Brand Related User Generated Content in Consumer Socialization Process: A Conceptual Model and Research Propositions

Naghmeh Sabermajidi *, Kok Wei Khong, Sathyaprakash Balaji Makam

Taylor's Business School, Taylor's university, Subangjaya Malaysia
*naghmeh.sabermajidi@taylors.edu.my/n.s.majidi@gmail.com

Abstract

Considering the increase in popularity and usage of social media, there is no doubt that the potential for e-marketing and other forms of online positioning is growing in equal measure. Consumer socialization through these new types of online communities, especially via social networking websites, has become an important part of contemporary marketing. An online community provides a cost effective mechanism with the ability to target specific types of consumer demographics. However, there is still a gap in the socialization literature regarding the effects of Brand-related User-generated Content (BR-UGC) on users' intention to purchase branded products/services via their online interactions. Given the increasing exposure to generating and sharing BR-UGD and the prevalence of social networks like Facebook in the lives of today's users this gap needs to be addressed. This paper marks an exploratory step toward our understanding of the interactive roles BR-UGC content and Facebook play in the formation of socialization agent through the lens of consumer socialization theory and, their effects on users' attitude towards the brands and purchase intentions. It also addresses the impact of social structural variables and social experience variables as antecedents to generating vs. sharing BR-UGC as consumer socialization agents. The proposed model is valuable for future empirical research whereby user's interactions via BR-UGC can be enhanced to maximize the influence of social media in purchase intention.

Keywords Brand-related User-generated content; Consumer socialization agent; Consumer socialization theory; Social networking websites; Social structural variables ; Social experience variables; Purchase intention

Paper type: Conceptual Paper

https://doi.org/10.65194/IJBI-2015-1001
Received 8 March 2015; Received in revised form 18 June 2015; Accepted 2 August 2015
2309-0693/© 2015 The Authors. Published by IRC Publishers. This is an open access article under the CC BY license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

1. Introduction

Advancements in online communication characterized by user-generated contents (UGC) and social networking sites (SNSs) have huge ramifications for users' consumption and the study of customer socialization (Beer & Burrows, 2010). In this new era, social media is getting to be the enormous source of product related information where users will interact online with other individuals regarding their experience on a certain product/service (Mir & Zaheer, 2012). In place of passively use marketer generated content and their brand-relevant messages, users now can easily and smoothly generate and share their own content (Ertimur & Gilly, 2012). Within the extensive diversity of activities, specific behaviours such as liking, commenting and the combination of both on brands' social media pages have become highly demanded among users that currently they are implemented as consumer engagement measurement in social media (Gummerus et al., 2012; Van Doorn et al., 2010).

Since its development, social media, particularly social networking sites, have presented drastically new trend for connection and engagement between customers and brands (Kabadayi & Price, 2014). Social media is not only increasingly used by customers to study products and services, but also is to linked with the companies they buy from, along with other consumers who may have invaluable insights about these companies (Hanna et al., 2011). Brands have more capabilities to reach maximum of consumers and potentials by using both their own communities and the circles of users' online networks. In this new environment, achieving the best result out of these socializations is critical for brands' strategists.

Over the recent years, brands have opt for one social networking sites, i.e. Facebook, as a key promoting channel to drive engagement and brand awareness (Malhotra et al., 2013; Rohm et al., 2013). Facebook brand pages have turned into a real channel through which users have the ability to cooperate with brands in an immediate way by liking and/or commenting, sharing and even the combination of all features on brands' posts and messages. Actually, these features of Facebook empower individuals to react to a brand post effectively. Therefore, one brand post can get a huge number of comments from Facebook users interfacing with the brand and other commenters, giving an appealing stage to socialization on social networking sites (Malhotra et al., 2013). Consequently, it is not surprising that these

Facebook brand pages and their forcible impacts have become vital parts of brands' marketing and advertising campaigns.

