance of content acts either as native advertising or unnatural brand advocacy. This allows for relevance sampling to occur because the "best" content from the past year has been gathered.

As detailed in the methodology some instances of content were excluded, this means that while the rank number assigned will not correspond with the initial rankings. However, the order has been preserved.

The mean rank comparison analysis will look at whether in the top 250 posts, certain types of content tend to score higher than others. For example, if all instances of high prominence content rank higher on average (i.e., have more votes and comments) than low prominence

content, it may be inferred that high prominence content it is more likely to trigger consumer scepticism. The average rank for all the posts is 125. If posts displaying high prominence have an average rank of 110, for example, it could be posited that users in the community view high brand prominence as an indicator of advertising or advert like posts. As a result, it could be inferred that high prominence is more likely to cause consumer scepticism.

Having established the methodology and the data analysis strategy, the following section will present the results of the data analysis by discussing each variable individually.

4.3. Data Analysis

This section will present the findings of the content analysis based on the variables identified in the literature review, additionally it presents the most common brands and brands categories encountered and the impact of brand clutter.

4.3.1. Media Type - Modality

The content was categorised into 4 categories: text, images, GIF and both text and images.
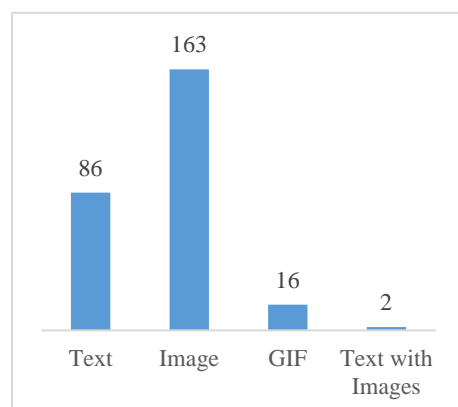
Table 3 Frequency of Media Types in Sample

Overall, 32% of the content was represented by text posts, 61% were images, 6% were GIFs and 0.7% of posts contained both text and images. The average rank for text posts is 117. While the average rank for images was 129. Their differences in rank may indicate that brand related text posts tend to score higher than images. However, in terms of frequency images are more preponderant. It may be concluded that text posts potentially trigger more scepticism than images.

Russell (2002) argues that modality of product placement impacts effectiveness. In the paper, visual versus auditory placements are compared, with auditory placements being found more effective. However, in this context, there are only textual versus visual brand inclusions. While brand related UGC images are more frequent, text formats seem to cause more scepticism in viewers. This may be explained through the preponderance of high brand prominence posts in the text category (90%). To account for this discrepancy in distribution when analysing only

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the low prominence content average rankings for low prominence text posts (130) and low prominence images (144) there is further evidence that text posts tend to create more scepticism. This difference in rank is also observable if comparing high prominence text posts (118) to high prominence images (134).

Based on these findings and existing literature it may be assumed that the type of brand related UGC has an impact on triggering scepticism.

4.3.2. Plot Relevance

In terms of plot relevance, most of the content falls under the High Plot Relevance category (68.5%), while 30% are Low Plot Relevance with the remaining 2.5% which were rated as Unclear. Across the category, the agreement percentage among the intercoders was 86.6%.
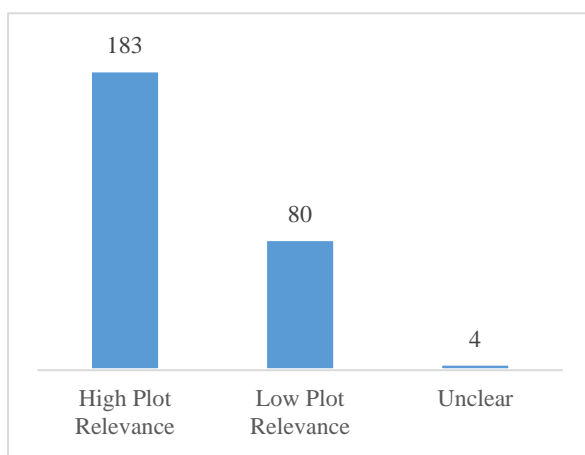
Table 4 Frequency of Plot Relevance Levels in Sample

Further, by analysing the average ranking of High Plot Relevance units and Low Plot Relevance units a small difference in the ranking was discovered. While the average for ranking HPR is 124 that of LPR is 127. This difference compounded with a higher incidence of HPR content could indicate that Plot Relevance affects the likelihood of triggering scepticism in consumers. These findings are also supported in Product Placement literature where higher plot relevance leads to lower rates of efficiency in some cases due to its increased visibility (Gupta and Lord 1998, Russell 2002). An ANOVA test was conducted which showed that there was a statistically significant difference between the rank of HPR and LPR content $F_{(17,262)} = 7.66$, $p=.00$.

ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	55.165	245	.225	7.656	.000
Within Groups	.500	17	.029		
Total	55.665	262			

Table 5 ANOVA test between Rank and Plot Relevance

To conclude, it is conceivable that Plot Relevance plays a role in triggering consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC.

4.3.3. Brand Prominence
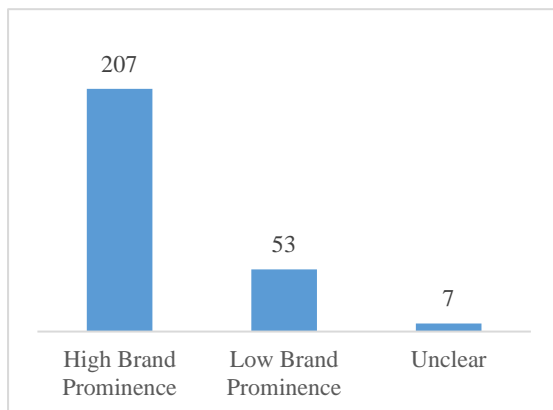
Table 6 Frequency of Brand Prominence Levels in Sample

In terms of Brand Prominence unsurprisingly the vast majority also were categorised as High (77.5%), only 19.9% as Low Brand Prominence and 2.6% Unclear. Across the category, intercoder agreement percentage was 84.9%.

In terms of average ranking surprisingly the average ranking of Low Prominence content is higher at 119 than High Prominence at 127. This would indicate that Lower Prominence may trigger more scepticism and thus garner more votes from members. However, the increased prevalence of High Brand Prominence content indicates that this is the most often encountered in the wider community. This is consistent with the negative effects of high brand prominence observed in product placement (Cowley and Baron 2008).

The average rank comparison contradicts existing evidence, while the difference in frequencies is supported by previous research. This creates a situation where a definitive conclusion as to

which of the variable levels is more likely to cause scepticism is not clearly identifiable. This indicates the need for further study of this variable to determine how it impacts consumer scepticism.

4.3.4. Tone towards the Brand

In terms of tone, most of the content was split between positive (46.4%) and neutral (50.1%), with a very small percentage coming from Negative (2.2%) and Unclear (1.1%). Intercoder agreement across this variable was 73.3%.
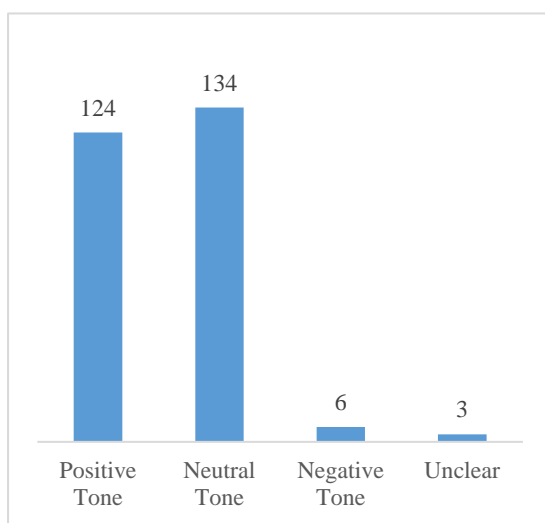
Table 7 Frequency of Tone towards Brand Levels in Sample

In terms of rank comparison, posts with a Positive Tone towards the brand tended to be highest in the list with an average rank of 110, while negative posts ranked 123 and neutral tone posts ranked 140 on average.

However, it must be admitted that there may be insufficient data points for the negative tone towards the brand to unequivocally affirm the difference in tone. Further, the negative posts that were often included in the forum with the indication that comment activity was suspicious rather than the content itself. The posters considered that the amount of brand defence present in the comment section was not justifiable. Due to these factors, the rank of negative posts is not inherently dependent on the content itself, but also the comments and context. In this case, we deem the average ranking of Negative posts irrelevant in this particular case. However, the difference in rank between the Positive and Neutral posts is quite significant, while frequency is largely similar, and can be attributed to differing rates of scepticism from consumers. As can be seen in Table 8 below, an ANOVA test was conducted after eliminating all the negatively toned content and the differences in rank between positive and neutral content are statistically significant $F_{(1,256)} = 12.24$, p=.001. This indicates that brand related UGC with a positive tone towards the brand is more likely to elicit a sceptical reaction from consumers.

ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	60470.268	1	60470.268	12.243	.001
Within Groups	1264406.197	256	4939.087		
Total	1324876.465	257			

Table 8 Anova Results Average Rank and Positive and Neutral Tone

In conclusion, the tone towards the brand expressed in content could have an impact on triggering consumer scepticism, with the strongest relationship being between positive and scepticism towards content.

4.3.5. Quality

In terms of quality of execution 14.9% were deemed professional level, 58.8% amateur and 26.2% unclear.

Due to the high percentage of "Unclear" answers, the intercoder reliability is quite low for this category at 56.7%. However, this number was expected as some content does not always explicitly display indicators of amateur or professional execution. While the coding instruction advised the intercoders to look for specific signs of one or the other these will not always be present or applicable in all cases.

Table 9 Frequency of Quality Levels in Sample
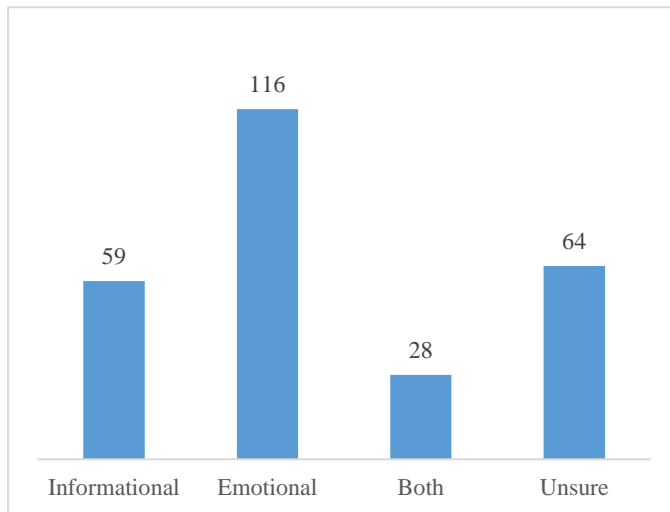
4.3.6. Message Type

Table 10 Frequency of Message Types in Sample

Message type was also quite skewed towards one category. Content with an informational message accounted for 22%, emotional content for 43.4%, content that contained both 10.4%, and unclear content 23.9%. Intercoder agreement for message type was the lowest amongst all coded categories, at only 55.4%.

There are some indications that type of appeal may have an impact on consumer scepticism, however due to low intercoder agreement across the category a definitive conclusion cannot be formulated.

4.3.7. Promotional Information

32% of the units of analysis had promotional information present, most of the content (62.9%) did not, and a small section (4.1%) was defined as unclear. Intercoder agreement for this category was 78.6%.

In terms of ranking the difference between the two categories is negligible, content that had promotional information ranking only slightly higher (123) than that content without (125).
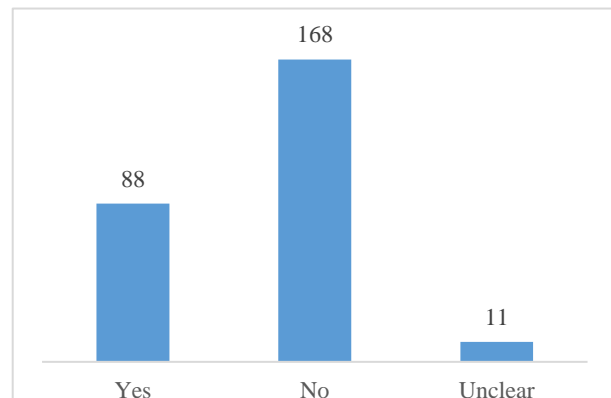
Table 11 Frequency of Promotional Information in Sample

An independent sample T-test showed no significant correlation between the presence of promotional information and rank.

4.3.8. Brand Clutter

Out of the 250 instances of content collected, 192 (72%) feature single brands and 56 (28%) feature two or more brands. There is a predominance of content that features a single brand. In terms of ranking average rank for content featuring multiple brands was 130, while for single brands it was 113. Brand related content that features a single brand tends to score higher than that featuring multiple brands indicating that the presence of multiple brands may lower the likelihood of consumer scepticism.

4.3.9. Brands and Product Categories

Another interesting avenue of analysis was the type of brands encountered. The most frequent product categories are restaurants (79 instances), entertainment (60 instances), and food and drink (53 instances). All relatively low involvement product categories. Higher involvement product categories such as automotive brands (16) and technology (21) were less frequent.

The most frequently encountered brands were McDonald's (16 instances), Amazon (11 instances), Star Wars (9), KFC (6), Coca Cola (6), Nintendo (6), Taco Bell (5), Target (5), Tesla (5), Wendy's (5), Apple (4), Pepsi (4).

These findings help establish a good basis for selecting stimuli for the coming experiments. The use of low involvement brands and/or products from the most frequent brand categories would mimic naturally occurring content.

4.4. Conclusion

Based on the data presented above there are strong indications that modality of placement, (media type), plot relevance, brand prominence, and tone towards the brand could affect consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC.

Based on the data gathered, it seems that brand related UGC in text form tends to arouse more scepticism in viewers than images, even when accounting for differences in prominence.

Plot relevance is another variable that may impact consumer reaction to the content. In addition to its increased frequency, high plot relevance tends to result in higher overall rank. These

findings indicate that when content is centred around the brand it is more likely to arouse consumer scepticism.

High brand prominence may have an impact on triggering consumer scepticism. This is due to the increased visibility and elaboration which is likely to occur in such situations (Cowley and Baron 2008). While low brand prominence may have a lower level of effectiveness, it also causes less scepticism.

It seems that negative brand related UGC is the least likely to arouse scepticism. Because of the negative tone towards the brand, it is less likely to be viewed as an attempt to manipulate viewers. However, it must be noted that it provides an interesting space for others to engage in brand defence, which ultimately may result in an improvement in brand attitude. Further, the differences in the rank of Neutral and Positive posts are also noteworthy, with content that features a positive tone towards the brand eliciting higher scepticism.

Other aspects analysed while, providing promising data, cannot be definitively established as affecting triggering of scepticism due to the low rate of intercoder reliability observed in these categories.

The main goal of the content analysis was to establish which of the characteristics identified in the literature have a stronger likelihood of triggering scepticism. Because content analysis uses inferential reasoning its findings cannot be definitively established unless verified through further research or similar previous findings. This is compounded by the limited scope of the data collection, while it analyses a wide spectrum of content because the evaluations are from a community of users who identify themselves as sceptics it is not generalizable to the wider population. However, this analysis serves as an important basis for selecting executional variables for the ensuing experiments.

Due to practical implications, not all variables could be integrated into an experimental design. As such based on the differences in frequencies of the characteristics and average rank, only some were selected for inclusion. Moving forward from the content analysis, the content characteristics that will be integrated into the experimental are brand prominence, plot relevance, and tone towards the brand.

The following chapter will present the conceptual framework that has been elaborated based on the content analysis results and existing literature as well as discuss the key constructs and articulate the relevant hypotheses.

Chapter 5 – Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis Development

The aim of this study is to establish and understand the effect of UGC characteristics on consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC and the impact of consumer scepticism on marketing outcomes. A review of existing literature highlighted several gaps in knowledge surrounding both brand related UGC and consumer scepticism. Due to the limited knowledge surrounding the interaction of these two concepts the study proposed a sequential research design with an initial exploratory content analysis followed by empirical study to establish the proposed relationships. The previous chapter presented the methodology for the content analysis as well as its results. After an analysis of 250 instances of brand related UGC, the findings indicated that brand prominence, plot relevance, media type and tone towards the brand are some of the most relevant concepts to analyse in relation to consumer scepticism.

This chapter will present the proposed conceptual framework, discuss the key constructs identified in both literature and the content analysis, and based on the discussion elaborate appropriate hypotheses.

5.1. Proposed Conceptual Framework

Based on a review of relevant literature and the results of the content analysis, this study proposes a conceptual framework depicted in Figure 18. The relevant UGC characteristics were identified from UGC and product placement literature, while the marketing outcomes were identified based on the effects observed in UGC and product placement literature. The theoretical framework contributes an initial answer to the RQ3 and establishes initial relationships between the proposed constructs.
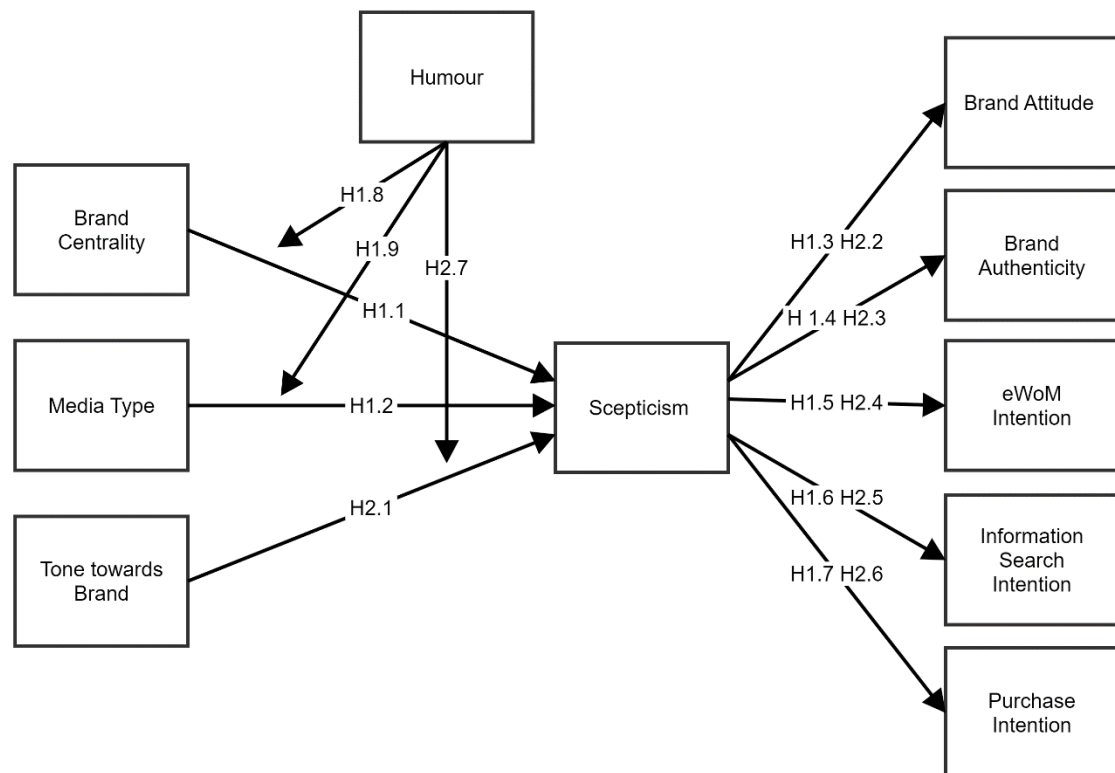
Figure 18 Proposed conceptual framework

One of the main reasons why UGC is largely more effective than Marketer Generated Communications is the increased trust consumers place in the opinions of their peers (Kozinets 2002). Other consumers' experiences are viewed as being more trustworthy than marketing communication because they are perceived as being impartial. The main source of UGC trust is the perceived trustworthiness of the author (Pan and Chiou 2011). Companies such as Amazon and Tripadvisor have started labelling their frequent reviewers or those who have made verified purchases to increase the likelihood that others will trust the information being communicated. Trust in UGC and its results have been firmly established in the literature (Pan and Chiou 2011, Tang et al 2014). The effects of scepticism towards UGC have been largely ignored in literature. One of the only studies that considered the impact of untrustworthy reviews (Reimer and Berkenstein 2016) found a so-called "boomerang effect" where consumers would engage in the opposite behaviour to that suggested by the content. Consumers showed increased purchase intention as a result of untrustworthy negative reviews and decreased purchase intention when exposed to untrustworthy positive reviews. With recent scandals relating to sponsored content on social media (Guardian 2019), and companies forcing

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their employees to write fake reviews for their products (Cosmopolitan 2018) consumers are more aware than ever of the deceptive potential of UGC. They can make inferences of manipulative intent (Kim and Song 2018) even when uncertain of the original intentions of the content author. These inferences of manipulative intent have been dubbed consumer scepticism or activation of persuasion knowledge (Campbell and Kirmani 2000). Persuasion knowledge theory also supports this view, establishing that a concrete instance of persuasion need not occur as long as one is perceived by the consumer (Obermiller and Spangenberg 1998). As a result of this perception of persuasive intent, the recipient of the message will take "corrective action" (Campbell et al 2013).

UGC trust literature highlighted that consumers have to rely on source and message cues in order to determine the trustworthiness of brand related UGC. While source-related cues have been studied extensively, there is little knowledge about how content characteristics impact the formation of consumer scepticism and what the impact it has on attitudinal and behavioural brand outcomes.

To establish how consumers respond to instances of brand related UGC this study will base its theoretical framework on The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) (Petty and Caccioppo 1986). It establishes how consumers process information when presented with a persuasion attempt. It is often referred to as the dual-processing model because it establishes two routes (central and peripheral) to persuasion based on the level of cognition a consumer dedicated to processing the information. It has been applied in similar contexts in order to explain the observed changes in brand attitude based on exposure to marketing messages. A study by Russel (2002) uses the model in the context of product placement to explain the varying levels of effectiveness of different types of product placement. Balasubramanian et al (2014) also use the model similarly in a product placement context to explain the impact of content and individual level variables on brand outcomes such as brand attitude and purchase intention. Further, the previously mentioned "boomerang effect" described by Reimer and Berkenstein (2016) is also accounted for in the ELM.

This study aims to apply it in a similar way, positing that increased elaboration can lead to consumer scepticism and ultimately to a negative change in brand outcomes. As such the study proposes that consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC will cause a decrease in brand attitude, brand authenticity, eWoM intention, information search intention and purchase intention.

The following section will further detail the variables present in the conceptual framework and elaborate the relevant hypotheses.

5.2. Key Constructs and Hypotheses

5.2.1. Brand Centrality

Brand centrality refers to the role the brand plays in the content. One of the key gaps identified in UGC literature is that brand centrality is often assumed (Smith et al 2012) rather than investigated. This can be deduced by looking at the object of study of most literature around UGC. In their study Tang et al (2014) evidenced that most literature in the area focuses on rating and reviews. These types of UGC are sought when consumer need information on products so they are inherently product or brand centric. As such literature has largely ignored brand inclusion in UGC where the product or brand is not a central aspect of the content.

In Smith et al's (2012) study they categorise UGC across social media platforms through content analysis. They divided brand inclusions into central and peripheral. Brands were coded as central if they played a main role in the content otherwise it was considered peripheral[6].

This variable has been included as it is a combination of the two variables used in the content analysis: brand prominence and plot relevance. The reason for which these two variables have been replaced with brand centrality is to avoid redundancy and variable level inconsistencies.

In the context of the content analysis, 86.5% of all content was coded as having the same level of brand prominence as plot relevance. This indicated that while there are situations where the two act as distinct concepts they largely operate in tandem, with high brand prominence coinciding with high plot relevance and low brand prominence coinciding with low plot relevance. While situations where the two have different levels exist for the purpose of this study it is more efficient to use a single variable to represent them.

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[6] "For example, a post on Lululemon's Facebook wall was coded 'yes' if it read, 'If I shop at Lululemon online do I still get the reusable bag?'. A YouTube video was coded 'no' if it featured a consumer showing off an outfit, wearing Lululemon along with nine other brands, and only mentioned Lululemon along with the other brands in the video notes. For such a post to be coded 'yes', the brand would need to be mentioned in the video and be the focus throughout the majority of its run time." (Smith et al 2012:107)

The second reason behind the substitution of the two initial variables with brand centrality is addressing variable level inconsistencies between the two variables that would impede experimentation. Variable level inconsistencies represent experimental conditions where the level of one variable conflicts with the level of another (Krippendorff 2004). Because high plot relevance implies the brand is the main element in the content and plays a lead role, it is not compatible with low brand prominence where the brand is less noticeable. A brand cannot simultaneously be the focus of the story (high plot relevance) and not be immediately noticeable (low prominence). For these two reasons, brand prominence and plot relevance were replaced with brand centrality.

In the area of product placement, the effects of brand prominence on recall and brand attitude have been extensively studied. It has been found that high prominence leads to better recall (Cowley and Barron 2008, D'Astous and Chartier 2000). However, in certain circumstances, high brand prominence may cause negative repercussions for brand attitudes (Matthes et al 2007). These negative effects are due to the fact that high prominence brand placements are processed more deeply and may activate awareness of deliberate brand placement (Van Reijmersdal 2009). These conclusions support the formulated hypothesis that content with high brand centrality may be more likely to cause scepticism in viewers. Although product placement literature provides an extensive array of studies which have looked at marketing outcomes there is not enough literature to establish the role of brand centrality in UGC, therefore, this study draws from product placement for hypothesis formulation:

H1.1: Brand related UGC with higher brand centrality will lead to higher

levels of scepticism in consumers than lower brand centrality content.

5.2.2. Media Type

Media type has been found to influence advertising effectiveness across a variety of platforms.

The superior effectiveness of images as opposed to text in advertising appeals was initially posited by Rossiter and Percy (1978). Further empirical studies (Eddell and Staelin 1983, Kisielius, 1982, Mitchel and Olson 1981) confirmed this. More recent studies have found similar effects for packaging (Underwood and Kelin 2002). In a UGC context, similar studies have found that consumers prefer images to text (Adweek 2017).

In some specific studies relating to online search results and advertising Hughes et al (2003) found that viewers tend to focus more on the text than images. Similar results from Rayner et al (2001) indicated more time is spent looking at textual components of advertising rather than the visuals. These results contradicted the participants' stated preferences for visuals. However, a more recent eye-tracking study (Hernandez-Mendez and Munoz-Leiva 2015) found that viewers pay more attention to images than text when looking at banner adverts. These differences may be due to the methodology of both studies. Li et al (2016) attribute the increased focus on text when prompted to consider purchasing the product and more time looking at images when the task is memorisation.

In the context of this particular study, respondents are given a scenario to place the stimuli in the context of encountering it while browsing social media or when looking for more information before purchase. This allows for more natural processing of the content, however, since the participants are aware of their presence in the study it stands to reason that they will be more likely to engage in memorisation behaviour which will need to be accounted for in the analysis of data. The associated hypothesis is:

H1.2: Brand related UGC in the form of images will lead to lower levels of scepticism in consumers than text UGC.

5.2.3. Tone towards the Brand

Tone towards brand or valence "captures the over-riding brand sentiment expressed in brand related UGC" (Smith et al 2012:106). In the context presented below tone refers to tone conveyed towards the brand, rather than overall tone of UGC, as such it is a distinct concept. While most research in the area of tone has focused on ratings and reviews, it is also relevant for a broader scope of UGC. Smith et al (2012) support expanding this categorisation to UGC. Tone towards the brand has been categorised a positive, negative, and neutral.

In Smith et al (2012) comparative cross-platform study on UGC types, they used a coding system to categorise the overall sentiment towards the brand as positive, negative, and neutral. This approach is similar to the one employed by this study, however, because their study focused on content that was brand-centric the overall sentiment of the UGC coincided with the tone towards the brand. Because the content was about the brand, the overall sentiment was

also the one directed towards the brand. In the context of this study, a distinction needs to be made between the tone of the content and the tone towards the brand. For example, if an instance of content is making fun of a marketing error or a faulty product, while the content is funny in tone overall, it has a negative tone towards the brand. As such we have made a distinction between UGC tone and tone towards the brand and in this case, the focus is on how the brand is being portrayed.

Positive brand related UGC acts as both a predictor and a driver of sales (Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006). It also is a key tool in achieving other marketing outcomes (Cheung and Thadani 2012, Christodoulides et al 2012).

Because studies into neutral UGC focused on ratings and reviews they ultimately only discuss a small subsection of UGC that is less represented in the study (Tang et al 2014). However, previous literature on product placement does indicate that neutral brand related content may also impact marketing outcomes (Cowley and Barron 2008). Tang et al (2014) used sentiment analysis to conceptualise neutral reviews as those that feature either negative and positive aspects in equal measure or those which do not use words that have positive or negative valences.

Negative reviews have been found to have a much greater impact on sales than positive ones (Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006, Park and Lee 2009). One explanation for this is rooted in impression formation literature, stating that people place more importance on negative information (Skowronski and Carlston 1989). Homer and Yoon (1992) also suggest that negative information is more likely to grab the attention of viewers. Findings from the content analysis indicate that negative content is the least likely to attract consumer scepticism.

The content analysis results indicate that content with a positive tone towards the brand is most likely to induce a sceptical response. This is in line with findings from Yi et al (2019) who found that highlighting extremely positive brand related UGC is more likely to cause an increase in consumer scepticism. However, the same study (Yi et al 2019) found that positive reviews, in general, tend to lower consumer scepticism and increase purchase intention. This dichotomy could be seen as a result of the highly sceptical nature of community being analysed, this study theorises that the HailCorporate community displays similar behaviours towards content with a positive tone towards the brand that are encountered in regular consumers only when the tone is extremely positive due to their higher level of persuasion knowledge. This

allows the members to more readily identify content as a persuasion attempt and as such the results from the content analysis may not be applicable to a larger population with more moderate levels of persuasion knowledge. As such the hypothesis for tone towards the brand will be based on the findings of Yi et al (2019) because it reflects a wider array of the population than that sampled in the content analysis.

Based on the existing literature and content analysis results, the associated hypotheses are as follows:

> *H2.1: The tone towards the brand included in the UGC is negatively related to scepticism such that an increase in positive tone determines a decrease in scepticism.*

5.2.4. Consumer Goal Seeking Behaviour

Consumers' goals for UGC consumption can vary from viewer to viewer. Katz et al (1974) were the pioneers of the uses and gratifications theory which endeavoured to explain why viewers consumer media. They posited that viewers actively seek out the media that fulfils their needs and expectations, stating that media consumption is primarily goal oriented. Based on their work Shao (2009) lists four main reasons why viewers consume user-generated media: it fulfils their informational, entertainment and mood-management needs, as well as integrating and enhancing social encounters. However, one of the most pertinent criticisms to this work is the fact that they have failed to sufficiently distinguish between entertainment and mood management needs. Both Katz et al (1974) and Wang et al (2012) present a slightly different categorisation: emotional, cognitive, social, and habitual.

