



**EXPLORING THE ROLE OF USER-GENERATED CONTENT IN
SHAPING ONLINE CONSUMER DECISION-MAKING FOR FASHION
RETAIL SECTOR**

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Abstract

With the evolution of technology and social media, every field of life has been greatly impacted. This is also true for fashion retail stores. The fashion industry has been greatly impacted by user-generated content (UGC) or consumer-generated content, which refers to content specific to a brand or store, created by the people, and spreads through social media. The rise of social media and user-generated content greatly influences the use of online marketing tactics and the study of consumer behavior. Comprehending the importance of user-generated information in customer decision-making is crucial for fashion retail practitioners and academicians alike so that specific strategies can be employed to increase sales or identify customer engagement patterns. The research design of this study uses the interpretivism philosophy to investigate the prevalence and influence of user-generated content in fashion. Secondary data sources such as books, journals, web articles and social media are used in the data collection process of the study to analyze the data qualitatively. Based on the secondary data sources, content analysis was done to determine the different types of UGC that fashion retailers employ and the multiple factors that influence the decision-making and purchase intention of the consumers. The main themes generated for different types of UGC were reviews and ratings, social media content, and hashtag campaigns. These themes have been proven vital forms of UGC that fashion stores are currently using. For the factors influencing the purchase intention, themes such as brand credibility and trust, social proof and influence, community and engagement, and influencer partnerships were identified and investigated as key elements that have an impact on the consumers. The research suggests fashion retailers need to focus on building strong connections with consumers to survive in this competitive business environment. In conclusion, the study has significant managerial impacts, and in order to attract customers to brands, marketing strategies must use a comprehensive approach.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

Digitalization in the market communication space has permeated every aspect of our daily lives. Social media platforms are being utilized by people in place of newspapers and other traditional means of staying informed about current affairs. The Internet offers a variety of opportunities to build strong and long-lasting connections with clients as well as facilitate collaboration with other parties, which might improve the efficacy of marketing interactions (Steinhoff 2019). User-generated content (UGC) or consumer-generated can be defined as original brand-specific content created by people and distributed through social media or other means. A broad spectrum of media, such as periodicals, podcasts, reviews, and images, are included in UGC. UGC is one way that businesses influence consumers (Naeem, 2019). When current or former brand consumers post evaluations of their product experiences online and tell their friends, electronic word of mouth refers to the spread of information among family members regarding a product or service (eWOM) (Poulis et al., 2019).

Subsequently, many businesses have joined the information exchange process, which allows interested customers to share comments, evaluations, suggestions, and questions and answers (Micu et al., 2019). This trend is also seen in the fashion retail sector. It also important to mention that the present research defines retail fashion brands as manufacturing companies that supply wealthy clients with high-end, unique, and usually excellent clothing, accessories, and lifestyle items. These retail fashion brands can be termed as luxury fashion brands that typically operate in posh neighborhoods and offer personalized customer service in opulent shopping environments.

However, in order for fashion brands to capitalize on the present digital era, they must have a strong online presence. Furthermore, the internet market is growing in significance as traditional brick-and-mortar establishments struggle to draw customers in and make fashion product purchases (Silva et al., 2020). It emphasizes how crucial digital tactics are to obtaining a competitive advantage in the retail industry. Thus Fashion businesses need to comprehend the complex and multifaceted influences of UGC on consumer purchasing decisions in order to create effective marketing campaigns, cultivate brand loyalty, and maintain their competitiveness in the digital marketplace.

1.2. Research Rationale

Evidence suggests that UGC on online entertainment communications websites has an impact on consumer purchase decisions. Consumer purchase decisions can be defined as the practice by which online shoppers pass through in their decision-making process when investigating goods and services, assessing their options, and finally making a purchase. Price range, usability, and the availability of information and reviews are a few important variables that affect consumers' decisions when they shop online. Brand objectives like awareness, perception, and interest are influenced by brand engagement indicators like people's responses to online videos, comments, and ratings. These customer reviews have a significant impact on how consumers make selections about what to buy in the current marketplace.

Investigating how UGC influences the decisions of the customers of fashion retail is justified by a number of significant factors. Furthermore, it also sought to investigate how consumer brand loyalty and purchase intentions have been altered by technological innovation and web-based entertainment.