Online communities give the users the ability to share their opinions and search for information. People who shop online trust in peers' opinion much more than information they receive from marketers (EMarketer, 2010). Many studies support the idea that peers' communication can strongly predict the attitude and behavior of consumers toward products and services, or brands (Barber, 2013; Bush et al., 1999; de Gregorio & Sung, 2010). Considering these effects, online social media which is a new type of media with high level of interactivity which both provides the opportunity for consumers to speak, and facilitate communication with peers (Taylor et al., 2011), should have a determining influence in shaping the consumers attitude and affect their purchasing behavior (Chan, 2012; Haenlein & Kaplan, 2009) and hence social media and SNSs can be called new types of socialization agents (Köhler et al., 2011; Lueg et al., 2006). The different environment of social media provides a new set of socialization agents that SNSs are one of the most important of them because they allow people to generate content and become involved in positioning brand and affecting its reputation. Besides, it gives more opportunity to people to interact with both peers and strangers (such as friends of friends and fan page followers on Facebook). Hence, the new socialization process with high level of interactivity would provide outcomes which not only influence people's attitude toward advertisings or products (Taylor et al., 2011) but also it can even change the purchasing behavior of individuals to the extent that they become online shoppers (Lueg & Finney, 2007). However the impact of such new socialization agent is not deeply researched, due to its complicated nature and newness (Wang et al., 2012). We identify the gap within the literature that there is still a dearth of studies to examine BR-UGC as a socially embedded process and study it as a component of interaction among people. In this paper we proposed a conceptual framework to address some proposition, namely whether BR-UGC, as socialization agent, aids in consumers' socialization learning towards products attitudes and their intention to purchase within global social networking sites platforms such as Facebook.

2. Consumer socialization theory

Consumer socialization developed interest from researchers in the latter half of the 1970's. Moschis and Churchill (1978) were the pioneers established a standardized

theoretical model indicating current sources of influence on young consumers when they make purchase decisions. Since the creation of the most used consumer socialization theoretical model, technology has grown extensively through many realms. Previous studies have shown that the socialization agents of peers, family, and media persist in proving their influential impacts on consumer socialization outcomes (Bush et al., 1999; Mangleberg & Bristol, 1998; Nelson & McLeod, 2005). Lately, consumer socialization theorists have explored the effect of different types of socialization agents on adolescents, including different types of antecedents in their studies. The consumer socialization framework also guides further research in the process of how consumers are socialized. Attitudes, or mental outcomes, and the intention to purchase, or behavioral outcomes, based on socialization through generating and sharing BR-UGC are proposed in this research for further empirical study. These two outcomes can be influenced by both antecedents; social structural variables and social experience variables through socialization agents, which are peer communication, by generating (liking, commenting and combination of both) and sharing BR-UGC. Table 1 provides a summary of some important studies in the area of consumer socialization theory.

Table 1. Summarizing previous studies which used consumer socialization theory

Reference	Social Structure Variables	Socialization Agents	Outcome
Gregorio and Sung (2010)	• Gender • Age • Ethnic • Education • Income	• Peer influence • Media: Movie Watching	• Attitude toward product placement • Product placement behaviors
Bush, Smith and Martin (1999)	• Race • Gender	• Communication With Parents • Communication with Peers • Use of Media	• Attitude toward advertising
Nelson and McLeod (2005)	• Gender • Age • Ethnicity	• Different types of Media • Parents • Peers	• Perceived Effects of Product on Self / Others • Brand Consciousness
Smith and Moschis (1984)	• Health • Age • Cognitive Age	• Interaction with advertises in mass media	• Attitude toward advertisements
Carlson and Grossbart (1988)	• Parental style	• Controlling Consumption or Exposure to Media • Consumption Autonomy of Children • Communication with Parents	• Concern about TV Advertises • Attitude toward TV Advertises
Ozmete (2009)	• Age • Gender	• Interaction of parents and adolescents • TV advertisements	• Purchasing Decision
Lachance, Beaudoin and Robitaille (2003)	• Gender • Age • Economic Level	• Parents (Each of them) • Peers • Television	• Brand sensitivity
Moscardelli and Liston-Heyes (2005)	• Gender • Age Employment	• Type/Intensity of Parents Communication	• Marketplace knowledge • Being Skeptical toward