This means that all viewers have distinct and specific goals they must accomplish through their consumption of media. We posit that reactions to brand related UGC may be different depending on the initial motivation for UGC consumption.

Entertainment is one of the foremost drivers of media consumption (Shao 2009). This means that consumers are more likely to consume UGC for entertainment than information. They use UGC as entertainment for the purpose of "escaping problems, relaxing, aesthetic enjoyments, filling time and emotional release" (Shao 2009: 11). Studies on product placement have emphasised that the reason for its effectiveness is the fact that when consumers are viewing

media for entertainment purposes, they are less guarded and more open to persuasion (Karrh et al 2003).

However, it a similar effect may not be observed when viewers have entertainment motivation for UGC consumption. Russell (2012) stresses the importance of placement congruence in her study on product placement effectiveness. The study posits that the presence of brands in UGC will be more likely to cause consumer scepticism due to the perceived incongruent nature of the placements, as opposed to when consumers are seeking information about a specific brand or purchase where the presence of a brand is expected. Thus, a higher rate of scepticism may be observed when consumers have an entertainment motivation for seeking out UGC. The associated hypotheses are as follows:

Not all four types of gratifications were included in the study: mood management and social motivation were excluded. Due to the type of study being conducted the participants are only presented with one instance of content and as such a social motivation cannot be replicated in this context. In terms of mood management as motivation, this was excluded due to the lack of consensus on whether this is a separate function from entertainment. While Shao (2009) categorises it as a separate activity, both Katz et al (1974) and Wang et al (2012) place both entertainment and mood management in the same category of emotional needs.

An informational motivation denotes times when consumers seek out the UGC because of its brand inclusion. They want to acquire information about a brand/product or service. This motivation is one that is used by default in most UGC studies, as they often focus on ratings and reviews as a subsection of UGC. Contrasting this choice against an entertainment motivation when consumers have no particular desire to interact with brands would provide an insight into the persuasiveness and effectiveness of the different types of UGC.

These two types of motivations also mirror the message types considered in the content analysis in the earlier phase of the study. The content analysis compared at the frequency of brand related UGC that was of informative or entertaining nature. Results from the content analysis showed that emotional/entertaining content was more prevalent. However, the content analysis could not consider what each individual users' goal-seeking behaviour was in that context.

As the scope of the study related to the impact of UGC characteristics, consumers' goals seeking behaviour (GSB) fall outside the remit of the study. However, as evidenced above GSB has an impact on how consumers choose the engage and respond to brand related UGC. To

account for these differences the study will use GSB as a control variable to ensure the reliability of the observed results.

5.2.5. Humour

Humour is a frequently employed in advertising messages due to its favourable effects on brand attitude and purchase intention (Newton et al 2016). Interestingly, Hansen et al (2009) found that humorous appeals in advertising impaired brand recall with consumers being more likely to remember the ad as opposed to consciously remembering the brand name. Chung and Zhao (2003) established the positive impact of humour appeals on memory and brand attitude for low involvement products. This is particularly relevant as this is the particular niche the study is focusing on as well. Alden et al (2000) argue that the effects of humour depend on the recipient. More explicitly, not all content is perceived as being equally humorous by different message recipients. This highlights the difficulties associated with manipulating humour as an independent variable, as some respondents may perceive some stimuli as having different levels of humour than those intended (Speck 1991). This prompted the use of humour in this study as a covariate rather than a manipulated variable.

Research on the effects of humour in the context of ELM theory (Zhang and Zinkhan 2006) has showed that it is an important motivator for information processing. This indicates that humour is more likely to elicit central processing of the message. In turn this increased elaboration of brand-related content has been found to increase the likelihood of consumer scepticism (Hang and Auty 2011). As such we posit that humour moderates the relationship between the identified content characteristics and consumer scepticism. The elaborated hypotheses are as follows.

H1.8: Humour moderates the relationship between brand centrality and consumer scepticism; For higher levels of perceived content humour, the brand centrality elicited scepticism would be stronger than for lower levels of perceived humour.

H1.9: Humour moderates the relationship between media type and consumer scepticism; For higher levels of perceived content humour, the media type elicited scepticism would be stronger than for lower levels of perceived humour.

H2.7: Humour moderates the relationship between tone towards the brand and consumer scepticism; For higher levels of perceived content humour,

the scepticism elicited by the tone towards the brand will be stronger than
for lower levels of perceived humour.

5.2.6. Consumer Scepticism

Consumer scepticism that refers to a state of mind induced momentarily towards a certain stimulus (Obermiller and Spangenberg 1998). What this variable seeks to measure is whether consumers perceive the content as being a persuasion attempt. Friestad and Wright (1994) propose in their study of persuasion knowledge that it is sufficient for consumers to think a persuasion attempt is ongoing, regardless of whether or not that is true. As such scepticism can be triggered regardless of verifiable facts. Consumers may react sceptically towards content that is genuinely not an attempt to persuade them as long as they feel it is. These are referred to as "ambiguous cues" and the triggering of scepticism depends on the situation or individual factors (Kirmani and Zhu 2007:689).

5.2.7. Brand Attitude

Spears and Singh (2011:55) propose a new definition "attitude towards the brand is a relatively enduring, unidimensional summary evaluation of the brand that presumably energizes behaviour". Some of the additions made are entirely supported by existing literature. Attitudes are relatively stable over time and can be used as a predictor of consumer behaviour (Mitchell and Olson 1981; Solomon 2016).

However, there are strong debates relating to the constituting elements of brand attitude. Some view it as unidimensional (Spears and Singh 2004, Machleit et al 1993), while others propose multidimensionality (Percy and Rossiter 1992; Solomon 2016) in various forms. Solomon (2016) proposes a distinction between how consumers feel, think, and act towards a brand (affect, cognition, behaviour).

It is expected that brand attitude will be influenced by the triggering of scepticism and corrective action towards brand related UGC. This expectation is based on a parallel between product placement effectiveness and persuasion knowledge literature. Similar effects have been achieved for sponsored blog posts or media by Campbell and Kirmani (2008), and Wei et

al (2008) when the sponsorship was disclosed to viewers. The associated hypotheses are as follows:

> *H1.3/2.2: Consumer scepticism negatively relates to brand attitude such*
> *that an increase in scepticism will lead to a decrease in brand attitude.*

5.2.8. Brand Authenticity

Gilmore and Pine (2007) argue that consumers have had different prevailing purchasing criteria as the market and society has evolved. They present this evolution as having gone from availability to cost to quality to authenticity. Their argument is supported by Brown et al. (2003:21) who posit that "consumers' search for authenticity is one of the cornerstones of contemporary marketing". Consumers are no longer willing to accept insincere brand behaviour and have started demanding consistency and authenticity.

Holt (2002) links brand authenticity with the lack of a perceived commercial intent. However, since the essential tenant of companies is creating a profit, real brand authenticity is at odds with the central tenant of doing business. "To be authentic, brands must […] disseminated by parties without an instrumental economic agenda, by people who are intrinsically motivated by their inherent value. Postmodern consumers perceive modern branding efforts to be inauthentic because they ooze with the commercial intent of their sponsors." (Holt 2002:83). This is exactly why this variable is of interest in the study of scepticism towards brand related UGC. As the study is focusing on why and how consumers make inferences of manipulative intent and its consequences, perceived brand authenticity is the most relevant outcome variables.

Because brand authenticity has components relating to both integrity and credibility (Napoli et al 2014, Morhart et al 2015) the triggering of a sceptical reaction could call both these qualities into question and thus have a negative impact on brand authenticity.

The associated hypotheses are as follows:

> *H1.4/2.3: Consumer scepticism negatively relates to brand authenticity*
> *such that an increase in scepticism will lead to a decrease in brand*
> *authenticity.*

5.2.9. eWoM Intention

Electronic Word of Mouth (eWoM) is an important marketing tool and can help achieve a variety of marketing outcomes. Numerous studies have emphasized the influence of eWoM on consumer attitudes, intentions and behaviours associated with purchases (Kim et al 2018, Lee 2014, Zhu and Zhang 2010, Lee and Youn 2009, Park, Lee, and Han 2007, Gruen et al 2005) and many others. Its success is due to the perception of being more credible and relevant than marketer generated content (Bickart and Schindler 2001). eWoM is defined as "all informal communication via the Internet addressed to consumers and related to the use or characteristics of goods or services or the sellers thereof" (Litvin et al 2008:459).

Due to the extensive influence of eWoM, some firms even strategically manipulate online reviews to influence consumers' purchase decisions (Dellarocas 2006, Harmon 2004). Kaikati and Kaikati (2004) argue in their paper about stealth marketing that when consumers perceive commercial intent behind what they believed was genuine content they feel cheated and betrayed by the brand. As such the likelihood of them engaging in eWoM will decrease as a result of a sceptical reaction towards brand related UGC. This is further supported by Kim and Johnson (2016) who found that exposure to brand related UGC influences eWoM creation.

The associated hypothesis is as follows.

> *H1.5/2.4: Consumer scepticism negatively relates to eWoM intention such*
> *that an increase in scepticism will lead to a decrease in eWoM intention.*

5.2.10. Information Search Intention

The internet is being used both when consumers are looking for specific information about a purchase and when they are looking for more general information. (Shim et al 2001)

Information search behavioural intention is linked with the theory of planned behaviour which argues that the intention to perform a certain behaviour is the cause of such behaviour (Ajzen 1991). So, while behaviour itself cannot be measured in this instance behavioural intention is the most common way of assessing the likelihood a consumer will engage in certain behaviour. (Peterson and Merino 2003). Moran et al (2014) talk about so-called "Moments of Truth" that represent encounters between consumers and brands or branded content online. They argue

that these moments of truth if positive can stimulate consumer curiosity and further information search behaviour. As such exposure to brand related UGC can create the intention to engage in information search behaviour. Conversely, a sceptical reaction that reflects badly on the brand may dissuade consumers from further engaging with the brand. The associated hypothesis is as follows:

H1.6/2.5: Consumer scepticism negatively relates to information search intention such that an increase in scepticism will lead to a decrease in information search intention.

5.2.11. Purchase Intention

Purchase intention is the "willingness to purchase a product or service in the future" (Cheung and Thadani 2012: 465). It has been strongly linked with the consumption of brand related UGC before purchase (Riegner 2007, Moran et al 2014, Malthouse et al 2016). This is due to the increased amount of trust consumer have towards content that is created by other consumers as opposed to marketers. However, if consumers perceive the UGC as an attempt at persuasion rather than a disinterested communication that increased trust disappears making a purchase decision less likely.

The associated hypothesis is as follows:

H1.7/2.6: Consumer scepticism negatively relates to purchase intention such that an increase in scepticism will lead to a decrease in purchase intention.

5.3. Conclusion

This chapter has used the findings from the literature review and exploratory content analysis to propose a conceptual framework and elaborate hypotheses for the interaction of the key constructs identified. It proposes brand centrality, media type and tone towards the brand as antecedents of consumer scepticism, humour as a moderator between the abovementioned UGC characteristics and consumer scepticism, and brand attitude, brand authenticity, eWoM intention, information search intention and purchase intention as relevant outcome variables.

The following chapter will discuss experiment methodology and variable operationalisation. It will reprise the research questions and discuss how the experiments will endeavour to answer

them. Experimental design will provide an empirical method of establishing causal relationships between the content characteristics and consumer scepticism as well as address the other research questions relating to the effect of consumer characteristics and the impact on brand attitude, brand authenticity, eWoM intention, information search intention, and purchase intention when a sceptical reaction is present.

Chapter 6 – Experiment Methodology

This study aims to analyse what content characteristics impact consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC and how consumer scepticism impacts behavioural and attitudinal brand outcomes. To this end, the literature review highlighted several gaps in relevant literature.

Firstly, the lack of a specific marketing-related definition for UGC and the frequent confusion between terms relating to the phenomenon. To address this the study proposed a relevant definition for brand related UGC, as well as clarified the differences between different types of UGC. Secondly, it identified a significant gap in the breadth of brand related UGC that has been examined in the literature. Most studies have been focused on analysing the impact of ratings and reviews on consumer purchase intention. This leaves out an important area of UGC that has been seeing rapid growth, that of non-evaluative UGC. Content such as Instagram posts, Youtube videos and many other social media posts featuring brands have not been considered for analysis. This study aims to close that gap by looking at a higher variety of UGC that has largely been ignored up until this point.

A third gap emerged from analysing trust literature where the main object of study was focused on trust cues emerging from the source of UGC. However, the nature of the internet where anonymity is very easy to achieve (Ku et al 2012), source cues are often unavailable to consumers. As little is known about what content specific variables contribute to its effectiveness with consumers this creates an important gap in knowledge that needs to be addressed.

Lastly, while consumer scepticism has been considered in the context of a variety of advertising communications, it has been mostly viewed as an attitudinal component impacting consumers' willingness to engage with advertising messages. A sceptical response has not been considered in the context of brand related UGC. The ramifications of such a response could be lasting and impactful.

To address these gaps the study analysed existing literature in the area of UGC, product placement and other marketing strategies to identify what executional variables could have an impact on consumers' reactions to brand related UGC. It elaborated an initial framework illustrating these relationships. In posited that plot relevance, brand prominence, tone towards the brand, the presence of promotional information, the type of message, the quality of the

content, and the type of media could have an impact on consumers' sceptical reactions towards brand related UGC. To explore which of these factors had a more prominent influence on scepticism a content analysis as conducted. It consisted of 250 units of analysis selected from an online community of scepticism. Using frequency analysis, mean rank comparison, as well as statistical testing it was established that the most likely characteristics to influence scepticism were plot relevance, brand prominence, and tone towards the brand. As detailed in the content analysis methodology these findings need to be tested empirically. This is because content analysis uses abductive reasoning that is not generalizable on its own. Further, as explained in the conclusions of the previous chapter the platform of study is not representative of the wider population. As a result, to verify the findings of the initial exploratory study a series of experiments will be performed.

6.1. Introduction

This chapter aims to discuss the methodology employed in the experimental design. Initially, it will provide a summary of the previous chapters, explain the choice of methodology, discuss how causation is established in empirical research, and present the research objectives and conceptual framework. Further, it will present the structure of the proposed studies and discuss stimuli selection. Finally, it will analyse the collected data and establish which hypotheses are supported.

6.1.1. Content Analysis Findings

The limited research in this area prompted the need for exploratory research to establish a foundation for subsequent projects. Content analysis was seen as the most efficient way to obtain more information on the phenomenon as it is one of the most efficient ways of conducting exploratory research (Neuendorf 2016). To this end, a community that focuses on identifying instances of brand related UGC that seem suspicious to its members was identified. Two hundred and fifty instances of content were collected for analysis. These were coded by 3 intercoders into predetermined categories. These categories (i.e., media type, brand clutter, brand prominence, plot relevance, tone towards the brand, quality, message type, and presence of promotional information) were established based on the analysis of existing research in the areas of UGC, product placement, covert advertising, and consumer trust in the literature

review chapter. The results of the content analysis indicated that modality of placement (image, text, GIF), plot relevance, brand prominence and tone towards the brand affected consumer scepticism.

Based on the analysis and preliminary findings of the content analysis the study will move forward to systematically and empirically establish a causal relationship between some of the factors that have been identified as significant in the triggering of scepticism. This will be done through the use of two experiments (Christensen 2004).

The following section will present the methodology of the two experiments being conducted by discussing the research questions, conceptual framework, experiment design, stimuli selection, reliability, and validity.

6.2. Experiment Methodology

The first phase of the experimental design is aiming to unpack how the type of content and brand centrality affect the triggering of scepticism and the impact of scepticism on brand attitude, brand authenticity, eWoM intention, information search intention and purchase intention. This will be done through a 2 (image vs text) x 2 (central vs peripheral brand) full factorial design. The subsequent phase will assess the impact of the tone towards the brand and consumers' goal-seeking behaviour on evoking a sceptical reaction from consumers and its impact on the same behavioural and attitudinal variables as phase one. This will be done through a 3 (positive vs neutral vs negative tone towards brand) x 2 (information vs entertainment motivation) full factorial design. The variables mentioned as well as the scales used will be further detailed in section 5.3., while the individual experiments will be detailed in section 5.4. and 5.5.

In conclusion, this study has used existing literature and content analysis to establish preliminary hypotheses which will now be further tested to empirically establish a causal relationship. This allows for a thorough investigation of the content and viewer related antecedents to consumer scepticism as well as an analysis of the effects on attitudinal and behavioural brand outcomes.

This is section will present the methodology for the experimental design phase of the study and how it addresses the proposed research questions. It will discuss the basic concepts of

experimental design and how it establishes a causal relationship Further, it will detail the proposed framework and research objectives. Lastly, it will present the structure of the experiments (and discuss how stimuli selection took place). Variables, scales and reliability and validity will be discussed in the second part of the chapter.

6.2.1. Research Questions

Based on a review of existing literature the following research questions were developed to address the indicated gaps in the literature review. These are reprised from the literature review chapter and are discussed in the context of the entire study.

1. **What content characteristics impact consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC?**

To address which content characteristics increase the probability of consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC. the study considered literature on product placement effectiveness, UGC as well as industry reports to propose a series of variables that may have an impact. Media type (Smith et al 2012), brand prominence (Van Reijmersdal 2009, Cowley, and Barron 2008), plot relevance (Russell et al 2006), tone towards the brand (LaFarle and Edwards 2006, Tang et al 2014), quality (Presi et al 2014), message type (Shao 2009), and presence of promotional information (Smith et al 2012) were initially considered. These have been discussed in detail previously in the literature review. These variables were used in the content analysis to narrow down to the list to the ones most likely to have an impact on sceptical reactions. The most prominent characteristics were media type, brand prominence, plot relevance and tone towards the brand. As there was little variation between brand prominence and plot relevance these were adapted into brand centrality (Smith et al 2012), the reasoning behind this choice will be further expanded in the section detailing variables and scales. Brand centrality, media type and tone towards the brand will be integrated as independent variables in the experiments, and levels of humour will also be analysed as potentially impacting consumer scepticism. Further, to address if or how context plays a role in establishing the relationships between content characteristics and consumer scepticism, consumer goal-seeking behaviour is being analysed. It will determine whether consuming brand related UGC for entertainment or information creates a difference in how consumers respond to various types of content.

2. How does consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC affect attitudinal and behavioural brand outcomes?

By analysing the changes in brand attitude, brand authenticity, eWoM intention, information search intention and purchase intention as a result of exposure to stimuli and recording the levels of scepticism associated with each, we can determine how the level of scepticism impacts these variables. These variables were chosen based on previous covert marketing and UGC studies (Wei et al 2009, Liang et al 2016, Kim and Johnson 2016, Tang et al 2014, Coursaris et al 2016). The choice of these specific variables has been discussed in chapter 2 and will also be reprised in the variable operationalisation discussion later in the chapter.

3. What are the dynamics between content characteristics, consumer scepticism and attitudinal and behavioural brand related outcomes?

The initial theoretical framework proposed a series of content characteristics identified in previous literature that could have a direct impact on consumer scepticism and a variety of behavioural and attitudinal brand outcomes that would be affected by consumer scepticism. The experiments will empirically test these relationships and establish a scepticism mediated model.

To better understand how these research question will be addressed the following section will present the conceptual frameworks that illustrate the proposed relationships between the variables in both experiments.

6.2.2. Conceptual Framework

This section will discuss how the proposed experiments will address the conceptual framework. Based on the results from the content analysis presented in Chapter 4, the variables included in the experimental design were refined and relevant hypotheses were proposed in Chapter 5. The initial variables considered in the content analysis were media type, brand prominence, plot relevance, tone towards the brand, quality, message type, and presence of promotional information. However, not all variables were found to be relevant to consumer scepticism based on the content analysis results. While that is not necessarily definitive proof that they have no influence and may very well be a drawback of the methods used in the initial analysis. Irrespective of the results such a large number of variables would have been too onerous for

examination in the context of this study, so the list would have to be narrowed down for practical concerns as well. The variables with the strongest correlation to a sceptical reaction were chosen (media type, brand centrality and tone towards brand) and detailed in Chapter 5.

Figure 19 and 20 below illustrate which aspects of the conceptual framework each experiment will address. These frameworks were adapted to better illustrate the variables being used in the study and the proposed hypotheses.

The key aim of the study is to understand how UGC characteristics impact consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC and what the consequences are for brand outcomes when it occurs.
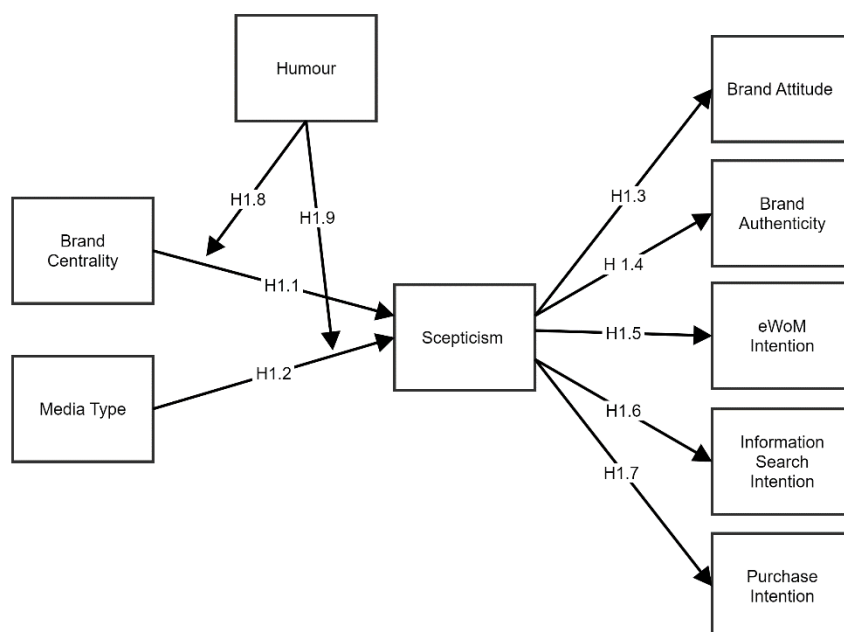
Figure 19 Experiment 1 Framework
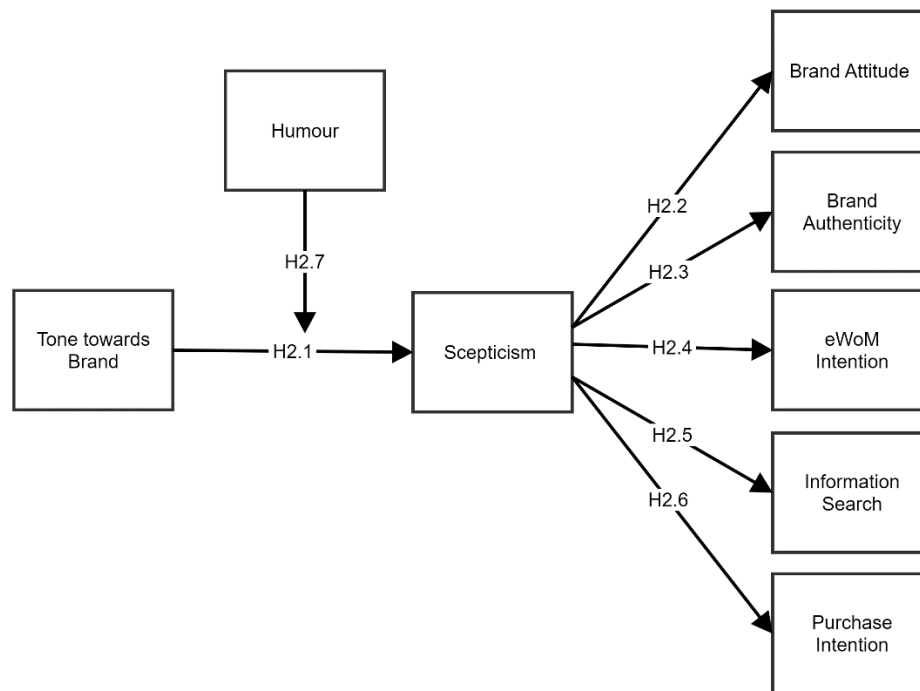
Figure 20 Experiment 2 Framework

The 3 independent variables being used are media type, brand centrality, and tone towards the brand. Consumer Goal-Seeking Behaviour will be used as a control variable. It was derived from the message type variable that sought to categorise content as entertaining or informative and based on Uses and Gratifications Theory discussed in 2.3.3. To achieve a broader perspective on this concept it was expanded to integrate a consumer perspective rather than a content related variable. This also links in with one of the gaps identified in the research as most research focuses on ratings and reviews in their analysis of UGC, the implicit motivation for their consumption is informational. As opposed to product placement where the goal is entertainment. Based on previous discussion on consumers' goal when consuming media entertainment is a significant driver of brand related UGC consumption (Shao 2009). As such it is important to account for the impact it may have on consumers who are exposed to brand related UGC and if this could impact the level of consumer scepticism elicited.

Brand centrality was created as a single variable addressing the role played by the brand in the content, as little variation was observed between plot relevance and brand prominence. Levels of brand prominence and plot relevance often coincided in the content analysis results. Levels for both variables throughout the sample were identical 86.5% of the time. This indicates that content with high plot relevance is also likely to display high brand prominence and content

with low brand prominence tended to have low plot prominence. As such, there is little need for two distinct variables in the case of this experimental design. The brand centrality variable proposed by Smith et al (2012) was initially unpacked into plot relevance and brand prominence for the purpose of the content analysis to ensure an exhaustive analysis was undertaken. However, in light of these results there may not be a significant need for differentiation between the two. This led to the use of brand centrality as independent variable in the experiments.

Scepticism, brand attitude change, brand authenticity, eWoM intention, purchase intention and information search behaviour are the dependents variables, while humour is proposed as a moderating variable based on previous literature findings. ELM literature posits that humour acts as a motivation for consumers to process messages (Zhang and Zinkhan 2006) and as such could lead to a more central processing of the message increasing the likelihood of consumer scepticism.

As the frameworks show, scepticism will be an important construct because this study hypothesises that it will have a direct impact on the proposed outcome variables. As will be further detailed in the chapter these variables are important indicators and drivers of marketing outcomes. Much praise has been laid at the feet of UGC for its overwhelmingly positive impact towards brands. However, the potential negative ramifications of consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC have not been considered. The notable exception being Reimer and Benkenstein (2016) who analysed the impact of distrust on a subset of UGC (reviews) with only one outcome variable (purchase intention). This study will provide important insight into how consumer scepticism can have a lasting effect on brands, through including a wider subsection of UGC as well as more diverse outcome variables.

The following section will detail the methodology of the experiments and their appropriateness as a method for the study.

6.2.3. Experiment Design

Experiments are a quantitative research approach designed to discover effects and presumed causes of phenomena. The key aspect of this method is the intentional variation of one or more elements (Christensen 2004), as opposed to observational research design where those conducting the research do not interfere and only make note of conditions and results. This

intentional variation is what allows for conclusions that relate to causality to be drawn. By isolating only certain variables in experimental conditions the causal link between them can be empirically established.

The need for empirically established results stems from the use of content analysis as a method in the earlier stage of the study. While content analysis is a valid research method its results need to be verified. This is because it uses inferential logic to establish a conclusion. Abductive reasoning starts with initial observation and seeks to find the best explanation for the phenomenon. As such they may not be true in all cases, but assumptions can be made with a certain probability (Krippendorff 2004). The results of the content analysis section have created strong inferences that need to be empirically tested to ensure their validity. As stated above and in the content analysis result chapter, the modality of brand placement in UGC has an impact on viewers' reactions. More specifically, brand prominence, plot relevance and tone towards the brand may impact how sceptical consumers are towards instances of content. However, the content analysis results are not definitive proof of the correlation or a causal relationship. Therefore, an experiment needs to be conducted to provide empirical proof to support the initial conclusions hypothesised in the first phase of the study.

The following section will detail how experimental design establishes a causal relationship and briefly discusses some of the philosophical debate surrounding the area of causation.

Establishing Causation

Experiments aim to establish causation, however, there has been some debate about whether anything can be proven. One of the earliest authors discussing causation was Popper (1968), He argued that true causation is impossible to discover, nothing can be proven, and any relationships that survive scientific testing are merely not yet disproven. This is a rather extremist view; however, it is still partly reflected in some of the recent research: "identification of causation can only occur when no alternate interpretations for the effect exist other than the one specified" (Christensen 2004:70). In essence, this argument proposes that one can never fully run out of alternative interpretations, merely that one does not have the knowledge, be it scientific or otherwise the propose them yet. A differing view proposes a more holistic perspective on causation, all phenomena are part of large cause and effect networks and any findings simply add to the network rather than establish ultimate truth.

Causal relationships often are inferred, as direct interaction between factors is often unobservable. One event may follow another a conclusion of causality cannot be made based purely on sequence. As such identifying a causal relationship can be done through one of four cannons: agreement (causality is identified through commonalities), difference (causality is identified through dissimilarities), the joint method of agreement and difference (causality is determined first by agreement, hypothesised and tested through difference), and the method of concomitant variation (causality is recognised through identifying if variation in a variable causes corresponding variation in another)(Christensen 2004). The experimental design makes use of concomitant variation by intentionally causing variation of one or more elements to assess whether it results in variation of the outcome.

Shadish et al (2002) point out that experimental designs are "highly localised and particularistic". Meaning that their scope of applicability is limited to a set of conditions and when formulation conclusions one must be aware of the specific setting and context being applied. This serves as a critique of experimental designs, arguing that their restricted testing conditions often do not reflect reality other than in the very specific conditions they have applied. However, in the context of this study, this barrier is at least partly overcome. Because the experiment is designed based on evidence from a content analysis it has a strong basis in real-world events. The experimental design has not been arrived at in a vacuum but rather based on data and inferences made from existing communities and consumers.

