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The Effects of UGC in Instagram Stories on Brand Perception and Purchase Intention

Analysis of UGC in small and large businesses

Julie Costa

Dissertation presented as partial requirement for obtaining the Master's degree in Information Management

NOVA Information Management School
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**THE EFFECTS OF UGC IN INSTAGRAM STORIES ON BRAND
PERCEPTION AND PURCHASE INTENTION**

by

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Dissertation presented as requirement for obtaining the Master's degree in Information Management, with a specialization in Marketing Intelligence

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ABSTRACT

The last decade has brought about a significant shift in content creation, as the Internet has enabled ordinary people to create and share their own content directly on social media platforms such as Instagram. User-generated content or UGC has become commonplace in the online world. While social media was developed to bring people together, businesses have taken advantage of the potential to leverage a social media presence to promote their brands. Businesses not only post their own content on their accounts, but some businesses also repost UGC about their brands, with Instagram stories being a popular feature used to repost UGC. This study analyzes the effects Instagram story UGC reposted by business accounts has on viewers' perception of a brand, specifically the quality and authenticity perception, and their purchase intention. We also examine the difference in the influence of Instagram story UGC between small and large businesses. Information was collected through an online questionnaire using a 2 (without UGC vs. with UGC) x 2 (small vs. large business) between-subjects factorial design, and a total of 262 respondents were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions. Results show that there is no statistically significant impact on quality perception and purchase intention. However, viewers' authenticity perception of smaller businesses was increased when the small business had reposted Instagram story UGC related to their brand. Overall, this study contributes to the literature on UGC and shows businesses how to leverage Instagram story UGC.

KEYWORDS

User-generated content; Instagram stories; Social media; Small businesses; Brand perception

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

SM social media

UGC user-generated content

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND

The digital world revolves around social media (SM). SM users utilize these platforms to share their daily lives and interact with other users. However, in recent years, SM has transcended its original purpose and while it is still used as a tool to bring people together, it has also become a valuable instrument for businesses to market and even sell their products and services. A large number of businesses have created accounts on various social media sites to promote their brands and communicate with SM users. Instagram, which was launched in October 2010, is one of the most popular SM sites for both individuals and companies. In 2021, Instagram had over 200 million business accounts (Get Your Business Started on Instagram, n.d.) and around 90% of all the Instagram users followed one or more business accounts in 2020 (Instagram Business Team, 2020).

Both personal and business accounts may use Instagram to upload photographs and videos, as well as like, save and comment on others' feed posts and send messages to other users. In 2016, Instagram released a new feature called Instagram stories. Instagram stories, unlike Instagram feed posts, expire after 24 hours, and each photo or video submitted to an Instagram story lasts no more than 15 seconds, making it a type of content that does not consume much of the user's time. Every day, 500 million Instagram users create and share Instagram stories (Dean, 2021). These stories can contain one's original content, but a lot of accounts also repost other users' feed posts and stories in their own Instagram stories.

Businesses use Instagram stories to share content related to their products, as well as to connect with their followers and engage with them by including polls or questions in their posts. Reposting user-generated content, or UGC, in their Instagram stories is another option for them to interact with their followers. They will utilize content made about their business to show their followers what type of experience customers had while interacting with their company and/or purchasing their items. UGC is oftentimes described as a cheap and efficient way of promoting a business (Timoshenko &

Hauser, 2019) because it is readily available and shows changes in consumer preferences (Mu & Zhang, 2021). And, given that UGC is created by customers rather than companies, it allows businesses to convey a different, unique viewpoint on their products. Instagram story UGC in particular is considered to be more organic than other types of UGC as it is less polished than, for example, feed posts and thus feels more authentic (Decker, 2017). It also has the advantage of being ephemeral, as people tend to focus more on information if it is unavailable later (Campbell et al., 2021). Overall, Instagram story UGC provides businesses with an unprecedented way of promoting their products.

1.2. RESEARCH GAP AND STUDY OBJECTIVES

Despite the numbers showing that the Instagram story feature plays an essential part in today's social media environment and promoting businesses, there is currently a lack of studies about Instagram stories. The main reason for this would be the recency of the launch of this feature, which only dates back to 2016. Therefore, this study's key focus will be on Instagram stories, and, more specifically, the impact of Instagram story UGC reposted in a business account's Instagram stories. The present study will not only analyze how this type of UGC influences users' perception of a brand, but also their intention to buy the products that are provided by the brand, as there is also a lack of studies about the impact of image content on viewers' purchase intentions (Li & Xie, 2019). This will offer insight on the possible economic effects of UGC on businesses and might show if Instagram story UGC can potentially help increase sales.

In addition, there is a lack of research on naturally occurring UGC, i.e., UGC that was not sponsored (Sommerfield et al., 2018). Creators of this type of UGC did not receive any compensation for their content but posted it because they like the company's products and want to spread the word about them. In this study, the main focus will be on UGC created by regular users, as opposed to users who were compensated for their posts, which would be the case with influencers.

Lastly, this study will also investigate the disparities in the impact of UGC in Instagram stories for small and large businesses. He et al. (2014) found that, since small businesses are more closely tied to the local community, with a suitable social media strategy, they could promote their business just as effectively as large businesses. The company size can also influence how people perceive a brand (Yang & Aggarwal, 2018). As a result, the purpose of this research is to look for any possible differences in impact of UGC usage in Instagram stories that may be connected to the size of the business, which to our knowledge has not been done in any prior study.

Based on the previously discussed information, the research questions for the present study would be as follows:

RQ1: Does Instagram story UGC reposted in a business' Instagram stories have an impact on the viewer's perception of the brand and on the viewer's intention to buy products offered by the brand?

