

How Does Brand-related User-generated Content Differ across YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter?

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Abstract

This study tests hypotheses regarding differences in brand-related user-generated content (UGC) between Twitter (a microblogging site), Facebook (a social network) and YouTube (a content community). It tests them using data from a content analysis of 600 UGC posts for two retail-apparel brands (Lululemon and American Apparel), which differ in the extent to which they manage social media proactively. Comparisons are drawn across six dimensions of UGC; the dimensions were drawn from a priori reading and an inductive analysis of brand-related UGC. This research provides a general framework for comparing brand-related UGC, and helps us to better understand how particular social media channels and marketing strategies may influence consumer-produced brand communications.

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Introduction

Social media have migrated into the ‘mainstream’ and marketers have taken notice: the percentage of companies using social media for marketing is expected to reach 88% by 2012, up from 42% in 2008 (Williamson 2010). Companies are leveraging social media not only for digital advertising and promotions, but also to handle customer service issues, mine innovation ideas, and ‘authentically’ engage with customers (Solis 2010). There is considerable diversity across the types of social media, which encompasses formats such as blogs, social networking sites and content communities (c.f. Kaplan and Haenlein 2010). While marketing scholars have studied certain social media channels in isolation, few have incorporated multiple types into a single study for comparative purposes. Research that compares how users engage with different social media can enhance our understanding of the variability between media, and provide managers with insights on how to allocate resources across

platforms. One form of consumer engagement that can be compared across social media sites is user-generated content (UGC).

User-generated content is an important means through which consumers express themselves and communicate with others online (Boyd and Ellison 2008); it is what is produced in the moment of being social, as well as the object around which sociality occurs. UGC takes on many different forms, such as Twitter tweets, Facebook status updates, and videos on YouTube, as well as consumer-produced product reviews and advertisements (c.f. Dhar and Chang 2009; Muñiz and Schau 2007). Importantly for marketers, much UGC across various media is brand-related and has the potential to shape consumer brand perceptions.

Casual observation suggests there is a tremendous assortment of brand-related UGC across the different social media types; for example, a YouTube video does not look like a Facebook wall post. Better understanding these differences is potentially important for marketers who are concerned with the co-creation of their brands in different social media platforms. As such, this research addresses the following questions: How does brand-related UGC vary across different social media types? And how does the extent to which social media marketing is proactively managed relate to differences across social media types? These questions have not yet been broached in the still nascent (Burmam 2010) research stream on brand-related

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UGC. To answer them, we draw on brand-related UGC from three different types of social media: Facebook (a social network), Twitter (a microblogging application), and YouTube (a content community). We test hypotheses using data derived from a content analysis of materials on two brands (American Apparel and Lululemon) on each site.

Our study builds on previous brand-related UGC research to make three primary contributions. First, it provides a preliminary framework for comparing the content that consumers create when they produce brand-related posts. Second, it improves our understanding of how specific social media channels influence the brand-related messages that consumers create (c.f. McLuhan 1964). Third, it highlights differences in UGC where social media is more, versus less, proactively managed by brands. Thus, it can help inform managerial decision making about social media. The paper proceeds as follows. It briefly reviews the literature on UGC and the social media sites of interest. It then develops research hypotheses and describes our methods. Finally, it presents results of the content analysis and a discussion of findings.

Literature

Academic research on social media and brand-related UGC is accumulating rapidly. To situate our research within this evolving literature, we review relevant studies on brand-related UGC and the three social media sites under consideration in this study.

User-generated Content

UGC is published content that is “created outside of professional routines and practices” (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010; OECD 2007, p. 61). It may be individually or collaboratively produced, modified, shared and consumed, and “can be seen as the sum of all ways in which people make use of social media,” (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010, p. 61). While the origins of UGC predate the rise of the Internet and social media, those developments, coupled with increased accessibility of technology, have made UGC creation less demanding (Burgess and Green 2009; Lange 2008). Compelling evidence of the effect of such developments may be observed in China where the percentage of Internet content that is user-produced now exceeds that which is professionally produced (Xiaoji 2010). UGC is related to, but not identical with, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), which is defined as being “any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet” (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004, p. 39). While UGC is broader than eWOM, the two overlap considerably when UGC is brand-related, as it is in our study. We identify three relevant streams of brand-related UGC research.

The first investigates consumer-generated advertisements and brands. This work considers what motivates consumers to create, what they produce, how the process of co-creation can be managed, and implications for marketers and advertisers (Berthon, Pitt, and Campbell 2008; Burmann 2010; Muñiz and Schau 2007; Pitt et al. 2006). The second stream of brand-related UGC research emphasizes how credible

consumers find user-generated posts and their goals for engaging with them (Cheong and Morrison 2008; Liu, Karahanna, and Watson 2011; Riegner 2008). Cheong and Morrison’s (2008) study is atypical of brand-related UGC research in that it considers content generated on different types of sites: YouTube, blogs, and forums. However, as their focus is on perceptions of brand-related UGC versus the types of content generated, they do not provide a systematic comparison of how UGC varies across sites. A third strand of brand-related UGC research focuses on the relationship between UGC and significant managerial outcomes, such as sales. In this research, brand-related UGC is considered a predictor (Dhar and Chang 2009) or driver (Ghose and Ipeirotis 2010) of these outcomes. Dhar and Chang’s (2009) study on predicting music sales incorporates UGC data from multiple media types (blogs and social network sites), but again, it does not concentrate on understanding how UGC differs across sites, which is focal in our study.

Social Media Sites

The range of social media sites on the Internet is vast and growing. This study focuses on brand-related UGC from three of the most popular sites in terms of consumer usage and marketer interest: Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. Each represents a different type of social media.

