A Comparative Analysis on the Different Food E-Commerce User Generated Content Affecting Millennials' Buying Intention

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Abstract

The paper aims to provide sufficient insights on the utilization of the different User-Generated Content on social media platforms created for businesses in the Food E-Commerce Industry, specifically on how it affects the buying intention of Millennial consumers. With this, the paper adopted a quantitative approach with a causal-comparative design. The researchers distributed an online survey questionnaire with close-ended and five-point Likert questions to 385 qualified respondents. The statistical tools, namely Chi-Square and Multiple Linear Regression, were applied to analyze the gathered data. The results strengthened the notion that the trend of social media is helping companies reach more consumers and promote what they offer to a larger audience with lesser expenses yet more value.

Keywords: User-Generated Content, E-commerce, Social Media, Food Industry, Millennials

I.   INTRODUCTION

A digital economy signifies a nation's growth marked by the development of businesses that use the internet to facilitate communication between corporations and individuals (Aniqoh, 2020). It then leads to the continuous shift towards e-commerce. As the industry transforms both the local and global market, consumers now have access to various choices causing them to make informed purchasing decisions. In the Philippines, internet users have increased to 73 million, as stated by last year's global digital overview report. With this, several businesses have focused on adapting various internet platforms to help them engage with their market. Different promotional strategies online are being utilized to influence consumers' buying intentions.

With the prevalence of internet usage among consumers, businesses have become more inclined to integrate the different social media platforms into their marketing strategies. It is considered a valuable context for marketing because of its functionality and access to people (Tuten, 2021). However, this promotional strategy will not work well if individuals are not active participants. Business owners then tend to rely on different tactics to cultivate engagement. They can incorporate user-generated content wherein the audience themselves share or create content as a response to brands. With this, it is a must for them, especially those with limited advertising resources, to have a reliable basis on what approach will be more effective and cost-saving.

While there are studies supporting the success of social media marketing and user-generated content, its context mainly helps those already practicing traditional marketing and its strategies beforehand. The lack of background and knowledge on new practices, primarily focusing on e-commerce in a local setting, can cause more significant risks in the long run in terms of how they use these types of approaches. The pursued end goal of the research then highly focuses on suggesting concrete recommendations and informed insights on what the industry should consider. With the increasing importance of user-generated content, companies must take proactive steps to stimulate its creation (Olenski, 2017). Thus, the paper aims to gather the perspective of Millennial customers in terms of their perceived value of the different social media promotions which motivate their buying intention.

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Social Media

For businesses, especially those born out of the pandemic, it is undoubtedly that its performance is crucial to owners as they depend on its profitability as a livelihood (Vereckey, 2021). Thus, they need to practice marketing to increase their sales, awareness, and engagement for their overall success (Endres & Turner, 2017). While some, initially, are the ones who design their own Integrated Marketing Communication plans, there is now an integration of social media marketing.

1) Integration of Social Media as a Marketing Tool

Generally, individuals use social websites as tools that can help them share their sentiments and relate with their relatives or peers. However, businesses have started to gain a competitive advantage by using these to promote themselves in the past years. Since the 21st century, the internet, continuously driven by various messages via social media, has influenced consumers' behavior (Cavinder, 2017). Studies explain that it is a web-based platform that facilitates communication between people. Despite this, its usage among companies can still be considered a relatively new marketing strategy. It was immensely beneficial as they could share their brand advocacies while effectively gathering and organizing customer information.

Using social media as an advertising strategy can be rewarding as it is easily accessible and less costly than other traditional means. It also allows businesses to communicate with their existing clients and expand their market base. Moreover, it can save time and money while reaching more potential customers (Cornelisse et al., 2011). Although this is the case, it is still imperative for organizations to conduct sufficient research. It is only pertinent considering that they belong to different industry sectors. Thus, the behavior and attitude towards their strategies can vary depending on their target market.