1.3. Aims and objectives

Examining the connection between UGC and online customer decision-making in the fashion retail industry is the primary goal of the research. The other main goals of the research are given below:

1. To investigate the types and prevalence of user-generated material that fashion stores employ.
2. To determine how and to what extent user-generated material influences the decision making of online consumers and their purchase intentions.
3. To offer suggestions to fashion retailers on how to best leverage UGC to improve online customer attraction and improve sales.

1.4. Research Questions

Following are the research questions.

1. How does the effectiveness of different types of user-generated content on social media websites influence the online consumer decision-making process?
2. What types of user-generated content do luxury fashion retailers utilize on social media websites?

1.5. Research Significance

Comprehending the significance of user-generated information in customer decision-making is crucial for fashion retail practitioners and academicians alike. For practitioners, insights derived from this study can inform marketing strategies aimed at leveraging UGC to engage consumers and drive sales. Brands can tailor their content creation and distribution efforts to maximize impact by understanding what types of UGC resonate. Scholars will find that this study adds both empirical support and a theoretical understanding of the dynamics of UGC in the fashion retail industry to expand the body of research on consumer behaviour and digital marketing. This research offers a theoretical addition to social identity theory by elucidating the link between consumer purchasing decisions and UGC on social media. Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine the social impact of UGC via the lens of social identity theory.

As a result, based on an investigation of UGC, the motives, the course of UGC development, and consumption have been explored through the lens of social identity theory. In addition, this is actually the very first study using social identity theory to explicitly investigate the connection between social influence and consumer purchasing decisions. This is an additional theoretical contribution made by the study.

1.6. Dissertation Structure

This dissertation document contains five sections (called chapters), and their details are provided below:

- **Chapter 1:** An overview of the study's main goals and objectives is given in this section. This part also summarizes the document's structure and the importance of the research, highlighting how a dissertation should be organized.
- **Chapter 2:** A critical analysis of UCG-related literature is presented in this section. Additionally, a theoretical framework indicating the links found in previous research is given.
- **Chapter 3:** This part provides a detailed illustration of the research methodology along with an explanation of the selected methodologies and techniques used to carry out the research. This section covers the methods used for data collection and analysis.
- **Chapter 4:** The data analysis results are presented in this section. Tables and graphs showing the results are included, along with appropriate interpretations. In order to give the results a meaningful representation, a discussion of the results is provided in this section.
- **Chapter 5:** This section summarizes the research findings and describes how the objectives of the study are fulfilled. The results' implications for reality are also discussed in this section. To finish the study, limitations and a discussion of future research are presented.

1.7. Summary

An overview of this research is provided in this chapter. The chapter explains the research gaps that should be addressed in this study. Moreover, it highlights the research background, objectives and importance of the study.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

Information on the opinions of other academics that are pertinent to the subject is provided in this chapter. Finding the gaps in the literature will be made easier with the aid of this chapter.

2.2. User Generated Content (UGC)

Research on UGC and social media networks is limited. The majority of the literature focuses on one of these two aspects. To put it briefly, UGC is a free marketing tool that users create to help brands gain more recognition. Social media platforms make it possible for UGC to be created and shared. The Internet has empowered customers' proactive conduct and purchase process. Social media networks provide necessary details about the product in which any consumer is interested, and these details can be easily accessible (Qin, 2020). UGC is considered a very diverse and widespread research issue, according to existing studies on a range of online communications, especially in the marketing literature (Singh and Chakrabarti, 2021). The earliest and most significant body of research has looked at how UGC, especially online customer reviews, affects market share and sales. They have also looked at how UGC influences consumer purchasing intentions and helps the customer in making a purchase decision. The behavioral elements associated with the formation of UGC are examined in the second stream. The current study has a closer relationship with this stream. Efforts within this area have concentrated on the important factors that affect the production and distribution of UGC (Bulut and Karabulut, 2018).

These are the findings of a study conducted by Nielsen that looked at people's attitudes towards user-generated content:

Percentage%	Results
92 %	Customers believe in credible media such as reviews and endorsements from bloggers, friends, and relatives.
70 %.	Online customer reviews are a trustworthy source of advertising.
50 %	Consumers view social media platforms as more trustworthy than TV commercials.
35 %	UGC increases the likelihood that viewers will recall the brand's material.
20 %	Respondents will rely on their purchasing judgements on unidentified online reviews. They will consult experts before making a purchase.
18 %	Content from social media is more trustworthy than traditional marketing methods.