Twitter is a micro-blogging site that was founded in 2006. It allows people to publish (tweet), reply to, and forward posts that cannot exceed 140-characters in length. Posts, which may include hyperlinks to news stories, blogs, pictures, etc., show up in the stream of those following the poster; most posts are also publically available. Research on Twitter has focused on a number of areas, including norms and behaviours (Boyd, Golder, and Lotan 2010), self-presentation (Marwick and Boyd 2011), as well as what and why people post (Jansen et al. 2009; Java et al. 2009; Naaman, Boase, and Lai 2010). Tweets commonly ask for or share information, news, opinions, complaints, or details about daily activities. Most relevant to this study is research that touches on brand-related tweets. Jansen et al. (2009) find that 19% of tweets are brand-related, but that in almost half of those cases the brand is not the primary focus of the post. In tweets where brands are focal, users express opinions about and seek or provide information on the brand.

Facebook is a social networking site that was founded in 2004. Facebook users can create profiles featuring personal information, interests, photos, and the like, and can ‘friend’ other site users. They can also participate in a wide range of activities such as writing on friends’ walls, commenting on links, participating in forum discussions, and “liking” brands. Facebook allows people to build or maintain social capital, communicate with others, keep up with other peoples’ lives, and discover rumours and gossip. Research on Facebook has considered the site’s functionality and norms (Papacharissi 2009), how and why people use it (Debatin et al. 2009; Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe 2007), as well as identity management and self-presentation on the site (Labrecque, Markos, and Milne 2011; Papacharissi 2009; Tom Tong et al. 2008;

Zywica and Danowski 2008). There is, however, a dearth of research on Facebook that considers brands (though one exploratory study has investigated branded entertainment on the site: Zhang, Sung, and Lee 2010).

YouTube is a content community that was founded in 2005. It allows users to post, view, comment on and link to videos on the site. Users can also set up personal profiles that display who they subscribe to, recent activity, friends, comments and favourite videos. While the most viewed videos on the site tend to be professionally produced (Kruitbosch and Nack 2008), the most commented-on videos tend to be user-generated (Burgess and Green 2009). Researchers have studied the site's community structure, culture, and norms (Benevenuto et al. 2008; Burgess and Green 2009; Snickars and Vonderau 2009), as well as user behaviours, such as self-presentation, which is important on the site: "DIY celebrity" is perceived to be attainable and users are encouraged to 'broadcast themselves' (Burgess and Green 2009; Lange 2008). Research has also examined the site's content (c.f. Cha et al. 2007; Kruitbosch and Nack 2008). Recent work by Burgess and Green (2009) finds that the most popular user-generated videos on the site are vlogs, music videos (e.g., fan videos), live material (e.g., performances), informational content (e.g., reviews), and scripted performances (e.g., sketch comedy). With regards to brand-related UGC, videos often feature reviews, demonstrations, creative consumption, the 'unboxing' of new products, amateur advertisements, satires and spoofs, brand community storytelling, and the coverage of brand-related events (Blythe and Cairns 2009; Pace 2008).

As this review shows, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube represent different types of social media, and that each site has its own unique architecture, culture and norms. Users visit these sites with slightly different intentions, interact in diverse ways, and produce content that, on the surface, often looks quite unique from one site to the next. However, as of yet we do not know whether and how brand-related UGC differs across these sites.

Hypotheses

Our initial research question was: how does brand-related UGC vary across different social media types? To answer that question, it was first necessary to identify a set of content dimensions that might be present in brand-related UGC. Based on prior literature, and on a preliminary inductive analysis of UGC by the authors, we identified the following dimensions: 1) Promotional self-presentation (Did the UGC self-promote the consumer as well as the brand?); 2) Brand centrality (Was the brand central or peripheral to the UGC?); 3) Marketer-directed communication (Did the UGC direct communications toward the marketer?); 4) Response to online marketer action (Did the UGC respond to an online marketer action?); 5) Factually informative about the brand (Did the UGC present factual information about the brand?); and 6) Brand sentiment (Did the UGC convey, a positive, negative, or neutral sentiment toward the brand?). Each dimension, except for the last, is binary. We now present hypotheses; these recognize both the technical and cultural aspects of the three sites that may influence the

production of brand-related UGC. It should be acknowledged that while the technical aspects of these sites may help shape their unique cultures and how they are used, technology itself does not narrowly constrain content. Quite similar UGC could, in principle, be posted on any site.

Promotional Self-presentation

Self-presentation is a performance (Goffman 1959): an "effort to express a specific image and identity to others" (Zywica and Danowski 2008, p. 6). Consumers commonly use possessions, brands, and other symbols to construct their images in both offline and online contexts (Belk 1988; Schau and Gilly 2003). Some overt attempts at self-presentation may be self-promotional.

Research suggests that people engage in self-presentation practices on all three social media sites (e.g., Lange 2008; Marwick and Boyd 2011; Zywica and Danowski 2008). Explicit self-promotion, as noted by some (e.g., Marwick and Boyd 2011), may actually create tensions, depending on the culture of the site; in fact, being labelled self-promotional by others could be the result of a failed self-presentation strategy. While the mass media sometimes depicts Twitter as being a site that hosts posts on the mundane details of one's daily activities, blatant self-promotion on the site is often considered inappropriate (Marwick and Boyd 2011). The site's culture and ephemeral nature also leads observers to argue that Twitter is more focused on promoting conversation than on self-presentation (Kietzmann et al. 2011). On Facebook, self-presentation occurs through both personal profiles and user-produced content (Zywica and Danowski 2008). And while the site offers more easy options for self-presentation through UGC than does Twitter, research suggests that one's personal profile (e.g., 'what I like') and "display of friends" (Papacharissi 2009, p. 210) are the chief means by which users self-present. Facebook users may, of course, use brands (e.g., through listing one's schools, favourite sports teams, etc.) in their self-presentation; however, the culture of user self-promotion through brand-referencing communications appears to be less highly developed on this social networking site. For these reasons, no difference is hypothesized to exist between brand-related UGC from Twitter and Facebook on the self-promotion variable. YouTube, however, is hypothesized to host more self-promotional brand-related UGC than the other two sites. Its slogan, 'Broadcast Yourself', encourages users to be the star of their video posts, and its architecture and culture support the development of micro-celebrities (Burgess and Green 2009). While YouTube users still need to negotiate a balance between self-promotion and connecting with others, the site is far more geared toward self-presentation than are Twitter or Facebook. Thus, we posit:

H1. Brand-related UGC on YouTube is more likely than brand-related UGC on Twitter or Facebook to feature consumer self-promotion.

