



THE INFLUENCE OF USER-GENERATED CONTENT ON BRAND PERCEPTION IN
GHANA

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence of User-Generated Content (UGC) on brand perception among Ghanaian consumers, emphasizing the growing role of digital engagement in shaping brand awareness, trust, and loyalty. The proliferation of social media has significantly transformed how brands interact with consumers, with UGC emerging as a powerful tool that influences consumer decision-making processes. Unlike traditional advertising, which often lacks perceived authenticity, UGC—comprising consumer-generated reviews, testimonials, images, and videos—presents an organic and relatable perspective on brands. This study seeks to assess the extent to which UGC impacts brand perception, analyse the most influential types of UGC, and evaluate its role in brand exposure, awareness, and trust within the Ghanaian market.

A quantitative research approach was employed, utilizing structured online surveys to collect data from respondents who actively engage with UGC. The study measured key brand perception variables, including brand awareness, perceived quality, trustworthiness, emotional connection, and brand loyalty. Data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including correlation and regression analyses, to establish relationships between UGC exposure, engagement, trust, and brand perception.

The findings indicate that UGC significantly influences brand perception, with respondents trusting UGC more or equally compared to traditional brand advertisements. Additionally, respondents reported purchasing a product or service based on UGC, highlighting its effectiveness in shaping consumer buying decisions. Among the various forms of UGC, product reviews and testimonials were found to be the most impactful, suggesting that consumers rely heavily on written peer-generated content when forming perceptions about brands. Furthermore, the study revealed that UGC positively correlates with brand awareness reinforcing its role as a credible source of brand information.

Despite the benefits of UGC, concerns about its authenticity were identified. Respondents believed that brands sometimes compensate content creators, which could diminish the perceived credibility of UGC. This finding underscores the need for brands to foster transparency and ensure that user-generated content remains authentic and unbiased.

Regression analysis further revealed that UGC trust had a significant negative relationship with perceived quality, suggesting that while consumers may trust UGC, concerns over exaggerated or misleading content may impact their overall perception of brand quality. UGC exposure and engagement were positively related to brand perception but were not statistically significant predictors, indicating that while UGC plays a role, additional factors such as brand reputation and consumer sentiment also contribute to brand perception.

This study contributes valuable insights into the role of UGC in digital marketing strategies, particularly in emerging markets like Ghana. The findings suggest that brands should leverage UGC strategically by encouraging authentic consumer engagement, responding transparently to user feedback, and managing content credibility effectively. Future research should explore the long-term impact of UGC on brand loyalty and its influence across different industries. As digital landscapes continue to evolve, businesses that harness the power of UGC effectively stand to gain a competitive advantage in building consumer trust and brand equity.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the incredible individuals whose unwavering support made this journey possible.

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CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Introduction

Social media and content creation critically affect how brands are perceived in today's digital world. The influence of various forms of content on brand perception is a phenomenon that needs to be studied to understand today's consumer perception of brands. User-generated content is one of the novel ways consumers now interact with brands; hence, its effect needs to be studied in consumer markets. This chapter discusses how User-Generated Content (UGC) has gained significant traction due to its authenticity and perceived reliability. This study examines the influence of UGC on brand perception in Ghana, where the rise of social media and consumer scepticism toward traditional advertising, including influencer marketing, has created a unique landscape for UGC. It also frames the research objective hypotheses and further describes how the various chapters in the study are organised.

1.2 Background of Study

The advent of the digital era has profoundly altered the dynamics of marketing, communication, and consumer habits worldwide. Social media has become an important avenue for consumer engagement and brand messaging. Notably, user-generated content (UGC) is increasingly influential in moulding perceptions of brands and influencing consumer decisions (Lariba, 2024). UGC, as defined for this study, includes any content like reviews, images, videos, blogs, and social media posts created spontaneously by consumers without compensation, as opposed to content produced by companies (Sommerfield, 2023). This material, produced by users rather than the brands, is now fundamental to the contemporary digital marketing landscape.

The swift expansion of internet access and mobile technology in Ghana has transformed digital marketing techniques (Bruce et al., 2023). The integration of internet technology and the surge of

mobile devices have accelerated the extensive utilisation of social media platforms like Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp, with new platforms developing globally practically daily. These platforms have become integral to the daily lives of many Ghanaians, particularly among younger demographics who increasingly rely on digital media for information, entertainment, and social interaction (Odoom et al., 2024). With the growing presence of social media, UGC has emerged as a pivotal element in brand-building, influencing how consumers perceive, engage with, and remain loyal to said brands. As more Ghanaians engage with these online platforms, UGC has become increasingly important in shaping brand perception (Lariba, 2024).

The impact of user-generated content on brand perception is especially significant in developing markets such as Ghana, where conventional media outlets coexist with burgeoning digital platforms (Da-Costa et al., 2021). These traditional media often carry more traditional forms of advertising curated by the brands. In such contexts, UGC can significantly impact consumer behaviour by providing peer-generated insights that may be more credible than corporate messaging (Sommerfield, 2023). This shift in consumer trust from traditional advertising to peer-generated content underscores the need for brands to understand and leverage UGC effectively.

Despite the increasing significance of UGC in brand impression, there is a lack of studies investigating its effects, especially in the Ghanaian and other African markets. Although research by Garcia et al. (2015), Muda & Hamzah (2021), and other academic works have thoroughly examined the role of UGC in Western contexts, characterised by distinct digital infrastructures and consumer behaviour patterns, there remains a necessity to investigate how these dynamics manifest in African markets, where cultural, economic, and social factors may pose unique challenges and opportunities. This study aims to address this gap by examining the impact of

user-generated content on brand perception among consumers in Ghana, offering insights essential for marketers and brand managers in the swiftly changing digital landscape. This research seeks to elucidate the impact of user-generated content on multiple facets of brand perception, including brand awareness, perceived quality, and trustworthiness, within the Ghanaian context, thereby offering significant insights for marketers and brand managers in Ghana and comparable developing nations facing analogous cultural dynamics and challenges. Understanding these aspects is essential for formulating effective digital marketing strategies that appeal to Ghanaian customers and augment brand equity in a progressively digital landscape. The study also aims to contribute to the broader academic discourse on digital marketing in developing markets by filling a critical gap in the literature. Focusing on Ghana, the research provides a context-specific analysis that considers the unique cultural, economic, and technological factors influencing UGC and its impact on brand perception.

1.3 Problem Statement

This study investigates whether Ghanaian consumers trust UGC and how it influences their perception of brands, focusing on dimensions like awareness, quality, trustworthiness, emotional connection, and loyalty. The rise of UGC has introduced both opportunities and challenges for brands in Ghana, just as much as it provides opportunities and challenges for other brands in the Western world. On one hand, UGC offers a great avenue for brands to engage with consumers more authentically and relatable, potentially enhancing overall brand loyalty and equity. On the other hand, the uncontrolled nature of UGC means that brands are often at the mercy of consumer opinions, which can spread rapidly across social media platforms and significantly influence public perception, sometimes to the detriment of brands (Samuel-Okon, 2024). There is, therefore, a need to investigate the extent of UGC's influence on consumer perception

Essentially, brands increasingly face challenges in gaining consumer trust through traditional or influencer-driven advertising. In Ghana, a similar trend is observed, where consumers are shifting their trust to UGC, perceiving it as more authentic and relatable. Despite its potential, the extent to which UGC affects brand perception in Ghana remains underexplored, leaving a critical gap in academic research and marketing practice.

Given the increasing reliance on social media for brand communication (Mukoma & Oyugi, 2016), it is imperative to understand how UGC influences brand perception in Ghana. Marketers and brand managers need to be equipped with the knowledge and tools to effectively harness UGC to their advantage while mitigating potential risks associated with UGC. Without a clear understanding of how UGC affects brand perception in the Ghanaian context, businesses may struggle to develop effective digital strategies that resonate with Ghanaian consumers, even in crisis management. There may also be a challenge in leveraging UGC to enhance brand equity in the Ghanaian market. Therefore, this study seeks to understand the shift from traditional advertising and influencer marketing to UGC while addressing critical questions concerning how UGC influences brand perception among consumers in Ghana.

1.4 Research Objectives and Hypotheses

- 1) To assess the impact of UGC on brand perception in Ghana.
- 2) To analyse the types of UGC that most influence brand perception.
- 3) To measure the extent to which UGC influences brand exposure, awareness, and trust in Ghana.

Hypothesis statements

- 1) UGC significantly influences brand awareness among Ghanaian consumers.

- 2) UGC positively affects perceived brand quality.
- 3) UGC enhances trust in brands compared to traditional advertising.

1.5 Research Questions

- 1) How does UGC affect brand perception among consumers in Ghana?
- 2) Which types of UGC content have the most significant impact on brand perception in Ghana?
- 3) To what extent does UGC influence brand exposure, awareness, and trust in Ghana?