RQ2: Is there a difference in impact between small and large businesses?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

2.1. UGC AND VIEWERS' BRAND PERCEPTION

With more and more information about businesses and their products available online, consumers will often search the Internet before deciding what products they want to purchase. Consumer reviews, in particular, are said to influence people's opinions on brands and the products they offer (Benlian et al., 2012; Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Flanagin et al., 2014; Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2014; Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2015). The reason for this is that consumers trust other consumers' reviews, often more than information received by a company (Benlian et al., 2012). Therefore, UGC on SM that includes a review of a brand, and its products can influence others' judgements of the brand and the products. Even further, if a consumer has positive initial beliefs about a brand or a product, the perceived helpfulness of the UGC reviewing the brand or product is increased (Yin et al., 2016). However, although consumer reviews are generally regarded as unbiased and honest, a review that is labeled as "sponsored" might not be perceived as an impartial customer review and does not have the same impact as UGC without an explicit marketing intention (Yi et al., 2019).

One of the key aspects that UGC related to a brand has an impact on is viewers' brand perception (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2014; Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2015). Brand perception refers to what buyers feel a product or service symbolizes, rather than what the brand claims it does (Brand Perception: Everything You Need to Know, n.d.). It has been proven that UGC positively affects brand perception, even more so than content created by the business itself because consumers consider information provided by other consumers as more credible and trustworthy (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2014).

Quality is one of the aspects of brand perception that UGC referring to a brand has the greatest impact on. Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006) found that online reviews have become an essential source for information regarding product quality. Given that online consumption involves some risks, consumers need to access information related to the product to decrease any kind of uncertainty

(Flanagin et al., 2014). Flanagin et al. explained that online consumers cannot inspect the products they want to purchase before the transaction, which causes a significant level of uncertainty regarding the purchase's result. Therefore, product reviews and UGC reviewing a product have become a barometer of the quality of the product and a higher perceived quality can lead to an increase in purchase intention. UGC also has a positive influence on perceived quality as consumers are seen as more reliable and trustworthy (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2015).

Another aspect of brand perception that UGC about a business greatly influences is the perceived authenticity of the brand (Somerfield et al., 2018). Bruhn et al. (2012) found that people seek authenticity in their everyday lives and in the brands they buy from, and the products that they own help ease the feeling of uncertainty created by major global events such as political instability or the climate crisis. Thus, brand authenticity is considered an influential business characteristic (Eigenraam et al., 2021). Brands that are regarded as authentic tend to stay true to themselves and their customers (Portal et al., 2018). Furthermore, Portal et al. noted that these brands are committed to their own values, deliver on their promises and while doing so, develop meaningful connections with their customer base.

Nowadays, more and more consumers are looking for authenticity from brands they buy from, which is why brands should be clear about who they are and where they came from (Eggers et al., 2013). Consumers' demand for authentic brands is gradually rising and the perceived authenticity of a brand helps foster emotional bonds with the consumer while also enhancing consumer loyalty (Fritz et al., 2017). De Vries et al. (2018) proved that the best social media engagers do not necessarily make use of professional, high-quality photos but instead focus on an authentic experience and engagement with the brand's followers. Thus, noncommercial considerations such as brand authenticity should be positioned as more important than economic considerations (Siemens et al., 2020). In addition, instead of posting overly professional images, businesses should use UGC as it can help increase the perceived authenticity of a brand (Somerfield et al., 2018). Somerfield et al. further explained that

UGC looks at the brand from the customer's perspective, therefore it feels more authentic and genuine and offers a compelling, unique perspective on the brand.

H1: Instagram story UGC that gets reposted in a business account's Instagram story has a positive impact on the viewer's perception, specifically the perceived quality and authenticity of the brand and the products the brand offers.

2.2. UGC AND VIEWERS' PURCHASE INTENTION

UGC related to a brand can also greatly influence viewers' purchase intention (Chen et al., 2019; Meier et al., 2020; Naeem & Ozuem, 2020). A purchase intention is an individual's "conscious plan" to make an effort and purchase from a brand (Spears & Singh, 2004). Customer reviews have been proven to affect other consumers' purchasing behavior on Internet retail sites (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Tsao et al., 2015), with positive reviews having a significant impact on the viewer's purchase intention (Tsao et al., 2015). Tsao et al. also noted that the more positive reviews a product received, the more the purchase intention increased.

Naeem & Ozuem (2020) stated that in the case of UGC, information is shared on SM to help others in their decision-making and to exchange information. Naeem and Ozuem further explained that viewers are influenced by others' proof of purchase, therefore UGC created by customers who have previously bought a product and uploaded UGC related to that product on SM can help increase purchase intention. Moreover, UGC has been found to have positive inspirational effects, meaning that it can inspire a viewer to take the same action as the user who posted the UGC (Meier et al., 2020). Meier et al. noted that UGC can not only make viewers envy the creator if the creator for example shows a product in the UGC that the viewer wants to have, but UGC can also inspire the viewer to buy the same product as the creator. Furthermore, if viewers frequently see content about the same brand, it can spark interest and lead to users reposting content about that business, which

in turn will also increase purchase intention and actual purchase behavior (Chen et al., 2019). This is because the more viewers are subjected to content about the brand, the higher the perceived popularity of the business, which in turn increases purchase intention, too.

H2: Instagram story UGC that gets reposted in a business account's Instagram story has a positive impact on the viewer's purchase intention of the products provided by the brand.

2.3. SMALL VS. LARGE BUSINESSES

On Instagram, both small and large businesses can be found among the 200 million business accounts (Get Your Business Started on Instagram, n.d.). Given that consumers expect big companies to have a social media presence, it is almost mandatory for them to create accounts on the major SM platforms (Sehl, 2021). However, for small businesses that do not get the same attention as large businesses, social media is considered a cost-effective way to promote their products and conduct market research, which helps them compete with larger businesses (Lepkowska-White & Parsons, 2019). SM can not only help drive traffic to the business' store but also engage with the business' follower base (de Vries et al., 2018). De Vries et al. also found that while small businesses don't have the same budget as larger businesses, they can still leverage SM to boost engagement and in-store traffic. One of the reasons why small businesses choose to have a SM presence on Instagram in particular is because Instagram is one of the SM sites that have been proven to provide high consumer engagement for small businesses, which increases their chances of effectively promoting their products (Devereux et al., 2019).