Brand Centrality

Brand centrality refers to the role of the brand in brand-related UGC. Is the brand the focus of the content, or is it more of a

supporting prop? While research on brand-related UGC does not explicitly discuss brand centrality in UGC, it often assumes it. Yet, recent empirical studies suggest that brand centrality may vary across content (c.f. Jansen et al. 2009). With Twitter's 140-character limit, plus hyperlinks, it is difficult to introduce multiple topics in a single tweet. While the site hosts content that varies in its brand centrality (Jansen et al. 2009), its technical design and stronger cultural focus on sharing information and facilitating discussion – including with marketers – comparatively privilege brand centrality. Specifically, compared with Facebook, which is more oriented toward facilitating social connectedness, Twitter is posited to host a greater percentage of brand-central posts. YouTube features a number of video types, such as reviews, demonstrations, and ‘unboxing’ videos, which could, in principle, feature the brand more centrally; however, research suggests that consumers find it hard to recall seeing product-related information on the site, indicating that brands may often play a more peripheral role (Cheong and Morrison 2008). As the dominant culture of the site is one that highlights the self, it is hypothesized that brands are more likely to be featured peripherally – as identity-supporting props (e.g., Schau and Gilly 2003) – on YouTube than on Twitter or Facebook.

H2. Brands are most likely to be central in brand-related UGC on Twitter and least likely to be central in brand-related UGC on YouTube.

Marketer-directed Communication

Many social media sites allow consumers to communicate with marketers (c.f. Deighton and Kornfeld 2009). In brand-related UGC, consumers may pose questions or complaints to marketers, as well as respond to companies' questions or comments. Twitter has hosted a number of high-profile consumer-marketer exchanges that have attracted media attention (c.f. Deighton and Kornfeld 2010). While Twitter is recognized as being a site on which users ask for information and complain (Naaman, Boase, and Lai 2010) – two reasons consumers might direct content towards marketers – Facebook allows consumers to pose similar content to marketers on their brand pages. Facebook, as the world's most popular site in terms of time-spent (Radwanick 2011), has attracted many marketers. As both sites offer easy access to marketers and low barriers to posting, they are hypothesized to feature a similar percentage of brand-related UGC that is targeted towards the marketer. Producing video (but not comments) for YouTube demands comparatively more time, resources, and technical skill; this makes it a less convenient platform for consumers to attempt to communicate with marketers. Thus, we posit:

H3. Marketer-directed brand-related UGC is less likely on YouTube than on Twitter or Facebook.

Response to Online Marketer Action

This content variable addresses whether or not a brand-related UGC post is in response to online marketer actions

such as posing questions to consumers, posting coupons, or announcing events or opportunities sponsored by the marketer. Note that consumer response need not necessarily be directed towards the marketer, but may rather be directed at other consumers.

Response to online marketer action is dependent on having something on which to reply; marketers must do something online to which consumers can respond. All three sites offer means through which users can regularly receive marketer communications in their information stream. YouTube members can subscribe to a brand's channel, Facebook users can ‘like’ a brand (enabling marketer information to stream as would any other friend's information), and Twitter users can follow a brand. As marketer information is potentially available and response is relatively easy on both Facebook and Twitter, it is hypothesized that brand-related UGC that is in response to marketer action is just as likely on Twitter as it is on Facebook. It is hypothesized that YouTube – because of its comparatively greater time, resource, and skill demands – will feature a lower percentage of brand-related UGC that is created in response to marketer actions.

H4. Brand-related UGC is least likely to be posted in response to an online marketer action on YouTube.

Factually Informative about the Brand

In brand-related UGC, brands may be mentioned for numerous reasons: symbolism, as the focus of opinions or complaints, or as objects of interest. Social media users may also simply share information about brands. This content variable reflects whether or not brand-related UGC contains factual information about the brand. Factual information, which may be included in everything from tweets to video reviews, is that which is objectively verifiable such as the colour or style of specific clothes, the price of an offering, the location of a store, or the timing of a sale.

With regards to factually informative brand-related UGC, none of the sites are hypothesized to differ. Twitter is frequently used to share information and news, whether about brands or other matters. Facebook is more focused on social connectedness, but sharing information about brands is one way connections may be formed and fortified. Facebook brand pages, where marketers provide information about new products, events and coupons, provide resources that consumers can draw on in their conversations, as well as a place where those conversations can happen. YouTube's stronger ‘self’ focus suggests a more peripheral brand presence, and some of the site's more popular formats (e.g., vlog) privilege the sharing of opinions; however, even amongst these opinions, if only in the video notes, and amongst other video formats (e.g., product reviews), factual information can readily be shared. YouTube also offers a comparatively richer and longer format, which makes it easy to highlight information about brands even if the brands are peripheral to the video's main focus on the “star.”

H5. Brand-related UGC on Twitter, Facebook or YouTube is equally likely to feature brand-related factual information.

Brand Sentiment

Brand sentiment, or valence, is a popular measure for marketers to consider in evaluating the success of social media initiatives (Hoffman and Fodor 2010); this content variable captures the over-riding brand sentiment expressed in brand-related UGC. Sentiment can be simplistically differentiated as being positive, negative, neutral, or unclear.

Sentiment towards brands in brand-related UGC is hypothesized to be similar across all three social media platforms. Twitter is associated with types of content that typically could be thought of as being neutral (information, ‘slice of life’), negative (complaints), and potentially positive (opinions). On Facebook, social posts could be driven by either positive or negative brand perceptions or experiences, as well as more neutral impetuses, such as questions. On YouTube, peripherally located brands may be associated with neutral sentiments; however, reviews and vlogs could also frame the brands in more positive or negative ways.