To further strengthen the case for experimental design as the optimal method to achieve the research objectives we must consider previous studies into similar topics and their methodologies. In their study of the effects of sponsored Facebook posts on viewers, Boerman et al (2017) used an experimental design to establish causal links between sponsorship disclosure and eWoM intention. Wei et al (2008) used a suite of 3 experiments to establish that in the context of covert advertising brand characteristics impact disclosure outcomes. Campbell and Kirmani (2000) used experiments to establish the role of cognitive capacity and motive transparency on evaluations of an influence agent. Campbell et al (2014) made use of experiments to establish the relationship between the timing of sponsorship disclosures to the strength of corrective action taken by consumers. These and many other examples illustrate both the appropriateness and effectiveness of an experimental design as the chosen method for this study. Further, as the primary function of experiments is to establish causality, this method is ideal for addressing the proposed research questions (see section 2). These look to establish

(1) the causal relationships between modality of placement, viewer characteristics and the triggering of scepticism; and (2) the causal relationship between the triggering of scepticism and marketing outcomes.

To gain a better understanding of how experimental design will be implemented the following section will detail how the study was divided, what are the hypotheses associated with each study and provide brief information about the pilots.

6.2.4. Study Division and Procedure

The experimental design has been broken into two independent studies. As opposed to running one experimental design with all the independent variables. This division will allow for better isolation of modality related and consumer-related antecedents and effects.

There are various types of factorial design available. In choosing between a full or reduced factorial design an equilibrium must be reached between the contribution to knowledge and resources available (Collins et al 2009). In this case, a full factorial design is being run for both experiments.

To ensure relevant results that would support publication in quality journals the sample size needs to be around 40 respondents per cell. This is in line with similar contemporary research in for the industry which have used 30-50 respondents per cell (De Jans and Hudders 2017; Schnurr 2018). A sample of 40 participants per cell would allow for the possibility of incomplete and incorrect responses being purged from the data set and still maintain the validity and reliability of the study.

This would equate to a total sample size of 400 participants across both experiments. To ensure that the sample is more representative of the population a panel was acquired from Qualtrics. This allows for a wider coverage in terms of demographics and a more expedient data collection.

Experiment 1

Study 1 will consist of an online experiment that assesses the impact of UGC characteristics on triggering a sceptical reaction in viewers. It will analyse the impact brand centrality and media type have on consumer scepticism and ultimately on brand attitude, brand authenticity,

eWoM intention, information search intention and purchase intention. It will use a 2 (brand centrality: central vs peripheral) x 2 (media type: image vs text) full factorial design (see table 12) to evaluate these outcomes.

Table 12 Visualisation of Experiment 1 Cells

Media Type	Brand Centrality	
	High	**Low**
Image	Image with high brand centrality	Image with low brand centrality
Text	Text with high brand centrality	Text with low brand centrality

A total of 4 cells with 40 respondents each corresponds to a total sample size of 160 respondents for this study. Respondents will be randomly assigned one of the 4 conditions with quotas established for each cell to ensure even distribution of respondents.

Pre-exposure to the stimuli, respondents will provide their demographic information as well as their familiarity with social media and internet proficiency. They will then be shown an instance of brand related content that features a fictitious brand whose inclusion conforms to the cell conditions (see Appendix 1). They will be asked to categorise the content to ensure it conforms to cell requirements in their perception and rate the extent of their sceptical reactions to it. Post-exposure perceived humour and attitude towards the content will be measured. Further, brand attitude, brand authenticity, eWoM intention, information search intention, and purchase intention will be measured to determine if a change has occurred as a result of the exposure.

Hypotheses

> *H1.1: Brand related UGC with higher brand centrality will elicit higher levels of scepticism in consumers than lower brand centrality content.*

> *H1.2: Brand related UGC in the form of images will elicit lower levels of scepticism in consumers than text UGC.*

H1.3: Consumer scepticism negatively relates to brand attitude such that an increase in scepticism will lead to a decrease in brand attitude.

H1.4: Consumer scepticism negatively relates to brand authenticity such that an increase in scepticism will lead to a decrease in brand authenticity.

H1.5: Consumer scepticism negatively relates to eWoM intention such that an increase in scepticism will lead to a decrease in eWoM intention.

H1.6: Consumer scepticism negatively relates to information search intention such that an increase in scepticism will lead to a decrease in information search intention.

H1.7: Consumer scepticism is indirectly correlated to purchase intention. An increase in scepticism determining a decrease in purchase intention.

H1.8: Humour moderates the relationship between brand centrality and consumer scepticism: for higher levels of perceived content humour, the brand centrality elicited scepticism would be stronger than for lower levels of perceived humour.

H1.9: Humour moderates the relationship between media type and consumer scepticism: for higher levels of perceived content humour, the media type elicited scepticism would be stronger than for lower levels of perceived humour.

Pilot 1

A pilot of 24 respondents was conducted to ensure manipulation checks and scale reliability.

In order to conduct manipulation checks respondents were asked to evaluate the level of plot and visual prominence of the brand after being exposed to the stimuli, as well as indicate the type of stimuli they were exposed to at the end of the questionnaire. These answers were used to conduct manipulation checks through ANOVA and Chi-square analysis, respectively. The manipulation checks were successful, indicating that there was a significant difference in brand prominence between testing conditions ($p<.05$) and between image and text content ($p<.001$).

However, consumer scepticism showed low scale reliability scores with Cronbach's alpha scores of under 0.7. As the reliability scores in the original journal articles were acceptable this was attributed to the small sample size rather than a problem with the scales. This was confirmed in the pilot for study 2 where a larger sample size corresponded with increased reliability scores ($\alpha > 0.7$).

Experiment 2

Study 2 will analyse the impact of tone towards the brand on consumer scepticism and ultimately on brand attitude, brand authenticity, eWoM intention, information search intention and purchase intention. It will use a 3 (positive vs neutral vs negative tone towards brand) full factorial design (see table 13) to measure the proposed outcomes.

Table 13 Visualisation of Experiment 2 Cells

Tone towards Brand		
Positive	**Neutral**	**Negative**
Positive tone	Neutral tone	Negative tone

A total of 6 cells with 40 respondents each will entail a sample size of 160 respondents for this study. Respondents will be randomly assigned one of the 6 conditions with quotas established for each cell to ensure even distribution of respondents.

Pre-exposure to the stimuli, respondents will provide their demographic information as well as their familiarity with social media and level. They will then be shown an instance of brand related content that features a fictitious brand whose inclusion conforms to the cell conditions. Manipulation checks will then be conducted by asking consumers to identify the perceived tone towards the brand and scenario they were assigned to. Post-exposure perceived humour, attitude towards the content will also be measured. Further, brand image and perceived brand authenticity, eWoM intention, information search intention, and purchase intention will be measured to determine if a change has occurred as a result of the exposure.

Hypotheses

> *H2.1: The tone towards the brand included in UGC positively relates to scepticism such that an increase in positive tone determines an increase in scepticism.*

> *H2.2: Consumer scepticism negatively relates to brand attitude such that an increase in scepticism will lead to a decrease in brand attitude.*

> *H2.3: Consumer scepticism negatively relates to brand authenticity such that an increase in scepticism will lead to a decrease in brand authenticity.*

H2.4: Consumer scepticism negatively relates to eWoM intention such that an increase in scepticism will lead to a decrease in eWoM intention.

H2.5: Consumer scepticism negatively relates to information search intention such that an increase in scepticism will lead to a decrease in information search intention.

H2.6: Consumer scepticism is indirectly correlated to purchase intention. An increase in scepticism determining a decrease in purchase intention.

H2.7: Humour moderates the relationship between tone towards the brand and consumer scepticism: for higher levels of perceived content humour, the scepticism elicited by the tone towards the brand will be stronger than for lower levels of perceived humour.

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Pilot 2

A pilot study with 40 respondents was conducted to test manipulation checks and scale reliability. All the scales used had Cronbach's alpha scores of over 0.7. The initial pilot revealed problems relating to one of the manipulation checks. Respondents were given one of two available contexts, prompting them to consider the content as either one they had encountered while they were searching for more information and considering a purchase, or one they had encountered while browsing social media. Only a small fraction of respondents could identify their given context at the end of the survey.

To ensure that manipulation checks were successful, a different approach was undertaken. The prompts were re-worded with a more mission-focused approach. All the stimuli were also changed in order to better accommodate the more goal-oriented prompting. Initially, respondents were asked to "Imagine you are looking to buy a [product category] and while looking for more information you come across this content". This was subsequently changed to "Imagine you are throwing a party for your child/friend and are looking for more information to help you decide on where to buy the cake from. While browsing the internet you come across this content". A second pilot was conducted to test this approach would improve manipulation check results and ensure that the new stimuli also had significantly different (P<0.05) tones towards the included brand.

The following section will discuss how the stimuli were selected and manipulated, as well as discuss how other studies approached the use of fictitious brands.

6.2.5. Stimuli Selection

As a part of the previously conducted content analysis, intercoders were used to rate and categorise 250 instances of brand related UGC. This allowed for selecting stimuli that had been independently rated and assigned the cell characteristics.

Firstly, to ensure that brand familiarity, and/or previous brand experience does not impact results the study used fake brand names. Positive and negative effects of exposure can be better assessed when no pre-existing brand attitudes are present (Bell and Buchner 2018:4; Kronrod and Lowery 2016:1184). Wei et al (2008) found that brand familiarity impacted the change in brand image post-exposure to product placement. Through using fictitious brands this concern is eliminated and results can be more directly linked with the content characteristics being examined, rather than brand related attributes. Bodur et al (2016) argue that the brand name carries a great deal of sway with consumers, as such the use of fake brand names is often employed in research. This ensures higher generalisability and reduces the number of confounding variables that could be present and impact the selected outcome variables.

Secondly, using fictitious brands would eliminate the need for pre-test questions to compare changes. This reduces the number of questions and length of the survey and ultimately reducing respondent fatigue. To ensure that respondents were not familiar with the fake brands a question was included asking them if they had even heard of the brand before. Those who indicated they were familiar with the fake brands were excluded from the sample.

One study by Arora and Henderson (2007) has raised important considerations for this study as well. They found that when using fictitious brands, the impact on the outcome variables was higher than when using real brands, this is because consumers already have pre-formed attitudes about real brands and the information can be put into context. This may also translate to this study as with no prior brand experience the degree of brand attitude change may be inconsistent between the fictitious brands used and real-world scenarios because consumers have more information points to base their brand attitude on than a single instance of content. However, the use of fictitious brands allows for tighter control over the brand attitude effects eliminating confounding effects of brand familiarity which were observed to impact brand attitude change in a similar study by Wei et al (2009). Furthermore, as this is ones the first studies of its kind seeking to establish this connection between consumer scepticism towards

UGC and the selected outcome variables, eliminating confounding variables helps the robustness of results.

Product involvement was also considered as a potential confounding variable. As the level of product involvement can cause changes in perceived risk, purchase decision process, information search length etc (Dholakia 2001). To preclude product involvement from causing a similar change it was kept low in all testing conditions by using stimuli that included a fast-food brand (study 1), a to-go coffee brand (study 1) and a cake bakery brand (study 2). Maintaining consistent low involvement throughout all testing conditions allows for a like-for-like comparison across cells. Further, an overwhelming proportion of stimuli collected in the content analysis featured low involvement products as detailed in the previous chapter.

There are several options when considering the use of fictitious brand names. Bell and Buchner (2018) used a pseudonym generator for their fake brand names. Kronrod and Lowery (2016) slightly modified the names of existing brands (i.e., Tastle – Nestle, Toogle - Google). Humphreys et al (2017) used a variety of fake brands that were both similar and dissimilar to existing ones. Ultimately, the decision to use dissimilar brand names was made. This was done to avoid confusion and transference of characteristics from real brands to fictitious ones (Bodur et al 2016). A similar approach was taken by Puzakova, Kwak and Bell (2015) who used a combination of common names and business descriptive (Joe's Burgers, Carlos' Tacos) in their study.

The three brands used across the two studies were Joe's Coffee, Joe's Burgers and Jane's Cakes. These were chosen due to their common appellatives and to ensure comprehension business descriptors were added to the brand names (i.e., burgers, coffee, and cakes). As discussed above, this is consistent with academic practice regarding the use of fictitious brand names.

The final stimuli were created by manipulating content from the content analysis to replace well-known brands with fictitious ones or simply introduce the fictitious brand names into the image when brand names were not explicitly present. This manipulation of already existing stimuli ensures that a certain authenticity is maintained, creating more realistic testing conditions. In addition to the initial intercoder ratings, manipulation checks were performed in the pilots of both studies to ensure that variable levels were significantly different (p<0.05) across testing conditions.

The following section will detail the variables used in the experimental design and their operationalisation. It will also discuss how the study will ensure the reliability and validity of methods and findings.

6.2.6. Reliability

Reliability in experimental design refers to whether a measurement yields consistent results (Cash et al 2016). Two types of reliability are of relevance in experimental design: internal reliability and inter-rater reliability.

Internal reliability is concerned with how variables with multiple scale items are consistent, whether the components of a variable truly correlate in their values with the variable they are supposed to measure. The most frequently used measure of variable reliability is Cronbach's alpha α (Miller 2005). This is a standard statistical test available in most statistical software packages. Its value ranges from 0 to 1 and a value of ≥ 0.7 is considered sound. To ensure internal reliability, several steps have been taken. Firstly, when choosing variable scales attention was paid to the initial α values. Secondly, Cronbach's alpha testing was performed on the pilot data to ensure the scales used have high reliability scores. While the pilot for study 1 raised some potential issues with the scales for Scepticism with α values of 0.63. These values were close to the acceptable 0.7, so the scales were kept and retested in the pilot for study 2 which has a higher sample size. In the second pilot, both scales had reliability scores higher than 0.7.

The second type of reliability that is of relevance to experimental design is inter-rater reliability. This type of reliability measures the consistency between multiple respondents' answers for the same variables. One of the measures most commonly used for measuring inter-rater reliability is the intra-class correlation coefficient (ICC). Similar to Cronbach's alpha its value ranges from 0 to 1. Acceptable values discussed in the literature vary, Cash et al (2016) state that ≥ 0.6 is acceptable, while Koo and Li (2016) state that a value between 0.5 and 0.75 is good and a value above 0.75 is excellent. There are several types of ICC test based on the type of experimental design being conducted. Because different samples are used for each testing condition the same set of raters does not evaluate all subjects the most appropriate form of ICC is a one-way random effects test (Koo and Li 2016). Due to the small number of

respondents in each cell for the pilots (n=5), this test will be performed and reported in the data analysis sections.

The following section will explain the concept of validity and discuss the methods through which it can be achieved.

6.2.7. Validity

Validity in quantitative research is concerned with assessing whether the variables and scales selected measure what they are intended to measure (Moskal and Leydens 2000). The main methods used to assess validity are content validity, criterion validity, and construct validity (Cash et al 2016).

Content validity is concerned with whether the scales used to measure a variable are exhaustive and pure. Exhaustive or comprehensive scales should address all potential aspects of a variable. Scales are regarded as pure if the measures do not address irrelevant aspects. The most common way to ensure content validity is to consult experts in the field (McKenzie et al 1999). This was done in the context of the two experimental design by using existing and widely used scales that have already gone through rigorous testing and validation.

Criterion validity refers to the link between the measurement of the variable and the actual level of that variable (Gregory 2004). This is frequently assessed using a correlation coefficient, namely Pearson's *r* coefficient. With values ranging from -1 to +1, *r≥0.3* indicates moderate validity, and values of *r≥0.5* indicate high validity (Cash et al 2016).

Construct validity refers to the correspondence between a concept and its operationalisation. It is more difficult to establish and often a single study cannot definitively establish construct validity (Peter 1981). High internal consistency is usually a very good indicator of a construct validity.

Another important consideration for study validity is external validity, one of its aspects is how representative the sample is of the selected population. To ensure a representative sample across the experiments quotas for gender were established and a cross-section of ages was included.

The use of online panels carries the inherent risk of excluding a section of the relevant population because not all consumers can access the internet and can affect the generalisability of results (Wright 2017). In most other areas of research this could constitute a threat to sample validity, however UGC is a phenomenon that exclusively takes place online. As such sampling from this medium ensures that the sample has the highest likelihood of being familiar with the context being discussed which Saleh and Bista (2017) identify as being "vital".

Moreover, online sampling methods provide advantages such as increased response rates and reduced interviewer bias (Walliman 2006). Increased response rates for online surveys can be attributed to a number of factors such as accessibility, and increased respondent convenience (Saleh and Bista 2017). Online surveys reduce the level of interviewer bias by removing the researcher from the response collection. For example, when discussing sensitive topics respondents tend to be more honest in online surveys (Duffy et al 2005).

Furthermore, measures of internet proficiency and social media familiarity have been introduced to allow for a discussion on the final representativity of the sample from this perspective. This study does not suggest that there is an ontological distinction between the internet and physical reality, it acknowledges that in studying a phenomenon that is intrinsically and inseparably connected to the online medium, sampling only from said medium does not constitute a major threat to reliability or validity (Callegaro et al 2014).

Having established the measures being taken to ensure validity and reliability the following section will briefly discuss the variables being used in the experiments and the scales selected for measurement.

6.3. Variables and Operationalisation

This section will discuss the proposed variables and concepts with the chosen measurement scales. Finally, a table summarising the variable types and their scales will be presented.

6.3.1. Independent Variables

The three independent variables employed in the two experiments are Brand Centrality, Media Type and Tone towards the Brand. Manipulation of these variable will be achieved at stimulus level and manipulation checks will be performed to ensure correct respondent perception.

Section 6.2.4. Study Division and Procedure as well as 6.2.5. Stimuli Selection provide a more in depth view on how manipulation was achieved and how the manipulation checks were implemented and carried out in the two pilot studies; Section 7.1.4. Manipulation checks and Section 7.2.3. Manipulation Checks detail the results of the manipulation checks for the three variables across the two experiments.

Consumer Goal-Seeking Behaviour

As previously described consumer goal-seeking behaviour (GSB) will be employed as a control variable in the second experiment. The manipulation of this variable will be achieved through prompting the respondents before they are shown the stimulus with a scenario, and to ensure that the information is retained a manipulation check is performed at the end of the questionnaire.

6.3.2. Humour

Several scales have been proposed for the measuring of humour in advertising. The two most prominent are those initially elaborated by Chattopadhyay and Basu (1990) and Cline et al (2003). Both scales are quite similar, Cline et al (2003) developing theirs based on the work of Chattopadhyay and Basu (1990).

This study uses the scale developed by Cline et al (2003) which consists of four unipolar items assessed on a Likert scale. They are as follows: "The content I saw was: (1) humorous, (2) funny, (3) amusing, (4) serious".

6.3.3. Consumer Scepticism

The previously presented hypotheses propose a causal link between content characteristics and consumer scepticism. In studies where reactions to covert marketing were being investigated researchers used artificial cues to create a sceptical response (Boerman et al 2012, Campbell and Kirmani 2000, Wei et al 2008). As such, there is no established scale of situational scepticism in this context. However, a scale for advertising scepticism as an attitudinal variable was developed by Obermiller and Spangenberg (1998). The reason the scale is not applicable is that an attitudinal measurement does not equate with a situational response to a single stimulus.

Campbell and Kirmani (2000) use a single-item scale to measure consumer scepticism: "it was pretty obvious it was trying to persuade viewers", measured on a 7-point Likert scale. However, they also included measures that assess respondents' perception of motives, ulterior intent, and inferred persuasion motives. Rozendaal et al (2010 cited in Tutaj and van Reijmersdal 2012) also developed a scale on understanding an advertisement's intent. It consists of six items that measure selling intent, persuasive intent, and informational intent. However, both scales are not suitable for use as they would require adapting to fit the context of the study and ensure they are measuring the concept as intended.

In a study measuring consumers' reactions to sponsored and non-sponsored Facebook posts, Boerman et al (2017) and Muller and Christandl (2019) propose a two-pronged scale to measure consumer scepticism. It measures whether viewers believe the content is advertising as well as their attitude towards it. This allows a more refined measurement when consumers cannot be certain of the presence of persuasive intent. As the measurement captures attitudes relating to the trustworthiness and credibility of the content as well as their perception of the persuasive nature.

By asking participants if they believe "That post was advertising" with responses being given on a 7-point Likert scale and asking them to indicate whether they thought the post was "honest", "trustworthy", "convincing", "biased" and "not credible". This approach captures both explicit and implicit consumer reactions to brand related content and offers a wider scope of analysis. As such this scale is more appropriate to use for measuring consumer scepticism.

6.3.4. Brand Attitude

Table 14 below details existing scales for measuring brand attitude. As can be seen, there is a variety of scales being proposed based on the variety of views regarding the uni or multidimensionality of the concept.

Table 14 Existing Scales for Brand Attitude

Article	Methodology for measuring brand attitude
Vanden Bergh et al (2011)	3 items - 7-point Likert scale good-bad; pleasant-unpleasant; favourable-unfavourable

MacKenzie and Lutz (1989) Liu et al (2012)	
Schivinski and Dabrowski (2016)	3 items – 5-point Likert scale pleasant – unpleasant idea of the brand; good-bad reputation; positive-negative characteristics
Yang, Asaad and Dwivedi (2017)	8 items 5-point Likert scale emotionally bonded to the brand; positive feelings; more inclined to buy; delighted to choose; intention to purchase other services and products; liked the experience; recommend to others
Yoon and Park (2012)	3 items – Likert scale Likeability; favourability; delightfulness
Spears and Singh (2004)	5 items - Likert scale Unappealing – appealing; bad – good; unpleasant – pleasant; favourable – unfavourable; unlikable – likeable;
Bruner (1998)	6 item Semantic Scale Bad – good, unappealing – appealing, unpleasant – pleasant, unattractive – attractive, boring – interesting, dislike – like

The study will use the scale developed by Spears and Singh (2004) as it is one of the most widely used and recognised. Using a scale with a higher number of items will also allow for more in-depth analysis of how brand attitudes change as a result of triggering scepticism. Furthermore, because the study uses a between-subjects design a multi-item scale can be used without causing fatigue to respondents.

6.3.5. Brand Authenticity

There are several frameworks available for the measurement of brand authenticity. Napoli et al (2014) propose a business centred framework for assessing brand authenticity. This scale is not appropriate as the focus on aspects such as quality of product/service and ingredients is unfeasible when the object of study is User Generated Content. Morhart et al (2015) propose a

more brand-centric approach to measuring PBA. This scale has some overlap with Napoli et al (2014), but its focus is on the intangible assets of a brand.

Ultimately the most appropriate scale is the one used by Fritz et al (2017) and Bruhn et al (2012) as the items were the most relevant to the context. However, certain items relating to continuity were discounted. This was necessary as the stimuli being used in the experiments feature fictional brands, as such no relevant continuity information is provided to respondents after one exposure to the brand. The table below illustrates the scale used to measure brand authenticity in both studies as adapted from Fritz et al (2017).

Originality	The brand is different from all other brands
	The brand stands out from other brands
	I think the brand is unique
	The brand clearly distinguishes itself from other brands
Reliability	The brand makes reliable promises
	The brand delivers what it promises.
	The brand's promises are credible
Naturalness	The brand does not seem artificial
	The brand makes a genuine impression.
	The brand gives the impression of being natural.

6.3.6. eWoM Intention

The scale used was developed by Maxham and Netemeyer (2002). It includes 3 scale items measured on a 7-point Likert scale.

I will spread the word about [brand] online.
I would recommend [brand] to others online.
If others were looking to purchase similar products, I would tell them to try [brand].

6.3.7. Information Search Behavioural Intention

The scale used to measure intention to engage in information search behaviour was developed by Swar, Hameed and Reychav (2017). They created a scale based previous behavioural intention scales in the technology acceptance model (TAM) research area which was initially proposed by Venkatesh and Davis (2000). It consists of 3 items measures on a 5-point Likert scale.

I intend to search for information about [brand] at some point in the future.
I intend to search for information about [brand] immediately.
I am very sure I will search for information about [brand] soon.

6.3.8. Purchase Intention

The scale used was initially developed by Burton et al (1999) to assess the impact of packaging on purchase decisions and also used by Kozup et al (2003). There are a myriad of purchase intention scales available (Bruner 2009), the reason this was chosen over other scales was the direct link to in the scale items with the stimuli. This will ensure responses are linked to the presented stimuli.

Would you be more or less likely to purchase the product, given the content shown? (More Likely / Less Likely)

Given the content shown, how probable is it that you would consider the purchase of the product? (Very Probable/ Not Probable)	
How likely would you be to purchase the product, given the content shown? (Very Likely/ Very Unlikely)	

6.3.9. Summary of Variables Used

The table below was created to summarise the characteristics and functions of the variables used in the study. It establishes what variables are being used, which are being manipulated, what are the variable levels being used and where they were conceptualised in extant literature. The survey instruments used are developed by identifying appropriate measurement scales from existing literature. In some cases, they have been slight adaptations. All scales have been tested for reliability using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, values for each variable will be presented in the data analysis section.

Table 15 Summary of Variables and Scales Used in Experiments

Name	Independent / Dependent	Manip ulated	Discrete / Continuous	Qualitative / Quantitative	Levels	Conceptualisation
Goal-seeking Behaviour	Control	Y	Discrete	Quantitative	Entertainment, Information	Shao (2009)
Brand Centrality	Independent	Y	Discrete	Quantitative	Central, Peripheral	Smith et al (2012)
Tone towards the Brand	Independent	Y	Discrete	Quantitative	Positive, Negative, Neutral	Smith et al (2012) Tang et al (2014)
Media Type	Independent	Y	Discrete	Quantitative	Image, Text	Content Analysis Results

Humour	Moderator	N	Continuous	Qualitative	Likert Scale	Cline et al (2003), Bruner (2009)
Scepticism	Dependent	N	Continuous	Quantitative	Likert Scale	Boerman et al (2017)
Brand Attitude	Dependent	N	Continuous	Quantitative	Likert Scale	Spears and Singh (2004)
Brand Authenticity	Dependent	N	Continuous	Quantitative	Likert Scale	Morhart et al (2015)
Information Search Behaviour	Dependent	N	Continuous	Quantitative	Likert Scale	Swar, Hameed and Reychav (2017)
eWoM intention	Dependent	N	Continuous	Quantitative	Likert Scale	Maxham and Netemeyer (2002).
Purchase Intention	Dependent	N	Continuous	Quantitative	Likert Scale	Daugherty and Biocca (2013)

All measures that use multi-item scales will be measures using a 5-point Likert type scale anchored from 1= *Strongly Disagree* to 5= *Strongly Agree*.

After having established the methodology and variable operationalisation, the following section will discuss the data analysis for the first experiment.

Chapter 7 – Experiment Data Analysis

7.1. Experiment 1 Data Analysis

The purpose of this experiment is to examine the impact of UGC brand centrality and UGC media type on consumers' sceptical responses. Further, it also examines the roles of consumers' sceptical reactions on other marketing outcomes (i.e., brand attitude, eWoM intention, authenticity, intention for information search, and purchase intention). This experiment analyses whether the characteristics of brand related UGC influence consumer responses and what are the consequences of a negative response on the above-mentioned marketing outcomes.

Figure 21 below illustrates the proposed relationships and hypotheses in experiment 1.
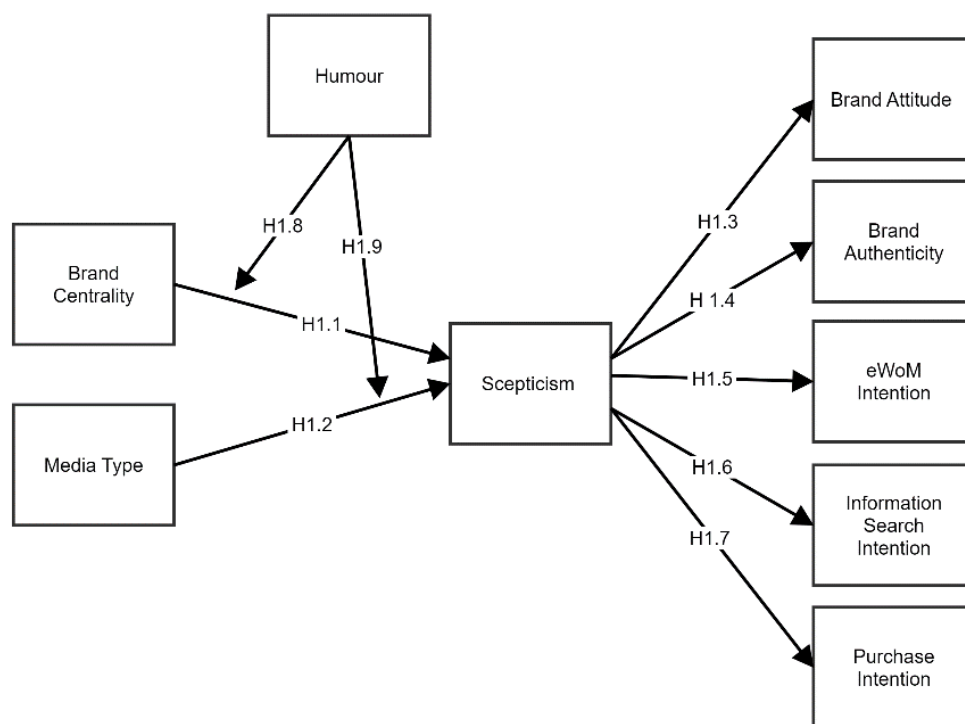
Figure 21 Conceptual Framework for Experiment 1

The next section details aspects relating to sample characteristics, sample quality assurance measures that were implemented, as well as giving a brief overview of the survey structure.

7.1.1. Participants and Procedure

A total sample of 175 UK respondents, recruited through Qualtrics, participated in a 2 (media type: image vs text) x 2 (brand centrality: central vs peripheral) between-subjects design. The table below illustrates the four experimental design cells.

Table 16 Experiment 1 - Summary of experiment cells.

| Media Type | Brand Centrality | |
	High	Low
Image	Image with high brand centrality	Image with low brand centrality
Text	Text with high brand centrality	Text with low brand centrality

The sample consisted of 49% males and 51% females. Figure 22 below shows the distribution of age categories across the sample.
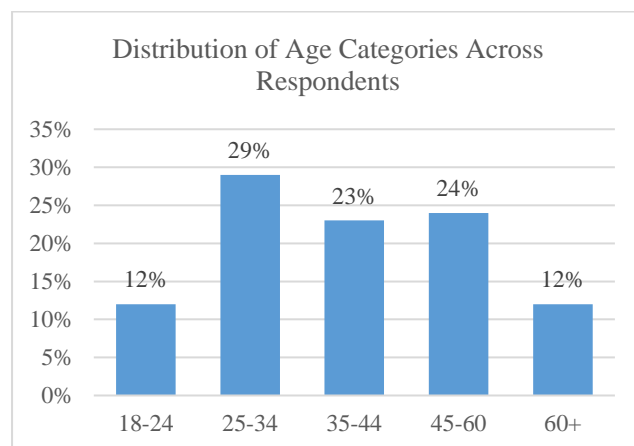
Figure 22 Experiment 1 - Age distribution of respondents

Respondents were instructed that they were going to be shown a piece of content that featured a brand and will be asked to give their opinion on it. All participants were randomly assigned to one of the four testing conditions; however, quotas were implements to keep even gender distribution across cells.