A lot of small and large companies repost UGC in their Instagram feed and their Instagram stories. When a user tags a business in a post, the business account manager can decide to share the content created by the user with the followers of the business account. Businesses might repost UGC whenever they deem fit or create specific events where they encourage their followers to create

UGC for the purpose of reposting it on the business account. Throughout the years, large corporations have held several infamous UGC events like Starbucks' "White Cup Contest," where users were asked to post the artworks they drew on Starbucks cups, or GoPro's ongoing photo of the day campaign, where they choose one photo that was shot on a GoPro camera and then shared on Instagram to be featured on the GoPro Instagram account each day (Todorovska, 2021). While small businesses oftentimes do not have the same substantial following those large businesses have, they might also make use of UGC events to encourage the creation of UGC related to their brand.

When it comes to brand perception, small businesses and their products are oftentimes seen as more authentic and trustworthy (Fuchs et al., 2015). Fuchs et al. stated that the reason for this is that a large number of small businesses offer handmade products, and this type of products is often considered "made with love" and "made with passion," meaning that the business put a lot of care into the production process. They refer to this phenomenon as the "handmade effect," where products that are labeled as handmade are often regarded as containing its creator's "essence," i.e., the creator's love and passion. This effect is more difficult to achieve for larger businesses compared to small businesses as large corporations are known for their mass productions, whereas the unique stories behind small companies and their handmade products create a more personal and special experience for their customers (Cheng, 2018). Furthermore, small, local business products are perceived to be made by "real" people, hence consumers believe them to have higher quality (Schnell, 2013). Schnell explained that the fact that small businesses are linked to tradition, places and history also impacts the business perception.

Another common perception people have is that small business' products are made in humane working conditions, while large corporations oftentimes do not offer the same working conditions as small businesses (Schnell, 2013). Therefore, large businesses are mistrusted (Kervyn et al., 2012; Schnell, 2013) and considered as putting the profit of their shareholders before anything else (Schnell, 2013). This also decreases consumers' authenticity perception of larger companies as

trustfulness, and more specifically reliability, is one of the key components of brand authenticity (Bruhn et al., 2012). In addition, more and more consumers are skeptic towards large businesses and believe that these businesses are not acting in the public's best interest (Kervyn et al., 2012), which also creates a difference between viewers' perception of small businesses and large businesses. Overall, small businesses are seen as more authentic than large businesses (Schnell, 2013) and the brand authenticity that people associate with smaller businesses can help fuel the growth of these businesses (Eggers et al., 2013).

H3: Instagram story UGC that gets reposted in a larger business account's Instagram story significantly improves the viewer's perception of the brand's authenticity.

H4: Instagram story UGC that gets reposted in a smaller business account's Instagram story moderately improves the viewer's perception of the brand's authenticity.

H5: Instagram story UGC that gets reposted in a business account's Instagram story will increase the handmade effect, i.e., the perception of being "made with love" and "made with passion" for both small and large businesses.

2.4. INSTAGRAM UGC IN THE FOOD INDUSTRY

Instagram hosts a variety of business accounts, coming from all different industries. 9 out of 10 hospitality businesses, for example, have an account on the SM platform (SevenRooms, n.d.). The food industry, which is one of the most important members of the hospitality industry, has been increasingly successful on Instagram (Klassen et al., 2018; Olivera, 2017). The main reason for this is that food is among the most popular topics on social media (Schwarz, 2020). And given that the food industry relies heavily on visual content, Instagram's focus on photos and videos has been very helpful in promoting food products effectively (Tomczak, 2021) and a large number of people even

specifically use Instagram to, for example, help them decide which restaurants they should visit (Bracher, 2018).

Wachyuni & Yusuf (2021) found that users not only post photos of their food on Instagram to capture moments spent with friends and family but also to document what they ate. Posting food content can also be considered a hobby or relaxation activity. Moreover, they found that another motivation for users to upload food pictures on their Instagram account is to promote the businesses that they dined at. And the content they post can become a valuable review for another user (Bracher, 2018). While Instagram users can be influenced by content posted by regular users, content uploaded on a food business' account can also have an impact. Klassen et al. (2018) analyzed food industry businesses' accounts on Facebook and Instagram and found that users who followed an account of a food business had some interest in purchasing the products promoted by the account. However, people also followed food accounts to receive information about discounts and promotions. Overall, Instagram can be a profitable marketing platform for food businesses.

Given the importance of the food industry's Instagram presence, the given study will focus on analyzing the impact of Instagram story UGC reposted in food businesses' Instagram stories, as well as examine the difference in impact between small food businesses and large food businesses.

2.5. THEORETICAL MODEL

Based on the previously discussed information, we propose the following theoretical model for this article:

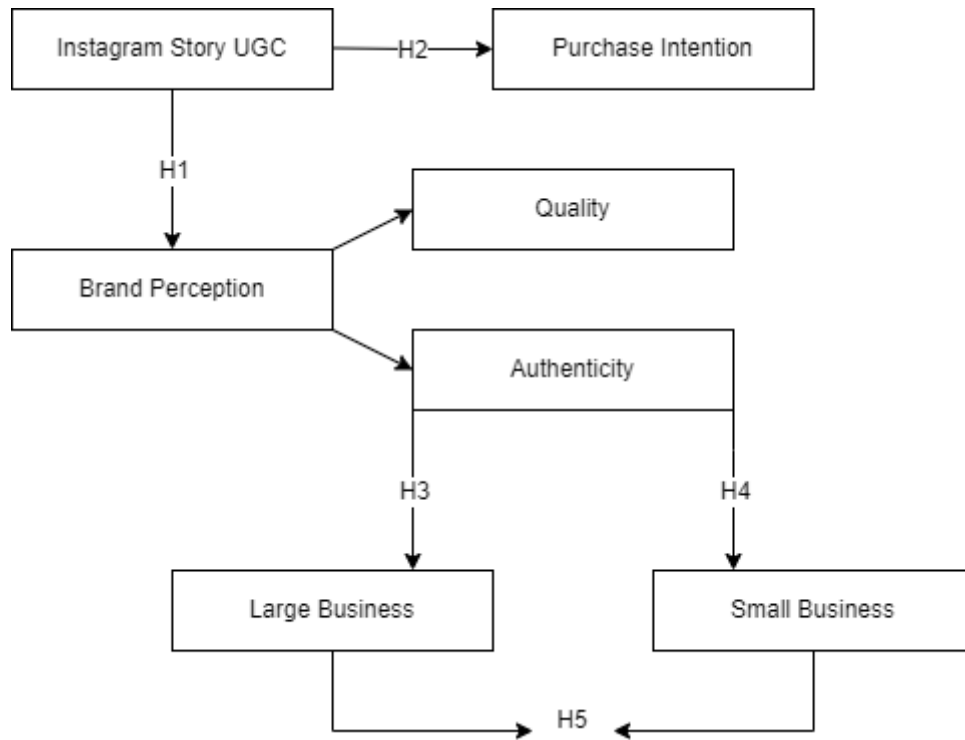


Figure 1: Theoretical model

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the present study, we used an online questionnaire to collect information. In the questionnaire, we utilized an experimental design, more specifically a 2 (without UGC vs. with UGC) x 2 (small vs. large business) between-subjects factorial design. Participants were randomly placed into one of four groups to measure the effect of the independent variables on brand perception and purchase intention, which were the dependent variables. Independent variables were without UGC and with UGC, and the two levels of each of the independent variables were small business and large business.

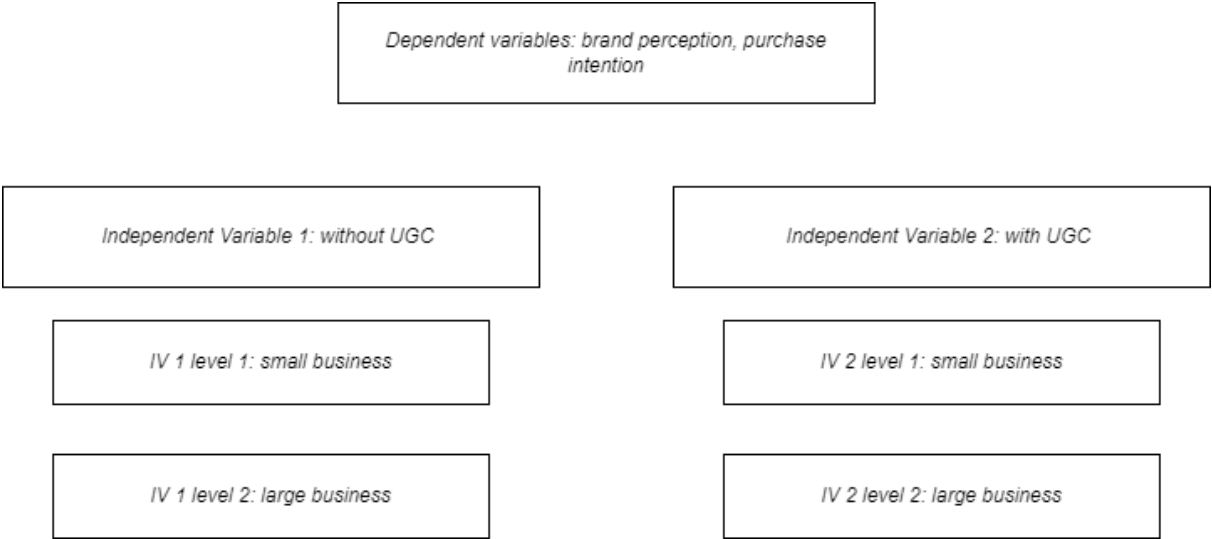


Figure 2: 2x2 between-subjects factorial design

Four conditions were created, one for every independent variable, and every level of the given independent variable. In each of the questionnaires, participants would first read a description of a made-up food business called “Swenties.” In the questionnaires focusing on level 1, Swenties would be a small, independent brunch restaurant while for questionnaires regarding level 2, Swenties would be a brunch restaurant chain. Before participants could move on to the next step, they had to correctly answer a question asking them whether Swenties was 1) “a hotel,” 2) “a small, independent brunch restaurant,” 3) “a bookstore” or 4) “a brunch restaurant chain.” Respondents could only get to the next page of the survey if they had chosen the right answer. This was used to ensure participants had read the description carefully. Then, they would be subjected to five made-up Instagram stories that they were told were either posted by that business (without UGC) or posted by regular users and then reposted by the business (with UGC). The made-up Instagram stories of the food businesses were created using copyright free pictures from Pexels, which is a stock photo provider that offers millions of photos depicting all kinds of items (*About Us*, n.d.). The Instagram stories without UGC were generated using more professional-looking photos and were made to appear as if they had been created and posted by Swenties themselves. For the UGC stories, the stories were first “posted” by regular Instagram accounts who tagged “@swenties” in the photos to let other users know where they had bought the food items on the picture. The photos in these stories looked like they had been taken by customers and not by the business itself as these photos had a marginally lower quality, the users had put typical Instagram photo filters on them or the angles did not always show the entire food item, which is a less common occurrence in professional photos. These aspects added to the UGC feel of the photos posted by regular users and made it obvious that the pictures had not been taken by professional photographers. In the questionnaire, the Instagram stories with UGC showed Swenties “reposting” the regular stories in their own Instagram stories.