H6. Sentiment towards brands in brand-related UGC on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube is similar across all three social media sites.

These hypotheses consider whether and how brand-related UGC differs across three distinct types of social media. The rationale for each hypothesis is grounded in the technical and cultural characteristics of the sites themselves. Before describing the methods used to test these hypotheses, we draw attention to an important factor, marketers’ social media strategies, which may also influence brand-related UGC.

Social Media Marketing Strategy

While this research investigates content developed by consumers, it is critical to recognize that UGC is produced in a co-created brand environment in which marketers can engage with consumers, whether more or less proactively (Fournier and Avery 2011). Marketer-produced content may elicit UGC by encouraging consumer sharing, commenting, piggybacking, or replies to the company. Thus, some UGC is directly facilitated by marketers and is indicative of brand engagement and word-of-mouth, metrics that are considered relevant gauges of the effectiveness of a company’s social media marketing activities (Hoffman and Fodor 2010).

Companies have adopted diverse strategies in approaching social media (c.f. Wilson et al. 2011). While much is unclear about how best to plan and execute effective social media marketing, there is some agreement that more impactful strategies are generally more proactive in nature. Being more proactive entails creating content more regularly, and initiating and maintaining conversations with consumers on an ongoing basis. More proactive companies often empower employees, sometimes at local levels, to talk, listen, and respond to what

consumers post on social media (c.f. Bernoff and Schadler 2010). Being less proactive entails treating social media like just another ‘push’ channel by using it to announce deals or promotions, while responding infrequently to what consumers are saying on these platforms. As proactive social media strategies better satisfy consumer “needs to create, consume, connect and control in the social Web,” they could conceivably also affect the type of content that consumers produce (Hoffman and Fodor 2010, p. 49).

Given a lack of theoretical bases for doing so, we do not create specific hypotheses about how a more proactive social media strategy will affect brand-related UGC across social media sites. However, we do consider (as our second research question) whether the extent to which social media marketing is proactively managed relates to differences in UGC across social media types. Our sample includes UGC pertaining to two companies whose social media marketing proactiveness varies markedly, as described below.

Method

This study compares UGC across three social media sites. A necessary first step in this process was to conduct a content analysis that would allow for comparisons. Content analysis is a standard method for systematically comparing the content of communications (Kolbe and Burnett 1991). It has long been used by researchers interested in examining communication such as advertisements, media stories, and web sites (Kassarjian 1977; Roznowski 2003; Yun, Park, and Ha 2008). Content analysis is appropriate here because it offers a systematic and objective way to compare content for a large sample of UGC. As mentioned, dimensions were drawn both from reading prior literature and from an inductive analysis of a brand-related UGC conducted by the authors. To minimize page length, this research phase is not detailed here.

Sampling

Our unit of analysis was individual brand-related UGC postings; a posting was considered to be brand-related if the brand was mentioned or displayed in it. Postings were screened to ensure that they were produced by consumers and did not have an apparent commercial objective. As our first research question addressed whether and how brand-related UGC differs across types of social media, the UGC was sampled from three distinct types of sites: a microblog (Twitter), a social network (Facebook), and a content community (YouTube).

As our second research question concerned whether a more proactive social media marketing strategy impacts brand-related UGC, we selected postings from two brands in the same category: retail-apparel. The brands, Lululemon and American Apparel, were chosen because they are popular but have different general marketing approaches and corporate images; interestingly, their social media strategies also appear to be quite different. Lululemon Athletica is a fast growing yoga-inspired clothing designer and retailer founded in 1998; its 124 stores (as of Jan. 2010) are mostly located in North America (Google Finance).

Lululemon's social media marketing approach is very community-oriented. It regularly sends out and responds to tweets on Twitter, and many individual stores have their own high-traffic Facebook pages; Lululemon's social media strategy could be characterized as being quite proactive. American Apparel is a vertically integrated manufacturer, wholesaler and retailer of basic fashion apparel. The company, founded in the early 1990s, grew rapidly until it was slowed by financial problems in 2010; its 281 stores (as of Dec. 2009) are located in approximately 20 countries (Google Finance), but the company prominently advertises its choice to manufacture in downtown Los Angeles. American Apparel is not nearly as active as Lululemon is on Twitter and Facebook (e.g., it has approximately 1/17th the volume of tweets), and it uses the platforms to 'push' out information rather than to engage in conversations; American Apparel's social media strategy is comparatively less proactive. The two brands thus differ in their social media marketing approach. (It should be noted that they also differ in that American Apparel has received some negative scrutiny because of its controversial founder, Dov Charney, its provocative advertising and its deteriorated financial health (Hill 2010)).

To keep the sampling scope manageable, but still capture a reasonably representative set of brand-related UGC for these brands, a restricted time frame was established: only posts published by consumers between June 1, 2010 and January 25, 2011 were sampled. Posts from this time frame were collected between December 2010 and January 2011. They were selected randomly from date-restricted Google search results for: 'brand' on 'site:' (e.g., 'Lululemon' on 'Facebook.com'). One post was randomly selected from the first page of search results, and then every 10th result was selected until 100 posts were collected for each brand on each social media site. In total, 600 brand-related UGC posts were collected. Posts represented the range of UGC types found on each site. For example, on Twitter, tweets, retweets, and replies were all collected. On Facebook, status updates, wall posts, forum contributions, pictures, and videos were all collected. On YouTube, videos and comments were both collected.

Coding Categories

Prior to coding, operational definitions and categories were developed for each dimension.

Promotional Self-presentation

Content was coded as 'yes' if the poster was mentioned, referenced, or featured in the content in a way that was explicitly self-promotional; otherwise, it was coded 'no.' For example, a tweet was coded 'yes' if it read, 'I just bought this Lululemon jacket and it looks great on me,' while a YouTube video was coded as 'no' if it showed a yoga event in a park where a panned shot revealed that people were wearing Lululemon clothes.

Brand Centrality

Content was coded 'yes' for brand centrality if the brand was the main focus of the content, rather than peripheral; otherwise, it was coded 'no.' 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.