Table 1 Global Consumers' Trust in Advertising

Source: (Nielsen research 2012)

The above table demonstrates how brands that allow users to submit UGC offer a wealth of content and foster greater customer brand loyalty. Nielsen's poll demonstrates the reach of messages and the effectiveness of percentage results. These media content messages engage viewers across a variety of media channels. It implies that prosperous brands will make an effort to engage with customers and utilize their perceptions to provide feedback and share personal stories. UGC is an excellent marketing tool, but it has no control over the quality of the content. A single unfavorable review can harm a brand's reputation as a whole. Developing value alongside customers is how businesses are going to succeed in the future sums up one of the most recent developments in marketing. It also captures the previously listed elements, according to Leiser and Gensert (2019). This quote illustrates how consumers no longer feel satisfied with simply requesting goods and services—instead, they feel compelled to participate in the procedures of production and market development. In order to refer to this as co-creational marketing, Singh and Chakrabarti (2021) created the idea of stimulated UGC. The brand supervisor can set up the programme guidelines, and the user input may be canalised but not controlled is how stimulated UGC is defined. However, the efficiency of UGC for companies is influenced by user interaction and brand reputation (Nash, 2019).

Companies are using influencer relationships as UGC to market their goods more and more. Brand engagement or sales are increased via social influence. Influencer marketing may increase brand awareness without affecting consumers' willingness to trust and make a purchase. According to (Mayrhofer et al., 2020), compliant social media users base judgements about brands, such as whether to purchase their products, on the opinions of others. According to Chetioui et al. (2020), modern internet users trust UGC more than seller-generated content. Participants in UGC have faith in one another to deliver reliable information. Timoshenko and Hauser (2019) discovered that positive user feedback affected consumers' inclinations to buy. A bad review might discourage a purchase. The integrity and authenticity of user reviews have an impact on consumers' faith in companies. Before making a costly or brand-new purchase, high-risk perceivers frequently look into UGC. Despite their frequent interchange, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and UGC are not the same (Smith et al., 2012). Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) specifically refers to any online customer review, whether positive or negative, that is shared about a product or service (Kim and Johnson, 2016). Ideas, referrals, and product recommendations come from social media connections. Consumer engagement is increased when customers and marketers have mutual trust. Marketers employ social media marketing and user evaluations on their websites to get customers to leave comments (Naeem, 2019).

Prior studies by Halvorsen et al. (2013) and Camacho et al. (2019) demonstrate the value of consumer fashion reviews in assisting shoppers by providing guidance on what and where to purchase. Additionally, some studies suggest that UGC has a crucial effect on buying decisions (Zain et al., 2018). The networking elements that comprise the digital shopping community have become UGC graphic types. Since aesthetics and taste are at the core of visuals, UGC, like user-generated designs and models, have developed as key social factors that stimulate relationships and expand online fashion consumption (Olbrich and Holsing, 2011).

While marketers can interact with consumers and present their products on social media, their influence on purchase intentions may be diminished by sponsored posts and overexposure (Geng and Chen, 2021). Variations in perspectives and experiences influence how consumers perceive risk. Customer apprehension about making transactions online is known as perceived risk (Mathur et al., 2022). Influencer partnerships might not increase revenue because customers could question sponsored content and influencers' intentions.

2.3. Importance of Social Media

Online communications, particularly social media, are the source of data interchange, item recommendations and brand affiliation with various companies (Djafarova and Bowes, 2021). Making decisions might assist marketers in effectively developing brand marketing tactics among social media users in order to attract customers and open up new business chances. Furthermore, with knowledge of social media user-generated material and customer decision-making, marketers may be able to more effectively handle their social media marketing campaigns to establish, expand and promote businesses if they understand the social setting of UGC and its societal impact on customer attitudes. This might additionally promote relationships with social media consumers by creating, sharing and consuming UGC about businesses. These days, social media use has a bigger impact; therefore, it is important to understand what it means first. When it comes to interaction, the terms "social" and "media" can be separated (Aji et al., 2020). Identification takes place when a product or service is recommended by someone who is well-liked by others and is subsequently seen favourably by customers (Naeem, 2019). This urges these customers to use or purchase the products or services. Celebrity endorsements of goods or services serve as one illustration of this particular scenario (Goh et al., 2013). Several companies use celebrity endorsements as a sales-boosting

tool to market their products. Compared to the general population, celebrities have more social impact on society (Jin and Phua, 2016).