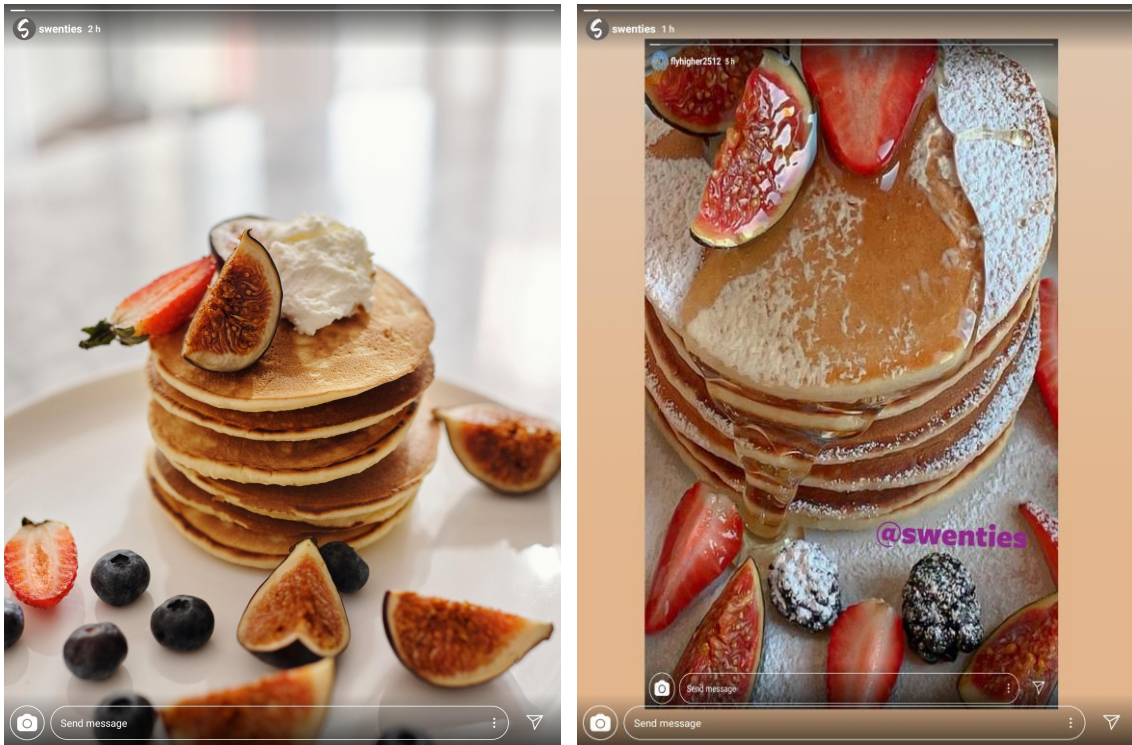


Figure 3: Instagram story examples (without UGC vs. with UGC)

After looking at the made-up Instagram stories, all the participants would reply to the same questions related to what they had just seen. The questions measured the participants' perception of the quality of the food, as well as the quality of the production, the service quality and Instagram story content quality. They also measured participants' perceived authenticity of Swenties and the participants' purchase intention. Lastly, respondents were asked to reply to questions related to their Instagram usage habits and their demographics.

4. KEY FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. OVERVIEW

The survey had 262 respondents, which were recruited on Amazon Mechanical Turk (also commonly known as MTurk). The participant pool was made up of 60.7% men, 38.9% women and 0.4% stating that they do not prefer to say their gender. The average age was 38.18 with a standard deviation of 10.3. 82.4% of all participants were from the United States, 11.8% from India and the remaining 5.8% were from Brazil, Italy, Singapore, Portugal, the United Kingdom, and Ireland.

The survey initially had 272 completed answers, but 9 of the participants had to be excluded from the survey as they had failed to answer the attention check correctly. The attention check, which asked respondents to “please select number five” on a 7-point Likert scale, was embedded among the questions and was used to ensure participants were paying attention to the questions and not providing random answers. One additional response was removed from the study because it included hateful speech.

Out of the four conditions of the study, 24.4% of respondents were put in the small business without UGC condition, 26% were part of the large business without UGC condition, 22.5% were added to the small business with UGC condition and 27.1% of participants were in the large business with UGC condition.

4.2. SCALES

In order to measure the dependent variables, brand perception and purchase intention, several items were put together to create suitable multi-item scales.

In this article, the two components of brand perception that were assessed were quality perception and authenticity perception. For quality perception, four items formed one scale. These items were partially based on the perceived quality indicator multi-item scale created by Dodds et al. (1991). In

the case of this article, participants were asked to rate food quality, production quality, service quality and Instagram story quality on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1, “very poor quality,” to 7, “very good quality.”

Two different scales were used to assess brand authenticity perception. The first scale was based on the brand authenticity scale created by Bruhn et al. (2012). Three of the four key components of brand authenticity were embedded in the scale (the fourth component, continuity, could not be measured as “Swenties” was a fictitious brand that none of the participants had encountered in real life). According to Bruhn et al., the remaining components of brand authenticity are reliability, naturalness, and originality. These components were added into a single scale and were used as one of the scales to measure brand authenticity. The other scale that was utilized to assess brand authenticity was a simple, direct statement asking the respondents whether they thought that Swenties seemed authentic (“Overall, Swenties seems authentic to me.”). The participants were asked to give their answer on a 7-point Likert scale, which ranged from 1, “strongly disagree,” to 7 “strongly agree.” The reason for using two different scales was to capture an adequate response, because brand authenticity has often been described by researchers as a complex concept that is not only formed by the brand itself but is a co-creation of brands and consumers (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010; Pace, 2015). Therefore, we used a brand authenticity scale that was created and is prominently used by researchers, as well as a direct statement that focuses more on what the respondent considers to be authentic.

A multi-item scale based on the purchase intention scale conceptualized by Spears and Singh (2004) was used to measure the second dependent variable, purchase intention. It included six items that all asked participants whether or not they would be interested in buying from Swenties.