The stimuli were selected from the previously conducted content analysis to match the required cell characteristics. The existing brands were removed and replaced with fictitious brands to

control for pre-existing brand attitudes and brand knowledge. Pre-tests with a different sample confirmed the manipulated content conformed with the content analysis assigned categories, these were detailed in the methodology chapter presented earlier. Participants initially answered demographic related questions, after which they were shown the content with a brief title. They were then asked to identify the brand that was present, as well as identify the type of content they were shown and their perceived brand centrality. Any participants that could not correctly identify the brand shown or claimed they were already familiar with the brand were excluded from the study automatically.

Participants were then asked to rate the level of brand centrality, the type of media, the level humour of the content and their attitude towards it. Finally, they were asked about brand attitude, brand authenticity, eWoM intention, purchase intention, intention to search for information.

7.1.2. Sample Quality Assurance

Some of the scale items throughout the questionnaire were reversed to serve as attention checks and some scales included scale items that were diametrically opposed. These were used as indicators of response quality and when a respondent did not answer consistently with his previous replies to the reversed scale items several times they were eliminated from the sample.

Other attention questions, that asked the respondents to identify the brands they were exposed to in the content or the type of content they were exposed to, were also used to filter out inattentive participants.

Due to the methods of analysis being employed, another aspect of data quality had to be considered. ANOVA and ANOVA type tests do not provide quality results in the presence of data outliers. To ensure accurate results outliers were identified using SPSS a median test. As per Hoaglin and Inglewicz (1987), there has been some debate in the statistics community about which multiplier is best suited to identify outliers in a data set. They argue that the standard 1.5 multiplier is only applicable in a small number of cases and a value of 2.2 provides a better representation of data outliers. However, SPSS does not have the capacity of setting an outlier variable. As such, only the extreme outliers identified by SPSS were removed from the sample. These are those that adhere to the IQR3 extreme outlier rule. In total 6 responses were deleted from the data set to ensure data quality.

To further establish the quality control measures that are in place to ensure data validity, the following section will discuss the scales used to measure the variables in the questionnaire. A more extensive discussion on scale items and appropriateness of scales can be found in the variables subsection of the experimental design methodology chapter.

7.1.3. Scale Reliability Checks

Table 17 below illustrates the Cronbach's Alpha values for the scales used in the study. Acceptable values for Cronbach's α are those above 0.7 (DeVellis 2016). All the scales used and their specific items are detailed in the variables section of the experimental design methodology chapter. As can be observed all variables used in the questionnaire display high levels of internal consistency. The Cronbach's Alpha values for the variables were also pre-tested in the pilot questionnaire and the results were similar.

NAME	VALUE
INTERNET CAPABILITY	.819
HUMOUR	.863
ATTITUDE TOWARDS CONTENT	.896
SCEPTICISM	.792
BRAND ATTITUDE	.920
EWOM INTENTION	.928
AUTHENTICITY	.918
INTENTION FOR INFO SEARCH	.931
PURCHASE INTENTION	.920

Table 17 Cronbach's Alpha Values for Scales Used

In addition to sample quality and scale reliability, another aspect that is essential for a valid experiment is ensuring that the participants perceived the manipulated variables at the levels

they were intended. The following section will detail the manipulation checks that were performed.

7.1.4. Manipulation Checks

Perceived stimuli brand centrality was assessed through two questions: one regarding the visual or textual prominence of the brand or brand signifiers and another regarding the brand's involvement in the plot or story of the content. An independent T-test was conducted that showed that there is a significant difference in responses to the two questions based on the assigned testing condition.

Scores for prominence were significantly different across the two testing conditions, central brand placement (M = 3.78 SD = 1.12) and peripheral brand placement (M = 3.10, SD = 1.34), t (1,173) = 3.56, p < .00.

The same was true for the plot connection questions where central placements (M=3.33 SD= 1.12) and peripheral placements (M = 2.78 SD = 1.2), t (1,173) = 3.10, p < .00) were perceived as being significantly different. As a result, manipulations for brand centrality were successful.

Perceived media type was assessed through one question where participants were asked to select the type of media that was shown to them at the beginning of the survey. As both the independent and the dependent variable are categorical a T-test could not be conducted. Instead, a Chi^2 test was required. The test showed there was a strong correlation between the two variables $\chi2$ (1) = 167.18 p <.00. As a result, the manipulation for media type was successful.

This section has established the successful manipulation of the variables in the experimental design. The following section will present analysis results structured to reflect the proposed hypotheses.

7.1.5. Brand Centrality, Media Type and Scepticism

A two-way analysis of covariance (or factorial ANCOVA) was conducted to establish the influence of the two independent variables (media type and centrality) on the level of scepticism directed towards the viewed content. Media type included two levels (image and

text), while centrality also had two levels (central and peripheral). The relevant hypotheses being tested are:

H1: Brand related UGC with higher brand centrality will lead to higher levels of scepticism in consumer than lower brand centrality content.

H2: Brand related UGC in the form of images will lead to lower levels of scepticism in consumers than text UGC.

Brand Centrality and Scepticism

The main effect for centrality yielded an F ratio of F $(1,175) = 10.51$, p<.001, indicating a significant difference between central (M= 3.00, SD= .66) and peripheral (M=2.75, SD=.70) brand placement in terms of the level of scepticism elicited in respondents. These findings support *H1* with scepticism means being higher for content that features brands centrally, as opposed to peripherally.

Media Type and Scepticism

The main effects for media type were significant with an F value of F $(1,175) = 4.03$, p= .046, indicating a significant difference between UGC in the form of text (M=2.96, SD=.71) and image (M=2.79, SD= .65). These findings support *H2,* with scepticism means being higher for text post than ones for images.

7.1.6. Brand Centrality, Media Type and Outcome Variables

Brand Centrality and Outcome Variables

A one-way ANOVA analysis revealed no correlation (p > .05) between brand centrality and the proposed outcome variables (brand attitude, eWoM intention, brand authenticity, information search intention and purchase intention). This is in line with the full moderation model proposed in the study.

The following table illustrates mean levels across the two testing conditions for the outcome variables and their respective *p* values.

Table 18 Effects of Brand Centrality on the Outcome Variables

Outcome Variable	F	p	Means
Brand Attitude	.29	.6	$M_{Peripheral} = 3.22$ $M_{Central} = 3.27$
eWoM intention	.37	.55	$M_{Peripheral} = 2.09$ $M_{Central} = 2.18$
Brand Authenticity	.25	.43	$M_{Peripheral} = 2.88$ $M_{Central} = 2.81$
Information Search Intention	.12	.75	$M_{Peripheral} = 2.21$ $M_{Central} = 2.26$
Purchase Intention	.01	.9	$M_{Peripheral} = 2.74$ $M_{Central} = 2.73$

Media Type and Outcome Variables

A one-way ANOVA analysis revealed no correlation ($p > .05$) between media type and the proposed outcome variables (brand attitude, eWoM intention, brand authenticity, information search intention and purchase intention).

Table 19 Effects of Media Type on the Outcome Variables

Outcome Variable	F	p	Means
Brand Attitude	2.25	.14	$M_{Image} = 3.18$ $M_{Text} = 3.31$

eWoM intention	.7	.41	$M_{Image} = 2.2$ $M_{Text} = 2.1$
Brand Authenticity	1.43	.23	$M_{Image} = 2.79$ $M_{Text} = 2.9$
Information Search Intention	.08	.78	$M_{Image} = 2.21$ $M_{Text} = 2.26$
Purchase Intention	.02	.88	$M_{Image} = 2.73$ $M_{Text} = 2.75$

7.1.7. Scepticism and Outcome Variables

To assess the impact of scepticism on brand attitude, brand authenticity, eWoM intention, information search intention, and purchase intention, regression analysis is necessary, as both scepticism and the outcome variables are continuous. The relevant hypotheses being tested are:

H3: Consumer scepticism negatively relates to brand attitude.

H4: Consumer scepticism negatively relates to brand authenticity.

H5: Consumer scepticism negatively relates to eWoM intention.

H6: Consumer scepticism negatively relates to information search intention.

H7: Consumer scepticism negatively relates to purchase intention.

The results of the regression analysis between scepticism and the dependent variables are summarised in Table 20 below.

Table 20 Regression Results

Dependent Variable	Standardised β	SE	p	R²	Hypothesis Status
Brand attitude	-.54	.06	<.00	.3	Confirmed
eWoM intention	-.27	.1	<.00	.07	Confirmed
Brand authenticity	-.4	.06	<.00	.16	Confirmed
Information search intention	-.27	.1	<.00	.07	Confirmed
Purchase intention	-.35	.01	<.00	.12	Confirmed

In conclusion, scepticism has an indirect correlation of varying strength with all the outcome variables (brand attitude, eWoM intention, information search intention, brand authenticity, and purchase intention) supporting hypotheses 3-7 above.

To better assess how brand centrality and UGC type relate to scepticism and humour, the following section will analyse their relationships through the use of Process analysis.

7.1.8. Humour as a Moderator

To better understand the relationships between the variables being studied a moderation analysis was necessary. This was done through the use of the Process plugin for SPSS. It uses linear regression to analyse the relationships between selected variables using a predefined set

of models provided by the software (Hayes 2018). Process provides a variety of predefined models from which researchers can select one that best fits their variables and conceptual framework. This experiment moulds itself best to model 1 (see Figure 23).

Model 1

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Figure 23 Moderation Model 1 (Hayes 2018)

Each independent variable will be tested separately with each moderator. This will result in four process tests being conducted to establish the relationships between the proposed variables which are depicted in the figures below.

Humour	Humour
Brand Centrality → Scepticism	UGC Type → Scepticism
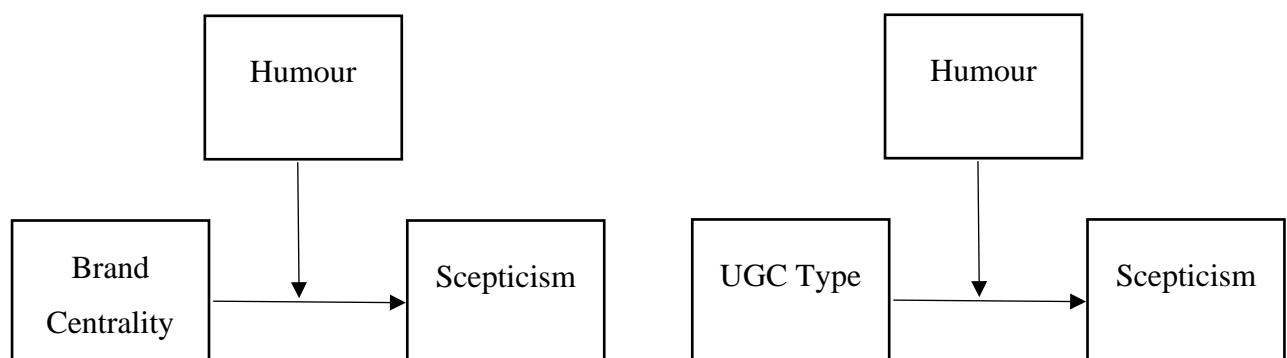
To evaluate role as a moderator two tests have been performed: one evaluating the impact of humour on the relationship between brand centrality and scepticism, the second evaluating the impact of humour on the relationship between UGC type and scepticism.

Brand Centrality, Humour and Scepticism

*H8: Humour moderates the relationship between brand centrality and
consumer scepticism: for higher levels of perceived content humour, the
brand centrality elicited scepticism would be stronger than for lower levels
of perceived humour.*

Brand centrality was used as an independent variable, humour as a moderator, and scepticism as a dependent variable.

The direct effect of humour on scepticism is b = -.58 95% CI [-.94, -.23], t = - 3.2, p = .001. This indicates that there is an indirect relationship between the level of perceived humour and scepticism, with an increase in humour corresponding to a decrease in scepticism.

The interaction term between brand centrality and humour accounted for a significant proportion of the variance in scepticism ΔR^2 = .04, F (1,171) = 4.6, p < .001 b = .32, t (1,171) = 2.96. The test revealed a statistically significant moderation effect, b = .32, 95% CI [.11, .53], t = 2.96, p <.001, indicating that the relationship between brand centrality and scepticism is moderated by humour. For medium levels of humour there is a significant positive relationship between centrality and scepticism b = .3, 95% CI [.09, .51], t = 2.88, p <.001. For high levels of humour there is a significant positive relationship between centrality and scepticism b = .62, 95% CI [.33, .92], t = 4.14, p <.001. Figure 24 below illustrates the relationships described above. The analysis supports the proposed hypothesis.
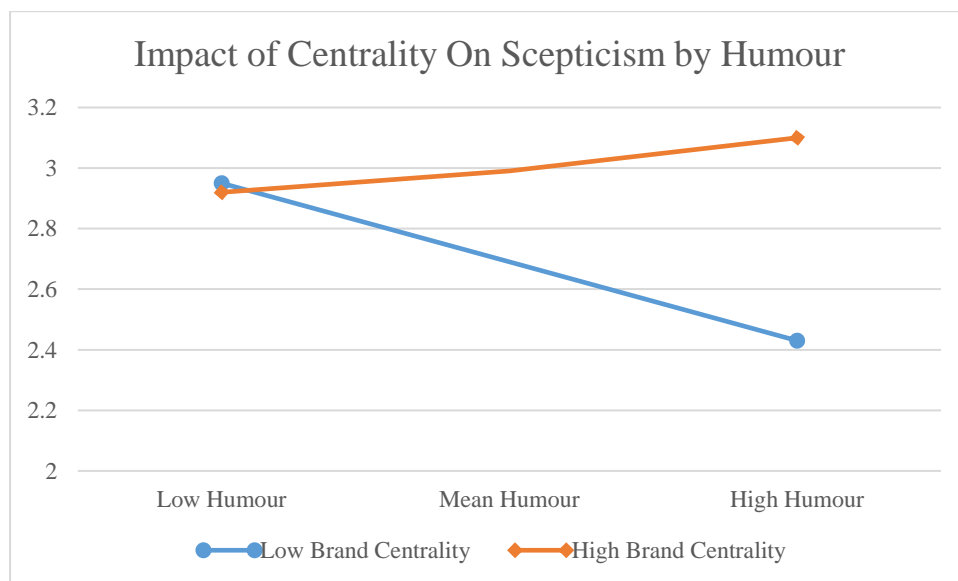
Figure 24 Impact of Centrality on Scepticism by Humour

UGC type, Humour and Scepticism

H9: Humour moderates the relationship between UGC type and consumer scepticism: for higher levels of perceived content humour, the media type elicited scepticism would be stronger than for lower levels of perceived humour.

UGC type was used as an independent variable, humour as a moderator, and scepticism as a dependent variable.

The direct effect of humour on scepticism is b = -.58 95% CI [-.93, -.23], t = - 3.3, p = .001. This indicates that there is an indirect relationship between the level of perceived humour and scepticism, with an increase in humour corresponding to a decrease in scepticism.

The interaction term between UGC type and humour accounted for a significant proportion of the variance in scepticism ΔR^2 = .057, F (1,171) = 10.56, p < .001 b = .32, t (1,171) = 3.24.

The test revealed a statistically significant moderation effect, b = .34, 95% CI [.13, .55], t = 3.24, p <.001, indicating that the relationship between UGC type and scepticism is moderated by humour. For high levels of humour there is a significant positive relationship between centrality and scepticism b = .51, 95% CI [.01, .23], t= 3.58, p <.001. Figure 25 below illustrates the relationships described above. The analysis supports the proposed hypothesis.
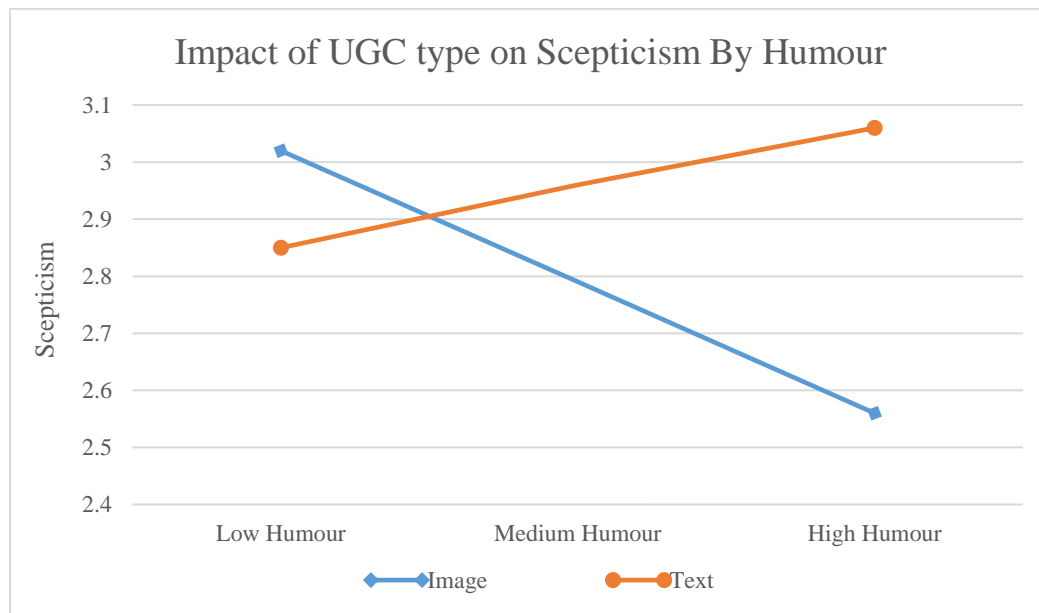
Figure 25 Impact of UGC type on Scepticism by Humour

The following section will briefly present the main findings of the data analysis for experiment 1 and the status of the proposed hypotheses.

7.1.9. Conclusions

The relationship between brand centrality, UGC type, and scepticism was established through the use of ANCOVA tests. Brands placed centrally elicit more scepticism from respondents than those placed peripherally, and brands placed in text content elicit more scepticism than those placed in images.

Through regression analysis the relationship between scepticism and the outcome variables (brand attitude, eWoM intention, brand authenticity, information search intention, and purchase intention). It was determined that higher levels of scepticism lead to lower values in the outcome variables.

Lastly, the section probed the nature of the relationships between the independent variables, scepticism, and perceived content humour. This relationship was investigated through the use of Process. It can be concluded based on the tests conducted that the relationship between the independent variables, the moderator, and the dependent variables is strengthened when the UGC has high levels of humour.

Table 21 below restates the hypotheses for this study and provides their status based on data analysis.

Table 21 Hypothesis Summary

	Hypothesis	**Status**	**p**	**Coeff**
1	Brand related UGC with higher brand centrality will lead to higher levels of scepticism in consumers than lower brand centrality content.	Supported	$p < .001$	$F_{(1,175)} = 10.5$
2	Brand related UGC in the form of images will lead to lower levels of scepticism in consumers than text UGC.	Supported	$p = .04$	$F_{(1,175)} = 4.03$

3	Consumer scepticism negatively relates to brand attitude such that an increase in scepticism will lead to a decrease in brand attitude.	Supported	$p < .001$	$\beta = -.54$
4	Consumer scepticism negatively relates to brand authenticity such that an increase in scepticism will lead to a decrease in brand authenticity.	Supported	$p < .001$	$\beta = -.4$
5	Consumer scepticism negatively relates to eWoM intention such that an increase in scepticism will lead to a decrease in eWoM intention.	Supported	$p < .001$	$\beta = -.27$
6	Consumer scepticism negatively relates to information search intention such that an increase in scepticism will lead to a decrease in information search intention.	Supported	$p < .001$	$\beta = -.27$
7	Consumer scepticism negatively relates to purchase intention such that an increase in scepticism will lead to a decrease in purchase intention.	Supported	$p < .001$	$\beta = -.35$
8	Humour moderates the relationship between brand centrality and consumer scepticism: for higher levels of perceived content humour, the brand centrality elicited scepticism would be stronger than for lower levels of perceived humour.	Supported	$p < .001$	$\beta = .3$
9	Humour moderates the relationship between media type and consumer scepticism: for higher levels of perceived content humour, the media type elicited scepticism would be stronger than for lower levels of perceived humour.	Supported	$p < .001$	$\beta = .34$

To further probe the relationships between UGC characteristics and individual consumer differences and scepticism a second experiment was conducted. The following section will discuss its results.

7.2. Experiment 2 Data Analysis

The previous section detailed the results of experiment 1 which consisted of 2 (brand centrality: high vs low) x2 (media type: image vs text) between-subjects design. This section will detail experiment 2 which is a 3 (tone towards brand: positive vs neutral vs negative) between-subjects design. It will discuss the sample and its quality, reliability, and manipulation checks. Further, it will examine the effect of the independent variables (tone towards brand) have on scepticism through the use of ANOVA type tests, as well as the impact of scepticism on the proposed outcome variables (brand attitude, eWoM intention, brand authenticity, information search intention, and purchase intention) through regression tests. Lastly, it will analyse the relationship between the independent variables, scepticism, and humour through the use of Process analysis. Figure 26 below illustrates the proposed relationships and hypotheses in experiment 2. The following section will discuss the sample characteristics and quality assurance measures that were implemented as well as giving an overview of the survey structure.
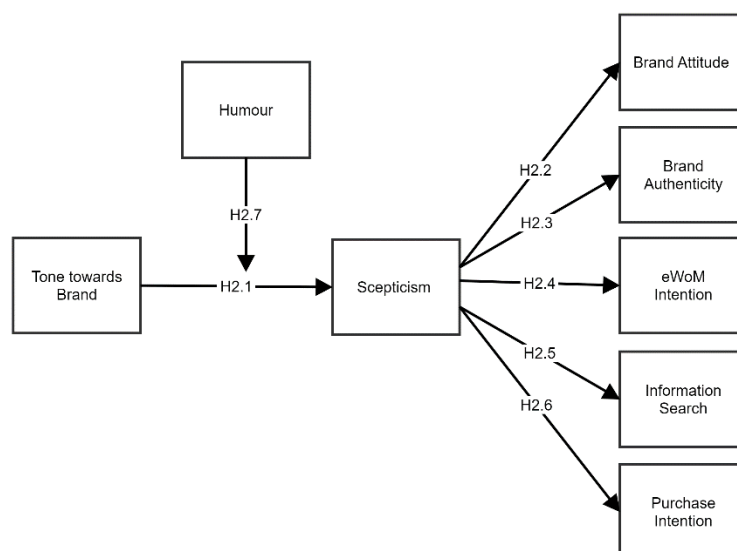
Figure 26 Conceptual Framework Experiment 2

7.2.1. Participants and Procedure

A total sample of 279 respondents, recruited through Qualtrics, participated in a 3 cell (tone towards brand: positive vs neutral vs negative).

Table 22 Experiment 2 – Summary of experiment cells

	Tone towards Brand		
	Positive	**Neutral**	**Negative**

The sample consisted of 53% males and 47% females, 13.6% aged 18-24, 32.6% aged 25-34, 23.7% aged 35-44, 20% aged 45-60, and 9.3% over 60.
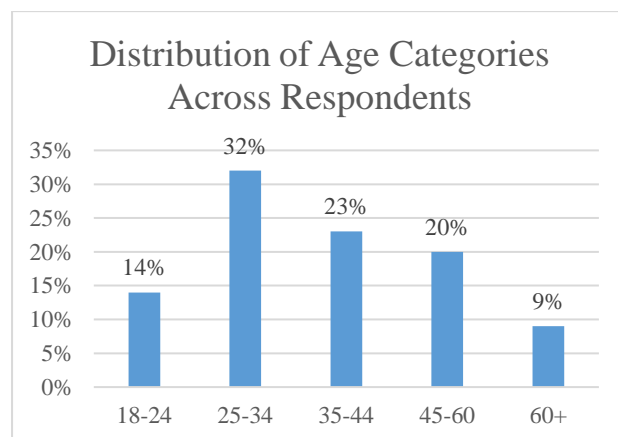
Respondents were instructed that they were going to be shown a piece of content that featured a brand and would be asked to give their opinion on it. All participants were randomly assigned one of the six testing conditions with quotas implemented to maintain gender rations across cells. The stimuli were selected from the previous content analysis and existing brands were replaced with fictitious ones to control for pre-existing brand attitudes and brand knowledge. After answering demographic questions, they were shown the stimuli and give their context. They were then asked to rate the tone towards the brand, the level of humour, and their attitude towards the content. They were asked about brand attitude, brand authenticity, eWoM intention, purchase intention, intention to search for information. Finally, they were asked to identify the context they were given at the beginning of the survey.

Any respondents who did not correctly identify the brand, the context or stated they were already familiar with the brand were excluded from the sample.

7.2.2. Scale Reliability Checks

Table 23 below illustrates the Cronbach's Alpha values for the scales used in the study. Acceptable values for Cronbach's α are those above 0.7 (DeVellis 2016). All the scales used, and their specific items are detailed in the variables section of the experimental design methodology chapter. As can be observed all variables used in the questionnaire display high levels of internal consistency. The Cronbach's Alpha values for the variables were also pre-tested in the pilot questionnaire and the results were similar.

Table 23 Cronbach's Alpha Values for Scales Used

NAME	VALUE
INTERNET CAPABILITY	.763
HUMOUR	.806
ATTITUDE TOWARDS CONTENT	.866
SCEPTICISM	.768
BRAND ATTITUDE	.949
EWOM INTENTION	.895
AUTHENTICITY	.927
INTENTION FOR INFO SEARCH	.93
PURCHASE INTENTION	.938

7.2.3. Manipulation Checks

Perceived stimuli tone towards brand was assessed through two questions, one assessing the positive tone and another assessing the negative tone towards the brand present in the content. There was a statistically significant difference between groups as determined by a one-way ANOVA (F (2,276) = 89.52, p <.00). A Turkey post hoc test revealed that the perceived tone towards the brand was lower for the negative content ($M_{Negative}$ = 2.08, SD = 1.03), than neutral content ($M_{Neutral}$ = 3.5, SD = .9), and positive content ($M_{Positive}$ = 3.9, SD = 1).

7.2.4. Tone towards the Brand and Scepticism

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to establish the influence of the independent variable (Tone towards Brand) on the level of scepticism directed towards the viewed content, with humour as a covariate and Consumer Goal Seeking Behaviour (GSB) as a control variable. Tone towards brand included three levels (positive, neutral, and negative), while the GSB had two levels (information and entertainment). The relevant hypotheses being tested are:

> *H1: The tone towards the brand included in the UGC is negatively related to scepticism such that an increase in positive tone determines an decrease in scepticism.*

Tone towards brand and Scepticism

A one-way ANOVA test concluded that there is a statistically significant difference between the levels of scepticism elicited by positive, neutral, and negative toned UGC (F (2,276) = 7.77 p =.001), with negative content eliciting $M_{SkepNegative}$ = 2.77 (SD = .72), neutral content eliciting $M_{SkepNeutral}$ = 2.55 (SD = .56), and positive content eliciting $M_{SkepPositive}$ = 2.4 (SD = .64).
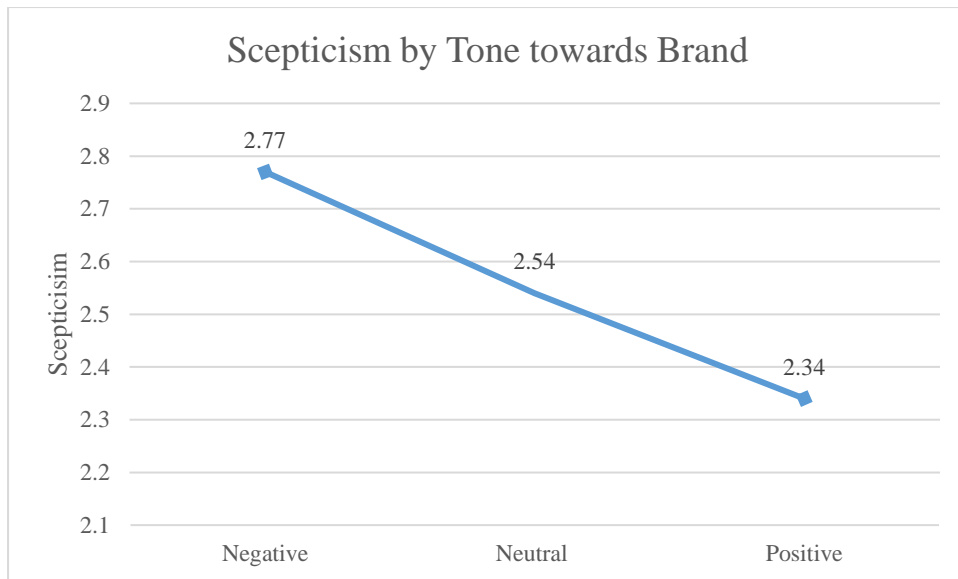
Figure 27 Scepticism by Tone towards the Brand

No significant relationship was found between GSB and consumer scepticism (p>.05) and the relationship between the tone towards the brand and consumer scepticism remained the same regardless of GSB (p >.05).

7.2.5.   Tone towards the Brand and Outcome Variables

A one-way ANOVA analysis revealed significant correlations (p < .05) between the tone towards the brand and the proposed outcome variables (brand attitude, eWoM intention, brand authenticity, information search intention and purchase intention). This indicates the presence of partial moderation between tone towards the brand, scepticism, and the outcome variables.

The following table illustrates the F, p, and mean values for the outcome variables for each level of the independent variable.

Table 24 The effects of Tone towards the Brand on the Outcome Variables

Outcome Variable	F	p	Means
Brand Attitude	40.53	>.001	$M_{Negative} = 2.72$
			$M_{Neutral} = 3.51$
			$M_{Positive} = 3.66$

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eWoM intention	23.39	>.001	$M_{Negative} = 2.1$
			$M_{Neutral} = 2.7$
			$M_{Positive} = 3.05$
Brand Authenticity	29.57	>.001	$M_{Negative} = 2.55$
			$M_{Neutral} = 3.15$
			$M_{Positive} = 3.33$
Information Search Intention	5.87	.003	$M_{Negative} = 2.14$
			$M_{Neutral} = 2.52$
			$M_{Positive} = 2.67$
Purchase Intention	34.73	>.001	$M_{Negative} = 2.11$
			$M_{Neutral} = 3.09$
			$M_{Positive} = 3.314$

7.2.6. Scepticism and Outcome Variables

To assess the impact of scepticism on brand attitude, brand authenticity, eWoM intention, information search intention, and purchase intention, regression analysis is necessary, as both scepticism and the outcome variables are continuous. The relevant hypotheses being tested are:

H3: Consumer scepticism negatively relates to brand attitude such that an increase in scepticism will lead to a decrease in brand attitude.