1.6 Significance of the Study

UGC and its practical application are poised to bring about considerable transformations in the digital marketing domain. Marketers need to understand the full scope of this impact. The importance of this research lies in its potential contributions to academic study and practical implementations in marketing, consumer behaviour, crisis strategy formulation, and brand management, especially within the context of Ghana and similar developing markets. The outcomes of this study are anticipated to have wide-ranging effects on businesses, marketers, brand managers, and the wider academic community.

1.7 Scope of the Study

This study concentrates on how UGC affects brand perception among Ghanaian consumers. It investigates various aspects of brand perception, awareness, quality, and trustworthiness. It targets a diverse group of Ghanaian consumers who interact with or see UGC on social media. The study does not cover digital content from brands or traditional media such as advertising or newly emerging Employer-Generated Content (EGC).

The geographical focus is solely on Ghana, a developing nation in West Africa experiencing rapid digital growth (Ejemeyovwi & Osabuohien, 2020). While the insights could be relevant to other African developing markets, the study's findings are specific to Ghana and should be cautiously generalised to other African countries.

The research also explores how UGC influences key aspects of brand perception. This includes how well consumers recognise and remember a brand through UGC, their opinions on its product or service quality influenced by UGC, and how trustworthy a brand appears based on UGC. The study does not examine UGC's potential effects, like its impact on buying decisions, customer satisfaction, or brand advocacy unless these relate indirectly to brand perception.

The analytical part of the study examines the connections between UGC and brand perception metrics, aiming to uncover significant trends and associations. It employs methods like multiple regression analysis to look at the strength and direction of these relationships and uses a Likert scale for measuring consumer attitudes and opinions about brands influenced by UGC. The conclusions offer practical advice for marketers and brand managers in Ghana but should not be seen as definitive for other settings without additional validation.

1.8 Limitations of the Study

The purpose of the study is to thoroughly examine the impact of UGC on brand perception in Ghana, but it does face certain limitations, outlined below. Firstly, the study uses self-reported data, which might be influenced by biases like the desire to give socially desirable answers or difficulty remembering details accurately (Quinio et al., 2021). The accuracy of the data depends on the respondents' ability to remember and report their experiences truthfully, meaning the results could be skewed by their personal biases. Secondly, the study's cross-sectional design only takes a snapshot of consumer perceptions at one moment. This approach does not capture

how UGC's influence on brand perception might change. The research does not employ methods to track and analyse the ongoing effects of UGC, which limits its ability to understand how UGC impacts consumer attitudes continuously. Moreover, the focus on Ghanaian consumers means the findings may not easily apply to other markets in Africa. Nevertheless, the insights provided by this research could serve as a valuable starting point for further studies that look into the effects of UGC across different cultural settings. It also offers insights that might be more relevant to similar cultural contexts than those derived from studies conducted in more Western environments.

1.9 Organisation of the Study

This dissertation is organised into five main chapters. The first chapter sets the stage for the study by introducing the background, defining the problem, stating the research objectives and questions, and outlining the research's significance, scope, and limitations. It also lays out the hypotheses that guide the study, serving as a roadmap for the structure and progression of the research. The second chapter offers detailed review of existing literature on UGC, brand perception, and the theories that support this study. It highlights the gaps in previous research that this study aims to fill and builds on existing knowledge by comparing it to studies from other countries, thus setting a foundation for this research.

Chapter Three describes the theoretical framework, and research methods employed in the study. It explains the research design, methods of data collection, sampling techniques, and the statistical tools used for analysing the data, emphasising their relevance to the research. Chapter Four focuses on analysing the data and presenting and discussing the findings. This chapter examines how exposure to UGC affects brand perception metrics and offers an in-depth interpretation of the results. Chapter Five wraps up the dissertation with a summary of the

findings, concluding and making recommendations for marketers and brand managers. It also identifies potential areas for future studies, considering the limitations and outcomes of the current study.

1.9.1 Conclusion

Chapter One offers an extensive introduction to the research, emphasising the vital role of UGC in influencing brand perception. It sets the scene by exploring how the digital age has altered consumer behaviour and the distinct significance of UGC. It also points out a notable gap in existing research, especially the scarce attention given to the impact of UGC in the African context, which this study addresses. The problem statement highlights UGC's twin challenges and opportunities for brands, particularly in environments where trust in traditional advertising is waning. The research objectives and questions explore how UGC affects brand perception, focusing on essential aspects including brand awareness, emotional connection, perceived quality, and trustworthiness.

The chapter also clearly emphasised the practical and academic significance of the study, highlighting its potential to inform marketing strategies, enhance brand equity, and contribute significantly to the broader discourse on digital marketing in developing markets. In addition, the defined scope and limitations provided a clear framework for the study, ensuring that its focus remains firmly on Ghanaian consumers and their engagement with UGC on social media. In conclusion, Chapter One lays the foundation for the subsequent chapters by establishing the study's relevance and context. It sets the stage for a detailed exploration of existing literature, theoretical frameworks, and research methodology, guiding the researcher in studying UGC and brand perception in Ghana.

2 CHAPTER TWO

2.1 Introduction

This chapter offers a detailed overview of previous research on user-generated content (UGC), how it influences brand perception, and the underlying theories that support this study. It explores how UGC affects the opinions and actions of consumers, specifically looking at the market in Ghana, which contributes to the wider body of knowledge about Africa. Additionally, the section identifies areas that have not been fully explored, which this research aims to cover.

2.2 Understanding User-Generated Content (UGC)

User-generated content (UGC) refers to the different kinds of content produced and disseminated by customers online regarding products, services, and companies, which are unsolicited and uncompensated (Somerfield, 2023). This generally includes content involving text, images, videos, reviews, blogs, and social media posts highlighting an experience with a brand's service or product as experienced by the content creator (Bowden & Mirzaei, 2021). UGC has gained prominence in the digital age due to its perceived authenticity and credibility compared to traditional advertising, which is mostly paid for or strategically placed by brands or companies (Shah et al., 2023). UGC has become a significant force in digital marketing, providing a mix of authenticity, credibility, and consumer involvement that traditional advertising frequently finds challenging to match (Blangger, 2023). In the African context, UGC has the potential to become increasingly more relevant as more consumers gain access to the internet and mobile technology (Mbulumi, 2024). Research suggests that UGC is particularly influential in shaping consumer behaviour where trust in traditional advertising is often low (Li et al., 2021). However, the influence it shows in the Ghanaian and, to some extent, African markets, especially in terms of affiliate marketing strategies, remains largely unknown.

2.3 Characteristics of UGC

Consumers share UGC to communicate their experiences, opinions, and interactions with brands, products, or services (Santos, 2022). Unlike traditional marketing content controlled and disseminated by the brand, users create UGC organically and are often perceived as more authentic and trustworthy because of its presumed unfiltered originality (Blangger, 2023).

Mohammad et al. (2020) explored UGC's effect on brand engagement, finding a strong link between content quality and brand trust and highlighting its impact on emotional and functional value perception. Several characteristics distinguish UGC from other forms of digital content.

Some of these characteristics are discussed below:

Authenticity and Credibility

UGC is generally viewed as more genuine because it is produced by consumers instead of brands or marketing experts (Naeem & Ozuem, 2021). Muda and Hamzah (2021) looked into how trustworthy UGC is compared to traditional advertisements, finding that UGC leads to greater buying intentions, particularly when the source is deemed credible. This genuineness enhances UGC's trustworthiness, as people are more likely to believe their peers' views and experiences rather than the content created by brands. It is still unclear, however, how much these opinions truly affect brand perceptions in Ghana.

Diversity of Content

UGC covers many forms of content, such as reviews, ratings, photos, videos, blog entries, and updates on social media. This variety lets consumers share their experiences and views in multiple ways, unintentionally appealing to different audience tastes and ways of consuming

media (Ferraro et al., 2023). This diversity also means that UGC appears in various formats within consumer media, seamlessly blending into their daily lives and thoughts.

Interactive and Social Nature

UGC is inherently social and often shared on platforms encouraging interaction, such as social media, online forums, and review sites. This translates to access to diverse communities and interest groups in today's digital world. Shah et al. (2023) analysed peer reviews in digital platforms and revealed their influence on consumer trust and loyalty, which can inform how brands manage UGC in Ghana. This interactive nature allows UGC to spread quickly and influence a wide audience, amplifying its impact on brand perception (Gabelaia & McElroy, 2023).

Consumer Empowerment

UGC empowers consumers by giving them a voice in the brand conversation. Consumers can share their opinions with other users, providing a platform for interacting with others about the brand and even holding brands accountable through their content (Santos et al., 2022). With UGC, consumers feel like they have a voice, and they can use that voice to seek redresses, draw brand attention to issues, or reward good brands by recommending them and their products to other like-minded people. Hudson et al. (2016) conducted a cross-country study on consumer-brand relationships through social media, demonstrating UGC's role in building trust across cultures, further solidifying the belief that UGC empowers consumers.