Lastly, an additional scale was created to measure the impact of UGC on the “handmade effect” (Fuchs et al., 2015) for small and large businesses. This scale used two items related to the participants’ perception of the products being “made with love” and “made with passion.”

4.3. SURVEY RESULTS

The data in this study was analyzed using SPSS. First, we performed a one-way ANOVA to test hypothesis **H1** and **H2**, which primarily focused on the effects of UGC in general. Quality perception, authenticity perception and purchase intention were set as dependent variables and UGC was used as independent variable.

For quality perception, the ANOVA did not provide a statistically significant effect ($F(1,260) = 1.946, p = .164, \eta^2 = .007$).

For the first authenticity perception scale, we could not find a notable impact ($F(1,260) = 0.24, p = .877, \eta^2 = .000$). In the case of the second authenticity scale, there was also no significant effect ($F(1,260) = 1.032, p = .311, \eta^2 = .004$).

Lastly, purchase intention did not have a statistically valuable impact, either ($F(1,260) = 0.23, p = .879, \eta^2 = .000$).

We also conducted a moderation analysis using PROCESS macro for SPSS (Hayes, n.d.), with model 1. In the analysis, UGC was set as independent variable, quality perception as dependent variable and different Instagram usage habits as the moderator.

Table 1: Moderation analysis with quality perception as dependent variable

Quality perception	coeff	se	t	P	LLCI	ULCI
Frequency of using Instagram	.0619	.2281	.2712	.7864	-.3873	.5110
Frequency of looking at Instagram stories	.1922	.2004	.9591	.3384	-.2024	.5867

Frequency of posting Instagram stories	.1253	.2019	.6203	.5356	-.2724	.5229
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We also used the first, and then the second authenticity scale as dependent variable.

Table 2: Moderation analysis with authenticity perception (1) as dependent variable

Authenticity perception (1)	coeff	se	t	P	LLCI	ULCI
Frequency of using Instagram	.0779	.2887	.2698	.7875	-.4906	.6464
Frequency of looking at Instagram stories	.2065	.2548	.8103	.4185	-.2953	.7083
Frequency of posting Instagram stories	.1884	.2519	.7481	.4551	-.3076	.6845

Table 3: Moderation analysis with authenticity perception (2) as dependent variable

Authenticity perception (2)	coeff	se	t	P	LLCI	ULCI
Frequency of using Instagram	-.1813	.3189	-.5684	.5703	-.8092	.4467
Frequency of looking at Instagram stories	.3331	.2807	1.1867	.2365	-.2197	.8860
Frequency of posting						

Instagram stories	.4973	.2800	1.7759	.0769	-.0541	1.0488
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Lastly, we set purchase intention as dependent variable.

Table 4: Moderation analysis with purchase intention as dependent variable

Purchase intention	coeff	se	t	P	LLCI	ULCI
Frequency of using Instagram	.3457	.2524	1.3697	.1720	-.1513	.8427
Frequency of looking at Instagram stories	.1613	.2219	.7270	.4679	-.2756	.5983
Frequency of posting Instagram stories	.0644	.1987	.3244	.7459	-.3268	.4557

As shown in the tables above, no statistically significant interaction between UGC, Instagram usage habits and the dependent variables, quality perception, authenticity perception, and purchase intention, could be detected.

A two-way ANOVA was also performed to test hypothesis **H3** and **H4** and assess the impact of the two independent variables, without UGC vs. with UGC, and small vs. large businesses, on the dependent variable, authenticity perception. While **H3** and **H4** mainly focused on authenticity perception, we also analyzed the effects on quality perception and purchase intention to see if there was a notable influence of the independent variables on any of these two dependent variables.

In the case of authenticity perception, there was no statistically significant effect for the first scale, which was based on Bruhn et al.'s (2012) brand authenticity scale ($F(1,258) = 3.054, p = .082, \eta^2 =$

.012). There was also no considerable impact on the three individual components of brand authenticity, which are originality ($F(1,258) = 1.663, p = .198, \eta^2 = .006$), reliability ($F(1,258) = 2.186, p = .141, \eta^2 = .008$), and naturalness ($F(1,258) = 2.978, p = .086, \eta^2 = .011$).

On the other hand, the second scale, which was the direct statement, showed a significant impact of the independent variables on brand authenticity perception ($F(1,258) = 4.517, p = .035, \eta^2 = .017$). The participants who were subjected to the small business description responded more favorably to being asked whether they think Swenties seemed authentic to them when they were in the with UGC group ($M = 6.07, SD = .998$), compared to those who were in the without UGC group ($M = 5.61, SD = 1.305$). However, the respondents who read the large business description and were in the with UGC group had a slightly lower authenticity perception ($M = 5.69, SD = 1.064$) than those who were in the without UGC group ($M = 5.82, SD = 1.105$).

The ANOVA did not provide any notable effect for quality perception ($F(1,258) = 1.345, p = .247, \eta^2 = .005$) and for purchase intention ($F(1,258) = 0.003, p = .955, \eta^2 = .000$).

We also conducted another moderation analysis with the help of PROCESS macro for SPSS (Hayes, n.d.), using model 1. For the first analysis, business type was set as the independent variable, quality perception as the dependent variable, while UGC was used as moderator. No significant interaction was found in this case ($b = .2338, se = .2016, t = 1.1596, p = .2473$). There was also no considerable interaction when the first authenticity scale was set as dependent variable ($b = .4402, se = .2519, t = 1.7477, p = .0817$), but we found a statistically significant interaction when the second authenticity scale was the dependent variable ($b = .5918, se = .2785, t = 2.1252, p = .0345$). Lastly, when purchase intention was set as dependent variable, there was no substantial interaction ($b = -.0124, se = .2179, t = -.0571, p = .9545$).

In a second moderation analysis, where we used model 3, we set business type as independent variable and quality perception as dependent variable, with UGC being the first moderator and the different types of Instagram usage habits the second moderator.