H4: Consumer scepticism negatively relates to brand authenticity attitude such that an increase in scepticism will lead to a decrease in brand authenticity.

H5: Consumer scepticism negatively relates to eWoM intention attitude such that an increase in scepticism will lead to a decrease in eWoM intention.

H6: Consumer scepticism negatively relates to information search intention attitude such that an increase in scepticism will lead to a decrease in information search intention.

H7: Consumer scepticism negatively relates to purchase intention attitude such that an increase in scepticism will lead to a decrease in purchase intention.

The results of the regression analysis between scepticism and the dependent variables are summarised in the table below.

Table 25 Regression Analysis Results between Consumer Scepticism and Outcome Variables

Dependent Variable	Standardised β	SE	p	R^2	Hypothesis Status
Brand attitude	-.44	.07	<.001	.19	Confirmed
eWoM intention	-.35	.09	<.001	.13	Confirmed
Brand authenticity	-.36	.07	<.001	.13	Confirmed
Information search intention	-.29	.1	<.001	.08	Confirmed
Purchase intention	-.38	.1	<.001	.14	Confirmed

In conclusion, scepticism has an indirect correlation of varying strength with all the outcome variables (brand attitude, eWoM intention, information search intention, brand authenticity, and purchase intention). This support hypotheses three through to seven.

7.2.7. Humour as a Moderator

H7: Humour moderates the relationship between tone towards the brand and consumer scepticism: for higher levels of perceived content humour, the scepticism elicited by the tone towards the brand will be stronger than for lower levels of perceived humour.

To better understand the relationships between the variables being studied a moderation analysis was necessary. This was done through the use of the Process plugin for SPSS. As opposed to the previous experiment in this case humour was not a moderator in the relationship between tone towards brand and scepticism ($p > .05$).

However, a linear regression analysis revealed a statistically significant indirect relationship between humour and scepticism $F (1,278) = 17.36$, $p < .001$, standardised $\beta = -.24$, SE $= .05$, $R^2 = .06$.

The following section will summarise the findings of experiment 2 and the status of the proposed hypotheses.

7.2.8. Conclusions

The data analysis found a significant correlation between tone towards the brand and scepticism thought the use of ANCOVA tests. Content that has a positive tone towards the brand is least likely to elicit scepticism, followed by neutral and negative tones.

Through regression tests, a negative relationship was established between scepticism and brand attitude, brand authenticity, eWoM intention, information search intention, and purchase intention were established. It was determined that an increase in scepticism leads to a decrease in the values of the outcome variables.

Lastly, the chapter probed the nature of the relationships between tone towards the brand, consumer scepticism and humour. A moderation analysis revealed humour did not moderate the relationship between tone towards the brand and consumer scepticism. However, liner regression analysis showed a negative relationship between humour and consumer scepticism, with an increase in humour corresponding to a decrease in consumer scepticism.

Table 26 below restates the hypotheses and summarises their status.

Table 26 Hypothesis Summary

	Hypothesis	Status	p	Coeff
1	The tone towards the brand included in UGC positively relates to scepticism such that an increase in positive tone determines an increase in scepticism.	Supported	P=<.001	F (2,276) = 7.77
2	Consumer scepticism negatively relates to brand attitude such that an increase in scepticism will lead to a decrease in brand attitude.	Supported	P<.001	β= -.44
3	Consumer scepticism negatively relates to brand authenticity such that an increase in scepticism will lead to a decrease in brand authenticity.	Supported	P<.001	β= -.36
4	Consumer scepticism negatively relates to eWoM intention such that an increase in scepticism will lead to a decrease in eWoM intention.	Supported	P<.001	β= -.35
5	Consumer scepticism negatively relates to information search intention such that an increase in scepticism will lead to a decrease in information search intention.	Supported	P<.001	β= - .29
6	Consumer scepticism negatively relates to purchase intention such that an increase in scepticism will lead to a decrease in purchase intention.	Supported	P<.001	β= -.38

| 7 | Humour moderates the relationship between tone towards the brand and consumer scepticism: for higher levels of perceived content humour, the scepticism elicited by the tone towards the brand will be stronger than for lower levels of perceived humour. | Not Supported | p>.05 | |

7.3. Conclusions

This chapter has detailed the data analysis for the two experiments with a between-subjects full-factorial design which have been conducted. The first has analysed the impact of media type and brand centrality (2x2) and another tone towards brand (3). The independent variables being manipulated were brand centrality, media type, tone towards the brand; while the dependent variables were scepticism, brand attitude, perceived brand authenticity, eWoM intention, information search intention, and purchase intention. The experiments sought to establish a causal relationship between the executional variables of UGC and consumer scepticism. Further, it presented the data analysis conducted for each experiment. The provided a summary of the results and hypothesis status.

To be better able to contextualise the results presented in this chapter, the following chapter will discuss the thesis findings and contributions. It will do so by discussing the results based on the initial research questions and examining how the conceptual framework has evolved across the study.

Chapter 8 – Discussion

UGC is an important tool for both consumer and marketers. In order to understand how best to leverage it in a marketing context, the study aims to examine the impact of content characteristics on consumer scepticism and the effects of consumer scepticism on behavioural and attitudinal brand outcomes. The two conducted experiments examined how brand centrality, media type, tone towards the brand, and humour affect consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC (1), the impact on brand attitude, brand authenticity, eWoM intention, information search intention and purchase intention when consumer scepticism is present (2), and the underlying dynamic of the relationships between the identified antecedents and consequences of consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC (3). The findings of the study highlight important considerations for the effectiveness of brand related UGC.

This chapter will discuss the findings from the content analysis and two experiments and how they contribute to the existing literature. It will be divided into four main sections. To provide further detail on the nature of these relationships, the first and second sections will discuss the findings in terms of antecedents and consequences of consumer scepticism, respectively. The third section will discuss how the findings contribute and impact on existing models and theories in marketing (ELM). Lastly, the chapter will distil the main discussion points covered by presenting them as the answers to the research questions proposed at the beginning of the thesis.

A review of literature, directly and indirectly, relevant to the area of research identified several gaps in knowledge and elaborated a proposed conceptual framework. The review of existing literature identified four gaps in knowledge. The first was the lack of a cohesive definition and understanding of types of UGC. This was addressed in the same chapter by providing a marketing-related definition, as well as a method of categorisation based on the role of the brand in the content. This was done to clarify the scope and focus of existing research on brand related UGC and position the thesis in relation to other existing studies.

The second gap identified in UGC literature was related to the scope of relevant research. As also highlighted by Muller and Christandl (2019), most of the literature focuses on ratings and reviews as its object of study, this leads to issues relating to generalisability of findings to a broader scope of UGC and also ignores the more contemporary uses of the concept. This study addresses that methodological gap using a mixture of UGC types in both the exploratory

content analysis and two experiments. By doing so it ensures the findings can be applied to a wider scope of content which is more in line with how it is being used by consumers and it provides a more complete perspective on the phenomenon of brand related UGC.

The third issue that emerged was the fact that literature largely ignored the possibility of consumers having a negative reaction to brand related UGC. Most literature focuses on why consumers inherently place more trust in UGC than traditional marketing messages (Chari et al 2016, Reimer and Benkenstein 2016, Zhou et al 2016, Pan and Chiou 2011). However, with the level of current awareness of issues such as fake news and the growing phenomenon of sponsored content, it stands to reason that consumers could display scepticism towards brand related UGC. This would parallel existing research in the areas of product placement (Cowley and Barron 2008) and covert marketing (Wei et al 2008). Because the area of UGC has largely been ignored, little is understood about what the consequences are to marketing outcomes when consumer scepticism is evoked towards UGC. This is one of the main issues in the existing literature that is being addressed by this study by measuring the level of consumer scepticism towards a variety of brand related UGC and how marketing outcomes are impacted by its presence.

The final issue that was highlighted is the fact that UGC trust literature only identifies source-based cues as antecedents of trust towards UGC. Due to the frequently anonymous nature of content online (Nam et al 2020), this creates important limitations in understanding the effectiveness of UGC in a marketing context when the only cue is the content itself.

At the end of the literature review the three main research questions that had been articulated: which content characteristics impact consumer scepticism (1), how does consumer scepticism affect behavioural and attitudinal brand outcomes (2), and what is the nature of the relationship between the three (3) are reprised in light of the identified gaps in literature.

Chapter 3 justifies the use of a positivist research paradigm, discusses the research approach design and ethical considerations. In order to best address the research questions a multi-method quantitative sequential methodology is employed.

Chapter 4 covered the methodology and data analysis of the quantitative content analysis. It was employed as an exploratory method and used to narrow down the large number of potential UGC characteristics that had been identified in the literature review by establishing their relevance in the context of brand related UGC. It was determined that brand prominence, plot

relevance, tone towards brand and UGC media type had a higher likelihood of evoking scepticism in consumers.

Chapter 5 proposes the conceptual framework and elaborates the relevant hypotheses. The exploratory content analysis identified which of the chosen variables would be most relevant for further study. This chapter discusses them in more depth in relation to both the findings and existing literature in order to crystalise the relationships between concepts and formulate the hypotheses.

Chapter 6 details the proposed methodology for the two experiments. The first experiment was a 2 (brand centrality: high vs low) x 2 (media type: image vs text) between-subjects design, while the second was a 3 (tone towards the brand: positive vs neutral vs negative) between-subjects design. These are meant to empirically establish causation between UGC characteristics, scepticism, and brand attitude, eWoM intention, brand authenticity, information search intention and purchase intention. Further, the chapter discusses the scales available for measuring the selected variables and the reasoning behind the selection of specific ones.

Chapter 7 presents the data analysis from the two experiments based on the proposed hypotheses.

This chapter will discuss the findings of the content analysis and the two experiments through the lens of the three research questions and how these findings impact existing theories and frameworks.

Table 27 below provides an overview of the research questions, study objectives, identified research gaps and contributions of this study.

Table 27 Summary of Research Questions, Objectives, Gaps and Contributions

Research Question	Research Objectives	Research Contribution
1. **What content characteristics impact consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC?**	Identify which content characteristics are relevant to the context of consumer scepticism.	**Theoretical** Develops literature on consumer scepticism in a UGC context by identifying content related variables which impact consumer scepticism. **Methodological** Expands the range of brand related UGC that has been empirically examined.
	Empirically ascertain the relationship between UGC characteristics and consumer scepticism	**Practical** Recommendation to marketing managers that allow the formulation of specific co-creation guidelines.
2. **How does consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC affect brand related outcomes at attitudinal and behavioural levels?**	Identify which attitudinal and behavioural brand outcomes are relevant to the context of consumer scepticism.	**Theoretical** Contributes to the emerging literature on consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC. Highlights the darker side of brand related UGC by outlining potential negative outcomes as a result of consumer scepticism.
	Empirically establish the causal relationship between the identified relevant outcome variables and consumer scepticism.	**Methodological** Expands the scope of UGC effectiveness through a wider variety of outcome variables such as brand authenticity. Examines the formation of consumer scepticism in a context where no disclosures are present.

		Practical
		Improves brand social listening efforts by better understanding the impact of brand related UGC on key marketing outcomes.
3. What are the dynamics between content characteristics, consumer scepticism and attitudinal and behavioural brand related outcomes?	Investigate the types of relationships between content characteristics and consumer scepticism.	**Theoretical** Creates a conceptual framework establishing the relationships between the examined constructs. Explains the mechanism of moderation and mediation between content characteristics, consumer scepticism, humour and brand outcomes which have been overlooked in literature. Contributes to the existing literature on the ELM model identifying additional content-related variables that could impact consumers' motivation to process the content.
	Investigate the types of relationships between consumer scepticism and the identified behavioural and attitudinal brand related outcomes.	**Practical** Identifies differences in UGC effectiveness based on content characteristics and levels of consumer scepticism.

8.1. Antecedents of Consumer Scepticism

One of the main aims of this study is to understand what content characteristics can increase consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC. According to Lee et al "knowing what consumers do not want is just as valuable as knowing what they want" (2009:169). By identifying the antecedents of consumer scepticism, this study provides valuable insight into consumer preferences in terms of brand related UGC.

In order to identify which content characteristics are of relevance to the study the literature review analysed existing studies on UGC. Further, it drew parallels from other comparable research areas to identify characteristics that have not been discussed in a UGC context but could be applicable. The variables initially evaluated were plot relevance, brand prominence, media type, tone towards the brand, message type, presence of promotional information, brand engagement, and content quality.

The study employed a complementary sequential research design. It used exploratory content analysis to test the variables identified in the literature review and establish which would most likely be applicable in the context of UGC. Then two experiments were conducted to determine the causal relationship between the identified UGC characteristics and scepticism.

The results of the content analysis indicated that media type, plot relevance, brand prominence, and tone towards the brand are most likely to impact consumer scepticism. This was consistent with research in the area of product placement that focuses on placement modality (visual vs auditory), plot relevance and brand prominence to analyse the effectiveness of placements (Cowley and Barron 2008, Balasubramanian et al 2006, Russell et al 2006).

However, brand prominence and plot relevance display variable level incompatibilities, that is to say, that certain levels of one variable determine the value of the other which would impede a full-factorial experiment design. High brand prominence can exist in conjunction with low plot relevance (for example an image where the brand logo is featured prominently but is not the focus of the message), but high plot relevance cannot exist in a low brand prominence condition. This is because being the main focus of the message implies high brand prominence (if the content is about the brand it precludes low prominence). To address this issue, the variables were replaced with the initially discussed concept of brand centrality. This variable had already been established in UGC literature (Smith et al 2012, Roma and Aloini 2019) and is conceptually very

close to both brand prominence and plot relevance but had not been studied in this context before. Both previous studies (Smith et al 2012, Roma and Aloini 2019) were descriptive and aimed to establish how brand related content differed across social media platforms and did not address the issues of how brand centrality impact consumer scepticism or more broadly UGC effectiveness.

The two experiments manipulated three content characteristics to establish their impact on consumer scepticism: brand centrality, UGC media type (experiment 1) and tone towards the brand (experiment 2). Experiment 2 also considered consumer goal-seeking behaviour as a control variable. Both experiments also considered the impact of humour on the relationship between content characteristics and consumer scepticism.

The following table summarises the hypotheses related to the research question across the two experiments and their status.

	Hypothesis	Status
	Experiment 1	
H1	Brand related UGC with higher brand centrality will elicit higher levels of scepticism in consumers than lower brand centrality content.	Supported
H2	Brand related UGC in the form of images will elicit lower levels of scepticism in consumers than text based UGC.	Supported
H8	Humour moderates the relationship between brand centrality and consumer scepticism: for higher levels of perceived content humour, the brand centrality elicited scepticism would be stronger than for lower levels of perceived humour.	Supported
H9	Humour moderates the relationship between media type and consumer scepticism: for higher levels of perceived content	Supported

	humour, the media type elicited scepticism would be stronger than for lower levels of perceived humour.	
	Experiment 2	
H3	The tone towards the brand included in the UGC is negatively related to scepticism such that an increase in positive tone determines a decrease in scepticism.	Supported
H7	Humour moderates the relationship between tone towards the brand and consumer scepticism: for higher levels of perceived content humour, the scepticism elicited by the tone towards the brand will be stronger than for lower levels of perceived humour.	Rejected

The following section will discuss the results relating to brand centrality and how they fit in with existing literature.

8.1.1. Brand Centrality

Brand centrality represents the role the brand plays in brand related UGC. The data analysis for experiment one revealed that brand centrality has a significant impact on consumer scepticism. An increase in brand centrality leads to a corresponding increase in consumer scepticism. Similar findings were observed in the content analysis with content that displayed high plot relevance and high brand prominence ranking consistently higher than their counterparts.

In their analysis of how UGC differs across social media platforms, Smith et al (2012) argue that researchers often assume high brand centrality in all brand related UGC and exemplify instances where brands have been featured peripherally, argument which is later supported by Roma and Aloini (2019). Despite these acknowledgements, there has been little done to address the gap in research of brand centrality's role in UGC effectiveness. This study provides an important insight into how brand centrality shapes consumer reactions to brand related UGC. Because the existence of peripherally placed brands in UGC has been acknowledge in theory, this is one of the first studies to address the issue empirically. This is an important addition to existing knowledge because it provides clear evidence for both theory and practice that indicates that in

the context of UGC the effects of brand centrality are filtered through the level of consumer scepticism. The relationship between brand centrality and the outcome variables (brand attitude, eWoM intention, brand authenticity, information search intention and purchase intention) is fully mediated by consumer scepticism. This indicates that the actual mechanism through which brand centrality affects the outcome variables in the context of brand related UGC is due to its influence on consumer scepticism rather than acting directly to influence behavioural and attitudinal outcomes. This difference between how brand centrality operates in a UGC context as opposed to more traditional marketing methods highlights the distinct nature of brand related UGC. Because consumers must rely on their own judgement to assess whether they perceive it as being a persuasion attempt rather than rely on clear disclosures, the changes in brand outcome are more dependent on consumer scepticism than in other contexts. As a result, this study emphasizes the importance of consumer scepticism when leveraging brand related UGC for marketing purposes and provides important insight into the mechanisms through which the desired brand outcomes can be achieved.

In their study on brand integration in video games, Jeong and Biocca (2012) found that brands placed centrally are more likely to be remembered. Verhellen et al (2015) had similar results with centrally place brands being more easily recognised. To further this point, Van Reijmersdal (2009) determined that high prominence brand placements are more likely to activate awareness of deliberate brand placement. The same effect was found by Cowley and Barron (2008) in their analysis of placement prominence in the context of product placement. In summary, research in other areas of marketing and brand placement has identified brand centrality as being an important factor in consumers' responses to that message.

Further, Tellis et al (2019) analysed how online advertising characteristics such as brand prominence impact social media sharing. They posited that high brand prominence induces consumer avoidance and is more likely to induce consumer scepticism. Based on these findings, brands placed centrally prompt consumers to process the brand related UGC centrally, which has been shown to increase the likelihood of scepticism (Hang and Auty 2011). There has been little research directly analysing how brand centrality impacts scepticism, however, based on the abovementioned literature from related fields, it can be concluded that the results of this study both support and expand existing literature. The novelty of these findings lies in establishing the different levels of consumer scepticism elicited towards brand related UGC based on the level of brand centrality. These differences had not been previously established in this context.

The implications for practice derived from this are twofold. When brands are engaging in paid online sponsorships or native advertising campaigns, they should consider the levels of brand centrality of their content. Firstly, our findings suggest more peripherally placed brands could strike a better balance between effectiveness and scepticism. Secondly, when encouraging their consumer to engage with the brand through specific campaigns they should also consider the benefits of content that is less focused on the brand.

The following section will discuss the impact of another content-related variable, UGC type, on scepticism based on the results from experiment 1 and contextualise them in existing literature.

8.1.2. UGC Type

UGC type refers to the type of media that is used. The results of experiment one revealed that brand related text causes higher levels of scepticism than brand related images. The experiment results also support the initial findings of the content analysis. There is little directly comparative research on the effectiveness of text and image based UGC. As such this study is one of the first to empirically establish that in the context of brand related UGC images evoke less consumer scepticism than text.

However, similar findings have been observed in traditional advertising research. In a study on print advertising, Rayner et al (2001) found that consumers spend more time analysing text than images. This could be an indication that consumers are more likely to take a central route to persuasion when engaging with text content. This increased elaboration has been linked to consumer scepticism (Hang and Auty 2011). This indicates that UGC type could act as a motivator to process a message and would contribute to existing theory on the ELM.

The increased effectiveness of images as opposed to text in advertising appeals was initially posited by Rossiter and Percy (1978) and further supported by Eddell and Staelin (1983), Kisielius (1982), Mitchel and Olson (1981). More recent studies have found similar effects for packaging (Underwood and Kelin 2002). In a UGC context, similar studies have found that consumers prefer images to text (Adweek 2017). This study demonstrates that not only consumers prefer images to text, but images are a more effective persuasion medium than text in the context of brand related UGC. This provides important empirical support for decision making and establishing a brand communication channel strategy. Brands often instigate brand related UGC creation campaigns across social media. This increased understanding of how

media type impacts both consumer scepticism and brand outcomes allows for a higher level of certainty when choosing both the type of brand related UGC to encourage as well as choosing the most appropriate social media channels to do so.

In some specific studies relating to online search results and advertising Hughes et al (2003) found that viewers tend to focus more on the text than images. Similar results from Rayner et al (2001) indicated more time is spent looking at textual components of advertising rather than the visuals. These results contradicted the participants' stated preferences for visuals. However, a more recent eye-tracking study (Hernandez-Mendez and Munoz-Leiva 2015) found that viewers pay more attention to images than text when looking at banner adverts. These differences may be due to the methodology of both studies. Li et al (2016) attribute the increased focus on text when prompted to consider purchasing the product and more time looking at images when the task is memorisation. This would explain the slightly contradictory findings of the previously discussed studies (i.e., Hughes et al 2003, Rayner et al 2001 and Hernandez-Mendez and Munoz-Leiva 2015). In conclusion, when prompted to consider brand related UGC in a purchase context, text-based content will be met with increased attention, while in outside of it images will benefit from more of consumers' attention.

As discussed previously the increased time spent analysing text can lead to consumer scepticism (Hang and Auty 2011). These conclusions support the increased levels of consumer scepticism observed for text based brand related UGC. As such the results provide an explanation for the decreased effectiveness of text in the form of consumer scepticism. The increased time spent analysing it leading to an increase in consumer scepticism and ultimately a decrease in brand outcomes.

These results have important implications for UGC literature. They empirically establish consumer preferences and effectiveness of brand related UGC based on media type used. They support the current shift towards image-based content online, as images are less likely to create consumer scepticism. This also indicates that perhaps companies should consider either using consumer created images in their campaigns more frequently or encouraging their creation and distribution online compared to text-based content.

The next section will examine the findings relating to tone towards the brand and scepticism derived from the data analysis of the second experiment.

8.1.3. Tone towards the Brand

Tone towards the brand "captures the over-riding brand sentiment expressed in brand related UGC" (Smith et al 2012:106). In this case, it is essential to distinguish tone towards the brand from the general tone of the UGC. For example, instances of brand related UGC where the brand is featured peripherally could express a positive tone overall, but a neutral tone towards the brand. There is abundant literature discussing the impact and effectiveness of brand related UGC based on tone towards the brand (Tang et al 2014), however, few studies have examined the impact it could have on consumer scepticism.

One of the most interesting finding of the study overall is the negative correlation between tone towards the brand and scepticism. It analysed the impact of negative, neutral, and positive tone towards the brand on scepticism. Content with a positive tone towards the brand eliciting the lowest levels of scepticism. The second experiment contradicted the findings of the exploratory content analysis which indicated that positive tone towards the brand was most likely to evoke scepticism.

The content analysis found that positive brand related UGC was more frequently identified as suspicious, than content that was neutral or negative in tone, while the second experiment indicated the opposite, with consumer scepticism decreasing in more positive toned content. One explanation for the discordant findings could be the differences in the levels of persuasion knowledge between the HailCorporate community and the experiment respondents. Because the community is centred on identifying brand related content that acts as advertising it could be argued that they are more aware of "unconventional" marketing tactics than the average consumer. With increased knowledge of marketing persuasion tactics, they may be more likely to identify "benign" content as a persuasion attempt and react sceptically, while those who are less aware choose to trust the information they are presented with. The levels of consumer scepticism reported across experiment two seem to support this argument as the mean levels of consumer scepticism are below average overall.

These findings provide an interesting addition to existing literature. UGC with a positive tone towards the brand has been found to created favourable brand attitudes (Sonnier et al 2011, Goh et al 2013). Yi et al (2019) attribute the increased effectiveness of positive brand related UGC, as opposed to positive marketer generated content, to its ability to mitigate consumer scepticism.

The results of this study, while generally supporting existing literature, indicate that when leveraging positive brand related UGC brands should consider their target market. If the market segment they are trying to reach is comprised of highly sceptical consumers a more balanced approach would be beneficial. Similarly, one recent study by Yi et al (2019) found that when very positive reviews were highlighted by the company, they were less effective than those which were more moderate. They argued that, in some contexts, highly positive content is more likely to generate a sceptical reaction. Correspondingly, the findings of this study also support the highlighting of brand related UGC that is more balanced in its opinions of the brand to reduce consumer scepticism. Further, this study also increases the scope of applicability of Yi et al (2019). While their study only addresses text-based product reviews, this study finds the similar results for images. This addition is valuable because, in a UGC context, consumers prefer images to text (Adweek 2017), but the way consumers process images is different to the way they process text (Hernandez-Mendez and Munoz-Leiva 2015). As such, providing an understanding of how tone towards the brand affects consumer scepticism and marketing outcomes in an image-based context provides much needed additional clarify for both researchers and marketers.

Wakefield and Wakefield (2018) and Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006) found that negative eWoM is more impactful than positive eWoM. These studies indicate that consumers are more likely to believe and rely on negative eWoM as opposed to positive eWoM when making purchase decisions. This study's findings also support consumers' reliance on negative UGC when making purchase decisions. Respondents exposed to negative tones brand related UGC are much less likely to purchase the featured brand when compared to the increase in purchase intention generated by positive brand related UGC. This supports the findings of previous studies, however where this study makes an important contribution to both theory and practice is in clarifying the impact of neutral brand related UGC. The results indicate that in most cases, neutral brand related UGC also positively impacts marketing outcomes to a degree very similar to positive content. However, the differences between the two are more pronounced for behavioural outcomes (purchase intention and eWoM intention), as opposed to attitudinal outcomes which are quite similar (brand attitude, brand authenticity). This provides important insight into how neutral and positive toned content can be best leveraged by marketing managers. Coupled with the previous discussion of how neutral toned content elicits less consumer scepticism in some target markets, the findings indicate that neutral toned content can be a much more effective tool than previously recognised.

The main takeaway from this analysis is that, to strike a balance between creating a favourable brand outcomes and consumer scepticism, brands should consider their target audience and they should also encourage the creation of neutral or more balanced UGC. While companies should still encourage the creation of positive UGC, they should consider the value of more balanced content, especially if their customers are prone to scepticism. Companies should not encourage consumers to create content that can be perceived as too positive as it will immediately raise suspicions from other potential or existing customers.

The next section will discuss how humour relates to the examined variables and how these findings connect with literature on the subject.

8.2. Humour

Perceived humour of content was found to have a significant impact on scepticism. In experiment one, it was established as a moderator of the relationship between UGC characteristics (brand centrality and UGC type).

For images, an increase in perceived humour leads to a decrease in consumer scepticism. It has the opposite effect for text, with an increase in perceived humour also leading to an increase in consumer scepticism. In content with high brand centrality, an increase in humour leads to an increase in scepticism. Content with low brand centrality benefits from a decrease in consumer scepticism with the increase of humour.

Zhang and Zinkhan (2006) found that humour motivates processing of advertisements. This has been found to be an important mechanism that enhances attention towards the ad and ensure more positive brand evaluations (Eisend et al 2014). Analysing this through the lens of the ELM framework, humour can lead to a central route to persuasion, prompting increased levels of cognition when processing brand related UGC. This increased elaboration has been linked to consumer scepticism (Hang and Auty 2011). This accounts for the different impact of humour based on brand centrality and UGC type. If humour enhances processing of the content, the addition of humour in situations that already prompt central route processing (high brand centrality, text) enhances these effects. As such the results of this study contribute to the ELM framework by expanding the understanding of what factors contribute to consumers' motivations to process brand related UGC providing an important theoretical contribution. Further discussion

on how the study results impact existing knowledge of the ELM can be found in the following section.

Humour has an important impact on information processing (Zhang and Zinkhan 2006) and is frequently used as a method of bypassing consumer scepticism in traditional advertising (Strick et al 2012). In their study of humour as a disseminating behaviour for eWoM, Hsieh et al (2012) found that it encourages positive attitudes towards the content, forwarding intention, as well as, disguising commercial intent. Results from both experiments solidify the applicability of previous research in a brand related UGC context. Both experiments found that the presence of humour leads to a decrease in overall consumer scepticism and by extension an increase in desirable brand outcomes, however the first experiment highlighted some situations in which the use of humour could prove detrimental, specifically when used in conjunction with high brand centrality UGC. This allows for a more nuanced understanding of the role of humour within the context of brand related UGC.

In light of the varying effects of humour observed in both experiments, the study proposes that the differences in the role of humour between brand centrality, media type and tone towards the brand are due to the nature of these UGC characteristics. While brand centrality and media type relate to the execution of the content, tone towards the brand relates directly to the brand. Product placement literature that analyses the impact of humour in conjunction with other execution variables such as brand prominence and placement modality has found that humour when associated with high brand centrality can cause "irritation" (Cowley and Barron 2008). Similar effects have been found in this study, an increase in perceived humour in a high brand centrality context increases the level of consumer scepticism towards UGC, while decreasing the level of consumer scepticism for low brand centrality content.

While literature on tone towards the brand in eWoM and UGC has found that a positive tone towards the brand tends to lower the levels of consumer scepticism (Yi et al 2019) and has positive effects on brand outcomes (Tang et al 2014). There has been little to no empirical research on the relationship of tone towards the brand and humour. This study has found that humour does not impact the relationship between tone towards the brand and consumer scepticism. Due to the limited research into the impact of execution factors of brand related UGC on its effectiveness this study is one of the first to demonstrate that their impact on both consumer scepticism and brand outcomes is different to that of brand related factors. The literature review identified a definitive gap in research concerning the factors that influence UGC effectiveness.

Trust and scepticism literature relying heavily on source-based cues to explain the formation of consumer attitudes towards brand related content. However, in a frequently anonymous medium such as the internet, where source cues are often absent, it is of paramount importance to understand what other factors could impact consumer scepticism. While this study has proposed a variety of content and brand related characteristics that could serve this purpose, it is by no means exhaustive. As such, further research is necessary to establish if humour's lack of impact extends to other brand related UGC characteristics in order to fully support the proposition that humour only affects the relationship between execution related characteristics and consumer scepticism.

These findings establish that humour also impacts consumer scepticism in a UGC context. They expand the scope of existing literature pertaining to the impact of humour and further the understanding of how humour interacts with other content related variables. The findings indicate humour is a double edge sword and can either hinder or help UGC effectiveness based on the context. Companies can leverage this through their co-creation efforts. Results have found that in a high brand centrality context, humour actually increases the likelihood of scepticism. This indicates that brands should ensure review type content created by consumers does not have a humorous component to ensure efficiency. Because eWoM is inherently content with high brand centrality (Roma and Aloini 2019), humour would increase consumer sceptical reactions towards it and lower its efficiency.