2) Relevance of Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing integrates various internet platforms or networks to accomplish marketing and sales objectives. If implemented effectively, companies can undoubtedly increase their brand awareness. It also becomes a peer influencer regarding purchasing decisions (Husain, 2016). Through this, consumers will be able to share their experiences and insights, thus affecting their product choices. Moreover, it allows them to customize their preferences or the contents that they want to encounter, making it easier to segment the market. However, the usual error companies face is utilizing these platforms without the right strategy. Instead of making it their advantage, it becomes a way to lose profit or customers. They must then keep in mind that although targeted promotions may be more costly, they can still lead to greater returns. (Harrington et al., 2016).

Considering that social media is one of the significant influencers of consumer purchasing decisions, it is becoming more critical for businesses to know the strategies that resonate with what they offer. It is high time for them to integrate subtle yet creative branding (Brettel et al., 2018). If they seek to increase awareness and establish their image, it will be best for them to combine the elements of information and entertainment. On the other hand, if they want engagements to be the top priority, asking for customer feedback and offering sales promotions is a must

as it encourages people to react or share posts. Over time, this approach can motivate people to visit sites and pages more often, thus creating long-lasting relationships.

B.   Social Media with UGC

Simultaneously, between 2020 and 2021, there was reportedly a 22 percent increase in the number of social media users in the Philippines (Kemp, 2021). After that, the significant rise in internet consumers positively affected the registration of ventures utilizing online platforms to sell their products (Nacario, 2020).

1)   Introduction to User-Generated Content on Social Media Platforms

The different social media platforms, especially Facebook, continuously gain more users. The site delivers the highest return on investment and is considered a vital channel (Newberry, 2018). In a consumer's news feed or timeline, they may encounter branding promotions differently. These may be through paid advertisements usually directed to a specific group of people or an online community wherein individuals with similar interests can interact. One may also post content themselves on their page or profiles. It is considered user-generated content, which is already a valuable marketing tool for companies (Merckel, 2017).

2)   Commonly Encountered User-Generated Content

Several businesses have already emphasized the value that user-generated content may provide. They are now re-assessing their goals for social media marketing to include engagement. Generally, consumers who share pictures of themselves using a particular product or service create this. According to Sung, Kim, and Choi (2018), one can classify these as "brand selfies" or user-generated social media posts. It can be an effective means of self-expression. It also helps one relate to their peers or groups and form connections with a company.

User-generated content can also be mainly from social media contests. Individuals are encouraged to take photos or share their thoughts on their platforms through these events. Also, using hashtags in these instances is expected, considering that it helps leverage the brand's engagements. According to Brodmerkel and Carah (2013), a consumer's personal experience can circulate branded information within their circle. Thus, the influence of these product-related narratives online must be studied further.

C.   User-Generated Content

The rise of e-commerce and social media platforms has slowly overthrown the standard advertising methods commonly used. Considering its importance in customer purchasing decisions, Brettel, Flatten & et al. (2018) mentioned the need to integrate creative branding to increase the awareness of their product or service. Thus, numerous firms shift towards their dependency on user-generated content, which is a type of content that originates from the user without profiting from those published to an undetermined audience (Xu & et al., 2015). It further arises from the idea that buyers are more trusting towards the opinion of their peers rather than what is being presented to them by professional salespeople or even brands themselves (Chuchu & et al., 2019).

1)   Classifying Content as User-Generated

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) identifies three consecutive features in user-generated content; first, it should be available to the public or accessible through the internet. Second, there should be a reflection of a creative effort, meaning there should be originality to the content and not a copy of an already existing one. Lastly, one must create it outside the profession, its routines, and the practices of the consumer (Arnhold, 2010; Vincent et al., 2019). Thus, as Demba & et al. (2019) stated, user-generated content is not published for monetary gain but as a form of self-expression and demonstration of seeking relatability and recognition with peers.

2)   The Attitude of Consumers towards User-Generated Content

According to Filleri (2016), trust in user-generated content has a significant effect on one's intention to follow the recommendations of other users. Studies conducted on the subject result in consumers perceiving its content as more unbiased and helpful based on their personal experience. Furthermore, Mir and Rehman (2013) suggest that potential consumers are more trustworthy of the content generated by other users mainly because, with regards to the relationship between the brand and the user, there is no commercial interest. With this, marketers must become effective facilitators that will encourage consumer engagement by understanding their attitude if businesses want to utilize these approaches in their strategies.