Table 5: Moderation analysis with quality perception as dependent variable

Quality perception	coeff	se	t	P	LLCI	ULCI
	-.4084	.4581	-.8915	.3735	-1.3106	.4938
Frequency of using Instagram	.2024	.4042	.5007	.6170	-.5937	.9985
Frequency of looking at Instagram stories	.0943	.4071	.2316	.8171	-.7074	.8959
Frequency of posting Instagram stories						

Then, we used the first brand authenticity scale as dependent variable.

Table 6: Moderation analysis with authenticity perception (1) as dependent variable

Authenticity perception (1)	coeff	se	t	P	LLCI	ULCI
Frequency of using Instagram	-.0062	.5796	-.0107	.9915	-1.1477	1.1353
Frequency of looking at Instagram stories	.6539	.5116	1.2782	.2023	-.3536	1.6614
Frequency of posting Instagram stories	.6194	.5049	1.2268	.2210	-.3749	1.6136

We also set the second authenticity scale as dependent variable.

Table 7: Moderation analysis with authenticity perception (2) as dependent variable

Authenticity perception (2)	coeff	se	t	P	LLCI	ULCI
Frequency of using Instagram	-.1225	.6382	-.1919	.8480	-1.3793	1.1343
Frequency of looking at Instagram stories	.0658	.5634	.1168	.9071	-1.0437	1.1752
Frequency of posting Instagram stories	.2129	.5615	.3792	.7049	-.8929	1.3187

Lastly, we used purchase intention as dependent variable.

Table 8: Moderation analysis with purchase intention as dependent variable

Purchase intention	coeff	se	t	P	LLCI	ULCI
Frequency of using Instagram	.7118	.5046	1.4107	.1596	-.2819	1.7054
Frequency of looking at Instagram stories	1.3301	.4406	3.0191	.0028	.4625	2.1977
Frequency of posting Instagram stories	.7575	.3978	1.9045	.0580	-.0258	1.5409

In this second moderation analysis, the only significant interaction that was found was the impact of the frequency of looking at Instagram stories on purchase intention ($b = 1.3301$, $se = .4406$, $t = 3.0191$, $p = .0028$). We performed a three-way ANOVA to get an in-depth analysis of this interaction. In the ANOVA, business type, UGC and how frequently respondents looked at their Instagram stories were used as independent variables, and purchase intention was set as dependent variable. Just as in the moderation analysis, the ANOVA exhibited a statistically significant effect on purchase intention ($F(1,254) = 9.115$, $p = .003$, $\eta^2 = .035$). For the small business group, the results of the respondents who look at their stories every day ($M_{withUGC} = 4.14$, $M_{withoutUGC} = 4.52$; $SD_{withUGC} = .988$, $SD_{withoutUGC} = 1.091$) were different compared to those who do not look at their stories every day ($M_{withUGC} = 4.27$, $M_{withoutUGC} = 4.10$; $SD_{withUGC} = .981$, $SD_{withoutUGC} = .783$). For the large business group, the results were even more prominent because those who look at their Instagram stories daily ($M_{withUGC} = 4.24$, $M_{withoutUGC} = 3.81$; $SD_{withUGC} = .912$, $SD_{withoutUGC} = .517$) displayed vastly different results compared to those who do not look at their Instagram stories daily ($M_{withUGC} = 3.97$, $M_{withoutUGC} = 4.31$; $SD_{withUGC} = .735$, $SD_{withoutUGC} = .905$).

In the moderation analysis, we discovered another effect that was only marginally higher than the recommended p value of ≤ 0.05 . The frequency of posting Instagram stories can have an influence on purchase intention ($b = .7575$, $se = .3978$, $t = 1.9045$, $p = .0580$), although this was not statistically significant enough to be factored into the key results.

For **H5**, we first conducted a two-way ANOVA with UGC and business type as the independent variables and the handmade effect as the dependent variable. In this case, we discovered a statistically significant effect ($F(1,258) = 5.684$, $p = .018$, $\eta^2 = .022$). UGC slightly improved the results for small businesses ($M_{withUGC} = 5.86$, $M_{withoutUGC} = 5.80$; $SD_{withUGC} = 1.137$, $SD_{withoutUGC} = 1.041$), while for large businesses, results decreased when they reposted UGC ($M_{withUGC} = 5.21$, $M_{withoutUGC} = 5.84$; $SD_{withUGC} = 1.372$, $SD_{withoutUGC} = 1.049$).

We also ran a moderation analysis, using model 1. The business type was set as independent variable, the handmade effect as dependent variable and UGC acted as a moderator. In the analysis, we found a considerable interaction between the three variables ($b = .6867$, $se = .2880$, $t = 2.3842$, $p = .0178$).

In another moderation analysis, we made use of model 3, and just as in the previous analyses set several Instagram usage habits as the second moderator.

Table 9: Moderation analysis with handmade effect as dependent variable

Handmade Effect	coeff	se	t	P	LLCI	ULCI
Frequency of using Instagram	-.4427	.6540	-.6769	.4991	-1.7307	.8453
Frequency of looking at Instagram stories	.4592	.5770	.7960	.4268	-.6770	1.5955
Frequency of posting Instagram stories	.0617	.5685	.1085	.9137	-1.0580	1.1813

In this moderation analysis, there was no significant interaction between the variables.

4.4. RESULTS DISCUSSION

The following hypotheses were tested in this study:

H1: *Instagram story UGC that gets reposted in a business account’s Instagram story has a positive impact on the viewer’s perception, specifically the perceived quality and authenticity of the brand and the products the brand offers.*

H2: *Instagram story UGC that gets reposted in a business account's Instagram story has a positive impact on the viewer's purchase intention of the products provided by the brand.*

For **H1** and **H2**, we could not find any statistically significant effect, thus we failed to reject the null hypothesis.