Marketer-directed Communication

Content was coded 'yes' if a post was clearly directed towards Lululemon or American Apparel; otherwise, it was coded 'no'. For example, a consumer reply to a Lululemon tweet or a post on Lululemon's Facebook wall asking about product availability was coded 'yes', while a vlog post on YouTube which criticizes Lululemon's sourcing practices was coded 'no.'

Response to Online Marketer Action

Content was coded 'yes' if it was in response to a specific online marketer action; otherwise, it was coded 'no.' For example, an @reply to the marketer on Twitter was coded 'yes', while a Facebook post declaring, 'I love your clothes!', was coded 'no'.

Factually Informative about the Brand

Content was coded 'yes' if it contained objective brand information, such as a price or location; otherwise, it was coded 'no.' For example, a tweet that says 'I'm at the Lululemon store at 4th and Main St.' was coded 'yes' because it identifies the location of a store, while a Facebook status update that proclaims 'American Apparel's advertisements are vulgar' was coded 'no' because it conveys a personal opinion.

Brand Sentiment

Content was coded as 'positive', 'negative', or 'neutral' based on the over-riding sentiment of the post. If sentiment was ambiguous, content was coded as 'unclear.'

Coding

Data coding was manually conducted by an independent coder, who had no knowledge of the research hypotheses, as well as by one member of the research team. The independent coder was given an explanation of the codes and also conversed with a second member of the research team to seek clarification after coding an initial portion of the sample. Intercoder reliability, as calculated using Perreault and Leigh's (1989) formula, was approximately 0.9, falling within the accepted range of 0.8–1.0. Any discrepancies in coding were examined and adjudicated by a third member of the research team. Following coding, category frequencies were tabulated and statistical differences were assessed using Chi-square tests. This will be discussed next.

Results

Analysis of the data reveals some interesting differences and consistencies between brand-related UGC from the three social

Table 1
Coding Frequencies: Lululemon.

Code	Social Media Site			
	Twitter	Facebook	YouTube	Total Across Sites (%)
<i>Promotional Self-Presentation</i>				
Yes	13	30	75	39%
No	87	70	25	61%
<i>Brand Centrality</i>				
Yes	76	66	42	61%
No	24	34	58	39%
<i>Marketer-Directed Communication</i>				
Yes	36	38	0	25%
No	64	62	100	75%
<i>Response to Online Marketer Action</i>				
Yes	19	23	0	14%
No	81	77	100	86%
<i>Factually Informative</i>				
Yes	29	14	32	25%
No	71	86	68	75%
<i>Brand Sentiment</i>				
Positive	64	58	47	56%
Negative	4	9	4	6%
Neutral	17	26	49	31%
Unclear	15	7	0	7%

Table 2
Coding Frequencies: American Apparel.

Code	Social Media Site			
	Twitter	Facebook	YouTube	Total Across Sites (%)
<i>Promotional Self-Presentation</i>				
Yes	9	33	76	39%
No	91	67	24	61%
<i>Brand Centrality</i>				
Yes	70	57	25	51%
No	30	43	75	49%
<i>Marketer-Directed Communication</i>				
Yes	0	0	0	0%
No	100	100	100	100%
<i>Response to Online Marketer Action</i>				
Yes	3	6	2	4%
No	97	94	98	96%
<i>Factually Informative</i>				
Yes	38	32	38	36%
No	62	68	62	64%
<i>Brand Sentiment</i>				
Positive	22	49	52	41%
Negative	24	16	4	15%
Neutral	39	30	43	37%
Unclear	15	5	1	7%

media sites. However, prior to testing for differences in UGC across the sites, Poisson and log-linear analyses were run on the tabulated data (Tables 1 and 2) in order to check for the existence of significant brand x site interactions.¹ First, Poisson regression models were run (the content category served as the response variable for each model). The results from these models indicated that the brand x site interaction (reported in brackets) was not significant, and that it was thus suitable to collapse the two brands for further analysis, for four of the content categories: ‘promotional self-presentation’ (0.868, 2df, $p < 0.648$), ‘brand centrality’ (0.013, 2df, $p < 0.994$), ‘response to online marketer action’ (4.649, 2df, $p < 0.096$) and ‘factually informative’ (2.867, 2df, $p < 0.238$). The brand x site interaction was significant for ‘marketer-directed communication’ (6.988, 2df, $p < 0.030$) and ‘brand sentiment’ (8.044, 2df, $p < 0.018$) (Table 3). Second, to corroborate these results, log-linear analyses, which treat input variables as factors rather than as predictors or response variables, were run. Under these analyses, collapsing the two brands was appropriate if the three-way (brand x site x content category) interaction for each dimension was not significant (Field 2005) (see Table 3). Consistent with the Poisson regression results, the log-linear analyses (reported in brackets) suggested combining the two brands for the same four content categories: ‘promotional self-presentation’ (1.057, 2df, $p < 0.590$), ‘brand centrality’ (1.344, 2df, $p < 0.511$), ‘response to online marketer action’ (5.876, 2df, $p < 0.053$) and ‘factually informative’ (3.242, 2df, $p < 0.198$). The analyses suggested that brand

amalgamation was not appropriate for the remaining two content categories: ‘marketer-directed communication’ (7.549, 2df, $p < 0.023$) and ‘brand sentiment’ (26.721, 6df, $p < 0.000$).

For those content categories in which combining the brands was inappropriate, tests of how brand-related UGC differ across social media sites were conducted separately for each brand. In all instances, Chi-square tests were first conducted across the three sites for each dimension. If these tests yielded a significant Chi-square statistic ($p \leq 0.05$), additional tests were run in order to establish which specific site relationships (e.g., Twitter–Facebook or Twitter–YouTube) were contributing significantly to that statistic. If the initial cross-site Chi-square statistic was insignificant, indicating similarity between the brand-related UGC of Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube on that

Table 3
Brand x Site Interaction Effects (Poisson Regression and Log-Linear Analysis).