Reference	Social Structure Variables	Socialization Agents	Outcome
Mangleberg and Bristol (1998)	• Socio-economic status	• Peers Communication • TV • Internet • Parents • Television	Advertisements • Marketplace knowledge
Wang,Yu and Wei (2012)	• Individual level tie strength • Group level identification	• Peer communication	• Product attitude • Purchase intention
Luczak and Younkin (2012)	• Internet Usage • Age	• Social Interaction • Social Ties • Attitude of Others	• Purchase Intention • Social Consciousness

3. Brand related user generated content as socialization agent

Just when organizations learned to use the internet as a tool for communication and marketing, an enormous progress in communication technology and web infrastructures provided a new environment with different potentials and thread which left the managers disorganized and stranded. The main pressure was on marketing managers who have to execute international marketing strategies in a new world in which uncountable consumers spread their thought and ideas instantly by generating online contents (Berthon et al., 2012).While users generate majority of the content in new social media environment, they also may contribute to the contents which is related to specific brands. Introducing a specific branded product/service and writing reviews about their consumption experience are some examples of such contribution, which generally are called Brand Related User Generated Content (BR-UGC). The importance of BR-UGC to marketers is that this type of content generation can affect the consumers' perception of the products (Fong & Burton, 2006). Studies show that BR-UGC cover a considerable portion of the UGCs over the SNSs: 19% of the "tweets" on the twitter website are found to be brand related, in many of them people seek to find some information about the brand or share their experience (Jansen & Zhang, 2009).

4. Attitudes towards the brand and purchase intention

The final outcome of socialization process as it is driven from consumer socialization theory is the effect of this process on mentality and behavior of the consumer. This mental outcome of the process is seen as the attitude that people develop toward advertisements, reviews, and rankings. Popular products are usually reviewed by many customers and by knowledge gain, discussions and interactions enhance and become more powerful to shape or change the attitude of consumers toward both branded products or services (Xiaofen & Yiling, 2009). The mental outcome, which is the attitude of the consumer, together with direct effect of socialization agents, and considering the background of the consumer, will determine the intention to purchase. The more positive comments and reviews a person reads, the higher is the chance that they may purchase a product (Prendergast et al., 2010). Trustworthy websites with trusted contents provide a good environment to positively affect purchasing decisions. When individuals view an online content, the knowledge and goodwill of content generator is a key determinant to influence their shopping decisions (Hsiao et al., 2010). This is in line with the fact that what family and peers suggest, whether online or offline is

important in socialization process and modelling the attitude of individuals, since peers and family are usually first trusted source of information in consumer socialization theory.

5. Social structural variable

Demographic as well as social structure variables has been suggested and used in different studies on consumer socialization as being important and significant antecedents to affect socialization process (Barber, 2013; de Gregorio & Sung, 2010; Özmete, 2009). For example, findings show not only women are more likely do shopping online, but also in general they spend more time in SNSs, such as Facebook and Twitter. Women are also more likely to use SNSs to know about the sales and valuable deals, while men are more likely to use reviews to know about the products (Stambor, 2010).

There is no consensus about the effect of gender on the outcomes of socialization process, although the importance of gender to affect attitude toward products and advertisements has been shown in the literature. Some studies found females to have a more positive attitude toward brands/products (Bush et al., 1999; de Gregorio & Sung, 2010; Lachance et al., 2003), however sometimes this effect has not found to be significant (Nelson & Mcleod, 2005). Ozmete (2009) found that men are more under influence of advertisements, while Lachance et al. (2003) findings show that men are more affected by their peers.

The role of age in consumer socialization process is undeniable, since the original theory is based on the learning process of young adults when they interact with peers and society. In this process they receive knowledge and accept norms and shape their own consumption behavior (Moschis & Churchill Jr., 1978). Therefore, it is not a surprise to see age has a significant effect on the outcomes of consumer socialization theory, such as attitude. Age, has been found to affect interaction of individuals with socialization agents, such as parents or mass media (Özmete, 2009; Smith & Moschis, 1984).