3) *Impact of User-Generated Content on a consumer's Buying Intention*

Saranya and Gayathri (2016) studied how two motivations, namely utilitarian and hedonic, simultaneously impact consumers' purchasing intention concerning user-generated content. Its findings then showed that both positively affect one's buying behavior. Utilitarian use, driven by rationality, was more predominant in these types of content. It is contrary to hedonism, wherein emotions are the focus. Nevertheless, consumers highly regard the two as influential. Likewise, Xu & et al. (2015) further expressed that it helps form brand trust, allowing individuals to become more willing when purchasing a product or service.

III. METHOD

The study is quantitative as it intended to identify the level of influence user-generated content has on Millennial consumers. After encountering such content on different social platforms, the researchers sought to measure their willingness to purchase in the food e-commerce industry. Specifically, it has a causal-comparative design. According to Schenker and Rumill (2004), it is a type of research that attempts to analyze the differences between groups on a dependent variable. The participants were also only limited to Millennial consumers, ages 26-41 years old. They are known to be active, tech-savvy, and most likely spending ample time browsing their social media accounts (Frey, 2018). The selection of respondents was through purposive sampling. There were criteria that they must meet to determine if they could be a part of the research. Aside from the required demographic profile, they should have purchased food online via their social media accounts for the past six months. The social media platforms they used to buy food online must be Facebook, Instagram, or both. From a population size of 4, 764, 583 individuals, the ideal sampling size was 385. It included a confidence level of 95% and a 5% margin of error.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 presents the values of each category through a Chi-Square Test to identify the user-generated content commonly encountered. The ones with the highest observed variance are the most visible or present content for Millennial consumers.

Case	Observed vs. Expected Frequencies Chi-Square = 21.87747 df = 6 p = .001275			
	Observed Var 1	Expected Var 2	O-E	(O-E)**2/E
Branded Hashtags	324	296.143	27.8571	2.62043
Memes	246	296.143	-50.1429	8.49018
Product Reviews	344	296.143	47.8571	7.73379
Social Media Contests	271	296.143	-25.1429	2.13466
User-Generated Content Social Media Posts	305	296.143	8.8571	0.2649

Video Posts	283	296.143	-13.1429	0.58328
Story Mentions or Tagging	300	296.143	3.8571	0.05024
Sum	2073	2073	0	21.87747

Table 1. Chi-Square of Goodness Fit (Commonly Encountered User-Generated Content)

Table 1 shows the frequency of the degree to which the respondents have encountered user-generated content or any similar type of marketing content. According to the data, the highest difference with an observed count of 344 is product reviews signifying that they are the most encountered user-generated content for the respondents. Meanwhile, memes have the lowest observed count of 246.

Tables 2 and 3 determine the value of finding reliability in user-generated content regarding effectiveness, attention, and interest that Millennial consumers perceive from those created for e-commerce food businesses on social media platforms. The higher the score, the less (table 2) and the most (table 3) effective type of user-generated content for the respondents.

Case	Observed vs. Expected Frequencies Chi-Square = 191.2280 df = 6 p = 0.000000					
	Observed Var 1	Expected Var 2	O-E	(O-E)**2/E	t(377)	p-value
Branded Hashtags	243	157.286	85.7143	46.7108	-1.77123	0.07733
Memes	242	157.286	84.7143	45.6272	1.95285	0.051577
Product Reviews	61	157.286	-96.2857	58.9433	0.76387	0.445424
Social Media Contests	141	157.286	-16.2857	1.6863	-0.7694	0.44214
User-Generated Content Social Media Posts	89	157.286	-68.2857	29.6463	2.38867	0.017401
Video Posts	137	157.286	-20.2857	2.6163	27.0295	0
Story Mentions or Tagging	188	157.286	30.7143	5.9978	0.27844	0.780826
Sum	1101	1101	0	191.228	-0.17196	0.863559

Table 2. Least Effective Type of User-Generated Content for Consumers

According to table 2, there is a significant difference between the observed and expected count of branded hashtags garnering 243. The respondents find this type of user-generated content the least effective, followed by memes with 242.