Top-down marketing has been replaced with a new method of task organisation, peer recommendations and genuine UGC, which has altered consumer-brand relations. UGC increases the social media reputation of any particular brand. In the arbitrary and rapidly evolving fashion retail sector, UGC shapes customer opinions and purchases. Digital word-of-mouth and online engagement have surged due to social media.

UGC, such as product evaluations, influencer endorsements, and social media posts, aid in decision-making. According to research by Mayrhofer et al. (2020), information-sharing networks provided by social media are altering the way individuals create shared realities. UGC brings like-minded people together and appeals to respected peers, as well as strengthens customer confidence and community. Despite social media's growing prominence, research indicates that a sizable portion of Internet users generally do not use CGC throughout the pre-purchase stage (Wang et al., 2018). According to a recent poll, South African Internet users obtain information from the Internet before making a purchase. It serves as an example of the importance of taking into account the factors influencing UGC's usage of fashion preferences. Using attitudinal theories like the Technology Acceptance Model, current research has examined the factors that influence UGC as well as the use and acceptance of online consumer feedback (Lorenz et al., 2014). People may actively produce content by sharing their ideas, preferences, and exposure to the world via social media and online forums. Groups having UGC and collaborative knowledge are fostered via internet-based networking platforms (Nash, 2019). One of the major industries most impacted by the internet revolution is fashion retailing. Through social media platforms, consumers inspired by fashion have a unique opportunity to voice their opinions and ideas online through text, images and videos (Wolny and Mueller, 2013).

In a nutshell, this is an online social network that enables users to meet and find new people right away. There are two approaches in this regard: developing an online network of contacts or raising brand recognition, which refers to building a personal or company brand. As a result, there are two methods to communicate and work together (Barreda et al., 2015). From a branding perspective, they make it possible to locate and draw in new clients and win their loyalty by understanding their requirements and desires whenever it is convenient for them. People who utilise social media are looking for fun and excitement. Customer and brand

communication is referred to as interaction, and it is via UGC that companies may contribute to social media platforms where consumers can engage, communicate, and find individuals with similar interests as one's own (Buzeta et al., 2020). Finding the newest information and trends is very easy with the help of social media marketing (SMM). Consumers heavily use social media platforms as a source of information since they are perceived as more trustworthy than traditional types of advertising. Four sub-motivations may be identified within trendiness information: pre-purchase information, knowledge, inspiration, and surveillance (Buzeta et al., 2020). UGC comes in three different ways in the world of the internet.

At first, UGC can be found on social media sites. Social media sites can be defined as digital tools that provide a platform for members of online communities and networks to share information, including text and visual content. Social media sites refer to as Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, Google+, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Instagram, YouTube. Second, online communities produce UGC through product reviews and ratings. On social networking sites, user-generated material is frequently featured and promotes engagement through likes, shares, comments, and conversations. Several examples of these online communities are Google Business Rating, Yelp, OpenTable, Zagat, and TripAdvisor. Customers frequently discuss their experiences and voice their thoughts on a purchased good or service on OpenTable, Yelp, Zagat, and TripAdvisor. Thirdly, UGC can be seen on corporate and third-party websites such as eBay and Amazon. Numerous studies indicate that UGC is a more reliable source of information for consumers than content produced by marketers. However, because UGC varies depending on the online environment—instant messaging networks (WeChat, Imo, WhatsApp, Viber), third-party sales websites (Amazon, eBay), and corporate websites—it is crucial to look into the impact of UGC in these contexts.

2.4. Consumer Buying Decision

A consumer buying decision is defined as the probability that an individual will be interested in purchasing a specific product (Qazzafi et al., 2019). Previous research asserts that it is a critical predictor of consumer behaviour from now on. A wide variety of consumer behaviour models are employed to determine what consumers desire to buy (Yi and Jai, 2020). According to Papoutsis (2022), consumers make purchasing decisions based on the stimulation-response strategy. Globalization has made customers more conscious of issues impacting entire industries globally. This modifies their perspective on various nations. Many customers hold institutions accountable when an industry-wide catastrophe is linked to a nation of origin (Liu et al., 2023).