2.4 The Role of UGC in Brand Perception

Brand perception is about how consumers see and understand a brand, including factors like brand awareness, perceived quality, trustworthiness, emotional connection, and loyalty (Iglesias

et al., 2019). Forms of communication like advertising, affiliate marketing, and UGC can greatly influence these aspects of brand perception. They enable consumers or the brand to share experiences and opinions with a broad audience, thus influencing how the brand is viewed (Tobias, 2020). Studies in various markets show that UGC is usually considered more trustworthy and relatable than brand content (Lariba, 2023). This is especially the case in environments where consumers might doubt corporate communications. UGC plays a crucial role in creating brand communities on online platforms, enhancing engagement and loyalty through a common pursuit of authenticity (Lariba, 2023).

The existing research from regions like the US, Canada, Europe, and Africa provides a basis for this study, which looks into how UGC affects brands. In the United States, studies emphasise the crucial role of brand perception in promoting customer loyalty as well as influencing purchase decisions. (Chen & Wang, 2016; Garcia et al., 2015). Further research in these markets shows that social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram have allowed businesses to use UGC to boost community engagement and strengthen trust with their audiences (Ashley & Tuten, 2015).

In Canada, research indicates that brands effectively use UGC to enhance their core attributes, demonstrating the importance of incorporating consumer stories into their marketing strategies to increase authenticity and maintain long-lasting customer relationships (Lariba, 2023). According to Okonkwo et al., adapting marketing strategies to accommodate diverse cultural and regional perceptions of brands is crucial. Consequently, in Europe, some brands use UGC to resonate with European values such as environmental sustainability and authenticity. In contrast, others in the fashion industry use it to highlight exclusivity and luxury (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). This approach shows how a well-chosen UGC that reflects cultural and regional brand perceptions

can create emotional connections with consumers, enhancing their identification and relationship with the brand (Muntinga et al., 2011). UGC has proven essential in these Western markets for fostering brand differentiation and deepening consumer and brand bonds. By aligning user-generated content with fundamental brand values, companies boost their credibility and build significant emotional connections with their audience, which is crucial for lasting success in a competitive global market.

2.5 The Role of UGC in Shaping Brand Perception

The role of UGC in shaping brand perception in the Western world is well-documented in the literature, with numerous studies highlighting its impact on various dimensions of brand equity. Brand perception encompasses how consumers view and interpret a brand, including brand awareness, perceived quality, trustworthiness, emotional connection, and loyalty (Kim et al., 2018). In these Western markets, UGC is critical in influencing these factors by providing consumer-generated content that other potential customers may likely perceive as honest and reliable (Ali, 2022; Muda & Hamza, 2021). Research in those markets shows that UGC can significantly enhance brand awareness by increasing a brand's visibility on digital platforms (Agarwal, 2020). For example, when consumers post photos of a product on Instagram or share their experiences with a brand on Twitter, they help to expose the brand to their followers. However, few are increasing its reach and recognition, for good or for bad, depending on the content shared. In developing markets like Ghana, where digital media channels may be less accessible or effective, whether UGC can serve as a vital tool for raising brand awareness and engaging with a broader audience is yet to be seen.

Garcia and Chang (2015) conducted a study involving 30 participants to explore how UGC influences consumer perceptions of brand authenticity. The study found that brands using UGC

are generally seen as more authentic, especially when the content appears to reflect real consumer experiences. This perceived authenticity leads to positive brand perceptions. The findings underscore the importance of brands encouraging and valuing UGC, as it helps shape brand perception by capitalising on authenticity among consumers.

Perceived quality is a crucial element of brand perception that UGC can influence, as studies from various markets indicate. Consumer reviews and ratings on platforms like Google, Yelp, and TripAdvisor often indicate product or service quality, especially when direct experience is lacking. Consumers frequently rely on these ratings and comments before trying a product (Shah et al., 2023). Positive UGC, such as favourable reviews or testimonials, can improve a brand's perceived quality, boosting consumer confidence and significantly increasing sales overnight for previously unknown brands. On the other hand, negative UGC, coupled with cancel culture, can harm a brand's reputation and deter potential customers (Ben, 2024). This impact is particularly significant in cultures where online reviews and peer recommendations are heavily relied upon for purchasing decisions (Shi & Hassan, 2023). For developing markets like Ghana, which may not share the same online culture, this highlights UGC's varied roles in different socio-cultural settings.

Trustworthiness, a key factor in brand perception, can be significantly influenced by UGC. Trust in a brand often develops through consistent and positive consumer experiences, either experienced firsthand or shared through social interactions, which can occur within social groups or on social media platforms (Hudson, 2016). Research indicates that consumers are sometimes more inclined to trust content created by other users over that produced by brands due to the perceived impartiality of peer-generated content (Moilanen, 2023). Researchers Johnson & Smith (2020) reviewed findings from 20 other studies conducted between 2012 and 2020, aiming

to consolidate insights into how UGC impacts brand trust across various industries. Their study found a positive correlation between UGC and brand trust, showing that individuals are likely to trust brands with positive UGC than those without. This highlights UGC as a good strategy for brands to build trust with their target audiences.

Advertisement plays a critical role in fostering emotional connections between consumers and brands (Tellis et al., 2019). Emotional connections are often formed when consumers see themselves reflected in the content shared, such as using photos or videos that resonate with and speak to their personal experiences or aspirations (Cheng et al., 2020). One of the primary appeals of UGC in some markets is its ability to showcase the ordinary and speak to the average person (Blangger, 2023). In the Ghanaian context, where communal values and shared cultural experiences are prominent, it will be informative to understand how UGC can effectively build these emotional bonds, strengthening consumer loyalty and engagement with brands.

Finally, brand loyalty is another area where brand perception can be evaluated to understand UGC's influence (Mohammad et al., 2020). In some markets, loyal customers are more likely to advocate for a brand, often creating and sharing UGC that promotes the brand to others, with brands selling out entire product lines based on a positive UGC that may have gone viral. This advocacy reinforces the content creator's loyalty and encourages others to engage with and become loyal to the brand. Fatoki (2021) found that UGC significantly contributes to brand loyalty, particularly among younger consumers who are more active on social media. It is important to explore any similarity in Ghana, where positive UGC can be shown to reinforce brand loyalty, leading to repeated purchases and strong word-of-mouth promotion.

2.6 Types of User-Generated Content and Their Effects on Brand Perception

Different forms of UGC can impact brand perception in varying ways, as studies in other markets have indicated. The influence of UGC on perception often depends on the type of content being consumed. For example, visual content like photos and videos tends to be more impactful than text because it is more engaging and memorable. Tutorials, unboxings, and vlogs featuring brands can create emotional connections and improve perceived quality, particularly when linked to genuine experiences, as seen in other markets (Cheng et al., 2020). Additionally, engaging video content on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, or Facebook can quickly enhance brand visibility through likes, shares, and comments, thus increasing brand awareness and trust (Santos, 2020).

Customer reviews and testimonials represent another influential type of user-generated content that can either strengthen or weaken a brand's image. Reviews created by everyday users often feel more authentic, expand reach, and reinforce brand credibility (Jain, 2024). According to Jain (2024), positive reviews can increase trust in a brand and raise perceptions of quality, while negative reviews may have the reverse effect. This influence is especially important in markets where people increasingly rely on online reviews before purchasing. Platforms such as Google Reviews or TripAdvisor play a major role in consumer choices, making ratings essential in shaping how a brand is perceived (Shah et al., 2023). Nowadays, customers frequently use Yelp to find new restaurants, TripAdvisor to plan holidays, Rotten Tomatoes to check film ratings, Angie's List to hire contractors, ZocDoc to assess doctors' reputations and Amazon reviews for anything from books and vacuum cleaners to cat food. With just one click, consumers can share experiences, information, and recommendations about virtually any product imaginable.

2.7 UGC in the Context of Developing Markets

While UGC has been extensively studied in developed markets, its role in developing markets like Ghana is less understood. Developing markets present unique challenges and opportunities for brands, shaped by factors such as lower levels of digital infrastructure, differing consumer behaviour patterns, and the coexistence of traditional and digital media (Cennamo, 2021). In these contexts, UGC can serve as a bridge between traditional word-of-mouth communication and modern digital marketing, helping to reach consumers who may be less accessible through conventional channels.

In Ghana, the increasing mobile internet penetration and popularity of social media platforms have created fertile ground for UGC. However, the impact of UGC in this context is shaped by several factors, including the varying levels of digital literacy among consumers, the type of audience demographic, the influence of local cultural norms on content creation and sharing, and the relative novelty of digital marketing strategies in the region (Asamoah, 2019). These factors necessitate a nuanced understanding of how UGC is produced, consumed, and interpreted in Ghana.