Case	Observed vs. Expected Frequencies Chi-Square = 225.5589 df = 6 p = 0.000000					
	Observed Var 1	Expected Var 2	O-E	(O-E)**2/E	t(377)	p-value

Branded Hashtags	110	161.286	-51.2857	16.3079	-1.77123	0.07733
Memes	119	161.286	-42.2857	11.0864	-0.7694	0.44214
Product Reviews	292	161.286	130.7143	105.9376	0.76387	0.445424
Social Media Contests	69	161.286	-92.2857	52.8048	1.95285	0.051577
User-Generated Content Social Media Posts	211	161.286	49.7143	15.3238	2.38867	0.017401
Video Posts	208	161.286	46.71437	13.5302	27.0295	0
Story Mentions or Tagging	120	161.286	-41.2857	10.5683	0.27844	0.780826
Sum	1129	1129	0	225.5589	-0.17196	0.863559

Table 3. Most Effective Type of User-Generated Content for Consumers

Table 3 shows the highest significant difference with an observed count of 292 for product reviews revealing that this type of user-generated content is the most effective for Millennials. User-generated social media content and video posts with 211 and 208, follow respectively. A study conducted by Chua and Banerjee (2015) further supports the result. It states that personal opinions and experiences for products and services as online reviews have become one of the most valuable sources of information assisting users when making purchasing decisions.

Moreover, Tables 4 and 5 show a Multiple Linear Regression table that presents both levels of attention and interest that each type of user-generated content garners on social media.

N=385	Regression Summary for Dependent Variable R = .18265431 R² =.03336260 R² = .01541442 F(7,377) = 1.8588 p < .07517 Std Error of Estimate = .74211					
	b*	Std Err of b*	b	Std Err of b	t(377)	p-value
Intercept			3.938197	0.142123	27.70988	0
Branded Hashtags	-0.081012	0.057524	-0.137118	0.097363	-1.40831	0.159864
Memes	0.061136	0.059673	0.095074	0.092798	1.02453	0.306243
Product Reviews	0.054717	0.055949	0.13249	0.135475	0.97797	0.328718
Social Media Contests	0.097502	0.057676	0.159519	0.094362	1.69051	0.091758
User-Generated Content Social Media Posts	0.082816	0.059347	0.15246	0.109255	1.39544	0.163703
Video Posts	0.003814	0.055751	0.006868	0.100397	0.06841	0.945496
Story Mentions or Tagging	-0.018343	0.054768	-0.037521	0.112029	-0.33493	0.737866

Table 4. Level of Attention garnered by the different types of User-Generated Content

Table 4 focuses on the survey question "Has a User-Generated Content made me check on a brand or company?" The results show that social media contests have made the respondents check on a brand or company. It has the closest p-value of 0.092 to p<0.075 and b=0.159519, which means it gained the most significant attention. The figure also presents a negative b of -0.037521 and -0.137118, implying that for respondents, story mentions or tagging and branded hashtags, respectively, do not garner any level of attention. However, because the P-value is less than 0.07517, there is insufficient strong evidence to determine its full negative implication.

N=385	Regression Summary for Dependent Variable R = .19218776 R² =.03693613 R² = .01905431 F(7,377) = 2.0656 p < .04638 Std Error of Estimate = .76632					
	b*	Std Err of b*	b	Std Err of b	t(377)	p-value
Intercept			3.833578	0.14676	26.12139	0
Branded Hashtags	-0.043652	0.054667	-0.092374	0.115684	-0.7985	0.425081
Memes	0.057244	0.055648	0.106647	0.103673	1.02868	0.304289
Product Reviews	0.077648	0.055846	0.194513	0.139896	1.39041	0.165225
Social Media Contests	0.070261	0.059562	0.113039	0.095826	1.17963	0.238891
User-Generated Content Social Media Posts	0.055127	0.057418	0.096529	0.10054	0.9601	0.337619
Video Posts	0.045795	0.05757	0.077512	0.097441	0.79548	0.426837
Story Mentions or Tagging	0.011989	0.059237	0.022834	0.112821	0.20239	0.839723

Table 5. Level of Interest garnered by the different types of User-Generated Content

The results were obtained with the question "Has a User-Generated Content made me more interested in a brand or company?". According to table 5, with a P-value of less than 0.046, product reviews garnered the highest level of interest with b 0.194513 and a P-value of 0.165225, followed by social media contests with b 0.113039 and memes with b 0.106647. The result also showed that branded hashtags received a negative value of b -0.092374 with a P-value of 0.425081, connoting that they may have negatively affected one's level of interest. However, its value does not hold enough substantial evidence to explain and prove its connotation; thus, further studies are still strongly recommended.