Content Category	Poisson Regression 2-Way Interaction (Brand*Site) (df), <i>p</i> -value	Log-Linear Analysis 3-Way Interaction (Brand*Site*Content Category) (df), <i>p</i> -value	Decision
H1: Promotional Self-Presentation	0.868 (2), $p < 0.648$	1.057 (2), $p < 0.590$	Collapse Brands
H2: Brand Centrality	0.013 (2), $p < 0.994$	1.344 (2), $p < 0.511$	Collapse Brands
H3: Marketer-Directed Communication	6.988 (2), $p < 0.030$	7.549 (2), $p < 0.023$	Do Not Collapse Brands
H4: Response to Online Marketer Action	4.649 (2), $p < 0.096$	5.876 (2), $p < 0.053$	Collapse Brands
H5: Factually Informative	2.867 (2), $p < 0.238$	3.242 (2), $p < 0.198$	Collapse Brands
H6: Brand Sentiment	8.044 (2), $p < 0.018$	26.721 (6), $p < 0.000$	Do Not Collapse

¹ To address convergence difficulties in the Poisson regressions and concerns related to the violation of statistical assumptions in the log-linear analyses (both related to ‘0’ frequency counts in some cells), a small constant ($k=2$) was added to each cell for the calculation of interaction effects for three of the dimensions: ‘marketer-directed communication’ and ‘response to online marketer action’ (both analyses), as well as ‘brand sentiment’ (log-linear analyses only).

Table 4
Between Site Differences in Brand-Related UGC (Chi-Square Analyses).

Content Category	Total (df), <i>p</i> -value	Twitter–Facebook (df), <i>p</i> -value	Facebook–YouTube (df), <i>p</i> -value	Twitter–YouTube (df), <i>p</i> -value
<i>Promotional Self-Presentation</i>				
Total	182.059 (2), <i>p</i> <0.000	25.113 (1), <i>p</i> <0.000	77.821 (1), <i>p</i> <0.000	169.499 (1), <i>p</i> <0.000
<i>Brand Centrality</i>				
Total	67.005 (2), <i>p</i> <0.000	6.005 (1), <i>p</i> <0.014	31.439 (1), <i>p</i> <0.000	62.675 (1), <i>p</i> <0.000
<i>Marketer-Directed Communication</i>				
Lululemon	49.223 (2), <i>p</i> <0.000	0.086 (1), <i>p</i> <0.770	46.914 (1), <i>p</i> <0.000	43.902 (1), <i>p</i> <0.000
American Apparel	0.000 (2), <i>p</i> =1.000	—	—	—
<i>Response to Online Marketer Action</i>				
Total	24.380 (2), <i>p</i> <0.000	1.101 (1), <i>p</i> <0.294	25.492 (1), <i>p</i> <0.000	17.730 (1), <i>p</i> <0.000
<i>Factually Informative</i>				
Total	8.067 (2), <i>p</i> <0.018	5.439 (1), <i>p</i> <0.020	6.994 (1), <i>p</i> <0.008	0.100 (1), <i>p</i> <0.752
<i>Brand Sentiment</i>				
Lululemon	38.705 (6), <i>p</i> <0.000	7.011 (3), <i>p</i> <0.072	17.129 (3), <i>p</i> <0.001	33.119 (3), <i>p</i> <0.000
American Apparel	44.367 (6), <i>p</i> <0.000	18.042 (3), <i>p</i> <0.000	12.271 (3), <i>p</i> <0.000	38.893 (3), <i>p</i> <0.000

dimension, no further analyses were carried out. For a summary of these results, please refer to Table 4. For a summary of the hypotheses tests results, see Table 5.

Promotional Self-Presentation

Consistent with H1, brand-related UGC on YouTube (75%; 76%) was more likely than that on Facebook (30%, 33%) or Twitter (13%, 9%) to feature consumer self-promotion; this hypothesis was statistically supported ($p<0.000$). (Please note, when two numbers are presented in a bracket separated by a comma, the first number refers to data for Lululemon (hereafter LLL), while the second number refers to data for American Apparel (hereafter AA).) Interestingly, brand-related UGC from Facebook was also more frequently self-promotional than that from Twitter ($p<0.000$); this was not hypothesized. Prior research suggests that self-presentation and promotion on Facebook would primarily occur through the construction of one's profile, but this finding suggests that UGC might play a supporting role in this process as well. This result also appears to support the assertion that identity and self-presentation are less of a focus on Twitter than is conversation (Kietzmann et al. 2011).

Brand Centrality

The results on brand centrality intuitively align with those on self-promotion: the higher the self-focus, the lower the brand-focus. As posited in H2, brand centrality was observed least often in brand-related UGC on YouTube (42%, 25%; $p<0.000$). Regarding Twitter (76%, 70%) and Facebook (66%, 57%), Twitter was hypothesized to host more brand-central content because of its technical design and greater cultural focus on sharing news, information, and opinions. This aspect of the hypothesis was supported by the data as well ($p<0.014$).

Marketer-Directed Communication

H3 posited that marketer-directed brand-related UGC would be lowest for YouTube (0%, 0%); this was supported for Lululemon ($p<0.000$), but not for American Apparel, for which there was no marketer-directed communication across Twitter, Facebook or YouTube. Observation of both brands' social media activities suggests that this finding may reflect AA's strategy on some of these sites. For example, AA has only one Facebook page to which it posts information. Users do post some information and photos to AA's Facebook wall; however, they rarely receive any response from AA. In comparison, LLL has dozens

Table 5
Summary of Findings.