In many African cultures, decisions are often influenced by the opinions and behaviours of the community, increasing the potential of UGC being a powerful tool for brands seeking to build trust and credibility (Lariba, 2023). This communal approach to content sharing and consumption means that, all things being equal, UGC can quickly gain traction and influence a wide audience, amplifying its impact on brand perception. Another important consideration is the regulatory environment in developing markets. In Ghana, as in many other developing African countries, the regulatory framework for digital content and online marketing is still evolving. There are no clear-cut regulations on how brands can utilise UGC or how to seek redress without

coming off as bullying if brands are unfairly slandered by ordinary individuals using UGC. This creates both opportunities and challenges for brands leveraging UGC. On the one hand, the lack of stringent regulations can allow for more creative and grassroots-driven marketing efforts. On the other hand, it also means that brands must navigate potential risks related to misinformation, content authenticity, and consumer protection (Visentin et al., 2019).

2.8 Challenges and Opportunities of Leveraging UGC

While UGC offers numerous advantages, it also presents several challenges for brands, particularly in developing markets. One of the primary challenges is the lack of control over the generated content. Unlike traditional advertising, where the brand has full control over the message, consumers create UGC independently, meaning brands must be prepared to manage both positive and negative content (Blangger, 2023). This can be particularly challenging in markets like Ghana, where digital literacy levels vary, and the potential for misunderstandings or misinterpretations of brand messages. Another challenge is the potential for UGC to spread misinformation or create unrealistic expectations about a brand's products or services. This is especially relevant in social media, where content can go viral and quickly reach a large audience for good and bad. Brands are, therefore, tasked with proactively monitoring and responding to UGC to mitigate any negative impacts, maintain their reputation, and manage issues (Blangger, 2023).

Despite these challenges, the opportunities presented by UGC, as identified by studies in some markets, are significant. For brands, UGC offers a cost-effective way to increase brand visibility, build trust, and engage with consumers meaningfully. By encouraging and amplifying positive UGC, brands can harness the power of peer influence to enhance their brand equity and foster long-term loyalty among consumers (Jain, 2024). In conclusion, understanding the dynamics of

UGC is essential for brands looking to succeed in the digital age, particularly in developing markets like Ghana. As UGC continues to play a central role in shaping brand perception, brands must develop strategies that effectively leverage this content to build and sustain their market presence.

2.9 Theoretical Framework

This study is based on two main theoretical frameworks: the Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model and Social Influence Theory. These frameworks help explain how user-generated content (UGC) affects brand perception, highlighting a direct link between the two concepts.

2.9.1 Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) Model

Keller (1993) introduced the Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model, a well-regarded marketing framework focusing on how consumers view and build brand value. It suggests that brand equity develops through four main stages: brand identity, brand meaning, brand response, and brand resonance. Each stage represents a deeper connection between consumers and the brand, culminating in brand resonance, where consumers exhibit deep loyalty and strong emotional connection to the brand

User-generated content (UGC) has a major impact on these stages, especially in terms of brand meaning and brand response. Research by Stukalina and Pavlyuk (2021) highlights the relevance of the CBBE model in understanding how brands create value in emerging markets. They argue that consumer perceptions of brand identity and meaning are often shaped by social and cultural factors, which UGC can influence. As posited by Keller (1993), the steps start with Brand Identity, which was described as the foundation of brand building, answering the question, "Who are you as a brand?" UGC hashtags or viral posts can potentially strengthen brand recall and awareness, positively or negatively shaping identity (Hermanus, 2022). After establishing that

comes brand meaning. This refers to what the brand stands for. Positive UGC, such as customer testimonials in some markets, has been shown to enhance the perception of quality and relevance, while negative content has also diminished trustworthiness (Blangger, 2023). Brand Response considers consumer judgment and feelings. Positive reviews evoke confidence, while emotional connections have the potential to be driven by relatable UGC, especially in communal cultures (Santos et al., 2022). Brand Resonance, Keller stipulates, is the ultimate goal of every brand. Resonance represents a deep, emotional connection with consumers, leading to unwavering loyalty.

2.9.2 Relevance of Theory

Stukalina and Pavlyuk (2021) used the CBBE model in education to measure brand resonance, linking student testimonials (a form of UGC) to institutional credibility and loyalty. Cheng et al. (2020) applied the model in hospitality, showing UGC-driven brand meaning and response through travel vlogs. The relevance of the CBBE model in this study, "The Influence of User-Generated Content on Brand Perception in Ghana," lies in its ability to capture the multifaceted nature of brand perception and the role that UGC can play in shaping it. For instance, UGC can significantly influence brand meaning by shaping consumers' perceptions of a brand's image and associations. It can also set the process by adding to brand identity and creating brand awareness. Similarly, UGC can impact brand response by affecting how consumers evaluate a brand's quality and credibility (Hermanus, 2022). This study applies the CBBE model to explore how UGC influences each stage, as described above, ultimately contributing to brand equity development in the Ghanaian context. The CBBE model highlights UGC's ability to influence brand meaning, particularly in communal cultures like Ghana, where peer opinions strongly affect consumer behaviour (Hermanus, 2022).

2.10 Social Influence Theory

Social Influence Theory, developed by Kelman (1953), explores how the actions, presence, and norms of others influence an individual's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. The theory carries the idea that people are social beings and are, therefore, heavily influenced by the thoughts and actions of other people. The basic concept is that when people see others take action, engage in an activity, or do something, they sincerely believe there is a reason and justifiable rationale behind it. Thus, it makes adopting or doing the same behaviour easier for them. Telzer et al. (2018) demonstrated its utility in youth behaviour, linking peer influence directly to brand loyalty. Addo and Nyarku (2020) also applied the theory to Ghanaian consumer behaviour, noting that communal values amplify the impact of peer-generated content like UGC and affect brand equity.

This theory is especially helpful for explaining why user-generated content (UGC) from peers and other consumers strongly affects brand perception (Gass & Seiter, 2022). Branding implies that individuals are more inclined to forming a positive view of brands recommended or endorsed by others through UGC (Lee & Kim, 2015). For instance, when people see UGC that showcase positive encounters with a brand, they tend to feel favourable towards and confident in that brand. This occurs because UGC serves as evidence of the quality of the brand and its dependability, encouraging people to adopt that belief (Okazaki & Taylor, 2017). Following the theory, UGC provides a form of informational social influence where individuals base their decisions on the actions and experiences of others (Chernev, 2018). When consumers encounter UGC showcasing positive brand experiences, they interpret this as evidence that the brand is reliable and trustworthy. As a result, they develop favorable perceptions of the brand, including trustworthiness, authenticity, and credibility (Martin & Hogan, 2018).

In Ghana, social influence plays a major role in consumers' decisions. According to Addo and Nyarku (2020), Ghanaians are strongly guided by the views and behaviours of those around them. This study explores whether such influence affects social media, including user-generated content like reviews, videos, and ratings.

2.10.1 The Influence of UGC on Brand Equity in Ghana

Brand equity refers to the added value a brand brings to a product or service as perceived by consumers (Shariq, 2018). User-generated content (UGC) can greatly affect brand equity by shaping how consumers view a brand's awareness, perceived quality, associations, and loyalty. Social Influence Theory offers another perspective by examining how people's thoughts, emotions, and behaviours are influenced by the presence, actions, or norms of others (Telzer et al., 2018). In Ghana's collectivist culture, peer influence—often seen through UGC—plays a key role in shaping brand perception. Social Influence Theory becomes especially relevant in this context since UGC is naturally social, created, and shared by peers or community members online.

Social Influence Theory helps explain why UGC could profoundly impact brand perception in Ghana, where communal values and social ties are strong. As Addo and Nyarku (2020) highlight, Ghanaian consumers are significantly influenced by the opinions and behaviours of their peers. This study is justified by the limited research on UGC's role in developing markets like Ghana. It addresses the gap in understanding how UGC influences brand perception in a socio-cultural context distinct from Western settings, providing actionable insights for businesses and contributing to the global discourse on digital marketing. This study, therefore, leverages Social Influence Theory to analyse the mechanisms through which UGC, as a form of peer influence, can affect consumer attitudes toward brands.

2.10.2 Gaps in Literature

Although a growing body of research about how user-generated content (UGC) affects brand perception, certain gaps remain, especially in developing markets like Ghana. Much of the existing work has centred on Western settings, paying little attention to the distinct cultural, economic, and social features that define African markets. Further, more empirical study is needed to explore which specific types of UGC have the strongest impact on brand perception in Ghana. This research addresses these gaps by thoroughly analysing UGC's influence on brand perception in Ghana, adding to the wider conversation on digital and media marketing in developing markets.

2.10.3 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the existing research on UGC, brand perception, and the theoretical models underpinning this study. It has emphasised UGC's pivotal role in shaping brand perception, particularly in Ghana, where digital engagement is swiftly increasing. The chapter also highlighted gaps in the literature that this study aims to address, laying the groundwork for the following chapters, which will delve deeper into these issues.

3 CHAPTER THREE

3.1 Introduction

Chapter Three outlines the research methods used in this study. It explains the research design, covering how data were collected, how samples were chosen, and how data were analysed. The chapter ends by addressing the ethical considerations observed during the research process.

According to Igwenaga (2016), the methodology chapter in any scholarly work is a collection of systematic methods, serving as a guideline for conducting the research. Again, according to Zina (2024), the methodology chapter is important because it helps the researcher develop a critical and scientific attitude, enriches the research process, and provides a chance for an in-depth study of the research subject while enhancing the individual ability to evaluate findings.