In conclusion, the study empirically established the connection between brand centrality, UGC type, tone towards the brand, humour, and scepticism through the use of two experiments. The following section discusses the examined consequences of consumer scepticism in-depth and contextualise the study findings in existing literature.

8.3. Consequences of Consumer Scepticism

A review of extant literature indicated that, in most cases, exposure to brand related UGC lead to an increase in attitudinal and behavioural brand outcomes. Both experiments investigated how the nature of this relationship changes with the consideration of consumer scepticism. Due to the context of the study, brand authenticity was considered as a novel relevant variable, in addition to brand attitude, eWoM intention, information search intention and purchase intention which had already been empirically linked to brand related UGC.

They indicated a significant relationship between scepticism and brand attitude, brand authenticity, eWoM intention, information search intention and purchase intention.

	Hypothesis	**Status**
H3	Consumer scepticism negatively relates to brand attitude such that an increase in scepticism will lead to a decrease in brand attitude.	Supported
H4	Consumer scepticism negatively relates to brand authenticity such that an increase in scepticism will lead to a decrease in brand authenticity.	Supported
H5	Consumer scepticism negatively relates to eWoM intention such that an increase in scepticism will lead to a decrease in eWoM intention.	Supported
H6	Consumer scepticism negatively relates to information search intention such that an increase in scepticism will lead to a decrease in information search intention.	Supported
H7	Consumer scepticism negatively relates to purchase intention such that an increase in scepticism will lead to a decrease in purchase intention.	Supported

An increase in scepticism causes a decrease both the cognitive (brand attitude, brand authenticity) and behavioural variables (eWoM intention, information seeking intention, purchase intention). The most significant impact of scepticism was observed to be on brand attitude, brand authenticity and purchase intention in both studies. The impact of scepticism on each individual outcome variables was relatively equal in both studies.

In one of the few studies to consider how scepticism towards eWoM impacts marketing outcomes, Reimer and Benkenstein (2016) found that when consumers distrust eWoM their purchase intention shifted away from the original recommendation. This indicated that

scepticism towards brand related UGC results in consumers processing the content more centrally and developing a negative change in brand attitudes. The study confirmed these findings and established that there is a decrease in purchase intention when a sceptical reaction occurs.

Tellis et al (2019) analysed how online advertising characteristics impact eWoM intention. They found that consumers perceiving content as "commercial" would reduce eWoM intention. Scepticism towards brand related UGC could be considered a similar construct. These findings support the results of the current study, which also indicated that eWoM intention is reduced when scepticism increases.

Further supporting literature can be found in the area of covert marketing. Wei et al (2008) studied the impact of covert marketing on brand attitude. In most situations, brand attitude was decreased when disclosures of product placement were included. In some specific cases, brand attitude change is positive even after disclosure. One of the aspects considered in this study was how acceptable respondents thought covert advertising and the impact of brand familiarity. Isaac and Grayson (2017) also found that in specific circumstances when consumers are alerted to the persuasive intent of a message, they could potentially evaluate the brand more favourably. These mixed results were not supported by the study results which established a significant decrease in brand attitude when scepticism increases.

These findings have important ramifications for brand related UGC literature. They firmly establish the consequences of consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC. Further, they also indicated the wide-reaching impact of consumer scepticism in a scarcely explored context. Understanding the consequence of scepticism is essential for marketing managers. The study considers a wider array of outcome variables which could assist in gaining a broader understanding of the impact of scepticism on brand related UGC. The inclusion of brand authenticity as an outcome variable expands the range of effects consumer scepticism has been linked to and further emphasises its importance in the context of brand related UGC.

While the contributions of the study to the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) have also been addressed in the previous sections of this chapter, the following section provides a more macro-level view of how the study findings impact existing research about the ELM.

8.4. Consumer Scepticism and the Elaboration Likelihood Model

The study used ELM theory as a basis of establishing how persuasion occurs in consumers based on exposure to stimuli. The Elaboration Likelihood Model posits that consumers process messages based on their motivation and ability to process a message and the processing can lead to attitude change (Bloemer et al 2009). The ELM details the relationship between the properties of the message and their impact. The model implies that a variety of factors could influence how a consumer chooses to process information and their resulting attitudes. When analysing what motivates consumers to process messages in other marketing context studies have focused on source attractiveness, grammar, advertising executions, number of copy points, message repetition (Areni 2003), product involvement, information utility (Matthes and Wonnberger 2014), concrete and abstract messages (Aguirre-Rodriguez 2013). This study has broadened the scope of content related factors that motivate consumers to process the message in the context of brand related UGC. It has demonstrated that aspects such as brand centrality, media type, tone towards the brand, and humour can be viewed as factors contributing to consumers' motivation to process information in a brand related UGC context.

The results of the study are also in line with existing research on humour, Zhang and Zinkhan (2006) discuss the moderating role it plays in the context of the ELM framework. Based on their findings as well as the study results, it can be concluded that humour should be considered in the context of other executional variables. In certain situations, the use of humour can hurt marketing outcomes because it encourages counter-argumentation. In conclusion, this study provides additional evidence of the complex role humour plays in brand related content, be it marketer or consumer generated.

This study has identified how content related and brand related factors could impact consumers' motivation to process the message. Brand centrality, tone towards the brand, and media type all seem to impact consumers' motivation to process brand related UGC in different ways. Other studies such as Tam and Ho (2005), Cowley and Barron (2008) and Ferguson and Burkhalter (2015) have discussed how content related factors may impact consumers' willingness and motivation to process messages. These studies are in line with the findings of this study which solidify the position of brand related UGC characteristics as influencers of consumer motivation. Results indicate that higher brand centrality, text content, and a negative tone towards may lead

to a higher likelihood of central processing, thus increasing the likelihood of a sceptical response, while lower brand centrality, images, a positive tone towards the brand, and humour may lead to peripheral processing. Further, the level of consumer scepticism can be considered one of the instigators of either positive or negative attitude change in consumer. This is consistent with findings of ELM studies (Vashisht and Royne 2016) that state that, when aware of the persuasive intent of content, consumers display increased elaboration behaviour that results in scepticism and negative attitude change.

In conclusion, the study provides important additional understanding of the ELM in the context of brand related UGC expanding the existing list of factors that motivate consumer to process the message, as well as those that influence whether a central or peripheral route is employed, and it clarifies the role of consumer scepticism as a determinant of either positive or negative attitude change.

The following section will discuss how the thesis has answered the research questions and the contributions to literature.

8.5. Answering the Research Questions

RQ1: What content characteristics impact consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC?

The first research question aimed to clarify the impact of UGC executional variables on consumer scepticism. While there has been significant discussion about different ways to categorise UGC based on a variety of criteria (Smith et al 2012, Roma and Aloini 2019), there has been little examination of how these characteristics impact the effectiveness of brand related UGC with consumers. The notable exception here is literature of tone towards the brand in eWoM literature. The effects of whether eWoM is positive, negative, or neutral have been investigated in depth (Tang et al 2014, King et al 2014, Kim et al 2018).

 However, when comparing brand related UGC literature and product placement literature this disparity in research breadth becomes quite apparent. The majority of product placement literature discusses its effectiveness in the context of the placement characteristics, while UGC

literature discusses its effectiveness based on source trustworthiness cues. This study argued that the two phenomena are similar enough to consider analysing content-related characteristics in a UGC context. Both product placement and brand related UGC feature the embedding of a brand or brand signifier in an entertainment medium, however in the context of product placement this inclusion is made deliberately to avoid consumer scepticism. In the case of brand related UGC, it is more difficult the ascertain the original intention of the content author. This means that consumers have to rely on their own judgements to determine the trustworthiness of such content. In cases such as these, literature on UGC trust indicates that consumers turn to source related cues to establish whether the content is trustworthy (Kozinets 2002). However, those source related cues are not always available. The increased anonymity of the authors of brand related UGC (Nam et al 2020) makes examining content related variables imperative because the source of the content is not always identifiable.

The results of this study support the marketing industry's focus on engaging with customers rather than attempting to sell products. Content that focuses heavily on the brand either through high brand centrality or an overly positive tone towards the brand is more likely to be met with scepticism. To ensure the best results in terms of minimising consumer scepticism, brands need to focus on promoting or encouraging visual brand related UGC that is humorous and not extremely focused on the brand. This will still create positive change in behavioural and attitudinal brand outcomes through the non-cognitive routes to persuasion. The focus should be on achieving smaller, incremental changes over time, rather than risk negative consumer reaction which according to the ELM framework would become much more entrenched in consumers' minds.

RQ2: How does consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC affect brand related outcomes at attitudinal and behavioural levels?

This research question aimed to establish what impact of consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC has on attitudinal and behavioural brand outcomes.

Studies on the effectiveness of brand related UGC has been quite extensive. Brand related UGC has been found to positively influence consumers' brand attitude (Erkan and Evans 2016), eWoM intention (Kim and Johnson 2016), and purchase intention (Park et al 2007).

The findings indicate that consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC is an emerging trend that needs to be carefully considered by both industry and practice as it has important ramification on a wide variety of marketing outcomes. This "darker side" of brand related UGC will only proliferate with the increasing amount of brand related content being created. Developing a more complex understanding of how consumer scepticism impacts brand outcomes would allow brands to better quantify the impact of this type of content on their consumers and elaborate strategies to minimise unfavourable outcomes.

RQ3: What are the dynamics between content characteristics, consumer scepticism and attitudinal and behavioural brand related outcomes?

To address this research question, the study elaborated a conceptual framework based on relevant literature and the results of the content analysis. This formed the basis of the two experiments which aimed to test the proposed hypotheses.

The study found that consumer scepticism mediated the relationship between UGC characteristics and outcome variables. The extent to which this mediation occurred varied based on whether the UGC characteristics were content related or brand related. A fully mediated relationship was established between brand centrality and media type and the brand outcomes, while a partly mediated relationship was established between tone towards the brand and the outcome variables.

This distinction between how content related variables and brand related variables interacted with consumer scepticism also held true for humour. As previously discussed, humour was found to moderate the relationship between content related variables (brand centrality and media type) and scepticism, while it had no impact on the relationship between brand related variables (tone towards the brand) and scepticism.

Because the area of how UGC characteristics impact UGC effectiveness has been so underdeveloped, this is one of the first studies to acknowledge the difference between the mechanism through which content or execution related factors and brand related factors impact marketing outcomes.

Further, the study solidified the negative relationship between consumer scepticism and behavioural and attitudinal brand outcomes. It empirically established the impact of both UGC characteristics and consumer scepticism on marketing outcomes and has highlighted the importance of a wider scope of brand related UGC than has been present in previous literature.

8.6. Conclusions

This chapter discussed the study findings and contextualised them based on existing research. It discussed the results framing them based on the articulated research questions.

The first research question examined the content-related antecedents of scepticism, the second interrogated the effects of scepticism on attitudinal and behavioural brand outcomes while the third aimed to establish the relationships between the proposed constructs.

The relevant content-related variables identified were brand centrality, tone towards the brand, UGC type and humour impact scepticism. Humour was established as an important antecedent of scepticism in the second study and a moderator of the relationship between content characteristics and scepticism in the first. All the examined outcome variables were indirectly correlated with scepticism.

The findings of the two experiments were consistent with the existing literature. However, it must be acknowledged that only in a few cases could the results be verified by studies that were directly relevant to the study. In some cases, the results of this study are the only that analyse the chosen variables in this context.

The following chapter will present the conclusion of the study. It will provide a summary of the thesis and research questions and discuss the theoretical and managerial implication of the study. Lastly, it will discuss the study limitations and proposed directions for further research.

Chapter 9 – Conclusions

This chapter will conclude the thesis by providing a summary, presenting the answers to the research questions, discussing the theoretical and managerial implications of the study, as well as its limitations and directions for further study. The following section will provide chapter by chapter overview of the thesis.

9.1. Thesis Summary

This study aimed to analyse what content related characteristics impact consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC and what are the consequences for the brand when a sceptical reaction does occur.

The first chapter provided a background for the study discussing relevant contemporary issues. It highlighted how the focus of marketing activity has changed from transactional to relationship-based and is currently undergoing a second shift towards consumer engagement. The key element that facilitated this last change was the popularity of social media. This also enabled an increase in consumer-to-consumer communication, as well as consumer-to-brand communication. Invariably, consumers started discussing brands, products, and services online. An increase in accessibility and volume of this type of content led to consumers relying heavily on it for their purchase decisions due to its trustworthy nature. The sophistication of these communications increased with the further development of online platforms. It was no longer limited to ratings and reviews; consumers have begun integrating brands into a variety of content. As more and more research indicated the strong influence of brand related UGC on a myriad of marketing outcomes, it began being incorporated in a variety of ways in marketing communication plans. Recently, many companies have been discovered to be making use of fake reviews to boost their sales and consumers have taken notice. Coupled with the fake news phenomenon, this has resulted in consumers being sceptical towards brand related UGC.

The second chapter discussed relevant literature. It was divided into two main parts, one section discussing UGC literature, the second analysing other relevant key constructs and relationships such as trust, scepticism, methods of bypassing scepticism and communication theory.

The first main part of the literature review examined the way UGC is currently defined and categorised, it highlighted the lack of consensus in defining the term as well as issues with the

categorisation of UGC. To address this the study proposed the following definition for brand related UGC based on existing conceptualisations:

"Any artefacts created and uploaded to the internet created by the public that either explicitly or implicitly refers to one or multiple brands".

The second aspect of this identified gap was that there was little distinction between the various types of UGC now being used by consumers in terms of brand inclusion. The increasing number of online channels and methods consumers can now use to express themselves have led to the existence of a much wider variety of UGC than accounted for in existing research. Categorisations of UGC do exist and many are presented in the second chapter. However, there is no distinction between UGC based on the role the brand plays in the content. Many studies use the terms eWoM and UGC interchangeably. This study clarified how content that is evaluative in nature (eWoM - ratings and reviews) is only a subsection of brand related UGC. Brands are being included in a variety of content online that does not necessarily aim to evaluate the brand. For example, an Instagram post that also features a cup of Starbucks in the background is significantly different from an Amazon review.

To further understand how consumers use UGC, the following section of the literature review dealt with why viewers consume UGC through the lens of goal-seeking behaviour. It presented three main reasons for UGC consumption: entertainment, information, and socialising. This highlights the third gap identified in UGC literature concerning the scope of the existing research. A variety of studies use the term UGC, but the actual object of these studies is content in the form of ratings and reviews. There are almost no studies looking at a wider range of UGC such as images or videos or content meant for entertainment. This highlights a gap between theory scope and practice: a wider variety of brand related UGC is being created by consumers and used by companies than has so far been studied.

The following section discussed the effectiveness and uses of UGC. It presented current uses of UGC such as user-generated branding and advertising. It demonstrated the wide-ranging impact of UGC on a series of both attitudinal and financial indicators but also acknowledged the potential drawbacks of UGC for brands.

The second main section of the literature review dealt with the theoretical background of the study. It analysed communication theory, trust and scepticism, and current methods of bypassing scepticism.

The examination of communication theory was used to establish how consumers process information. It analysed an assortment of theories such as the Elaboration Likelihood Model, the influence of mood in information processing, mere exposure, preconscious processing and encoding and decoding theory to establish how exposure brand related UGC influences consumers' attitudes towards the brand. The Elaboration Likelihood Model plays an important role in the context of this study. It establishes how information processing occurs in the context of a persuasive message and determines the possible outcomes based on the level of cognition required from consumers. In addition to this, literature on persuasion knowledge has shown that consumers only need to believe that a persuasion attempt is occurring for them to react. In conjunction, these two theories indicate that brand related UGC, even when not intended as such, can trigger negative reactions in consumers.

After having established how consumers process the information contained in brand related UGC and the fact that a negative reaction is possible, the following section analyses literature on UGC trust and scepticism. It discusses how trust and scepticism impact consumers and establishes scepticism as a viable lens to apply in the context of brand related UGC. This constitutes the third gap identified in the literature. Scepticism has not been considered in the context of UGC previously. Certain studies have applied it the similar context of stealth marketing, but this is the first study to consider this aspect in relation to brand related UGC and analyse the impact of such a reaction when disclosure of commercial intent is not present.

Further, it highlighted that UGC trust literature focuses on source-based cues and that there is little knowledge about what content-based attributes contribute to consumer trust or consumer scepticism. Due to the increased anonymity of content online, source-based cues are often lost. This can either be due to the content being repeatedly shared and the original source is lost, or due to the lack of information about the source of the content. These aspects led to identifying the fourth gap in literature. Content characteristics have not been examined as a source of scepticism for consumers. In the absence of source-based cues consumers only have content characteristics to rely on when examining brand related UGC.

To examine which content characteristics could have an impact on consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC the following section examined literature from related fields. It analysed product placement, native advertising, and influencer marketing, as well as humour. Based on these it proposed a series of characteristics that could have an impact on consumer scepticism

(plot relevance, brand prominence, media type, tone towards the brand, message type, presence of promotional information, humour, engagement, and quality).

The third chapter discussed the main methodological choices for the study. The research philosophy adopted was positivism. Abductive reasoning was the research approach. The study used a multi-method approach with a complementary sequential research design. Quantitative content analysis was used to refine the two experiments which were conducted afterwards, both used cross-sectional data collection. Lastly, it discussed the ethical considerations involved in the study and what measures were being taken to address them.

The fourth chapter discussed the content analysis methodology, data collection, data analysis and the results. The content analysis sampled the most engaged with 250 instances of content that a community of sceptics identified as being either covert advertising or acting as advertising. It used three intercoders to categorise each instance of content according to the nine variables identified in the literature review (media type, brand prominence, plot relevance, type of message, presence of promotional information, engagement, tone towards the brand, quality, and brand clutter). It used a combination of characteristic frequency analysis and mean rank analysis to determine which content characteristics were more likely to trigger a sceptical reaction from consumers. Based on the analysis brand prominence, plot relevance, and tone towards the brand as the most significant from the analysed variables. These were chosen as independent variables in the experiments.

The fifth chapter used the findings from the literature review and the content analysis to propose a conceptual framework and relevant hypotheses. It discussed the selection of the proposed variables and relationships between them in more depth considering existing research and findings from the content analysis and elaborated relevant study hypotheses.

The sixth chapter presented the experiment methodology, the operationalization of variables, how the study was divided, data collection methods, and the results of the pilot studies in terms of scale reliability and manipulation checks. Two full factorial between-subjects experiments were conducted: the first was a 2 (brand centrality: high vs low) x 2 (media type: image vs text), while the second was a 3 (tone towards the brand: positive vs neutral vs negative) cell study with goal seeking behaviour used as a control variable. Experiment one examined the impact of brand centrality and media type on scepticism, the role of humour as a moderator in the relationship,

and the impact of scepticism on the outcome variables (brand attitude, eWoM intention, brand authenticity, information search intention, and purchase intention).

In the first experiment brand centrality was used instead of brand prominence and plot relevance because of variable level inconsistencies. High plot relevance is not compatible with a low brand prominence and the content analysis revealed that high prominence was primarily also associated with high plot relevance.

Experiment two analysed the impact of tone towards the brand with consumer goal seeking behaviour as a control variable, the role of humour as a moderator for the relationship, and the impact of scepticism on brand attitude, brand authenticity, eWoM intention, information search intention, and purchase intention.

The seventh chapter consisted of the data analysis for the two experiments. In Experiment 1 results indicated that an increase in brand centrality leads to an increase in scepticism and that brand related UGC in the form of text is more likely than images to garner a sceptical reaction from consumers. Results also showed that humour acted as a moderator between brand centrality, UGC type and scepticism, with higher values of humour decreasing the correlation between the independent and dependent variables. Most importantly the study showed that an increase in scepticism leads to a decrease in all the examined outcome variables (brand attitude, eWoM intention, brand authenticity, information search intention, and purchase intention).

In Experiment 2 results indicated a direct correlation between tone towards the brand and scepticism. As opposed to the previous experiments, humour was not found to be a moderator. However, an indirect correlation between humour and scepticism was found, similar to that encountered in experiment 1. This meant that an increase in level of perceived humour led to a decrease in consumer scepticism. Lastly, similar to the previous experiment and indirect correlation was found between scepticism and brand attitude, brand authenticity, eWoM intention, information search intention, and purchase intention.

The eighth chapter discussed the results of the experiments in terms of establishing antecedents in consequences of consumer scepticism in the context of existing literature and provided the identified answers to the research questions.

The following section will summarise the answers to the research questions elaborated at the beginning of the study.

9.2. Research Questions

1. What content characteristics impact consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC?

This study examined the impact of brand centrality, UGC type, and tone towards the brand on the triggering of consumer scepticism. It revealed a direct correlation between brand centrality and scepticism, content with high brand centrality led to higher levels of consumer scepticism. In terms of media type, the analysis found that images arouse less scepticism than text content. The second experiment found a direct correlation between tone towards the brand and consumer scepticism.

Humour was found to have an impact on consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC. While its role has not been completely clarified due to mixed results in the two experiments. The first experiment found that humour was a moderator of the relationship between content characteristics and scepticism, while the second could not confirm the moderation but found an inverse relationship between humour and scepticism. However, the discussion proposed that humour acts differently based on the type of characteristic as brand centrality and media type are executional factors while tone towards the brand is a brand characteristic.

2. How does consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC affect brand related outcomes at attitudinal and behavioural levels?

Consumer scepticism has an important impact on both attitudinal (brand attitude, brand authenticity) and behavioural (eWOM intention, information search intention, and purchase intention) brand outcomes. Scepticism has an indirect correlation with all the examined outcome variables mentioned above. An increase in consumer scepticism leading to a decrease in brand attitude, brand authenticity, information search intention, eWoM intention, and purchase intention. The strongest correlations are between scepticism, and brand attitude and purchase intention. These findings clarify the impact of consumer scepticism on a wide array of variables and serve as indicators of its importance for both theory and practice. Further, the link between consumer scepticism and brand authenticity which has been scarcely examined in this context provides a wider scope of impact than previously recognised.

3. What are the dynamics between content characteristics, consumer scepticism and attitudinal and behavioural brand related outcomes?

To answer this question the study elaborated a conceptual framework, which was based on existing literature and an exploratory content analysis. The framework was then tested and empirically established through the two experiments. The creation and testing of the conceptual framework have allowed for a better understanding of the antecedents and consequences of consumer scepticism and established the nature of the proposed relationships. The study has established the impact of content characteristics on consumer scepticism, as well as the moderating role of humour for some of the proposed variables. Brand centrality, UGC type and tone towards the brand and humour all directly affect consumer scepticism, while humour also moderates the relationship between brand centrality and scepticism, and media type and scepticism. Further, the conceptual framework illustrates how UGC characteristics can lead to negative brand outcomes by evoking consumer scepticism.

Considering these answers, the following section will examine how these answers have contributed to existing literature on the topic of UGC.

9.3. Theoretical Contributions

The findings of this study make a series of key theoretical contributions in addressing the research questions and gaps identified in the literature. While these gaps have been briefly addressed in the thesis summary this section will provide a more detailed view on how the study has addressed them.

The first gap is the lack of a cohesive definition and understanding of the scope and taxonomy of UGC. The proposed definition for brand related UGC clarifies and crystallises existing knowledge on the topic.

> *"Any artefacts created and uploaded to the internet created by the public that either explicitly or implicitly refers to one or multiple brands".*

Further, in terms of taxonomy, the study proposed a three-layered categorisation of UGC (Figure 28) which helps researchers and practitioners more easily differentiate between the types of UGC.
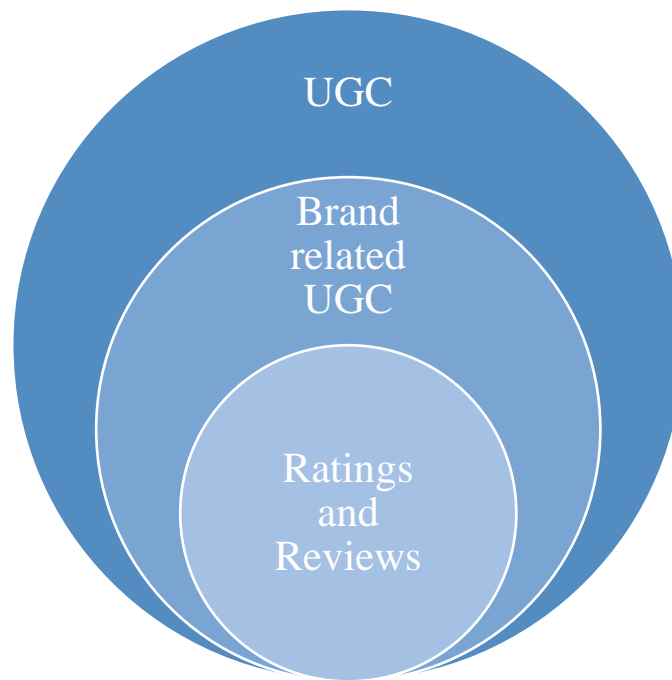
Figure 28 Proposed UGC taxonomy

The creation of this taxonomy was prompted by issues of research scope encountered in literature. This represents one of the **methodological gaps** identified. Many journal articles addressing the phenomenon use the term UGC when only addressing issues relating to ratings and reviews (Muller and Christandl 2019). This subsection of UGC is often addressed because it is inherently easier to analyse. A multitude of studies have looked at how the valence and volume of ratings and reviews can influence a variety of marketing outcomes (Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006; Liu 2006; Zhu and Zhang 2010, Christodoulides et al 2012, Ayeh et al 2013; Tang et al 2014, Presi et al 2014, Reimer and Berkenstein 2016 etc). However, with the boom of social media and social media influencers this type of UGC, while still relevant, has become secondary in importance to non-evaluative UGC. The lack of appropriate representation in research of this type of UGC has prompted its use throughout the study. By focusing on primarily visual content, it addresses a significant gap in research methodology. This approach is in line with industry data which indicates strong consumer preference for visual UGC (Adweek 2017) and an increased understanding of the effectiveness of this type of content is both theoretically and practically necessary. This represents one methodological aspect where this study makes important contributions is the scope of brand related UGC that has been analysed in both the content analysis and experiments. The inclusion of content outside of reviews in the study of UGC significantly expands the range of content that has been analysed in current literature.

While literature relating to consumer scepticism exists for a variety of contexts, it has not been extensively applied in the context of brand related UGC. The **third gap** identified is the lack of knowledge around the impact of consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC on key marketing outcomes. This study provides insight into consumers' sceptical reactions and their impact on both attitudinal (brand attitude and brand authenticity) and behavioural variables (eWoM intention, information search intention, purchase intention). As such it contributes to existing literature on UGC effectiveness, being one of the few existing studies that analyses the potential negative outcomes of exposure to brand related UGC.

The novelty of this study lies in considering the potential negative ramifications of consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC even when the content is positive or neutral. Findings have indicated that consumer scepticism leads to a decrease in brand attitude, brand authenticity, eWoM intention, information search intention and purchase intention. The study demonstrates that not all brand related UGC is created equal, different types of UGC can have varying levels of effectiveness when it comes to brand outcomes.

It is also one of the first studies of its kind to consider consumer scepticism in a context where consumers cannot definitively establish whether a persuasion attempt is occurring. Other studies in the area of consumer scepticism focus on examining content where the marketing intent is clearly signalled through various types of disclosures (Muller and Christandl 2019, Stubb and Colliander 2019, Boerman et al 2017, Wei et al 2008 etc). Through the deliberate omission of a disclosure, this study can assess and compare the levels of consumer scepticism elicited by different types of brand related UGC.

Further, most studies on UGC and consumer scepticism focus on a limited number of outcome variables (Muller and Christandl 2019, Tang et al 2014, Wei et al 2008 etc). This study has used a variety of both behavioural and attitudinal brand outcomes which allows for a better more complex understanding of the effects of consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC. Further, it is one of the first studies that considers the impact on consumer scepticism on brand authenticity. A concept which is becoming the "cornerstone of contemporary marketing" (Brown, Kozinets and Sherry 2003:21)

Existing studies on UGC trust attribute its increased efficiency and credibility with consumers on its perceived lack of commercial motivation. The factors examined in determining how consumers assess brand related UGC are all source-based cues. This highlights the **fourth gap**

identified: the lack of research into what content-based variables impact consumers' reactions towards brand related UGC. A deeper understanding of how content-related variables impact consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC would address important gaps in UGC effectiveness and consumer scepticism literature. The findings indicate that brand centrality, UGC type, tone towards the brand and humour play significant roles in the evoking of consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC.

The ELM model is one of the most prominently used to establish how consumers process persuasive information. It establishes that motivation to process content is one of the deciding factors in determining whether brand attitude change occurs based on exposure to stimuli. The study contributes to ELM literature by identifying a series of content related factors (brand centrality, UGC type, humour, and tone towards the brand) that can motivate consumers to process the stimuli. Further, it suggests that consumer scepticism could have an important role in creating negative attitude changes in consumers.

Having reviewed the important theoretical contributions, the following section will discuss the implications of the study for marketing practice.

9.4. Managerial Implications

"A major challenge in utilizing UGC, however, lies in the sheer amount of

UGC available and the difficulty in identifying the more valuable pieces that

are likely to make a real impact on businesses and other consumers" (Liu-

Tompkins and Rogerson 2012:71).

As brands are increasingly inserting UGC into their marketing campaigns and websites it is necessary to be able to evaluate which factors lead to a sceptical reaction towards brand related UGC. This will expand upon existing literature, as well as have important managerial implications.

A better understanding of consumer scepticism, its antecedents and consequences will provide a significant contribution to literature on UGC effectiveness and allow brands to make better decisions when integrating UGC into their campaigns or encouraging their customers to create brand related UGC. These managerial insights would be especially valuable in a context where

50% of consumers feel they should be given more guidance from brands when asked to create brand related UGC (Adweek 2014). However, brands cannot provide this guidance without examining what aspects of UGC prompt negative reactions in their audiences. As a result, only 12% of brands provide such guidelines (Adweek 2014). The study has found that centrally placed brands, text-based content, and a negative tone towards the brand can create consumer scepticism, which in turn leads to a decrease in a variety of brand outcomes. It is advised the brands focus their efforts on highlighting or encouraging content that is less brand focused, more visual and that provides a balanced and accurate portrayal of the brand. By doing so they will ensure positive change in a variety of brand outcomes.

Additionally, the findings provide empirical support for the more recent practice of allowing consumers to individually rate several aspects of the product or service in their reviews. For example, companies such as Argos now ask consumers to rate their products on quality, ease of set up, design etc. These provide an opportunity for a more balanced review which has been shown to decrease consumer scepticism which in turn leads to favourable brand outcomes.