The other social structure variable that has been considered in literature is ethnicity or race. Although ethnicity and race are not equal, but researchers chose one of this based on the context of the study. Bush et al. (1999) who focused their study on racial differences, compared Caucasians and African-Americans and found African-Americans to have a more positive attitude toward advertisements. Non-white Americans found to be more interested in peer communication when it is time to decide about purchasing a product, while Anglo-

Americans not only are not so positive about product placement, but also are less likely to be interested in communication with peers (de Gregorio & Sung, 2010).

6. Social experience variables

While internet is changing the concept of peer communication by introducing online social networks, recent studies paid attention to the difference between online and offline communications (de Gregorio & Sung, 2010) and based on the new context new types of antecedents are observable. Number of friends and strength of tie between peers has been studies and found to be an important antecedent of socialization process in both offline (Brown & Reingen, 1987; Erickson, 1996; Moschis, 1976; Roch et al., 2000) and online communities (Chu & Choi, 2011; Ellison et al., 2011). Level of activeness in social media (Iyengar et al., 2009) and medium of connection has been also used as antecedents of online social behavior (Barber, 2013).

7. Conceptual model development and formulation of research propositions

Building on the theoretical concepts of socialization and the general conceptual model originally presented by Moschis and Churchill (1978), this research explores the role of BR-UGC as socialization agent and its effect on users' attitude towards the brands and purchase intensions (Figure 1 and Table 2). The following propositions, to guide research into the consumer socialization process and the consequences, are offered:

- expand the consumers' socialization process to include brand-related user-generated content as socialization agent
- assess the effects of social structural variables (age, gender, and race) and social experience variables (number of friends in Facebook, frequencies of experience with interactions via BR-UGC in Facebook, years of experience with Facebook and number of hours spending on Facebook) as antecedents to generating vs. sharing BR-UGC as consumer socialization agents
- assess the influence of these socialization agents on users' attitude towards branded products/services
- assess the influence of these socialization agents on users' purchase intention

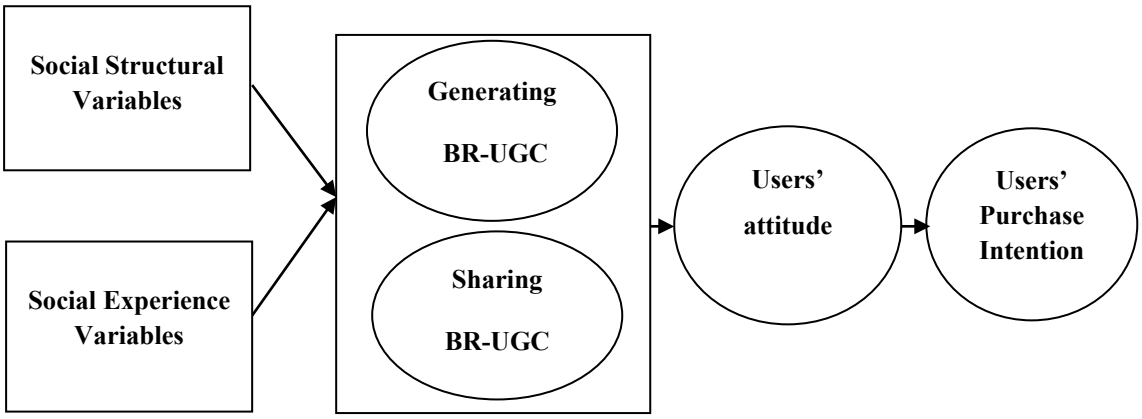

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Table 2. Social Structure and Social Experience Variables

Social Structural Variables	Age
	Gender
	Ethnicity
Social Experience Variables:	Number of friends in Facebook
	Frequencies of experience with BR-UGC in Facebook
	Years of experience with Facebook
	Number of hours spending on Facebook

It is the premise of this paper that the social structural variables and social experience variables will act as antecedents influencing consumers socialization through generating and sharing BR-UGC and ultimately their attitude towards branded products/services and purchase intentions.