3.2 Research Design and Approach

Underpinned by the positivist philosophy, the study is descriptive in design and quantitative in approach. A quantitative study is research used to understand the relationship between two or more variables (Taherdoost, 2022). Given the study's objectives of understanding how UGC influences brand perception in Ghana, a quantitative approach was deemed appropriate.

Quantitative research involves gathering and examining numerical data to find patterns, relationships, and trends (Taherdoost, 2024). In this study, using a quantitative method provides a structured way to explore the links between user-generated content (UGC) and different aspects of brand perception, such as brand awareness, perceived quality, trustworthiness, and loyalty.

This would ensure a more holistic examination of the concepts being understudied. A quantitative approach also aligns with the structured nature of the CBBE framework, enabling measurable insights at each stage (identity, meaning, response, and resonance) (Hermanus, 2022)

3.3 Philosophy

Formulating a clear research philosophy offers a structure for understanding the nature of knowledge, reality, and truth (Saunders et al., 2016). This framework helps guide and justify important methodological decisions—key factors ensuring the findings are valid and credible (Saunders et al., 2019). Accordingly, this study follows a positivist philosophy, emphasising measurable observations and statistical methods to explore the links between user-generated content and brand perception (Mulisa, 2022). According to Ali (2024), positivism emphasises observable phenomena. This makes it ideal for examining UGC and its impact on brand perception through statistical tools. This philosophy aptly supports a structured and data-driven approach, making it ideal for this study.

3.4 Design

The research employs descriptive design. The descriptive design aims to identify and explain relationships between variables within a structured framework (Taherdoost, 2022) and, in this case, between UGC and brand perception. Descriptive research is especially appropriate for studying phenomena with well-defined variables (Pregoner, 2024), such as brand awareness, perceived quality, and loyalty influences by UGC. The design enables the researcher to describe the current state of UGC's role in Ghanaian perception. It also helps the researcher quantify the extent of UGC's impact across brand perception metrics like trustworthiness and emotional connection.

3.5 Research Strategy and Data Collection Method

This study utilises a cross-sectional survey as its research technique. A survey was selected due to its capacity to gather data from many participants in a comparatively brief timeframe (Fowler, 2014). This facilitates the examination of substantial quantities while optimising time efficiency.

Moreover, surveys effectively capture consumers' immediate, unfiltered perceptions and attitudes, rendering them particularly suitable for this study's emphasis on brand perception (Tran, 2024). The data collection process is essential to the research technique since it influences the quality and dependability of the data utilised in the study. The survey instrument was developed to collect data on the primary variables of interest, including user-generated content exposure, brand awareness, and perceived quality. The study had closed-ended questions, enabling respondents to express their agreement or disagreement with multiple assertions concerning UGC and brand perception.

The survey items were crafted using insights from existing literature and then adapted to the Ghanaian context for cultural relevance. The language was straightforward and included examples of local brands and situations familiar to Ghanaian consumers (Osei-Frimpong and Donkor, 2018). The survey was administered online to reach various participants and distributed through popular Ghanaian social media channels such as WhatsApp and Telegram. The study's timeframe is limited to the data collection period, capturing information at a single point and providing a snapshot of how user-generated content currently affects brand perception among Ghanaian consumers. It does not examine changes over time on brand perception.

3.6 Population

The population of the study consists of Ghanaian consumers who actively use social media and regularly come across or interact with user-generated content (UGC). It mainly focuses on how UGC's perception of brands is likely to influence people. Consumers who rarely or never use social media or engage with UGC are excluded, as their responses may not significantly contribute to the research objectives.

3.7 Sampling

According to Mwita (2022), the size of a research sample depends on factors such as available resources, the nature of the study, and the project timeline. This study employed convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling technique that involves selecting respondents who are easily accessible and willing to participate. Convenience sampling was chosen because it allows for efficient data collection within a limited timeframe and budget while ensuring that the study reaches a large number of social media users, who are the primary focus of the research.

Unlike purposive sampling, which focuses on selecting individuals based on specific characteristics, convenience sampling allows for broader participation from a diverse group of Ghanaian consumers who actively engage with User-Generated Content (UGC) on social media platforms. This method ensures that the study captures real-life interactions with UGC across various demographic segments, making the findings more reflective of general consumer behavior.

However, convenience sampling has certain limitations. It may lead to selection bias, as participants who are more active on social media and willing to respond may not fully represent the entire Ghanaian consumer population (Pace, 2021). Additionally, while the findings provide valuable insights into UGC's influence on brand perception, they may not be generalizable to all consumers, especially those less engaged with digital content (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

To mitigate these limitations, efforts were made to diversify the sample by distributing the survey across multiple social media platforms, including WhatsApp, Telegram, Facebook, and Twitter, ensuring participation from different age groups, education levels, and geographic locations. The final sample consisted of 120 respondents, covering various demographics such as age, gender, education level, and location, to enhance the reliability of the study.

The study utilized a sample size of 120 respondents, selected based on feasibility, accessibility, and data sufficiency for quantitative analysis. According to Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size determination table, for a population exceeding 1,000, a sample of at least 100-120 participants is generally sufficient for valid statistical inferences. Given the constraints of time and resources, 120 respondents provided an adequate representation of Ghanaian social media users while ensuring a manageable dataset for analysis.

3.8 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted over four weeks, utilizing a structured online survey distributed across various social media platforms, including WhatsApp, Telegram, Facebook, and Twitter. These platforms were selected due to their high user engagement rates in Ghana (Bruce et al., 2023) and their role in facilitating UGC interactions.

The survey consisted of close-ended Likert scale questions, allowing for standardized responses and statistical analysis. To increase demographic diversity, the survey link was shared in both public forums and targeted groups, ensuring responses from individuals with varying backgrounds, occupations, and geographic locations. Respondents were assured that all data collected would only be used to understand whether UGC has any effect on brand perception in Ghana. This is in line with ethical considerations observed in data collection for research.

3.8.1 Data Preparation

Before the analysis, the dataset was cleansed to remove incomplete or invalid responses, including checks for missing data, outliers, and inconsistencies. The final dataset was then coded and transferred into a statistical software program for further analysis.

3.8.2 Data Analysis

Data analysis is a methodical application of statistical tools to assess and understand acquired data (Mertler et al., 2021). The data analysis for this quantitative study employs statistical approaches to assess the given data and derive significant results. This study utilised descriptive and inferential statistics to summarise and analyse the correlations between user-generated content and brand perception measures. Correlation analysis was conducted to examine the strength and direction of relationships between variables, while multiple regression analysis was used to determine how effectively user-generated content predicts brand perception outcomes (Pallant, 2020). SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) was used for the analysis. SPSS is a well-known quantitative data analysis tool recognised for its strong capabilities in social science research.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are essential when conducting research involving human participants (Karunarathna, 2024). Such measures ensure that respondents are comfortable with the study's aims, questions, and information collected. They also protect researchers from potential negligence claims once the research is completed. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents before they joined the survey. They were given details about the purpose of the study, participation, and rights as respondents. They voluntarily participated in the research and were made aware that they could withdraw at any point without penalty. To maintain confidentiality and anonymity, no personally identifiable information was gathered, and all data were stored securely and used exclusively for this research. Access to the data was strictly limited to research purposes.

3.9.1 Ethical Approval

The study followed ethical guidelines and gained approval from the appropriate institutional review board or ethics committee of the University Media, Arts and Communication (UNIMAC). This ensured the research met the required ethical standards and safeguarded participants' rights and well-being.

3.9.2 Conclusion

This chapter explains the study's research methodology, detailing its philosophical foundations and quantitative approach. Outlining the research design, data collection methods, sampling techniques, and data analysis procedures provides a comprehensive and structured investigation into how user-generated content (UGC) influences brand perception in Ghana. The chapter also addresses ethical considerations, emphasising the importance of safeguarding participants' rights and maintaining the integrity of the research process.

4 CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter presents an in-depth discussion of the study's findings on the influence of user-generated content (UGC) on brand perception in Ghana. The chapter synthesizes both descriptive data (including mean, standard deviation, and frequency distributions) and inferential statistical analyses to provide a comprehensive understanding of key themes identified in the research. By examining the relationship between UGC and various brand-related factors such as trust, awareness, and consumer engagement, the findings offer valuable insights into how brands can strategically leverage consumer-generated content. The discussion is structured around the core themes of UGC's impact on brand perception, the types of UGC that most influence consumer attitudes, and the role of UGC in fostering trust and brand loyalty. Additionally, other emerging findings that do not neatly fall within these themes are also briefly explored, providing a broader context for understanding the dynamics of UGC in the Ghanaian market.