To assess how the different types of user-generated content affect the buying intention of Millennial consumers, tables 6 to 8 show the values of each category through Multiple Linear Regression. Positive results signify that the specific content mentioned leads to purchasing a product or service.

N=385	Regression Summary for Dependent Variable R = .15948369 R² =.02543505 R² = .00733968 F(7,377) = 1.4056p < .20155 Std Error of Estimate = .81377					
	b*	Std Err of b*	b	Std Err of b	t(377)	p-value

	b*	Std Err of b*	b	Std Err of b	t	p-value
Intercept			3.907292	0.155846	25.07153	0
Branded Hashtags	-0.03642	0.055979	-0.071625	0.110092	-0.65059	0.515705
Memes	-0.02694	0.05959	-0.054163	0.119805	-0.45209	0.651462
Product Reviews	0.125154	0.059917	0.212553	0.101758	2.0888	0.037396
Social Media Contests	-0.038058	0.054993	-0.085018	0.122846	-0.69206	0.489323
User-Generated Content Social Media Posts	0.041721	0.056178	0.110326	0.148557	0.74265	0.458154
Video Posts	0.046376	0.057912	0.082861	0.103474	0.80079	0.423755
Story Mentions or Tagging	0.041196	0.05776	0.076147	0.106765	0.71323	0.476147

Table 6. Relevance of the Different Types of User-Generated Content as a Factor for Purchasing

With the question "Has a User-Generated Content been a relevant factor for me to purchase a product?" table 6 shows that product reviews have been a relevant factor for the respondents to purchase from a brand or company with a b 0.10175 and a P-value of 0.037396. Furthermore, with b 0.110326 and a P-value of 0.458154, social media posts were also voted as a relevant factor for the respondents when purchasing a product.

N=385	Regression Summary for Dependent Variable R = .16415801 R² =.02694785 R² = .00888057 F(7,377) = 1.4915 p < .16873 Std Error of Estimate = .76880					
	b*	Std Err of b*	b	Std Err of b	t(377)	p-value
Intercept			3.854048	0.147234	26.17637	0
Branded Hashtags	-0.040341	0.05495	-0.085203	0.116058	-0.73415	0.463316
Memes	0.002206	0.059544	0.004194	0.113185	0.03705	0.970464
Product Reviews	0.124474	0.056135	0.311211	0.140348	2.21742	0.02719
Social Media Contests	0.009358	0.057715	0.016354	0.100865	0.16214	0.871284
User-Generated Content Social Media Posts	0.024915	0.05987	0.040007	0.096135	0.41615	0.67753
Video Posts	0.060666	0.057867	0.102484	0.097756	1.04837	0.295141
Story Mentions or Tagging	0.016527	0.055936	0.03073	0.104008	0.29546	0.767809

Table 7. Level of Helpfulness of the different types of User-Generated Content in the Decision-Making Process of Millennial consumers when Purchasing

According to table 7, product reviews are the most helpful for the decision-making process of the respondents when purchasing with a b of 0.311211 and a P-value of 0.02719, followed by video posts with a b of

0.102484. Moreover, a negative value was received by branded hashtags with a b -0.085203, indicating that this type of user-generated content does not help the respondents whenever they decide to purchase a product.