8. Discussion and Implication

This paper provides a conceptual model that can serve as a basis for future empirical exploration of how BR-UGC acts as consumer socialization agent and affects users' attitude towards the Branded Products and their purchase intensions. The BR-UGC represents a newly promising and impressive tool. Implementation of these new types of socialization tools represents a shift in consumers' opinions and companies need to coordinate with this

trend. Future research will provide data and statistical testing of the overall conceptual model and the specific research propositions presented. Additionally, future research will differentiate between generating BR-UGC and sharing BR-UG and their impacts on the users' mental and behavioral consumption outcomes, i.e. attitude towards the branded products/services and purchase intention.

9. Limitations and directions for future research

Although the present study provides a reboots conceptual paper with the aid of rich literature reviews, it has some limitations to be considered. We only presented a conceptual model in this research. However, measurement model of the constructs needs to be designed with a set of reliable and valid rating scales. This research was proposed to be conducted in Facebook. Hence, future research may extend our findings and investigate the hypothesized relationships in different social media platforms. It might also be interesting for future research not only to include characteristics of the socialization agents in the analysis but also to investigate the impacts of extrinsic and intrinsic motivational factors on creation and sharing of them in online communities.

10. Conclusion

In this study, we propose to examine BR-UGC as a socially embedded process and study it as a component of interaction among people. Based on the consumer socialization theory (Ward, 1974; Moschis & churchill, 1978), we propose an integrated conceptual model viewing BR-UGC as a socialization agent that interact with learners and allows them to engaging in BR-UGC to learn consumer-related skills and gain knowledge for brands on Facebook. Our model is stablished on the basis of integrating social experience variables with the fundamental components of consumer socialization theory as the antecedents and the two new components (generating and sharing BR-UGC) as the socialization agents influencing attitude and intention of users for buying branded products.

In line with socialization theory, we argue that BR-UGC act as socialization agents through social media (particularly Facebook) and users are influenced by BR-UGC through communication, as a result of a social learning process. Future research will provide data and statistical testing of the overall conceptual model and the specific research propositions

presented. Additionally, future research will differentiate between generating and sharing BR-UGC as new trend of consumer socialization agents in the context of social media.

The earlier brief version of this paper was presented in GLOBAL CONFERENCE ON BUSINESS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES (GCBSS), 15-16 December 2014, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

References

Barber, N. A. (2013). Investigating the potential influence of the internet as a new socialization agent in context with other traditional socialization agents. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice, 21*(2), 179-193.

Bush, A. J., Smith, R., & Martin, C. (1999). The Influence of Consumer Socialization Variables on Attitude toward Advertising: A Comparison of African-Americans and Caucasians. *Journal of Advertising, 28*(3), 13–24.

Beer, D. and Burrows, R. (2010), Consumption, presumption, and participatory web cultures: an introduction. *Journal of Consumer Culture, 10* (1), 3-12.

Berthon, P. R., Pitt, L. F., Plangger, K., & Shapiro, D. (2012). Marketing meets Web 2.0, social media, and creative consumers: Implications for international marketing strategy. *Business Horizons*, *55*(3), 261–271.

Chan, MC. (2012). An Empirical Investigation of Consumer Socialization and The Impact of Internet Use on Scepticism Towards Advertising Among Young Adults'. Doctor of Business Administration. The University of Newcastle, Australia.

De Gregorio, F., & Sung, Y. (2010). Understanding Attitudes Toward and Behaviors in Response to Product Placement. *Journal of Advertising, 39*(1), 83–96.

EMarketer.(2010).Who Gives the Most Trusted Recommendations? Retrieved from http://www.emarketer.com/Article/Who-Gives-Most-Trusted-Recommendations/1008241

Ertimur, B., & Gilly, M. C. (2012). So, whaddya think? Consumers create ads and other consumers critique them. *Journal of Interactive Marketing, 26*(3), 115-130.

Fong, J., & Burton, S. (2006). Elecronic Word-of-Mouth: A Comparison of Stated and Revealed Behavior on Electronic Discussion Boards. *Journal of Interactive Advertising, 6*(2), 53–62.

Gummerus, J., Liljander, V., Weman, E., & Pihlström, M. (2012). Customer engagement in a Facebook brand community. *Management Research Review, 35*(9), 857-877.