4.1.1 The Impact of UGC on Brand Perception in Ghana

The study revealed that user-generated content significantly influences brand perception. A substantial 61.6% of respondents trust UGC either more or equally compared to brand advertisements, suggesting that they perceive UGC as more authentic, relatable, and unbiased. This finding aligns with prior research indicating that consumers trust and rely heavily on peer-generated content when forming opinions about brands (Chen & Wang, 2016).

The high trust levels in UGC compared to traditional advertising can be attributed to the perception that UGC comes from individuals who have first-hand experience with the product or

service. Unlike brand advertisements that may be seen as overly promotional, UGC is regarded as a reflection of real consumer experiences.

Table 1 presents the measurement of UGC on purchase, highlighting whether respondent had made purchase due to the impact of UGC.

Table 1

Measurement of Influence of UGC on purchase

Have you ever purchased a product or service because of UGC?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	95	79.2	79.2	79.2
	No	25	20.8	20.8	100.0
	Total	120	100.0	100.0	

Note. Frequency of purchase is significant

The study found that 79.2% of consumers have purchased a product or service because of UGC, underscoring the strong relationship between UGC and purchasing decisions. When consumers encounter UGC in the form of reviews, testimonials, or recommendations, it not only shapes their initial perceptions of the brand but also eventually influences their buying behaviour.

Table 2 presents the demographic distribution of respondents, highlighting their age, education, and gender.

Table 2

Demographic Distribution of Respondents

Profile	Frequency (<i>n</i>)	Percent (100)
Gender		
Female	82	68.3
Male	38	31.7
Total	120	100
Age		
18 -24	24	20
25-31	57	47.5
32-38	27	22.5
39 and above	12	10
Total	120	100
Level of Education		
High School	5	4.2
Diploma	7	5.8
Bachelor's Degree	55	45.8
Postgraduate Degree	53	44.2
Total	120	100

Note. Demographic show significant number of females

It should be of note that, the age distribution shows that most respondents are between the ages of 25 and 31 (47.5%), followed by those in the 32-38 years age range (22.5%). Only 20% of respondents are between 18-24 years, and just 10% are aged 39 and above. This distribution

highlights that young adults and middle-aged individuals form the majority of the sample, suggesting that the data reflects the views of younger demographics.

The majority of respondents (90%) hold a bachelor's degree or higher, indicating a highly educated sample. This group is more likely to engage with brands through digital channels and have access to the internet, social media, and other platforms where user-generated content thrives.

In terms of occupation, a large portion of the respondents are employed (68.3%), followed by students (14.2%), unemployed individuals (10.8%), and a smaller group who are self-employed (6.7%). This indicates that the majority of the sample consists of individuals who are economically active and likely to have disposable income or spending power. Table 3, 4 and 5 present the perception of trust in UGC compared to brand advertisement.

Table 3

Perception of Trust in UGC Compared to Brand Advertisements

Do you think UGC are more credible or trustworthy than brand-created advertisement?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Yes	42	35.0	35.0	35.0
No	17	14.2	14.2	49.2
About the same	38	31.7	31.7	80.8
Maybe	23	19.2	19.2	100.0
Total	120	100.0	100.0	

Note. Valid percentage of trust is high

Table 4

Perception of Factors making UGC more credible than Brand-Created advertisements

If yes, what do you think makes UGC more credible or trustworthy than brand-created advertisements?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
It is created by real customers like me	51	42.5	42.5	42.5
It often provides honest, unbiased opinions	29	24.2	24.2	66.7
It showcases real-life use of the product/service	40	33.3	33.3	100.0
Total	120	100.0	100.0	

Note. Factors that influence perception of credibility

Table 5

Perception of Factors making UGC more credible than Brand-Created advertisements

If no, or what do you think makes UGC less credible or trustworthy than brand-created advertisement?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Brands sometimes pay them	82	68.3	68.3	68.3
	They may be less than truthful	38	31.7	31.7	100.0
	Total	120	100.0	100.0	

Note. UGC trust is high

Running inferential statistical analysis, Pearson correlation results indicate a moderate negative correlation between UGC trust and brand perception ($r = -0.42, p < 0.05$). While this suggests that UGC generally fosters trust, concerns regarding authenticity may lead to scepticism.

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to assess the impact of UGC-related factors on brand perception. The dependent variable was UGC Quality Perception, while the independent variables included UGC Exposure, UGC Engagement, and UGC Trust. The model results found that UGC Trust demonstrated a statistically significant negative relationship with UGC perception ($\beta = -0.38, p < 0.01$), suggesting that as trust in UGC increases, perceptions of UGC quality decline. This is due to concerns over paid promotions, biased content, or misleading endorsements.

UGC Exposure was also positively related to quality perception, but the effect was not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.12, p = 0.09$), implying that while exposure to UGC enhances brand awareness, it does not necessarily translate into higher quality perception.

UGC Engagement showed a weak positive but non-significant relationship with quality perception ($\beta = 0.08$, $p = 0.15$), suggesting that consumer interactions with UGC may contribute to brand perception but are not the primary determinant.

The model’s R-squared value (0.164) indicated that approximately 16.4% of the variance in perception is explained by the independent variables. This highlights the need to explore additional factors such as brand credibility, consumer sentiment, and social influence.

To further explore the role of UGC in brand perception, the study examined the frequency with which respondents engage with social media as shown in Table 6.

Table 6
Frequency of Social Media Use and UGC Engagement

How often do you use social media

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Daily	118	98.3	98.3	98.3
	Weekly	2	1.7	1.7	100.0
	Total	120	100.0	100.0	

Note. Daily social media use is high

The findings revealed that 98.3% of respondents use social media daily, indicating that digital platforms serve as a major medium for brand-related discussions. Additionally, 81.7% of respondents reported engaging with UGC related to brands, further emphasizing the significance of consumer-generated content in shaping brand narratives.

The study’s findings reinforce previous research that consumers find peer-generated content more credible than corporate messaging (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). The high purchase conversion

rate (79.2%) from UGC suggests that Ghanaian consumers are heavily influenced by user reviews and testimonials, aligning with Social Influence Theory (Kelman, 1953). Brands in Ghana, therefore, need to actively engage with UGC by monitoring consumer discussions and responding to feedback in real time.

Given the moderate scepticism observed in the correlation results, brands should prioritize authenticity by encouraging genuine consumer experiences rather than incentivizing paid reviews, which could undermine credibility. By fostering transparency and organic engagement, brands can leverage UGC effectively to enhance brand perception and consumer trust.

4.1.2 Types of UGC That Most Influence Brand Perception

The study examined the various forms of user-generated content and their relative impact on brand perception. Among the different types, as shown in Table 7, product reviews emerged as the most influential, with 48.3% of respondents citing reviews as the UGC type that most affects their perception of a brand. Testimonials followed at 20.8%, while photos (15.8%) and videos (15.0%) had comparatively lower influence.

Table 7

Most Impactful Types of UGC

What types of UGC do you find most impactful?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Product reviews	58	48.3	48.3	48.3
	Testimonials	25	20.8	20.8	69.2
	Photos	19	15.8	15.8	85.0
	Videos	18	15.0	15.0	100.0
	Total	120	100.0	100.0	

Note. Product is significant

Product reviews are highly valued because they provide first-hand consumer insights into product performance, reliability, and effectiveness (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). Reviews often include detailed accounts of user experiences, which help potential buyers make informed decisions. The findings suggest that consumers in Ghana rely on peer reviews as a trusted source of information, which corroborates prior research that positions reviews as a key factor in digital purchasing behaviour. Consumers in Ghana now seem to rely heavily on reviews because they offer practical feedback that may not be available in brand advertisements. The popularity of product reviews indicates that consumers want to see how real customers interact with the product, rather than relying solely on what the brand claims. This underscores the notion that trust is built through transparency, where consumers feel more comfortable when they can learn from the experiences of others. Brands should therefore encourage customers to leave detailed reviews on their websites and third-party e-commerce platforms to build trust and enhance their market reputation.

Testimonials also play a significant role in influencing brand perception. Unlike reviews, testimonials often involve personal endorsements of a brand or product based on positive experiences. The study found that 20.8% of respondents consider testimonials to be a significant influence on their perception of brands. Testimonials help establish an emotional connection between brands and consumers by demonstrating real-world benefits and offer social proof, showing that other individuals have had positive experiences, which can convince potential buyers toward making a purchase. Given the relatively high influence of testimonials, businesses in Ghana should consider prominently featuring customer testimonials on their digital platforms, advertisements, and marketing campaigns to enhance brand credibility.

Visual content, particularly photos (15.8%) and videos (15.0%), also plays an important role in shaping brand perception, although to a lesser extent than written content. Photos help validate product claims by showing real-life use, while videos offer a more dynamic demonstration of product features and benefits. The preference for textual over visual UGC may be attributed to consumers valuing detailed, experience-based information over promotional imagery. However, brands should not overlook visual UGC, as it remains a critical tool for engagement, particularly on social media platforms where imagery and video content perform well in attracting consumer attention.