Hypotheses Summary	Findings Summary
H1: Self-Promoting UGC <i>greatest</i> on YouTube	Supported
H2: Brands are <i>most likely</i> to be central in UGC on Twitter, <i>least likely</i> to be central in UGC on YouTube	Supported
H3: Marketer-Directed Communication <i>lowest</i> on YouTube	Partially supported: Hypothesis holds for LLL but not for AA
H4: UGC responding to online marketer action <i>least likely</i> on YouTube	Supported
H5: Brand-related factual information <i>equally likely</i> across sites	Partially supported: Factual information <i>equally likely</i> for Twitter and YouTube
H6: Brand Sentiment in UGC <i>not different</i> across sites	Not supported: For LLL, (+) <i>higher</i> for Twitter than YouTube, (–) <i>no difference</i> , (neutral) YouTube <i>highest</i> For AA, (+) Twitter <i>lowest</i> , (–) YouTube <i>lowest</i> , (neutral) <i>no difference</i> Between brands, (+) <i>highest</i> for LLL, (–) and (neutral) <i>highest</i> for AA

of Facebook pages, most of them for individual stores. Further, LLL regularly responds to consumer posts. On Twitter, AA occasionally broadcasts information about promotions and employment opportunities, but does not publicly respond to followers. In contrast, LLL uses its Twitter account to ask and answer questions, offer tips, provide product information, etc. Thus, AA creates fewer opportunities, on Facebook, for consumers to communicate, as well as less reason, on Facebook and Twitter, for consumers to “reach out” to the marketer. Our findings indicates that “reaching out” is something consumers routinely do to LLL on both Facebook (38%) and Twitter (36%).

Response to Online Marketer Action

This dimension refers to brand-related UGC created in response to some online marketer action. As posited in H4, response to online marketer action was lowest for YouTube (0%, 2%; $p < 0.000$). Interestingly, the magnitude of responses differed for the two brands on Twitter (19%, 3%) and Facebook (23%, 6%). The generally subdued response to AA’s online actions may, again, reflect the nature of its content or users’ motivations to respond to it. Daugherty, Eastin, and Bright (2008) find that two functional motivations associated with UGC attitudes and creation are ego-defensiveness and sociality. AA’s propensity to ignore consumer posts on Facebook and Twitter might threaten the egos of users, dissuading response; it certainly would not buoy the social motivations of potential UGC producers. Additionally, while its content of promotions and job postings is potentially valuable for facilitating social interaction, it is less rich than the content supplied by LLL on these sites.

Factually Informative about the Brand

H5 posited that factually informative brand-related UGC would be equally common across the social media sites. While YouTube (32%, 38%) and Twitter (29%, 38%) scored similarly on this dimension ($p < 0.752$), Facebook (14%, 32%) scored significantly lower ($p \leq 0.020$). Thus, H5 was not fully supported. The more proactive brand on Facebook, LLL, provided information that facilitated social interaction on its brand pages; however, this branded content tended to elicit conversations featuring more opinions and questions than stated facts. (Interestingly, this information did not appear to directly spread to other parts of the site either). In addition, since LLL

was a part of these conversations, it was available to provide answers (which tended to be more factual) to consumer inquires (which tended to be less factual). As AA was not as active on Facebook and didn’t provide as much in the way of content, these conversations occurred away from its brand page. In these conversations, consumers posed questions and opinions, while also occasionally offering answers in the absence of the marketer.

Brand Sentiment

H6 posited that UGC brand sentiment would be consistent across the three social media sites; this hypothesis was not supported for either brand ($p < 0.000$ for both brands). Not only was sentiment different across sites, the pattern differed for the two brands (see Table 6). For LLL, negative posts were consistent, and low, across the sites ($p < 0.210$), while positive posts were generally consistent and high – although higher for Twitter (64%) than for YouTube (47%; $p < 0.016$). For neutral mentions, YouTube (49%) was the outlier relative to Twitter (17%; $p < 0.000$) and Facebook (26%; $p < 0.001$) owing to three styles of posts (amateur exercise, live event, and ‘what I’m wearing’ videos) common for LLL that tended to express neutral sentiments. For AA, positive posts were lowest for Twitter (22%; $p < 0.000$), while negative posts were lowest for YouTube (4%; $p \leq 0.005$); neutral mentions were statistically similar across sites. Comparing the two brands, UGC brand sentiment differed most notably on Twitter (see Table 7). On Twitter, positive mentions were higher for LL (LL: 64% vs. AA: 22%; $p < 0.000$), while negative (LL: 4% vs. AA: 24%; $p < 0.000$) and neutral (LL: 17% vs. AA: 39%) posts were higher for AA. In general, as would be expected given the lower proactiveness of AA and the greater controversy surrounding it, there was significantly more negative UGC on Twitter for AA than for LLL. What seems safest to conclude from our results is that brand sentiment may differ, but is not predictably different, across sites.

Discussion

This study offers three contributions. First, it provides conceptual insights into how different social media sites foster UGC with different characteristics. Second, it develops some preliminary ideas on how proactive social media marketing relates to UGC. Third, it offers a preliminary set of dimensions for comparing brand-related UGC found on different sites.

Table 6
Between Site Differences in Brand-Related UGC Sentiment (Chi-Square Analyses).

Sentiment	Total (df), p -value	Twitter–Facebook (df), p -value	Facebook–YouTube (df), p -value	Twitter–YouTube (df), p -value
<i>Lululemon</i>				
Positive	6.044 (2), $p < 0.049$	0.757 (1), $p < 0.384$	2.426 (1), $p < 0.119$	5.851 (1), $p < 0.016$
Negative	3.118 (2), $p < 0.210$	—	—	—
Neutral	25.617 (2), $p < 0.000$	2.400 (1), $p < 0.121$	11.285 (1), $p < 0.001$	23.157 (1), $p < 0.000$
<i>American Apparel</i>				
Positive	22.571 (2), $p < 0.000$	15.919 (1), $p < 0.000$	0.180 (1), $p < 0.671$	19.305 (1), $p < 0.000$
Negative	16.193 (2), $p < 0.000$	2.000 (1), $p < 0.157$	8.000 (1), $p < 0.005$	16.611 (1), $p < 0.000$
Neutral	3.790 (2), $p < 0.150$	—	—	—

Table 7
Between Brand Differences in Brand-Related UGC Sentiment (Chi-Square Analyses).