Understanding the precise decision-making stage at which a consumer is situated is crucial for creating targeted marketing efforts, engaging with them at the right touchpoints and enhancing customer relationship management (CRM) platforms (Towers and Towers, 2022). Because making choices for purchases is heavily influenced by internet conversations among potential customers, analysing the various social media platforms is essential to finding this information (Hudson and Thal, 2013). According to Pookulangara and Koesler (2011), In addition to altering the stages of evaluation and purchase, online social networks enable consumers to take on the role of brand ambassadors.

According to a related study, customer discussions conducted online can reinforce a person's connection with a product, among other factors that impact purchase decisions (Wang et al., 2018). According to studies done by earlier researchers, consumers seek out the opinions of other consumers in order to reduce their exposure to the danger of misinformation (Visentin et al., 2019). Because a single negative review can undermine a company's positive marketing message, negative UGC may affect consumers' intentions to buy and their perception of a brand.

Additionally, UGC might affect consumer feelings. It was discovered that even after providing them with all 32 pieces of information regarding the good or service, pleasant emotions still had an impact on their conduct. UGC has an impact on the business as well-known social media sites, like Facebook, permit product sales on their pages, which means that user reviews play a crucial role in consumers' choice to buy (Bahtar and Muda, 2016). Additionally, it helps B2C businesses grasp the potential benefits and income from social selling. As a result, they use

social networks more frequently and provide incentives to prospective clients who collaborate with them.

Additionally, it has been noted that interpersonal physical contact can trigger purchase intents through information sharing in daily interactions and that these society interactions also serve as a foundation for social trust-building on social media. Physical social contagion is the standard term for this particular case (Skinner, 2018). According to Kumar and Möller (2018), the identification process helps in the creation of UGC, for example, positive feedback or comments provided online for any specific product or service. Marketers have also noticed this phenomenon and started brand communities on social media platforms in an effort to interact with customers, create buzz and encourage information sharing, which have the potential to boost sales. The rise of social media and UGC has profoundly altered online marketing tactics and customer behaviour. Modern social media developments are creating new networks for exchanging knowledge, which is radically changing how people create shared realities (Nambisan et al., 2017). The majority of fashion-related websites have sizable user communities where members purchase, search, create and exchange product data, individual style preferences and other relevant material. One of the major industries most impacted by the internet revolution is fashion retailing. Through social media platforms, including forums, social networking sites, media sharing websites, and customer review sites, among others, fashion customers have a unique opportunity to voice their opinions and ideas online through text, images, and videos (Wolny and Mueller, 2013). Other social media users (SMUs) get interested when a customer starts an online conversation about a company. The social context in which UGC authors and consumers interact influences the degree of interest in UGC (Koivisto and Mattila, 2018).

2.5. Theory - Social Identity Theory

It may be studied using social identity theory. According to Henri Tajfel and John Turner's Social Identity Theory from 1986, conduct and self-perception are influenced by groups (Harwood, 2020). This notion could be applied to fashion retail research to evaluate the ways in which UGC influences the social identities of consumers. UGC allows users to provide their opinions, assessments and evaluations of goods and services (Mathur et al., 2022). Customers may access companies, fashion trends and styles through UGC. UGC includes product evaluations, social media posts and influencer endorsements. According to social identity theory, members of positive groups have higher self-esteem. Social media users frequently assist others with purchases (Geng and Chen, 2021). Items with UGC impact that reflect the identities and opinions of social groups may have higher sales.

As per the Social Identity Theory, individuals preserve a favorable social identity by fortifying their connections with a group and its characteristics. Purchase intention is influenced by positive customer attitudes, which are quickly changed by product innovation, technological development, buying scenarios, satisfaction or dissatisfaction, demography, reference groups and selling environments (Djafarova and Bowes, 2021). Through UGC, customers may engage with fashion networks and develop their sense of style. As a result, fashion companies may adjust their marketing to appeal to consumer inclinations for particular UGCs and modes of self-expression, which may impact consumer choice.

2.6. Conceptual Framework

A lot of previous studies looked at the influence of social media platforms on marketing, including customer relationships and purchase intentions, customer equity, marketing and public relations, marketing communication frameworks, promotional strategies and user interactions (Kim and Ko, 2012). On the other hand, little is known about the motivations behind UGC creation, communication and exchange on social media, as well as how and why UGCs influence one another with respect to fashion businesses. Consumer buying decisions are influenced by web-based entertainment, client surveys, and force to be reckoned with (CPD). It significantly affects expectations for purchases and brand perception.