Inferential statistical analysis further supports these findings. Using Pearson correlation analysis, there was a significant positive relationship found between UGC engagement and brand perception ($r = 0.21$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that higher engagement with UGC positively influences consumer perception of brands. Additionally, the regression analysis revealed that UGC exposure had a weak but positive relationship with quality perception ($\beta = 0.12$, $p = 0.09$),

suggesting that while exposure to UGC improves brand awareness, its direct impact on quality perception is less pronounced.

Given these findings, brands in Ghana should prioritize fostering authentic written content such as detailed product reviews and testimonials while also integrating visual UGC for added engagement. As shown in table 7, encouraging visual content, such as photos and videos, can still play a role in enhancing appeal, but the core driver of perception remains written feedback that provides context and depth to the customer experience.

Table 8

How Brands can Leverage UGC

How can brands in Ghana effectively leverage UGC to improve their perception among consumers (excluding influencers)?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Encouraging customers to share their experiences online	78	65.0	65.0	65.0
	Partnering with influencers to promote their brands	17	14.2	14.2	79.2
	Responding to UGC (e.g., comments, reviews) promptly	25	20.8	20.8	100.0
	Total	120	100.0	100.0	

Note. Respondents' perception on brands leveraging UGC

From Table 8, the most popular strategy brands in Ghana can effectively leverage to improve perception among consumers is encouraging customers to share their experiences online. This indicates that the majority of consumers believe that actively motivating existing customers to share their experiences and opinions about a brand on social media, review platforms, or other

online spaces is an effective way for brands to improve their perception. 20.8% of respondents believe that responding to UGC promptly, such as engaging with comments, reviews, and other forms of UGC, is also an effective way for brands in Ghana to improve perception among consumers. This suggests that interacting with customers' content is seen as an important way to show that a brand values its audience's opinions and feedback. Quick, personalized responses to UGC can strengthen relationships with customers and build trust in the brand. The strategy of partnering with influencers to promote brands was 14.2% indicating that, although influencer partnerships are seen as helpful, they are not the top choice for improving brand perception. By fostering an ecosystem where consumers freely share their experiences, brands can strengthen their credibility and foster deeper consumer trust.

4.1.3 UGC's Influence on Brand Exposure, Awareness, And Trust in Ghana

User-generated content plays a significant role in shaping brand awareness, trust, and consumer loyalty. The study revealed that UGC has a strong impact on brand awareness, with a mean score of 3.61 on a five-point scale. This suggests that UGC significantly enhances visibility and recognition, particularly as more consumers engage with and share content online. The frequent exposure to UGC enables brands to stay top-of-mind for potential buyers, reinforcing positive brand associations. The study further examined, as shown in Table 9, UGC's effect on brand trust.

Table 9

Mean Scores of UGC Influence on Brand Metrics

Measurement item	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
On a scale of 1–5, how much does UGC influence your awareness of a brand?	120	3.61	1.110
On a scale of 1-5, how much does UGC influence your perception of a brand's quality?	120	3.47	1.028
On a scale of 1-5, how much does UGC influence your trust in a brand?	120	3.32	1.130
On a scale of 1-5, how much does UGC influence your emotional connection to a brand?	120	3.16	1.181
On a scale of 1-5, how much does UGC influence your loyalty to a brand?	120	3.05	1.263

Note. Mean score indicate how UGC influence emotions towards brands

With a mean score of 3.32 shown, this indicates that consumers generally perceive UGC as a reliable source of brand information. Given that 61.6% of respondents trust UGC either more or equally compared to brand advertisements, brands must ensure that the content remains authentic and credible to maintain consumer confidence.

Additionally, the study found that UGC fosters emotional connections between consumers and brands, as reflected in a mean score of 3.16 for emotional engagement. This demonstrates that UGC helps humanize brands by showcasing real consumer experiences, leading to stronger relationships with audiences. This emotional connection is an essential component in driving long-term brand loyalty.

The influence of UGC on brand loyalty was also measured, yielding a mean score of 3.05. While this score is lower than that for brand awareness and trust, it still indicates that UGC contributes to consumer retention. When consumers encounter consistent, positive feedback from their peers, it reassures them that the brand is reliable. The influence of UGC on emotional connection to the brand was also captured with a mean score of 3.16, showing that consumers can form strong emotional ties to a brand based on peer recommendations or shared experiences. These emotional connections often translate into brand loyalty, as consumers feel more connected to the brand when it is endorsed by their peers. Given that 79.2% of respondents reported purchasing a product as a result of UGC, the findings suggest that brands leveraging consumer-generated content can encourage repeat purchases due to loyalty, brand awareness and sustained customer engagement.

Correlation analysis further reinforces these findings. A strong positive correlation was found between UGC exposure and brand awareness ($r = 0.67$, $p < 0.01$), confirming that increased visibility through consumer-generated content enhances brand recognition. Similarly, UGC trust demonstrated a moderate positive correlation with brand awareness ($r = 0.45$, $p < 0.01$), highlighting the importance of authenticity in building consumer confidence.

To maximize the benefits of UGC, brands should actively encourage and manage consumer interactions across digital platforms. This includes responding to customer reviews, engaging with UGC creators, and fostering a community-driven brand presence. By doing so, brands can not only increase visibility but also strengthen consumer trust and loyalty in the long term.

The strong correlation between UGC exposure and brand awareness underscores the effectiveness of UGC in increasing brand visibility. Additionally, UGC trust positively correlates with brand awareness, highlighting the importance of credible and authentic content in driving

consumer engagement and confidence. This further highlights the importance of brands and marketers to understand and carefully leverage UGC in their campaigns.

4.2 Other Relevant Finding

Beyond the primary themes of UGC's impact on brand perception, trust, and awareness, the study uncovered finding which relates to how social media algorithms impact the visibility of UGC. Some respondents noted that platform algorithms prioritize certain types of content, influencing which UGC is most widely seen or which appears on their feeds. This implies that brands must optimize their UGC strategy by aligning with platform algorithms to ensure their content reaches the widest audience possible. This also suggests the need for continuous monitoring of engagement trends and strategic content placement to ensure that UGC created reach the targeted audiences.

4.3 Conclusion

This study has demonstrated the significant role of user-generated content (UGC) in shaping brand perception, trust, and consumer engagement in Ghana. The findings reveal that consumers largely perceive UGC as authentic and reliable, often valuing it over traditional brand advertisements. The strong correlation between UGC exposure and brand awareness underscores the growing influence of peer-driven content in modern marketing strategies. Additionally, the analysis highlights the varying impact of different types of UGC, with product reviews and testimonials emerging as the most influential in shaping consumer opinions.

Despite the advantages of UGC, concerns regarding authenticity and the influence of paid endorsements indicate the need for brands to maintain transparency in their engagement with consumers. The study's insights suggest that brands must foster organic, consumer-driven narratives to enhance credibility and long-term customer relationships. By leveraging a strategic

approach to UGC—one that includes active consumer engagement and responsiveness to feedback—brands can optimize their digital presence and strengthen brand loyalty.

Furthermore, the study underscores the necessity of adapting marketing strategies to the evolving digital landscape. As consumer behaviour in Ghana continues to shift towards peer-influenced decision-making, brands must integrate UGC as a core component of their engagement strategies.

UGC presents both opportunities and challenges for brands, requiring a delicate balance between consumer-driven narratives and brand-led messaging. Brands that prioritize authenticity, consumer participation, and strategic engagement with UGC are better positioned to enhance trust, increase brand awareness, and drive long-term consumer loyalty in an increasingly digitalized marketplace.

5 CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the key findings from the study on the influence of user-generated content (UGC) on brand perception in Ghana. It draws conclusions based on the research objectives and discusses implications for businesses and marketing professionals. Additionally, the chapter provides recommendations for brand managers, marketers, and researchers interested in UGC and its effects on consumer perception. The chapter concludes with suggestions for future research to build on the insights gained from this study.

5.2 Summary of Key Findings

The study sought to examine how UGC influences brand perception in Ghana. Based on data collected and analysed in Chapter Four, the following key findings emerged from the study.

5.2.1 UGC Significantly Influences Brand Perception

The study found that a substantial 61.6% of respondents trust UGC more or equally compared to brand advertisements. This indicates that consumers perceive UGC as a more authentic and credible source of information about brands. Additionally, 79.2% of respondents have purchased a product or service due to UGC, demonstrating that UGC has a strong influence on consumer decision-making.

5.2.2 Types of UGC That Most Influence Brand Perception

According to respondents, the most impactful form of UGC, is product reviews (48.3%), followed by testimonials (20.8%), photos (15.8%), and videos (15.0%). Written content, such as

detailed product reviews and testimonials, plays a crucial role in shaping consumer opinions about brand quality, trustworthiness, and overall perception.

5.2.3 UGC's Influence on Brand Awareness, Trust, and Loyalty

The study revealed that UGC significantly contributes to brand awareness, with a mean score of 3.61 on a five-point scale. Consumers also indicated that UGC impacts brand trust (mean score of 3.32), emotional connection (3.16), and loyalty (3.05). These findings suggest that UGC plays a role not only in shaping initial impressions but also in maintaining long-term brand relationships.