Haenlein, M., & Kaplan, A. M. (2009). Flagship Brand Stores within Virtual Worlds: The Impact of Virtual Store Exposure on Real-Life Attitude toward the Brand and Purchase Intent. *Recherche et Applications En Marketing, 24*(3), 57–79.

Hanna, R., Rohm, A., & Crittenden, V. L. (2011). We're all connected: The power of the social media ecosystem. *Business horizons, 54*(3), 265-273.

Hsiao, K.-L., Lin, J. C.-C., Wang, X.-Y., Lu, H.-P., & Yu, H. (2010). Antecedents and consequences of trust in online product recommendations: An empirical study in social shopping. *Online Information Review, 34*(6), 935–953.

Jansen, B. J., & Zhang, M. (2009). Twitter Power: Tweets as Electronic Word of Mouth. *Journal of the American society for information science and technology 60*(11), 2169–2188.

Kabadayi, S., & Price, K. (2014). Consumer–brand engagement on Facebook: liking and commenting behaviors. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing, 8*(3), 203-223.

Köhler, C. F., Rohm, A. J., de Ruyter, K., & Wetzels, M. (2011). Return on Interactivity: The Impact of Online Agents on Newcomer Adjustment. *Journal of Marketing, 75*(2), 93-108.

Lewin, J. E., Strutton, D., & Taylor, D. G. (2011). Friends, Fans and Followers: Do Ads Work on Social Networks?. *Journal of Advertising Research*, *51*(1), 258-275.

Lueg, J., Ponder, N., Beatty, S., & Capella, M. (2006). Teenagers' use of alternative shopping channels: A consumer socialization perspective. *Journal of Retailing, 82*(2), 137–153.

Lueg, J. E., & Finney, R. Z. (2007). Interpersonal communication in the consumer socialization process: Scale development and validation. *The Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice, 15*(1), 25-39.

Mangleburg, T. F., & Bristol, T. (1998). Socialization and Adolescents' Skepticism toward Advertising. *Journal of Advertising, 27*(3), 11–21.

Malhotra, A., Malhotra, C. K., & See, A. (2013). How to create brand engagement on Facebook. *MIT Sloan Management Review, 54*(2), 18-20.

Mir, I., & Zaheer, A. (2012). Verification of Social impact theory claims in social media context. *Journal of Internet Banking and Commerce, 17*(1), 1-15.

Moschis, G. P., & Churchill Jr., G. A. (1978). Consumer Socialization: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis. *Journal of Marketing Research, 15*(4), 599–609.

Nelson, M. R., & Mcleod, L. E. (2005). Adolescent brand consciousness and product placements: awareness, liking and perceived effects on self and others. *International Journal of consumer studies, 29*(6), 515–528.

Özmete, E. (2009). Parent and adolescent interaction in television advertisements as consumer socialization agents. *Education, 129*(3), 372–381.

Prendergast, G., Ko, D., & Yuen, S. Y. V. (2010). Online word of mouth and consumer purchase intentions. *International Journal of Advertising, 29*(5), 687–708.

Rohm, A., Kaltcheva, V. D., & Milne, G. R. (2013). A mixed-method approach to examining brand-consumer interactions driven by social media. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing, 7*(4), 295-311.

Taylor, D. G., Lewin, J. E., & Strutton, D. (2011). Friends, fans, and followers: do ads work on social networks? How gender and age shape receptivity. *Journal of Advertising Research*, *51* (1), 258-275.

Van Doorn, J., Lemon, K. N., Mittal, V., Nass, S., Pick, D., Pirner, P., & Verhoef, P. C. (2010). Customer engagement behavior: theoretical foundations and research directions. *Journal of Service Research, 13*(3), 253-266.

Wang, X., Yu, C., & Wei, Y. (2012). Social Media Peer Communication and Impacts on Purchase Intentions: A Consumer Socialization Framework. *Journal of Interactive Marketing, 26* (4), 198–208.

Ward, S. (1974). Consumer socialization. *Journal of consumer research*, *1*(2), 1-14.

Xiaofen, J., & Yiling, Z. (2009). The impacts of online word-of-mouth on consumer's buying intention on apparel: An empirical study. In *International Symposium on Web Information Systems and Applications* (pp. 024-028).2009.