Further, the study highlights the fickle nature of humour in the context of brand related UGC, as in certain circumstances, it could lead to an increase in the level of consumer scepticism. The findings establish humour as an effective tool if applied in the right settings. For example, adding humour in visual content can reduce the level of scepticism, while it increases it for text content. Humour increases consumer scepticism when brands are placed centrally and reduces it when they are placed peripherally. As such, when designing brand related UGC campaigns marketing managers need to carefully consider whether the use of humour is appropriate in relation to the type of content they are asking consumers to create.

Moreover, having a better understanding of how consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC impacts key marketing outcomes both attitudinal (brand attitude and brand authenticity) and behavioural (eWoM intention, information search intention, purchase intention) will allow brands to better assess UGC impact. The ability to predict the effect of individual posts can provide an invaluable advantage for brands (Moro et al 2016) and would aid in social listening efforts. Social listening refers to the monitoring of online conversations to derive value from consumer brand related discussions. By creating a framework to assess the impact of brand related UGC this would allow managers to ascertain or predict how consumers would react based on the type of content being posted. This could allow companies to better understand the effects brand related UGC can have on both tangible and intangible brand assets. For example, being

able to better predict consumers purchase intention based on the type of brand related UGC they are exposed to.

In conclusion, the study provides important insights for marketing managers in terms of both assessing consumer reactions to brand related UGC, aid in decision making when integrating UGC in campaigns, and allow them to encourage the creation of effective UGC from their consumers.

The following section will discuss the limitations of the existing study in order to further clarify its applicability in both theoretical and managerial contexts.

9.5. Study Limitations

To clarify the generalisability of the findings of this study they must be seen in light of some limitations.

The first is due to the data included in the content analysis. Because the data collected was from a community of sceptics, it may not be representative of the views of the larger population. However, the initial content characteristics used in the content were identified through literature and the content analysis was used to indicate which had the most potential to apply to a broader spectrum of consumers. Due to the limited number of studies addressing these issues in a UGC context there was a distinct need for an exploratory phase before engaging in empirical research. Since these results were for exploratory purposes aimed at narrowing down a list of content characteristics already identified as significant in existing literature this drawback has been minimised. It must also be noted that the content characteristics identified as relevant in the content analysis and then used as independent variables in the experiments coincide with the most widely used factors to examine product placement and eWoM effectiveness which indicates that the findings from the content analysis hold some merit outside of the sample population.

Another limitation of this study that needs to be considered is the applicability in terms of product category. Both experiments used fictitious brands to minimise the impact of pre-existing brand attitudes. To ensure content was as similar to that consumers would encounter normally the stimuli were chosen from those identified in the content analysis and the existing brands were replaced with fictitious ones. To maintain involvement at a constant level, low-involvement

product categories were used (i.e., coffee and food). This was also consistent with the types of brand that were encountered in the content analysis as content featuring brands with low involvement product categories were more frequent that high involvement ones. While this was a methodologically sound choice it is important to acknowledge that the results may not apply to higher involvement product categories or service-based products.

While the use of fictitious brands allowed for a better assessment of the effects of scepticism on brand outcomes, it raises issues in terms of effect magnitude. Other studies have found that brand familiarity impacts the change in marketing outcomes. This could signify that in the case of brands with high familiarity the level of change observed in the outcome variables could be smaller. For the purpose of this study, however, isolating these effects to establish a baseline was more important. This was due to the lack of existing research into how consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC impacts brand outcomes.

In conclusion, while the study has some limitations due care has been taken to ensure that the findings of the study are relevant for both theory and practice. Notwithstanding these limitations, the study still provides valuable insight into why and how scepticism impacts brand related UGC. In light of these limitations, the following section will detail what other avenues for future research would be warranted.

9.6. Directions for Further Research

While this study makes important contributions to knowledge there are still important gaps in knowledge that should be addressed in further research. This area of study is one that will continue to be relevant for years to come in light of the increasing interest in the consumption of UGC.

One of the most important avenues for further study is a greater variety of content characteristics and their impact on UGC effectiveness. Through a review and amalgamation of literature from several other relevant fields such as product placement and communication theory, this study identified a wide variety of factors that could impact consumer scepticism towards brand related UGC. However, not all of them could be included in the empirical research phase. As such, this study has established a basis of understanding how and which content characteristics impact consumer scepticism there is a wide scope for further empirical research. Aspects such as message type, quality of content, number of brands present, product category, levels of consumer

engagement and the presence of promotional information which have not been fully included in the experiments should be further explored in relation to consumer scepticism.

This study aimed to address a methodological gap identified in the scope of brand related UGC being studied. By using content from a variety of formats it provided valuable insight into the different mechanisms that govern brand related UGC, however one study cannot fully address the scope of brand related content and contexts it can find itself in. For example, one area that was not covered, but is becoming increasingly relevant with the growing popularity of TikTok, was that of brand related video content. Further study into how brands integrated into videos or other formats of UGC would be needed to fully close the methodological gap identified.

One aspect that this study has focused on was expanding the scope of brand related UGC that has been included in research. It focused on using content more in line with what users would encounter on social media, rather than ratings and reviews. However, this distinction creates an interesting opportunity for research. A comparison of the effectiveness of brand related UGC and consumer reviews would provide important insights into how consumers react to different types of UGC. This would further address the issues highlighted with the applicability of previous brand related UGC research that is solely focused on reviews when discussing issues relating to a broader spectrum of UGC.

Another aspect to consider could be that of context, as discussed by Smith et al (2012) and Roma and Aloini (2019) UGC differs across social media platforms. This could indicate that the same stimuli placed across different social media platforms could elicit different reactions from consumers based on their expectations of the medium. Understanding the impact of context in the processing of brand related UGC would allow brand managers to create more accurate social media marketing plans depending on the platforms they choose to engage with their customers on.

Both experiments have demonstrated the important role of humour in the context of the study. However, the discussion has identified areas that need further investigation. In addition to the indirect correlation between humour and consumer scepticism encountered in both experiments, the first experiment established humour as a moderator in the relationship between brand centrality, UGC type and scepticism. This disparity in results could be a result of a difference in how humour relates to content related characteristics and brand related characteristics. The first experiment analysed the relationship between two content related characteristics (brand

centrality and media type) and consumer scepticism. It was found that humour moderates those relationships. The second experiment analysed the relationship between a brand related characteristic (tone towards the brand) and consumer scepticism and found that humour does not moderate that relationship. This potentially indicates that the role of humour as a moderator between UGC characteristics and consumer scepticism is limited to content related variables and does not impact brand related variables such as tone towards the brand. Further research to clarify the nature of the relationship between humour, different types of UGC characteristics and consumer scepticism would be warranted to validate this proposed theory.

Another issue that arose from the experiment results was the impact of goal seeking behaviour and the type of message on scepticism. While this study used goal seeking behaviour as a control variable, further research into how consumers' motivations for UGC consumption impacts their reaction to brand related UGC could provide valuable insight into the differences in how consumers process information in different contexts. Further, literature on the types of advertising appeals does indicate a difference in how consumers respond to emotional and information appeals. This opens an interesting avenue of research not only geared towards the consumers' goals when viewing UGC, but also towards how brand related UGC conveys its message to consumers irrespective of their viewing goals. A study comparing the effectiveness of brand related UGC based on the type of appeal present could provide further valuable contributions to both theory and practice.

Moreover, while this study has been focused on how content characteristics affect consumer scepticism there is a gap in literature relating to how individual consumer differences impact their reaction to brand related UGC. Aspects such as demographics, psychographics or behaviours could impact consumers' reactions to brand related UGC. Research into this area could provide valuable insight into the types of content a brands' target market(s) favour, allowing brands to further tailor their marketing strategies.

Persuasion knowledge literature argues that consumers are more or less prone to scepticism based on their understanding of marketing tactics. However, the scale for measuring persuasion knowledge in consumers has lagged behind the marketing reality. It focuses heavily on consumer understanding of direct selling rather than the more subtle aspects of marketing that are pervasive currently. Knowledge of persuasion tactics allows consumers to identify and respond to marketing messages more effectively. However, in order to understand how persuasion knowledge impacts brand related UGC, its measurement scale needs to reflect contemporary

marketing methods. As such a study focusing measuring consumer persuasion knowledge in an online context would clarify how consumer scepticism manifests in this environment and allow for further research into its applicability in a more contemporary context.

Lastly, research using existing brands in stimuli would also be necessary. This would allow a more in-depth understanding of the effects of scepticism when consumers have pre-existing knowledge and attitudes towards the brands being included in the content. Consumers who have previous experience with a brand may exhibit changes in attitude at a different scale than those who have not been exposed to the brand previously. Because brand image is something that is built through a variety of encounters across a consumer's lifetime the impact of brand related UGC on brand outcomes could vary. Similar research in covert advertising indicates that well-known brands tend to experience less change in brand image than less popular ones as a result of consumer scepticism directed towards brand related content. As such further research could provide valuable insight into how brand related UGC leads to consumer scepticism based on exiting brand attitudes and how that impacts the scope of change in them post-exposure.

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Appendix

1. Stimuli Used in Experiment 1

High Brand Centrality – Image

"It is literally a sesame seed bun."

This item has been removed due to 3rd Party Copyright. The unabridged version of the thesis can be found in the Lanchester Library, Coventry University.

High Brand Centrality – Text

For April Fools Day, Joe's Burgers took out a full-page ad introducing a burger designed especially for lefties. The new burger would contain the same ingredients as the original but rotated 180°. Thousands of customers swarmed the restaurants requesting Joe's "lefty" burger.

Low Brand Centrality – Image

"I put my coffee cup in the microwave and it scorched right on the 'Do Not Microwave' warning."

Low Brand Centrality – Text

Does anyone else feel that coffee places make you order the same thing over and over rather than encourage you trying new things? I think it has a lot to do with the fact that there is so much available in places such as Joe's Coffee that it's almost overwhelming, so I just settle and have the same thing rather than try something else.

2. Stimuli Used in Experiment 2

Positive Tone

"Jane's Cakes nailed it! The left is the sample photo I sent them and right is the one I got!"

This item has been removed due to 3rd Party Copyright. The unabridged version of the thesis can be found in the Lanchester Library, Coventry University.

Neutral Tone

"The marbling on this cake looks like a skunk!"

Negative Tone

"This looks horrible! The wedding cake we ordered versus the cake we picked up"

This item has been removed due to 3rd Party Copyright. The unabridged version of the thesis can be found in the Lanchester Library, Coventry University.

3. Questionnaire for Experiment 1

Experimental Design 1

1. Information about the project/Purpose of the project

The aim of this project is to assess how respondents react to User Generated Content that includes brands. User-Generated Content represents any content that is consumer-created and published online. You will be shown a series of mock-ups and asked to state your opinions about them, and the brands featured in them.

2. Do I have to take part?

 Your participation in the project is entirely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time. Please see the section on withdrawal options for more details.

3. What do I have to do?

You will be required to complete a questionnaire which should take no more than 20 minutes. You will be shown a series of images and texts and asked about your perception of them.

4. Withdrawal options

You may choose to withdraw from this study at any point during completion without facing any repercussions. Please be aware that once the survey is completed the data is fully anonymised. This means that once you have completed the survey your responses cannot be withdrawn.

5. Data protection & confidentiality

The data collected as a result of this research will remain confidential and anonymous. It will be processed in accordance with the new GDPR regulations. It will be stored and processed in the EEA. No identifying information will be collected and only anonymized data will be used.

The data will only be accessed by the research team. The data will be stored in an encrypted and password protected medium and disposed of securely after 5 years.

6.   What if things go wrong?

Who to complain to: If you are not happy with any part of this research please contact

Dr. Anvita Kumar (supervisor)

Email: ab3512@coventry.ac.uk

Title: Senior Lecturer in MarketingSchool of Marketing and Management

Coventry University

England

CV1 5FB 7.

7.   What will happen with the results of the study?

The results of this study will be used in a PhD thesis which is expected to be published in 2020/2021. They may also appear in academic journal articles, conference papers, book chapters or other related outputs.

If you wish to see a copy of the final results please email: Monica Mihaiu

mihaium2@uni.coventry.ac.uk

8.   Who has reviewed this study?

This study has been reviewed and approved by a team of senior researchers, as well as the Coventry University Ethics Panel.

Q1.2 I have read and understood the above information.

○ Yes

○ No

X→

Q1.3 I understand that my data will be fully anonymised and I cannot withdraw from the study once I have completed the survey.

○ Yes

○ No

X→

Q1.4 I am aged 18 or over and I consent to my responses being used in the ways described above.

○ Yes

○ No

Q2.1 Dear Participant,
Thank you for agreeing to take part in this questionnaire.   It consists of two parts. Part one will ask you questions about yourself and your online habits. Part two will show you an image or a brief piece of text and ask you about your opinion about that image or text.   There are no right or wrong answers, so please select the answer that closest resembles your opinions.

○ I will not provide my best and honest answers to the survey

○ I will provide my best and honest answers to the survey

X→

Q2.2 What is your age?

○ 18-24

○ 25-34

○ 35-44

○ 45-60

○ 60+

X→

Q2.3 Which gender identity do you most identify with?

○ Male

○ Female

○ Other (Please Specify) _____

X→

Q2.4 What is the highest level of education you have completed?

○ GCSE

○ A-levels

○ Undergraduate degree (BA, BSc)

○ Postgraduate degree (MA, MSc, PhD)

X→

Q2.5 How much time do you spend, per day, browsing the internet for **non-work related activities**?

○ less than 2 hours per day

○ between 2-3 hours per day

○ between 4-5 hours per day

○ 6+ hours per day

X→

Q2.6 Which social media sites are you familiar with? (Select all that apply)

☐ Facebook

☐ Twitter

☐ Instagram

☐ Snapchat

☐ Reddit

☐ Tumblr

☐ 9Gag

☐ Youtube

X→

Q2.7 How often do you post content on social media websites?

○ Almost never

○ A couple of times per month

○ A couple of times per week

○ Multiple times per week

○ Everyday

○ Multiple times per day

X→

Q2.8 Please rate the degree with which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
I am extremely skilled at using the Internet.	○	○	○	○	○
I consider myself knowledgeable about good search techniques online.	○	○	○	○	○
I know somewhat less than most users about using the internet.	○	○	○	○	○
I know how to find what I am looking for online.	○	○	○	○	○

Page Break

Q3.1 You are browsing the internet and come across this piece of content on social media.

Please respond to the questions below based on your opinion of it.

Q3.2 It is literally a sesame seed bun

X→

Q3.3 The brand in the image is very noticeable.

○ Strongly agree

○ Somewhat agree

○ Neither agree nor disagree

○ Somewhat disagree

○ Strongly disagree

X→

Q3.4 The brand in the image is important to the message or "story" being told.

○ Strongly agree

○ Somewhat agree

○ Neither agree nor disagree

○ Somewhat disagree

○ Strongly disagree

X→

Q3.5 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

The content I saw was

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Humorous	○	○	○	○	○
Funny	○	○	○	○	○
Amusing	○	○	○	○	○
Serious	○	○	○	○	○
Boring	○	○	○	○	○

Q3.6 How would you rate the content you saw earlier?

	1	2	3	4	5	
The content was **good.**	○	○	○	○	○	The content was **bad**.
I **disliked** the content	○	○	○	○	○	I **liked** the content.
I have a **positive** opinion about the content.	○	○	○	○	○	I have a **negative** opinion about the content.

Q3.7 Which brand was present in the content you just viewed?

○ McDonald's

○ Joe's Burgers

○ Build Your Burger

○ Burger King

Q3.8 Have you ever heard of the brand in the image before?

○ Yes

○ Maybe

○ No

Q3.9 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

The image above is:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Trustworthy	○	○	○	○	○
Convincing	○	○	○	○	○
Honest	○	○	○	○	○
Biased	○	○	○	○	○
Not Credible	○	○	○	○	○
Advertising	○	○	○	○	○

X→

Q3.10 Please rate the degree with which you agree or disagree with the following statements about Joe's Burgers:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
The brand is appealing.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is likeable.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is unappealing.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is unlikeable.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is good.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is pleasant.	○	○	○	○	○
I have a favourable opinion of the brand.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is bad.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is unpleasant.	○	○	○	○	○
I have a negative opinion of the brand.	○	○	○	○	○

X→

Q3.11 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
I will spread the word about Joe's Burgers online.	○	○	○	○	○
I would recommend Joe's Burgers to others online.	○	○	○	○	○
If others were looking to purchase similar products, I would tell them to try Joe's Burgers.	○	○	○	○	○

X→

Q3.12 Please rate the degree with which you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding the brand featured in the content above.

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
The Joe's Burgers is different from all other brands in this area.	○	○	○	○	○
Joe's Burgers stands out from other brands.	○	○	○	○	○
I think Joe's Burgers is unique.	○	○	○	○	○
Joe's Burgers clearly distinguishes itself from other brands	○	○	○	○	○
Joe's Burgers delivers what it promises.	○	○	○	○	○
Joe's Burgers' promises are credible.	○	○	○	○	○
Joe's Burgers' makes reliable promises.	○	○	○	○	○
Joe's Burgers does not seem artificial.	○	○	○	○	○
Joe's Burgers makes a genuine impression.	○	○	○	○	○
Joe's Burgers gives the impression of being natural.	○	○	○	○	○

Q3.13 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
I intend to search for information about Joe's Burgers at some point in the future.	○	○	○	○	○
I intend to search for information about Joe's Burgers immediately.	○	○	○	○	○
I am very sure I will search for information about Joe's Burgers soon.	○	○	○	○	○

Q3.14 Would you be more likely or less likely to purchase the product, given the information shown?

○ More likely

○ Somewhat more likely

○ Neither more or less likely

○ Somewhat less likely

○ Less likely

X→

Q3.15 Given the information shown, how probable is it that you would consider the purchase of the product?

○ Very Probable

○ Somewhat Probable

○ Neither Probable nor Improbable

○ Somewhat Improbable

○ Very Improbable

X→

Q3.16 How likely would you be to purchase the product, given the information shown?

○ Very likely

○ Somewhat likely

○ Neither likely nor unlikely

○ Somewhat unlikely

○ Very unlikely

X→

Q3.17 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about yourself:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
I know when an offer is "too good to be true".	○	○	○	○	○
I can tell when an offer has strings attached.	○	○	○	○	○
I have no trouble understanding bargaining tactics used by salespeople.	○	○	○	○	○
I know when a marketer is pressuring me to buy.	○	○	○	○	○
I can see through sales gimmicks used to get consumers to buy.	○	○	○	○	○
I can separate fact from fantasy in advertising.	○	○	○	○	○

X→

Q3.18 What type of social media content were you presented with? (Select all that apply)

☐ Image

☐ Text

Q4.1 You are browsing the internet and come across this piece of content on social media.

Please respond to the questions below based on your opinion of it.

Q4.2
For April Fools Day, Joe's Burgers took out a full-page ad introducing a burger designed especially for lefties. The new burger would contain the same ingredients as the original but rotated 180°. Thousands of customers swarmed the restaurants requesting Joe's "lefty" burger.

X→

Q4.3 The brand in the text is very noticeable.

○ Strongly agree

○ Somewhat agree

○ Neither agree nor disagree

○ Somewhat disagree

○ Strongly disagree

X→

Q4.4 The brand in the text is important to the message or "story" being told.

○ Strongly agree

○ Somewhat agree

○ Neither agree nor disagree

○ Somewhat disagree

○ Strongly disagree

X→

Q4.5 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

The content I saw was:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Humorous	○	○	○	○	○
Funny	○	○	○	○	○
Amusing	○	○	○	○	○
Serious	○	○	○	○	○
Boring	○	○	○	○	○

X→

Q4.6 How would you rate the content you saw earlier?

	1	2	3	4	5	
The content was **good.**	○	○	○	○	○	The content was **bad**.
I **disliked** the content	○	○	○	○	○	I **liked** the content.
I have a **positive** opinion about the content.	○	○	○	○	○	I have a **negative** opinion about the content.

X→

Q4.7 Which brand was present in the content you just viewed?

○ McDonald's

○ Joe's Burgers

○ Build Your Burger

○ Burger King

X→

Q4.8 Have you ever heard of the brand in the text before?

○ Yes

○ Maybe

○ No

X→

Q4.9 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

The text above is:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Trustworthy	○	○	○	○	○
Convincing	○	○	○	○	○
Honest	○	○	○	○	○
Biased	○	○	○	○	○
Not Credible	○	○	○	○	○
Advertising	○	○	○	○	○

X→

Q4.10 Please rate the degree with which you agree or disagree with the following statements about Joe's Burgers:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
The brand is appealing.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is likeable.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is unappealing.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is unlikeable.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is good.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is pleasant.	○	○	○	○	○
I have a favourable opinion of the brand.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is bad.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is unpleasant.	○	○	○	○	○
I have a negative opinion of the brand.	○	○	○	○	○

X→

Q4.11 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
I will spread the word about Joe's Burgers online.	○	○	○	○	○
I would recommend Joe's Burgers to others online.	○	○	○	○	○
If others were looking to purchase similar products, I would tell them to try Joe's Burgers.	○	○	○	○	○

X→

Q4.12 Please rate the degree with which you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding the brand featured in the content above.

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
The Joe's Burgers is different from all other brands in this area.	○	○	○	○	○
Joe's Burgers stands out from other brands.	○	○	○	○	○
I think Joe's Burgers is unique.	○	○	○	○	○
Joe's Burgers clearly distinguishes itself from other brands	○	○	○	○	○
Joe's Burgers delivers what it promises.	○	○	○	○	○
Joe's Burgers' promises are credible.	○	○	○	○	○
Joe's Burgers' makes reliable promises.	○	○	○	○	○
Joe's Burgers does not seem artificial.	○	○	○	○	○
Joe's Burgers makes a genuine impression.	○	○	○	○	○
Joe's Burgers gives the impression of being natural.	○	○	○	○	○

Q4.13 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
I intend to search for information about Joe's Burgers at some point in the future.	○	○	○	○	○
I intend to search for information about Joe's Burgers immediately.	○	○	○	○	○
I am very sure I will search for information about Joe's Burgers soon.	○	○	○	○	○

Q4.14 Would you be more likely or less likely to purchase the product, given the information shown?

○ More likely

○ Somewhat more likely

○ Neither more or less likely

○ Somewhat less likely

○ Less likely

X→

Q4.15 Given the information shown, how probable is it that you would consider the purchase of the product?

○ Very Probable

○ Somewhat Probable

○ Neither Probable nor Improbable

○ Somewhat Improbable

○ Very Improbable

X→

Q4.16 How likely would you be to purchase the product, given the information shown?

○ Very likely

○ Somewhat likely

○ Neither likely nor unlikely

○ Somewhat unlikely

○ Very unlikely

X→

Q4.17 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about yourself:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
I know when an offer is "too good to be true".	○	○	○	○	○
I can tell when an offer has strings attached.	○	○	○	○	○
I have no trouble understanding bargaining tactics used by salespeople.	○	○	○	○	○
I know when a marketer is pressuring me to buy.	○	○	○	○	○
I can see through sales gimmicks used to get consumers to buy.	○	○	○	○	○
I can separate fact from fantasy in advertising.	○	○	○	○	○

X→

Q4.18 What type of social media content were you presented with? (Select all that apply)

☐ Image

☐ Text

End of Block: Stimuli and Manipulation Checks - TEXT JOE'S burgers

Q5.1 You are browsing the internet and come across this piece of content on social media.

Please respond to the questions below based on your opinion of it.

Q5.2 Does anyone else feel that coffee places make you order the same thing over and over rather than encourage you trying new things?
I think it has a lot to do with the fact that there is so much available in places such as Joe's Coffee that it's almost overwhelming, so I just settle and have the same thing rather than try something else.

X→

Q5.3 The brand in the text is very noticeable.

○ Strongly agree

○ Somewhat agree

○ Neither agree nor disagree

○ Somewhat disagree

○ Strongly disagree

X→

Q5.4 The brand in the text is important to the message or "story" being told.

○ Strongly agree

○ Somewhat agree

○ Neither agree nor disagree

○ Somewhat disagree

○ Strongly disagree

Q5.5 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

The content I saw was

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Humorous	○	○	○	○	○
Funny	○	○	○	○	○
Amusing	○	○	○	○	○
Serious	○	○	○	○	○
Boring	○	○	○	○	○

Q5.6 How would you rate the content you saw earlier?

	1	2	3	4	5	
The content was **good.**	○	○	○	○	○	The content was **bad**.
I **disliked** the content	○	○	○	○	○	I **liked** the content.
I have a **positive** opinion about the content.	○	○	○	○	○	I have a **negative** opinion about the content.

Q5.7 Which brand was present in the content you just viewed?

○ Costa Coffee

○ Joe's Coffee

○ Starbucks

○ Java Hut

X→

Q5.8 Have you heard of the brand in the text before?

○ Yes

○ Maybe

○ No

X→

Q5.9 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

The text above is:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Trustworthy	○	○	○	○	○
Convincing	○	○	○	○	○
Honest	○	○	○	○	○
Biased	○	○	○	○	○
Not Credible	○	○	○	○	○
Advertising	○	○	○	○	○

X→

Q5.10 Please rate the degree with which you agree or disagree with the following statements about Joe's Coffee:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
The brand is appealing.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is likeable.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is unappealing.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is unlikeable.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is good.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is pleasant.	○	○	○	○	○
I have a favourable opinion of the brand.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is bad.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is unpleasant.	○	○	○	○	○
I have a negative opinion of the brand.	○	○	○	○	○

X→

Q5.11 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
I will spread the word about Joe's Coffee online.	○	○	○	○	○
I would recommend Joe's Coffee to others online.	○	○	○	○	○
If others were looking to purchase similar products, I would tell them to try Joe's Coffee.	○	○	○	○	○

X→

Q5.12 Please rate the degree with which you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding the brand featured in the content above.

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
The Joe's Coffee is different from all other brands in this area.	○	○	○	○	○
Joe's Coffee stands out from other brands.	○	○	○	○	○
I think Joe's Coffee is unique.	○	○	○	○	○
Joe's Coffee clearly distinguishes itself from other brands	○	○	○	○	○
Joe's Coffee delivers what it promises.	○	○	○	○	○
Joe's Coffee's promises are credible.	○	○	○	○	○
Joe's Coffee makes reliable promises.	○	○	○	○	○
Joe's Coffee does not seem artificial.	○	○	○	○	○
Joe's Coffee makes a genuine impression.	○	○	○	○	○
Joe's Coffee gives the impression of being natural.	○	○	○	○	○

Q5.13 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
I intend to search for information about Joe's Coffee at some point in the future.	○	○	○	○	○
I intend to search for information about Joe's Coffee immediately.	○	○	○	○	○
I am very sure I will search for information about Joe's Coffee soon.	○	○	○	○	○

Q5.14 Would you be more likely or less likely to purchase the product, given the information shown?

○ More likely

○ Somewhat more likely

○ Neither more or less likely

○ Somewhat less likely

○ Less likely

X→

Q5.15 Given the information shown, how probable is it that you would consider the purchase of the product?

○ Very Probable

○ Somewhat Probable

○ Neither Probable nor Improbable

○ Somewhat Improbable

○ Very Improbable

X→

Q5.16 How likely would you be to purchase the product, given the information shown?

○ Very likely

○ Somewhat likely

○ Neither likely nor unlikely

○ Somewhat unlikely

○ Very unlikely

X→

Q5.17 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about yourself:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
I know when an offer is "too good to be true".	○	○	○	○	○
I can tell when an offer has strings attached.	○	○	○	○	○
I have no trouble understanding bargaining tactics used by salespeople.	○	○	○	○	○
I know when a marketer is pressuring me to buy.	○	○	○	○	○
I can see through sales gimmicks used to get consumers to buy.	○	○	○	○	○
I can separate fact from fantasy in advertising.	○	○	○	○	○

X→

Q5.18 What type of social media content were you presented with? (Select all that apply)

☐ Image

☐ Text

Q6.1 You are browsing the internet and come across this piece of content on social media.

Please respond to the questions below based on your opinion of it.

Q6.2 I put my coffee cup in the microwave and it scorched right on the 'Do Not Microwave' warning.

X→

Q6.3 The brand name in the image is very noticeable.

○ Strongly agree

○ Somewhat agree

○ Neither agree nor disagree

○ Somewhat disagree

○ Strongly disagree

X→

Q6.4 The brand in the image is important to the message or "story" being told.

○ Strongly agree

○ Somewhat agree

○ Neither agree nor disagree

○ Somewhat disagree

○ Strongly disagree

X→

Q6.5 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

The content I saw was:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Humorous	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Funny	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Amusing	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Serious	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Boring	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

X→

Q6.6 How would you rate the content you saw earlier?

	1	2	3	4	5	
The content was **good.**	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	The content was **bad**.
I **disliked** the content	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	I **liked** the content.
I have a **positive** opinion about the content.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	I have a **negative** opinion about the content.

X→

Q6.7 Which brand was present in the content you just viewed?

○ Costa Coffee

○ Joe's Coffee

○ Starbucks

○ Jave Hut

X→

Q6.8 Have you heard of the brand in the image before?

○ Yes

○ Maybe

○ No

X→

Q6.9 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

The image above is:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Trustworthy	○	○	○	○	○
Convincing	○	○	○	○	○
Honest	○	○	○	○	○
Biased	○	○	○	○	○
Not Credible	○	○	○	○	○
Advertising	○	○	○	○	○

X→

Q6.10 Please rate the degree with which you agree or disagree with the following statements about Joe's Coffee:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
The brand is appealing	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is likable.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is unappealing.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is unlikable.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is good.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is pleasant.	○	○	○	○	○
I have a favourable opinion of the brand.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is bad.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is unpleasant.	○	○	○	○	○
I have a negative opinion of the brand.	○	○	○	○	○

X→

Q6.11 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
I will spread the word about Joe's Coffee online.	○	○	○	○	○
I would recommend Joe's Coffee to others online.	○	○	○	○	○
If others were looking to purchase similar products, I would tell them to try Joe's Coffee.	○	○	○	○	○

X→

Q6.12 Please rate the degree with which you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding the brand featured in the content above.