H3: *Instagram story UGC that gets reposted in a larger business account's Instagram story significantly improves the viewer's perception of the brand's authenticity.*

H3 was also not supported, and we even discovered that for larger businesses, authenticity perception was marginally increased when professional photos were used. Out of all the participants who were part of the large business group, those who were subjected to the professional photos had a slightly higher authenticity perception ($M = 5.82$, $SD = 1.105$) than those who saw the UGC Instagram stories ($M = 5.69$, $SD = 1.064$).

H4: *Instagram story UGC that gets reposted in a smaller business account's Instagram story moderately improves the viewer's perception of the brand's authenticity.*

On the other hand, **H4** was supported as authenticity perception was moderately improved through the use of UGC in the business' Instagram stories ($M_{\text{withUGC}} = 6.07$, $M_{\text{withoutUGC}} = 5.61$; $SD_{\text{withUGC}} = .998$, $SD_{\text{withoutUGC}} = 1.305$).

H5: *Instagram story UGC that gets reposted in a business account's Instagram story will increase the handmade effect, i.e., the perception of being "made with love" and "made with passion" for both small and large businesses.*

H5 was only partially supported as Instagram story UGC slightly increased the handmade effect for small businesses ($M_{\text{withUGC}} = 5.86$, $M_{\text{withoutUGC}} = 5.80$; $SD_{\text{withUGC}} = 1.137$, $SD_{\text{withoutUGC}} = 1.041$), but the results were vastly different for larger businesses, as UGC even decreased participants' perception of

the products being “made with love” and “made with passion” ($M_{\text{withUGC}} = 5.21$, $M_{\text{withoutUGC}} = 5.84$; $SD_{\text{withUGC}} = 1.372$, $SD_{\text{withoutUGC}} = 1.049$).

While we were not able to reject the null hypothesis for four out of the five hypotheses, we discovered that one of the reasons why UGC did not have the initially expected impact on brand perception and purchase intention was included in one of the questions in the survey. At the end of the questionnaire, participants were asked what type of content they believed food businesses should post on Instagram. 23.3% responded that food establishments should mostly post professionally shot photos, while 12.6% replied that the main emphasis should be on reposting content created by other users about that business and 0.4% stated that they do not care about the type of content. However, the vast majority, with 63.7%, said that they think food businesses should focus on posting a mix of both professionally shot pictures and UGC. Thus, the fact that most participants did not choose one side over the other could explain why we could not find a major difference in the effects between professional photos and UGC in this study.

In addition, the moderation analysis and the three-way ANOVA showed that Instagram usage habits could also influence the impact business type and UGC have on the viewers’ purchase intention. In this study, we found that the participants who looked at their Instagram stories every day displayed a difference in purchase intention compared to the respondents who did not look at their stories daily.

Lastly, we discovered that, just as the literature had predicted, smaller businesses have better results for the handmade effect compared to larger businesses. A one-way ANOVA using business type as independent variable and the handmade effect as the dependent variable displayed higher results for small businesses ($M = 5.83$, $SD = 1.084$) than large businesses ($M = 5.52$, $SD = 1.260$).

5. CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

5.1. CONCLUSION

This study explored how effective Instagram story UGC reposted by a food business' Instagram account can be in terms of increasing brand perception and purchase intention. Our findings suggest that some consumers prefer seeing UGC on a brand's Instagram account, whereas others are more inclined towards professionally shot photos. Nevertheless, the majority of consumers wants to get both perspectives on the brand and the items the brand offers. Thus, while Instagram story UGC by itself does not increase brand perception and purchase intention, a content strategy that mixes both UGC and professional pictures could lead to higher customer satisfaction, which in turn could potentially improve brand perception and even purchase intention.

The differences in the impact of Instagram stories posted by small food businesses and large food businesses were also analyzed. We discovered that there was barely any difference between viewers' quality perception and purchase intention of small and large food businesses. This study has therefore proven that although small businesses might not have the same financial and other resources as large businesses, they are still capable of leveraging social media in the same way as larger companies (de Vries et al., 2018). This research also added to previous literature that found that small businesses are considered to be more authentic than large businesses (Fuchs et al., 2015; Schnell, 2013) and has shown that reposting UGC in Instagram stories can help increase viewers' authenticity perception of small food businesses even further.

5.2. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study encountered several limitations, with most of the limitations being related to the data collection. The data was acquired through MTurk, and the majority of workers on MTurk are from the United States, with India coming in second place (*Mechanical Turk Surveys*, n.d.). This was also the case in our study, as 82.4% of the respondents were from the US and 11.8% from India. The lack

of regional diversity of the participant pool might have created bias in the responses that could have been avoided by including more participants from other countries.

In addition, the study did not efficiently target one of Instagram's main users, Generation Z. According to Statista (2021), about 31% of all Instagram users are between the age of 18 to 24, but in this study, only 5.3% were part of the age group of 20-24 and none of the respondents were under 20 years old. Therefore, future studies should focus on analyzing the effects of Instagram story UGC on younger generations.

In this research, only quantitative methods were used to collect data, but a qualitative approach could potentially aid in getting in-depth insight into not only the impact of Instagram story UGC on brand perception and purchase intention, but also how Instagram usage habits can influence these statistics. As we have seen in this article, consumption habits such as how frequently a user looks at their Instagram stories can affect their purchase intention in certain conditions. Thus, a qualitative study that puts emphasis on observing how participants use Instagram and how they interact with Instagram story UGC would be beneficial in acquiring more exhaustive information regarding the key factors that help increase the impact of Instagram story UGC.

We also believe that future research should keep focusing on the Instagram story feature, given that despite its importance in social media marketing, it is still an under-researched topic that requires further analysis.

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7. ANNEX

The following are the Instagram stories that were created for the purpose of this study:



 swenties 6 h



Send message







swenties 2 h



Send message



 swenties 2 h



Send message



Send message



 swenties 1 h



Send message



Send message



 swenties 6 h



Send message



Send message



swenties 5 h



Send message



Send message



swenties 1 h



flyhigher2512 5 h

@swenties



Send message



Send message