N=385	Regression Summary for Dependent Variable R = .19846820 R² =.03938963 R² = 0.2155336 F(7,377) = 2.2084 p < .03292 Std Error of Estimate = .76109					
	b*	Std Err of b*	b	Std Err of b	t(377)	p-value
Intercept			3.939756	0.145758	27.0295	0
Branded Hashtags	-0.096705	0.054597	-0.203504	0.114894	-1.77123	0.07733
Memes	-0.045519	0.059162	-0.086211	0.11205	-0.7694	0.44214
Product Reviews	0.108919	0.055775	0.27133	0.138941	1.95285	0.051577
Social Media Contests	-0.009557	0.055577	-0.017706	0.102965	-0.17196	0.863559
User-Generated Content Social Media Posts	0.13734	0.057496	0.231165	0.096776	2.38867	0.017401
Video Posts	0.04544	0.059486	0.072698	0.095171	0.763874	0.445424
Story Mentions or Tagging	0.015967	0.057345	0.027803	0.099854	0.278446	0.780826

Table 8. Types of User-Generated Content that Leads to Purchase

According to table 8, product reviews led the majority of the respondents to purchase from a brand or company with b 0.27133 and a P-value of 0.05157, followed by user-generated content social media posts with b 0.231165. However, the results connote a generalized view that user-generated content is one factor that leads to purchasing but does not have a strong indication that it may solely lead to purchase.

VI. CONCLUSION

Due to the prevalence of digital platforms, individuals can now make purchasing decisions related to what they often see online. Businesses then are taking advantage by integrating practices that can highly encourage others to interact with them via social media. It led to the continuous rise of consumers who freely create or share their posts involving the use of particular products and services. One can consider this approach user-generated content, which tends to be more productive in connecting people as they engage or express themselves (Hutaori et al., 2015). After analyzing the data gathered, the researchers can conclude that Millennials commonly encounter product reviews followed by branded hashtags and social media posts. User-generated content of these types may often be present in one's news feed or timeline due to more engagement and creators.

Findings also suggest that the different types of user-generated content, such as product reviews, social media contests, story mentions, tagging, and posts, including videos, all positively affect one's buying intention. Despite this, the data still indicate that they are not the primary factor influencing Millennials. One can consider them as aspects that add value to a brand. It can be further proven by Yasin (2021), as he states that this approach could attract more consumers in terms of engaging them online and helping them seek a product. Branded hashtags also had a recurring theme of negative results, implying that the more individuals encounter them, the lesser possibility of them purchasing a good.

The study conducted by researchers also assessed the effectiveness of the different types of user-generated content. The results showed that social media contests and memes could create engagement. Still, they are not that significant when it comes to affecting the buying intention of Millennials. For the former, businesses often do them to generate higher engagement. On the other hand, the latter is now widely utilized as a marketing tool. They can reach a large audience on the internet, and it even helps one convey emotions. However, it may lack an influential factor. It may be because poorly chosen pictures, expressions, or context can negatively affect a company (Kovalyova, 2020).

The most effective user-generated content for Millennials is product reviews. As stated by Fan et al. (2019), it assists consumers in understanding product information as it serves as an essential reference whenever they are making purchasing decisions. The data states that social media posts are well-received since individuals tend to interact with their peers' pictures, videos, or other content. Moreover, the researchers must consider that many respondents deem video posts relevant. Further studies then are still recommended, especially since it seems that the perspective of others varies.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

With social media being one of the significant factors influencing a consumer's purchasing decision, it is becoming more critical for businesses to identify what online promotional tools are most effective. The data indicate that user-generated content provides additional value to a brand. It also helps build virtual communities for businesses, which can enhance their image (Holliman & Rowley, 2014). It is then a must for them to continuously think of ways to generate more engagement by utilizing these strategies. Shifting their marketing efforts towards how they could further encourage individuals to share their posts is likewise needed.

Although the given types of user-generated content in the study are not the significant factors affecting Millennials' buying intention, they are still needed, primarily if one seeks to improve one's perception of their brand. Specifically, product reviews are considered the most effective. Businesses can then increase the application for their online reviews and even motivate customers to upload photos of their purchased products differently (Fan et al., 2019). Social media posts are also important for consumers; thus, there is a need for marketing campaigns that can increase this kind of content. If more individuals notice that many of their peers share insights or material regarding a particular good, they may be more interested in checking them.

In addition, branded hashtags can increase a brand's page visits and awareness (Kim, 2017). However, the results were contradicting, considering that Millennials had varied responses. Future studies can focus more on this subject, especially since there is still not enough related information in this case. Also, the topic of user-generated content, and its different types, must still be further analyzed. The researchers then recommend having more respondents and adapting other sampling techniques for the consumers' insights to have better representation.

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