Sentiment	Twitter (df), <i>p</i> -value	Facebook (df), <i>p</i> -value	YouTube (df), <i>p</i> -value
Total	43.440 (3), <i>p</i> <0.000	3.336 (3), <i>p</i> <0.343	1.644 (3), <i>p</i> <0.649
Positive	35.985 (1), <i>p</i> <0.000	—	—
Negative	16.611 (1), <i>p</i> <0.000	—	—
Neutral	12.004 (1), <i>p</i> <0.001	—	—

Our findings show that while brand-related UGC tends to differ across sites for some facets of content (particularly promotional self-presentation and brand centrality), it does not do so for others. In addition, some cross-site content patterns (e.g., ‘marketer-directed communication’) appear to differ significantly for brands that are more, versus less, proactively managed.

The strongest site influences in brand-related UGC seem to stem from YouTube’s culture of self-promotion. True to its tagline, YouTube is focused on broadcasting the self. While brands may play a role in consumers’ presentation of face (Goffman 1959) on YouTube, it appears to be a supporting rather than a central role. This does not, however, mean that brand-related YouTube UGC is devoid of brand information: YouTube can provide factual information about brands, albeit often peripheral to the main messages that posts convey. Also, for brands like AA that face criticism, the site is somewhat of a haven relative to Facebook and Twitter, which feature more negative sentiment, perhaps because their cultures support conversation and link sharing.

Twitter is most distinctive from YouTube. Brand-related UGC on Twitter is least likely to feature consumer self-promotion; people more often use it to engage in discussions and spread news. Correspondingly, brand centrality trends highest for UGC on Twitter. Thus, Twitter is potentially both a boon and a bane for marketers. For proactive brands like LLL, Twitter users appear willing to use the channel to communicate with the marketer, enabling them to bask in positive sentiment and respond to negative posts. For brands like AA that are less proactive in social media, consumers will infrequently initiate marketer-directed content, presumably because they have little reason to expect it will be acknowledged. Furthermore, Twitter appears to be a particular point of vulnerability for brands receiving critical attention, yielding less positive content, and more neutral and negative content (for a brand like AA).

Facebook, with its myriad of UGC types, seems to fall somewhere in between YouTube and Twitter. Consumer self-promotion features more prominently on Facebook than on Twitter, but less so than on YouTube. UGC that highlights the brand centrally is also more likely on Facebook than on YouTube. As with Twitter, it appears that proactive marketer attention is required if marketer-directed content and response to marketer actions are desired; such content seems to be higher on Facebook for a proactively managed brand like LLL than for one like AA.

Though tentative, our findings have implications for marketers investing in social media. Particular media, such as Twitter and

Facebook, seem to offer more opportunities for marketers to collaborate with consumers to circulate positive sentiment about, and increase the visibility of, brands. This appears to be enhanced by a proactive social marketing strategy: brands should provide a space where conversation can occur, not only with them, but also with other consumers (c.f. Muñiz and Schau 2011). Marketers should also ‘entice’ consumers to participate, through relevant and valuable content, as well as to ‘validate’ their participation by responding to them. Sites such as Twitter may be a source of both threats and opportunities for brands experiencing unfavourable exposure. Monitoring the site and addressing potentially problematic posts may be one way marketers can dampen budding issues; as such, being active in providing information, listening, and participating in the social give-and-take on Twitter may be a priority for marketers. At the same time, ignoring YouTube may be a wasted opportunity for marketers. In particular, those seeking a subtle life-world placement and association with a particular constellation of brands might be well-advised to become actively engaged with YouTube.

Future research on brand-related UGC is required both to confirm and extend the tentative insights we advance here. Studies could analyze additional types of social media (e.g., collaborative projects, virtual social worlds, and virtual game worlds), which seem to vary considerably from the ones examined, as well as other content dimensions (e.g., response to other consumers, requests for information, etc.) that might be actionable and relevant for marketers. Analysis could consider user’s perceptions of their audience across different social media categories and how that might influence what users post (thanks to a reviewer for this suggestion). Extensions could examine how some of the content dimensions associate with traditional metrics that are important to marketers, such as sales, as well as with others that are becoming more important to social media marketers (c.f. Hoffman and Fodor 2010). Work could seek to understand how some of these dimensions relate to consumer meanings derived from the UGC (e.g., how do derived consumer meanings differ when one brand is central vs. when a brand is peripherally included in a constellation of similar brands?). Future research could also work to address limitations of this study, such as its narrow scope on one category.

We close by acknowledging other limitations of this research. One relates to how the data was gathered for the study. The data was harvested using Google search results between December 2010 and January 2011. Google’s results draw on Twitter’s archive, but Twitter deletes the number of tweets it publically archives over time (as does Facebook). For example, on August 1 2010, Twitter may have archived 500 tweets from July 1, 2010, but by December 1, 2010, there may only be 200 tweets archived for July 1. There is no way of knowing whether or not this deletion is systematically biasing the sample of Tweets (and Facebook posts) collected. This suggests that the results from this study should only be extrapolated beyond this sample with extreme caution. Further reinforcing this caveat is the fact that this UGC sample draws from only two brands, both targeting mostly female consumers. As such, most of the UGC for both brands was created by females, and research with more diverse samples is clearly warranted. In addition, one of the two brands

studied was under negative scrutiny for numerous reasons, which may limit the generalizability of the pattern of findings associated with it. Along these lines, research focusing on different types of brands (e.g., brands more closely tied to one's self-concept), representing a broader variety of product/service categories, would also be valuable. Some types of brands might be more likely to elicit a wider range of UGC (e.g., entertainment-related brands that inspire fan fiction); others, even those generally liked by consumers, might sponsor a more limited range (e.g., brands targeted toward businesses). Based on the findings from this study, we would expect some patterns of results (e.g., those relating to brand centrality or factuality) to be less variable across brands, while others (e.g., those relating to marketer-directed communication or brand sentiment) might be more variable across brands. Nevertheless, this study raises a useful set of implications for managers and provides a number of possibilities for future research.

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