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
The Joe's Coffee is different from all other brands in this area.	○	○	○	○	○
Joe's Coffee stands out from other brands.	○	○	○	○	○
I think Joe's Coffee is unique.	○	○	○	○	○
Joe's Coffee clearly distinguishes itself from other brands	○	○	○	○	○
Joe's Coffee delivers what it promises.	○	○	○	○	○
Joe's Coffee's promises are credible.	○	○	○	○	○
Joe's Coffee makes reliable promises.	○	○	○	○	○
Joe's Coffee does not seem artificial.	○	○	○	○	○
Joe's Coffee makes a genuine impression.	○	○	○	○	○
Joe's Coffee gives the impression of being natural.	○	○	○	○	○

Q6.13 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
I intend to search for information about Joe's Coffee at some point in the future.	○	○	○	○	○
I intend to search for information about Joe's Coffee immediately.	○	○	○	○	○
I am very sure I will search for information about Joe's Coffee soon.	○	○	○	○	○

Q6.14 Would you be more likely or less likely to purchase the product, given the information shown?

○ More likely

○ Somewhat more likely

○ Neither more or less likely

○ Somewhat less likely

○ Less likely

X→

Q6.15 Given the information shown, how probable is it that you would consider the purchase of the product?

○ Very Probable

○ Somewhat Probable

○ Neither Probable nor Improbable

○ Somewhat Improbable

○ Very Improbable

X→

Q6.16 How likely would you be to purchase the product, given the information shown?

○ Very likely

○ Somewhat likely

○ Neither likely nor unlikely

○ Somewhat unlikely

○ Very unlikely

X→

Q6.17 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about yourself:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
I know when an offer is "too good to be true".	○	○	○	○	○
I can tell when an offer has strings attached.	○	○	○	○	○
I have no trouble understanding bargaining tactics used by salespeople.	○	○	○	○	○
I know when a marketer is pressuring me to buy.	○	○	○	○	○
I can see through sales gimmicks used to get consumers to buy.	○	○	○	○	○
I can separate fact from fantasy in advertising.	○	○	○	○	○

X→

Q6.18 What type of social media content were you presented with? (Select all that apply)

☐ Image

☐ Text

4. Questionnaire for Experiment 2

9. Information about the project/Purpose of the project

The aim of this project is to assess how respondents react to User Generated Content that includes brands. User-Generated Content represents any content that is consumer-created and published online. You will be shown a series of mock-ups and asked to state your opinions about them, and the brands featured in them.

10. Do I have to take part?

Your participation in the project is entirely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time. Please see the section on withdrawal options for more details.

11. What do I have to do?

You will be required to complete a questionnaire which should take no more than 20 minutes. You will be shown a series of images and texts and asked about your perception of them.

12. Withdrawal options

You may choose to withdraw from this study at any point during completion without facing any repercussions. Please be aware that once the survey is completed the data is fully anonymised. This means that once you have completed the survey your responses cannot be withdrawn.

13. Data protection & confidentiality

The data collected as a result of this research will remain confidential and anonymous. It will be processed in accordance with the new GDPR regulations. It will be stored and processed in the EEA. No identifying information will be collected and only anonymised data will be used. The data will only be accessed by the research team. The data will be stored in an encrypted and password protected medium and disposed of securely after 5 years.

14. What if things go wrong?

Who to complain to: If you are not happy with any part of this research please contact
Dr. Anvita Kumar (supervisor)
Email: ab3512@coventry.ac.uk
Title: Senior Lecturer in MarketingSchool of Marketing and Management
Coventry University
England
CV1 5FB 7.

15. What will happen with the results of the study?

The results of this study will be used in a PhD thesis which is expected to be published in 2020/2021. They may also appear in academic journal articles, conference papers, book chapters or other related outputs.
If you wish to see a copy of the final results please email: Monica Mihaiu
mihaium2@uni.coventry.ac.uk

16. Who has reviewed this study?

This study has been reviewed and approved by a team of senior researchers, as well as the Coventry University Ethics Panel.

Q1.2 I have read and understood the above information.

○ Yes

○ No

Q1.3 I understand that my data will be fully anonymised and I cannot withdraw from the study once I have completed the survey.

○ Yes

○ No

Q1.4 I am aged 18 or over and I consent to my responses being used in the ways described above.

○ Yes

○ No

End of Block: Participant Information and Consent

Start of Block: Demographics

Q2.1 Dear Participant,
Thank you for agreeing to take part in this questionnaire.   It consists of two parts. Part one will ask you questions about yourself and your online habits. Part two will show you an image andl ask you about your opinion about it.There are no right or wrong answers, so please select the answer that closest resembles your opinions.

○ I will not provide my best and honest answers in this survey

○ I will provide my best and honest answers in this survey

Q2.2 What is your age?

◯ 18-24

◯ 25-34

◯ 35-44

◯ 45-60

◯ 60+

Q2.3 Which gender identity do you most identify with?

◯ Male

◯ Female

◯ Other (Please Specify) _____

Q2.4 What is the highest level of education you have completed?

◯ GCSE

◯ A-levels

◯ Undergraduate degree (BA, BSc)

◯ Postgraduate degree (MA, MSc, PhD)

Q2.5 How much time do you spend, per day, browsing the internet for **non-work related activities**?

   ◯ less than 2 hours per day

   ◯ between 2-3 hours per day

   ◯ between 4-5 hours per day

   ◯ 6+ hours per day

Q2.6 Which social media sites are you familiar with? (Select all that apply)

   ☐   Facebook

   ☐   Twitter

   ☐   Instagram

   ☐   Snapchat

   ☐   Reddit

   ☐   Tumblr

   ☐   9Gag

   ☐   Youtube

Q2.7 How often do you post content on social media websites?

○ Almost never

○ A couple of times per month

○ A couple of times per week

○ Multiple times per week

○ Everyday

○ Multiple times per day

Q2.8 What do you normally use social media for? (Check all that apply)

☐ Information

☐ Entertainment

☐ Socialising

☐ To lift my mood

Q2.9 Please rate the degree with which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
I am extremely skilled at using the Internet.	○	○	○	○	○
I consider myself knowledgeable about good search techniques online.	○	○	○	○	○
I know somewhat **less** than most users about using the internet.	○	○	○	○	○
I know how to find what I am looking for online.	○	○	○	○	○

Page Break

Q3.1
Imagine you have to throw a party for one of your children/friends and are looking to buy a cake. While looking online for a bakery you come across this content.

Please respond to the questions below based on your opinion of the content in the context specified.

Q3.2 Jane's Cakes nailed it! The left is the sample photo I sent them and right is the one I got!

Q3.3 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
The brand is portrayed in a positive light.	○	○	○	○	○
The content says something negative about the brand	○	○	○	○	○

Q3.4 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

The content I saw was

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Humorous	○	○	○	○	○
Funny	○	○	○	○	○
Amusing	○	○	○	○	○
Serious	○	○	○	○	○
Boring	○	○	○	○	○

Q3.5 How would you rate the content you saw earlier?

	1	2	3	4	5	
The content was **good.**	○	○	○	○	○	The content was **bad**.
I **disliked** the content	○	○	○	○	○	I **liked** the content.
I have a **positive** opinion about the content.	○	○	○	○	○	I have a **negative** opinion about the content.

Q3.6 Which brand was present in the content you just viewed?

○ Patisserie Valerie

○ Jane's Cakes

○ Egg Free Cakes

○ Paul

Q3.7 Have you ever heard of the brand in the image before?

○ Yes

○ Maybe

○ No

Q3.8 What was the context presented at the beginning of the survey?

○ Considering a purchase

○ Browsing social media

Q3.9 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

The image above is:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Trustworthy	○	○	○	○	○
Convincing	○	○	○	○	○
Honest	○	○	○	○	○
Biased	○	○	○	○	○
Not Credible	○	○	○	○	○
Advertising	○	○	○	○	○

Q3.10 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about Jane's Cakes:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
The brand is appealing.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is likeable.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is unappealing.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is unlikable.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is good.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is pleasant.	○	○	○	○	○
I have a favourable opinion of the brand.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is bad.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is unpleasant.	○	○	○	○	○
I have a negative opinion of the brand.	○	○	○	○	○

Q3.11 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
I will spread the word about Jane's Cakes online.	○	○	○	○	○
I would recommend Jane's Cakes to others online.	○	○	○	○	○
If others were looking to purchase similar products, I would tell them to try Jane's Cakes.	○	○	○	○	○

Q3.12 Please rate the degree with which you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding the brand featured in the content above.

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Jane's Cakes is different from all other brands in this area.	○	○	○	○	○
Jane's Cakes stands out from other brands.	○	○	○	○	○
I think Jane's Cakes is unique.	○	○	○	○	○
Jane's Cakes clearly distinguishes itself from other brands	○	○	○	○	○
Jane's Cakes delivers what it promises.	○	○	○	○	○
Jane's Cakes promises are credible.	○	○	○	○	○
Jane's Cakes makes reliable promises.	○	○	○	○	○
Jane's Cakes does not seem artificial.	○	○	○	○	○
Jane's Cakes makes a genuine impression.	○	○	○	○	○
Jane's Cakes gives the impression of being natural.	○	○	○	○	○

Q3.13 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
I intend to search for information about Jane's Cakes at some point in the future.	○	○	○	○	○
I intend to search for information about Jane's Cakes immediately.	○	○	○	○	○
I am very sure I will search for information about Jane's Cakes soon.	○	○	○	○	○

Q3.14 Would you be more likely or less likely to purchase the product, given the information shown?

○ More likely

○ Somewhat more likely

○ Neither more or less likely

○ Somewhat less likely

○ Less likely

Q3.15 Given the information shown, how probable is it that you would consider the purchase of the product?

○ Very Probable

○ Somewhat Probable

○ Neither Probable nor Improbable

○ Somewhat Improbable

○ Very Improbable

Q3.16 How likely would you be to purchase the product, given the information shown?

○ Very likely

○ Somewhat likely

○ Neither likely nor unlikely

○ Somewhat unlikely

○ Very unlikely

Q3.17 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about yourself:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
I know when an offer is "too good to be true".	○	○	○	○	○
I can tell when an offer has strings attached.	○	○	○	○	○
I have no trouble understanding bargaining tactics used by salespeople.	○	○	○	○	○
I know when a marketer is pressuring me to buy.	○	○	○	○	○
I can see through sales gimmicks used to get consumers to buy.	○	○	○	○	○
I can separate fact from fantasy in advertising.	○	○	○	○	○

End of Block: Positive Informational

Start of Block: Positive Entertainment

Q4.1
Imagine you are at home browsing social media and come across this content.
Please respond to the questions below based on your opinion of the content in the context specified.

Q4.2 Jane's Cakes nailed it! The left is the sample photo I sent them and right is the one I got!

Q4.3 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
The brand is portrayed in a positive light.	○	○	○	○	○
The content says something negative about the brand	○	○	○	○	○

Q4.4 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

The content I saw was

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Humorous	○	○	○	○	○
Funny	○	○	○	○	○
Amusing	○	○	○	○	○
Serious	○	○	○	○	○
Boring	○	○	○	○	○

Q4.5 How would you rate the content you saw earlier?

	1	2	3	4	5	
The content was **good.**	○	○	○	○	○	The content was **bad**.
I **disliked** the content	○	○	○	○	○	I **liked** the content.
I have a **positive** opinion about the content.	○	○	○	○	○	I have a **negative** opinion about the content.

Q4.6 Which brand was present in the content you just viewed?

○ Patisserie Valerie

○ Jane's Cakes

○ Egg Free Cakes

○ Paul

Q4.7 Have you ever heard of the brand in the image before?

○ Yes

○ Maybe

○ No

Q4.8 What was the context presented at the beginning of the survey?

○ Considering a purchase

○ Browsing social media

Q4.9 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

The image above is:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Trustworthy	○	○	○	○	○
Convincing	○	○	○	○	○
Honest	○	○	○	○	○
Biased	○	○	○	○	○
Not Credible	○	○	○	○	○
Advertising	○	○	○	○	○

Q4.10 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about Jane's Cakes:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
The brand is appealing.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is likeable.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is unappealing.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is unlikable.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is good.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is pleasant.	○	○	○	○	○
I have a favourable opinion of the brand.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is bad.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is unpleasant.	○	○	○	○	○
I have a negative opinion of the brand.	○	○	○	○	○

Q4.11 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
I will spread the word about Jane's Cakes online.	○	○	○	○	○
I would recommend Jane's Cakes to others online.	○	○	○	○	○
If others were looking to purchase similar products, I would tell them to try Jane's Cakes.	○	○	○	○	○

Q4.12 Please rate the degree with which you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding the brand featured in the content above.

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Jane's Cakes is different from all other brands in this area.	○	○	○	○	○
Jane's Cakes stands out from other brands.	○	○	○	○	○
I think Jane's Cakes is unique.	○	○	○	○	○
Jane's Cakes clearly distinguishes itself from other brands	○	○	○	○	○
Jane's Cakes delivers what it promises.	○	○	○	○	○
Jane's Cakes promises are credible.	○	○	○	○	○
Jane's Cakes makes reliable promises.	○	○	○	○	○
Jane's Cakes does not seem artificial.	○	○	○	○	○
Jane's Cakes makes a genuine impression.	○	○	○	○	○
Jane's Cakes gives the impression of being natural.	○	○	○	○	○

Q4.13 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
I intend to search for information about Jane's Cakes at some point in the future.	○	○	○	○	○
I intend to search for information about Jane's Cakes immediately.	○	○	○	○	○
I am very sure I will search for information about Jane's Cakes soon.	○	○	○	○	○

Q4.14 Would you be more likely or less likely to purchase the product, given the information shown?

○ More likely

○ Somewhat more likely

○ Neither more or less likely

○ Somewhat less likely

○ Less likely

Q4.15 Given the information shown, how probable is it that you would consider the purchase of the product?

○ Very Probable

○ Somewhat Probable

○ Neither Probable nor Improbable

○ Somewhat Improbable

○ Very Improbable

Q4.16 How likely would you be to purchase the product, given the information shown?

○ Very likely

○ Somewhat likely

○ Neither likely nor unlikely

○ Somewhat unlikely

○ Very unlikely

Q4.17 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about yourself:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
I know when an offer is "too good to be true".	○	○	○	○	○
I can tell when an offer has strings attached.	○	○	○	○	○
I have no trouble understanding bargaining tactics used by salespeople.	○	○	○	○	○
I know when a marketer is pressuring me to buy.	○	○	○	○	○
I can see through sales gimmicks used to get consumers to buy.	○	○	○	○	○
I can separate fact from fantasy in advertising.	○	○	○	○	○

Q5.1
Imagine you have to throw a party for one of your children/ friends and are looking to buy a cake. While looking online for a bakery you come across this content.

Please respond to the questions below based on your opinion of the content in the context specified.

Q5.2 The marbling on this cake looks like a skunk!

Q5.3 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
The brand is portrayed in a positive light.	○	○	○	○	○
The content says something negative about the brand	○	○	○	○	○

Q5.4 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

The content I saw was

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Humorous	○	○	○	○	○
Funny	○	○	○	○	○
Amusing	○	○	○	○	○
Serious	○	○	○	○	○
Boring	○	○	○	○	○

Q5.5 How would you rate the content you saw earlier?

	1	2	3	4	5	
The content was **good.**	○	○	○	○	○	The content was **bad**.
I **disliked** the content	○	○	○	○	○	I **liked** the content.
I have a **positive** opinion about the content.	○	○	○	○	○	I have a **negative** opinion about the content.

Q5.6 Which brand was present in the content you just viewed?

○ Patisserie Valerie

○ Jane's Bakes & Cakes

○ Egg Free Cakes

○ Paul

Q5.7 Have you ever heard of the brand in the image before?

○ Yes

○ Maybe

○ No

Q5.8 What was the context presented at the beginning of the survey?

○ Considering a purchase

○ Browsing social media

Q5.9 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

The image above is:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Trustworthy	○	○	○	○	○
Convincing	○	○	○	○	○
Honest	○	○	○	○	○
Biased	○	○	○	○	○
Not Credible	○	○	○	○	○
Advertising	○	○	○	○	○

Q5.10 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about Jane's Cakes:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
The brand is appealing.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is likeable.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is unappealing.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is unlikable.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is good.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is pleasant.	○	○	○	○	○
I have a favourable opinion of the brand.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is bad.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is unpleasant.	○	○	○	○	○
I have a negative opinion of the brand.	○	○	○	○	○

Q5.11 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
I will spread the word about Jane's Cakes online.	○	○	○	○	○
I would recommend Jane's Cakes to others online.	○	○	○	○	○
If others were looking to purchase similar products, I would tell them to try Jane's Cakes.	○	○	○	○	○

Q5.12 Please rate the degree with which you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding the brand featured in the content above.

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Jane's Cakes is different from all other brands in this area.	○	○	○	○	○
Jane's Cakes stands out from other brands.	○	○	○	○	○
I think Jane's Cakes is unique.	○	○	○	○	○
Jane's Cakes clearly distinguishes itself from other brands	○	○	○	○	○
Jane's Cakes delivers what it promises.	○	○	○	○	○
Jane's Cakes promises are credible.	○	○	○	○	○
Jane's Cakes makes reliable promises.	○	○	○	○	○
Jane's Cakes does not seem artificial.	○	○	○	○	○
Jane's Cakes makes a genuine impression.	○	○	○	○	○
Jane's Cakes gives the impression of being natural.	○	○	○	○	○

Q5.13 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
I intend to search for information about Jane's Cakes at some point in the future.	○	○	○	○	○
I intend to search for information about Jane's Cakes immediately.	○	○	○	○	○
I am very sure I will search for information about Jane's Cakes soon.	○	○	○	○	○

Q5.14 Would you be more likely or less likely to purchase the product, given the information shown?

○ More likely

○ Somewhat more likely

○ Neither more or less likely

○ Somewhat less likely

○ Less likely

Q5.15 Given the information shown, how probable is it that you would consider the purchase of the product?

○ Very Probable

○ Somewhat Probable

○ Neither Probable nor Improbable

○ Somewhat Improbable

○ Very Improbable

Q5.16 How likely would you be to purchase the product, given the information shown?

○ Very likely

○ Somewhat likely

○ Neither likely nor unlikely

○ Somewhat unlikely

○ Very unlikely

Q5.17 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about yourself:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
I know when an offer is "too good to be true".	○	○	○	○	○
I can tell when an offer has strings attached.	○	○	○	○	○
I have no trouble understanding bargaining tactics used by salespeople.	○	○	○	○	○
I know when a marketer is pressuring me to buy.	○	○	○	○	○
I can see through sales gimmicks used to get consumers to buy.	○	○	○	○	○
I can separate fact from fantasy in advertising.	○	○	○	○	○

Q6.1
Imagine you are at home browsing social media and come across this content.

Please respond to the questions below based on your opinion of the content in the context specified.

This item has been removed due to 3rd Party Copyright. The unabridged version of the thesis can be found in the Lanchester Library, Coventry University.

Q6.3 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
The brand is portrayed in a positive light.	○	○	○	○	○
The content says something negative about the brand	○	○	○	○	○

Q6.4 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

The content I saw was

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Humorous	○	○	○	○	○
Funny	○	○	○	○	○
Amusing	○	○	○	○	○
Serious	○	○	○	○	○
Boring	○	○	○	○	○

Q6.5 How would you rate the content you saw earlier?

	1	2	3	4	5	
The content was **good.**	○	○	○	○	○	The content was **bad**.
I **disliked** the content	○	○	○	○	○	I **liked** the content.
I have a **positive** opinion about the content.	○	○	○	○	○	I have a **negative** opinion about the content.

Q6.6 Which brand was present in the content you just viewed?

○ Patisserie Valerie

○ Jane's Bakes & Cakes

○ Egg Free Cakes

○ Paul

Q6.7 Have you ever heard of the brand in the image before?

○ Yes

○ Maybe

○ No

Q6.8 What was the context presented at the beginning of the survey?

○ Considering a purchase

○ Browsing social media

Q6.9 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

The image above is:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Trustworthy	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Convincing	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Honest	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Biased	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Not Credible	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Advertising	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

Q6.10 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about Jane's Cakes:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
The brand is appealing.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is likeable.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is unappealing.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is unlikable.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is good.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is pleasant.	○	○	○	○	○
I have a favourable opinion of the brand.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is bad.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is unpleasant.	○	○	○	○	○
I have a negative opinion of the brand.	○	○	○	○	○

Q6.11 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
I will spread the word about Jane's Cakes online.	○	○	○	○	○
I would recommend Jane's Cakes to others online.	○	○	○	○	○
If others were looking to purchase similar products, I would tell them to try Jane's Cakes.	○	○	○	○	○

Q6.12 Please rate the degree with which you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding the brand featured in the content above.

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Jane's Cakes is different from all other brands in this area.	○	○	○	○	○
Jane's Cakes stands out from other brands.	○	○	○	○	○
I think Jane's Cakes is unique.	○	○	○	○	○
Jane's Cakes clearly distinguishes itself from other brands	○	○	○	○	○
Jane's Cakes delivers what it promises.	○	○	○	○	○
Jane's Cakes promises are credible.	○	○	○	○	○
Jane's Cakes makes reliable promises.	○	○	○	○	○
Jane's Cakes does not seem artificial.	○	○	○	○	○
Jane's Cakes makes a genuine impression.	○	○	○	○	○
Jane's Cakes gives the impression of being natural.	○	○	○	○	○

Q6.13 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
I intend to search for information about Jane's Cakes at some point in the future.	○	○	○	○	○
I intend to search for information about Jane's Cakes immediately.	○	○	○	○	○
I am very sure I will search for information about Jane's Cakes soon.	○	○	○	○	○

Q6.14 Would you be more likely or less likely to purchase the product, given the information shown?

○ More likely

○ Somewhat more likely

○ Neither more or less likely

○ Somewhat less likely

○ Less likely

Q6.15 Given the information shown, how probable is it that you would consider the purchase of the product?

○ Very Probable

○ Somewhat Probable

○ Neither Probable nor Improbable

○ Somewhat Improbable

○ Very Improbable

Q6.16 How likely would you be to purchase the product, given the information shown?

○ Very likely

○ Somewhat likely

○ Neither likely nor unlikely

○ Somewhat unlikely

○ Very unlikely

Q6.17 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about yourself:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
I know when an offer is "too good to be true".	○	○	○	○	○
I can tell when an offer has strings attached.	○	○	○	○	○
I have no trouble understanding bargaining tactics used by salespeople.	○	○	○	○	○
I know when a marketer is pressuring me to buy.	○	○	○	○	○
I can see through sales gimmicks used to get consumers to buy.	○	○	○	○	○
I can separate fact from fantasy in advertising.	○	○	○	○	○

Q7.1
Imagine you have to throw a party for one of your children/friends and are looking to buy a cake. While looking online for a bakery you come across this content.

Please respond to the questions below based on your opinion of the content in the context specified.

Q7.2 This looks horrible! The wedding cake we ordered versus the cake we picked up.

Q7.3 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
The brand is portrayed in a positive light.	○	○	○	○	○
The content says something negative about the brand	○	○	○	○	○

Q7.4 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

The content I saw was

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Humorous	○	○	○	○	○
Funny	○	○	○	○	○
Amusing	○	○	○	○	○
Serious	○	○	○	○	○
Boring	○	○	○	○	○

Q7.5 How would you rate the content you saw earlier?

	1	2	3	4	5	
The content was **good.**	○	○	○	○	○	The content was **bad**.
I **disliked** the content	○	○	○	○	○	I **liked** the content.
I have a **positive** opinion about the content.	○	○	○	○	○	I have a **negative** opinion about the content.

Q7.6 Which brand was present in the content you just viewed?

○ Patisserie Valerie

○ Jane's Cakes

○ Egg Free Cakes

○ Paul

Q7.7 Have you ever heard of the brand in the image before?

○ Yes

○ Maybe

○ No

Q7.8 What was the context presented at the beginning of the survey?

○ Considering a purchase

○ Browsing social media

Q7.9 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

The image above is:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Trustworthy	○	○	○	○	○
Convincing	○	○	○	○	○
Honest	○	○	○	○	○
Biased	○	○	○	○	○
Not Credible	○	○	○	○	○
Advertising	○	○	○	○	○

Q7.10 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about Jane's Cakes:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
The brand is appealing.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is likeable.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is unappealing.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is unlikable.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is good.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is pleasant.	○	○	○	○	○
I have a favourable opinion of the brand.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is bad.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is unpleasant.	○	○	○	○	○
I have a negative opinion of the brand.	○	○	○	○	○

Q7.11 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
I will spread the word about Jane's Cakes online.	○	○	○	○	○
I would recommend Jane's Cakes to others online.	○	○	○	○	○
If others were looking to purchase similar products, I would tell them to try Jane's Cakes.	○	○	○	○	○

Q7.12 Please rate the degree with which you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding the brand featured in the content above.

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Jane's Cakes is different from all other brands in this area.	○	○	○	○	○
Jane's Cakes stands out from other brands.	○	○	○	○	○
I think Jane's Cakes is unique.	○	○	○	○	○
Jane's Cakes clearly distinguishes itself from other brands	○	○	○	○	○
Jane's Cakes delivers what it promises.	○	○	○	○	○
Jane's Cakes promises are credible.	○	○	○	○	○
Jane's Cakes makes reliable promises.	○	○	○	○	○
Jane's Cakes does not seem artificial.	○	○	○	○	○
Jane's Cakes makes a genuine impression.	○	○	○	○	○
Jane's Cakes gives the impression of being natural.	○	○	○	○	○

Q7.13 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
I intend to search for information about Jane's Cakes at some point in the future.	○	○	○	○	○
I intend to search for information about Jane's Cakes immediately.	○	○	○	○	○
I am very sure I will search for information about Jane's Cakes soon.	○	○	○	○	○

Q7.14 Would you be more likely or less likely to purchase the product, given the information shown?

○ More likely

○ Somewhat more likely

○ Neither more or less likely

○ Somewhat less likely

○ Less likely

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Q7.15 Given the information shown, how probable is it that you would consider the purchase of the product?

○ Very Probable

○ Somewhat Probable

○ Neither Probable nor Improbable

○ Somewhat Improbable

○ Very Improbable

Q7.16 How likely would you be to purchase the product, given the information shown?

○ Very likely

○ Somewhat likely

○ Neither likely nor unlikely

○ Somewhat unlikely

○ Very unlikely

Q7.17 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about yourself:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
I know when an offer is "too good to be true".	○	○	○	○	○
I can tell when an offer has strings attached.	○	○	○	○	○
I have no trouble understanding bargaining tactics used by salespeople.	○	○	○	○	○
I know when a marketer is pressuring me to buy.	○	○	○	○	○
I can see through sales gimmicks used to get consumers to buy.	○	○	○	○	○
I can separate fact from fantasy in advertising.	○	○	○	○	○

End of Block: Negative Informational

Start of Block: Negative Entertainment

Q8.1
Imagine you are at home browsing social media and come across this content.

Please respond to the questions below based on your opinion of the content in the context specified.

Q8.2 This looks horrible! The wedding cake we ordered versus the cake we picked up.

Q8.3 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
The brand is portrayed in a positive light.	○	○	○	○	○
The content says something negative about the brand	○	○	○	○	○

Q8.4 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

The content I saw was

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Humorous	○	○	○	○	○
Funny	○	○	○	○	○
Amusing	○	○	○	○	○
Serious	○	○	○	○	○
Boring	○	○	○	○	○

Q8.5 How would you rate the content you saw earlier?

	1	2	3	4	5	
The content was **good.**	○	○	○	○	○	The content was **bad**.
I **disliked** the content	○	○	○	○	○	I **liked** the content.
I have a **positive** opinion about the content.	○	○	○	○	○	I have a **negative** opinion about the content.

Q8.6 Which brand was present in the content you just viewed?

○ Patisserie Valerie

○ Jane's Cakes

○ Egg Free Cakes

○ Paul

Q8.7 Have you ever heard of the brand in the image before?

○ Yes

○ Maybe

○ No

Q8.8 What was the context presented at the beginning of the survey?

○ Considering a purchase

○ Browsing social media

Q8.9 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

The image above is:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Trustworthy	○	○	○	○	○
Convincing	○	○	○	○	○
Honest	○	○	○	○	○
Biased	○	○	○	○	○
Not Credible	○	○	○	○	○
Advertising	○	○	○	○	○

Q8.10 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about Jane's Cakes:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
The brand is appealing.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is likeable.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is unappealing.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is unlikable.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is good.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is pleasant.	○	○	○	○	○
I have a favourable opinion of the brand.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is bad.	○	○	○	○	○
The brand is unpleasant.	○	○	○	○	○
I have a negative opinion of the brand.	○	○	○	○	○

Q8.11 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
I will spread the word about Jane's Cakes online.	○	○	○	○	○
I would recommend Jane's Cakes to others online.	○	○	○	○	○
If others were looking to purchase similar products, I would tell them to try Jane's Cakes.	○	○	○	○	○

Q8.12 Please rate the degree with which you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding the brand featured in the content above.

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Jane's Cakes is different from all other brands in this area.	○	○	○	○	○
Jane's Cakes stands out from other brands.	○	○	○	○	○
I think Jane's Cakes is unique.	○	○	○	○	○
Jane's Cakes clearly distinguishes itself from other brands	○	○	○	○	○
Jane's Cakes delivers what it promises.	○	○	○	○	○
Jane's Cakes promises are credible.	○	○	○	○	○
Jane's Cakes makes reliable promises.	○	○	○	○	○
Jane's Cakes does not seem artificial.	○	○	○	○	○
Jane's Cakes makes a genuine impression.	○	○	○	○	○
Jane's Cakes gives the impression of being natural.	○	○	○	○	○

Q8.13 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
I intend to search for information about Jane's Cakes at some point in the future.	○	○	○	○	○
I intend to search for information about Jane's Cakes immediately.	○	○	○	○	○
I am very sure I will search for information about Jane's Cakes soon.	○	○	○	○	○

Q8.14 Would you be more likely or less likely to purchase the product, given the information shown?

○ More likely

○ Somewhat more likely

○ Neither more or less likely

○ Somewhat less likely

○ Less likely

Q8.15 Given the information shown, how probable is it that you would consider the purchase of the product?

○ Very Probable

○ Somewhat Probable

○ Neither Probable nor Improbable

○ Somewhat Improbable

○ Very Improbable

Q8.16 How likely would you be to purchase the product, given the information shown?

○ Very likely

○ Somewhat likely

○ Neither likely nor unlikely

○ Somewhat unlikely

○ Very unlikely

Q8.17 Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about yourself:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
I know when an offer is "too good to be true".	○	○	○	○	○
I can tell when an offer has strings attached.	○	○	○	○	○
I have no trouble understanding bargaining tactics used by salespeople.	○	○	○	○	○
I know when a marketer is pressuring me to buy.	○	○	○	○	○
I can see through sales gimmicks used to get consumers to buy.	○	○	○	○	○
I can separate fact from fantasy in advertising.	○	○	○	○	○

End of Block: Negative Entertainment