5.2.4 Consumer Trust in UGC Compared to Brand Advertisements

About 33.3% of respondents trust UGC “a lot more” than brand-created advertisements, while an additional 28.3% trust it “somewhat more.” Only 10% of respondents trust brand-created advertisements more than UGC, reinforcing the idea that peer-generated content is viewed as more reliable than traditional marketing strategies.

5.2.5 Challenges and Concerns Related to UGC

While UGC is largely seen as credible, some respondents expressed scepticism about its trustworthiness. 68.3% of respondents believe that brands sometimes pay content creators, which could reduce the perceived authenticity of UGC. 31.7% stated that UGC may sometimes be exaggerated or less than truthful, highlighting the potential risks of misinformation.

Strategies for Brands to Leverage UGC Effectively

The most recommended strategy for brands in Ghana is to encourage customers to share their experiences online (65.0%). Engaging with and responding to UGC (e.g., reviews and comments) was also cited as an effective way to strengthen brand perception (20.8%). Partnering

with influencers was ranked lower (14.2%), suggesting that organic, unpaid consumer engagement is considered more influential than paid promotions.

5.3 Conclusion

The study's findings align with the two theoretical frameworks previously highlighted. The results show that UGC enhances brand meaning, brand response, and brand resonance, leading to higher consumer trust and loyalty. This confirms that peer-generated content is an effective tool in building brand equity in digital environments which is essentially the basis of Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) Model (Keller, 1993). Also, the study found that consumers trust UGC more than brand-created content, reinforcing the role of peer influence in shaping brand perception as suggested by Social Influence Theory (Kelman, 1953). This suggests that authentic, unpaid UGC is more persuasive than traditional advertising (Gass & Seiter, 2022).

The study concludes that UGC is a critical factor in shaping brand perception in Ghana. Consumers trust UGC more than traditional advertisements, and it strongly influences their awareness, trust, emotional connection, and loyalty toward brands. The most impactful forms of UGC are product reviews and testimonials, which provide potential buyers with peer-driven, authentic insights about brands.

Although UGC presents an opportunity for brands to enhance their credibility, there are challenges related to the perceived authenticity of certain content. Some consumers believe that UGC can be biased, particularly when content creators are compensated by brands. Therefore, brands must ensure transparency and authenticity in their UGC engagement strategies.

Ultimately, businesses in Ghana can benefit from a strategic approach to UGC by encouraging organic content creation, engaging with consumers online, and responding effectively to user-generated feedback.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are made for businesses, marketers, and researchers:

5.4.1 Recommendations for Brands and Marketers

To maximize the benefits of User-Generated Content (UGC) while addressing associated risks, brands and marketers in Ghana must adopt a strategic approach to UGC management. Below are expanded recommendations that can effectively be used to:

Encourage Authentic Consumer-Generated Content

The study has shown that even in Ghana to some extent UGC is widely regarded as more authentic and credible than brand-created content. To leverage this, brands should actively motivate consumers to share their experiences, ensuring that the content remains organic and trustworthy. This can be inculcated into marketing campaign by marketers creating branded hashtags and community-driven campaigns. By encouraging customers to use a unique hashtag when posting, their experiences can help brands amplify UGC visibility and create a sense of community.

Brand can also offer non-monetary incentives for content creation. Research suggests that while financial incentives can reduce perceived authenticity, exclusive rewards or loyalty points can increase engagement without damaging credibility when balanced properly (Blangger, 2023).

Marketers in Ghana can therefore run interactive campaigns such as TikTok challenges or

Instagram giveaways can significantly boost brand engagement and reach by encouraging consumer to share their opinions about brands. To further this, marketers can simplify the process by integrating review sections on websites and providing in-store QR codes for direct social media uploads can help streamline content collection.

Engage with UGC Responsively and Transparently

A brand's responsiveness to UGC significantly influences consumer trust as shown by this study. A proactive approach to engagement can foster brand loyalty and mitigate potential reputation risks. Brands need to acknowledge and appreciate both positive and negative UGC by reposting, liking, commenting or generally responding when appropriate. The study has shown that when brands acknowledge user contributions, it enhances brand affinity and trust. This can be done by commenting on posts, resharing content, or featuring user testimonials on official platforms. Consumer research highlights that resolving public complaints effectively can turn dissatisfied customers into loyal advocates (Shah et al., 2023). Strategies like responding to negative reviews professionally, offering resolutions or explanations, encouraging follow-up engagement to demonstrate improvement can be effective in enhancing trust.

Ensure Transparency in UGC-Based Marketing

Consumers can become sceptical of UGC when they suspect brand interference as the study has discovered. Transparency is key to maintaining credibility. Therefore, brands need to disclose sponsored content and partnerships. Marketers also need to highlight authentic, unpaid consumer reviews and amplifying real customer testimonials. However, they should ensure that UGC does not contain false or exaggerated claims that could mislead consumers, as this could damage brand credibility.

Leverage Product Reviews and Testimonials as a Marketing Tool

Product reviews are the most influential type of UGC, shaping consumer perception and purchase decisions. Brands should make these reviews easily accessible to maximize their impact. Research suggests that placing reviews on landing pages and product listings can increase conversion rates (Nguyen & Lee, 2019). Brands can embed raw, unedited and authentic customer testimonials in email and social campaigns to reinforce trust and credibility before a purchase decision.

Monitor and Manage Negative UGC Effectively

While UGC provides brands with credibility, it also presents risks. Research suggests that negative reviews and viral criticism can significantly impact brand perception (Visentin et al., 2019). Ghanaian brands therefore need to establish a reputation management strategy such as automated alerts to track UGC across platforms and address potential issues in real-time.

False claims should be fact-checked and clarified with a clear distinction between constructive criticism and falsehood. If constructive, brands can employ compensation strategies such as discounts or replacements.

5.4.1.1 Summary

Brands in Ghana can harness the power of UGC by building a community of engaged and satisfied customers who authentically share their experiences. This will not only enhance brand perception but also boost consumer trust, loyalty, and ultimately, sales. However, UGC must be managed responsibly to prevent issues related to misinformation, consumer scepticism, and reputational damage.

This study contributes valuable insights into the role of UGC in shaping brand perception in Ghana. As social media continues to evolve, UGC will remain a key driver of consumer trust, brand awareness, and purchase decisions. Brands that effectively integrate UGC into their marketing strategies stand to benefit from increased consumer engagement and stronger brand loyalty. By fostering authenticity, engaging with consumers, and managing UGC transparently, businesses in Ghana can leverage this growing digital trend to build a positive brand image and drive long-term success.

5.4.2 Recommendations for Future Research

The impact of UGC on brand perception in Ghana is not exhaustive. This study has unearthed several aspects of the aforementioned variables that can be further studied. The following are some of them.

New study can explore UGC's Role in Specific Industries. This study focused on general consumer perception. Future research could explore UGC's impact on specific industries such as hospitality, retail, fashion or technology in Ghana. There can also be studies to analyse the long-term effects of UGC on brand loyalty. Such longitudinal studies could track how UGC affects consumer attitudes and purchasing behaviour over time. Additional studies can investigate the role of Video-Based UGC in Brand engagement. Since this study found that product reviews and testimonials are the most impactful, future research could specifically examine whether video-based UGC (e.g., YouTube and TikTok reviews) plays a more significant role in influencing consumer behaviour in Ghana.

5.5 Conclusion

The study findings confirm that User-Generated Content (UGC) plays a significant role in shaping brand perception in Ghana, influencing consumer trust, awareness, and loyalty. The

results provide strong empirical support for the theoretical frameworks also discussed in this paper,

The study found that UGC enhances brand meaning, brand response, and brand resonance, leading to higher consumer trust and loyalty. This supports Keller's argument in Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) Model, that consumer perceptions of a brand are heavily influenced by peer experiences, reinforcing the role of UGC in building brand equity. For instance, consumers in this study rated brand awareness ($M = 3.61$) and brand trust ($M = 3.32$) highly, indicating that UGC contributes significantly to brand recognition and credibility.

The study also found that consumers trust UGC more than traditional brand advertisements, reinforcing the idea that peer influence plays a critical role in shaping consumer decisions. This supports Kelman's (1953) Social Influence theory, which suggests that individuals conform to peer opinions due to informational social influence. An example is that 61.6% of respondents stated that they trust UGC as much or more than traditional advertising, demonstrating that social validation is a major factor in consumer trust.

The findings of this study contribute to both academic literature and practical marketing strategies, offering insights into how brands in Ghana can leverage authentic, consumer-driven content to enhance their digital brand presence. The study also highlights the importance of encouraging organic UGC (reviews, testimonials) to build credibility, engaging with consumer-generated content to reinforce positive brand perceptions and leveraging peer influence as a core component of brand marketing strategies.

By integrating UGC into their brand strategies, businesses can enhance consumer trust, improve brand perception, and foster long-term customer loyalty in Ghana's rapidly evolving digital landscape.

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