Understanding the consumer direction or preferences is important for moving forward in the intensely competitive retail market. Purchase decisions are influenced by shared brand

experiences on the internet, social media and Web 2.0. The study aims to investigate how fashion stores may enhance their competitiveness and relevance by leveraging UGC to create engaging engagement campaigns (Ramirez et al., 2018). Furthermore, the study validates how UGC increases brand loyalty for fashion retail firms and how UGC affects the decisions made by fashion retail customers. This study is useful both conceptually and practically since it focuses on digital consumer-brand interactions that occur online.

2.7. Chapter Summary

The basic ideas of UGC and its relation to consumer purchase decisions have been reviewed in the literature review. Moreover, theoretical models and various underlying concepts related to UGC have been discussed as well to develop the theoretical background of the study.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Introduction

Details about the methods or strategies that will be applied to complete the research are provided in this chapter. A research paradigm is a collection of shared views and consensus among scientists on the appropriate ways to comprehend and tackle issues. Saunders et al. (2019) argue that the researcher's philosophical stance guides the study method. The fundamental presumptions concerning the researcher's viewpoint and methodological technique to research problems are included in the research philosophy. These presumptions guide the choice of the researcher regarding research techniques and approaches to carry out the investigation (Crowther and Lancaster, 2012). Furthermore, Chapman and McNeill (2005) contended that the primary concern should not be the philosophical rigour of the research but rather the researcher's capacity for philosophical reflection during the investigation process. When talking about research philosophy, it is impossible to sidestep the dispute between ontology and epistemology. This research regularly discusses the conflicting social science philosophies of realism and social constructionism (Easterby et al., 2021). Even if one agrees with the claim that issues of axiology, ontology and epistemology come before research methodologies, then one must be aware that selecting positivism or social constructionism might produce unrealistic outcomes. The study adopted the research onion model presented by Saunders et al. (2019) as an approach.

3.2. Research Design

The study uses interpretivism philosophy to investigate the topic of concern. Interpretivism can be termed as a school of thought holds that comprehension of people's attitudes, motives, and reasoning within a social context is necessary for interpreting evidence regarding a phenomenon. Interpretivism encourages individual interpretations of social processes by focusing on the context and meaning of human behaviour. By looking at all the angles, the researcher aims to bring about societal change. This interpretive study looks at the intricate decisions made by fashion retail customers. The researchers will take goals, viewpoints, and UGC comprehension from secondary sources into account. Since information is not physical, interpretivism places a strong emphasis on context and meaning (Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020).

This sets people apart from objects. The complex interactions between clients, customers, and fashion shops are made simpler by employing this tactic.

Inductive reasoning will be used in this investigation. Researchers want to develop new theories. Inductive reasoning looks for themes and patterns in data and observations to create generalisations (Pandey & Pandey, 2021). The study will start with UGC from fashion retail and customer decision-making by using an inductive approach. The process of inductive inquiry usually involves observing and evaluating the situation.

The chosen research philosophy is a way of looking at the world. This serves as the foundation for a methodology for research and methodology approach (Maruyama and Ryan, 2014). This implies that the ideologies of the research have an impact on research techniques. Important concerns regarding the study design are raised by the level to which a researcher is confident in the theory at the outset of their examination.

Because qualitative research methods look at opinion and thinking through a cultural lens, they are primarily suited to social constructionism/subjectivism and relativism. Qualitative and quantitative research methodologies can be used to classify research approaches broadly. However, they do have certain similarities and are not wholly separate from one another. It explains the key distinctions between qualitative and quantitative research methodologies and provides support for the choice of qualitative research for this particular study.

Problems are tagged with numerical values in quantitative research, which is followed by testing and conversion into useful statistics. In quantitative research, opinions, attitudes and behaviours are measured. Data are collected from larger sample sizes. Measurable data are gathered, and specified data collection procedures are followed in quantitative research. Numerous survey formats are used in the collection of quantitative data, including paper, kiosk, online, and mobile surveys. Additional techniques include online surveys, website interceptors, longitudinal studies, and systematic observations. Quantitative research necessitates data quantification. As a result, the researcher can extrapolate the findings. The results apply to the full interest populations. This type of research quantifies attitudes and beliefs in order to assess attitudes and beliefs (Margolis and Pauwels, 2011). As previously said, no theories or hypotheses were evaluated, and the research only examined the issue at hand. Therefore, quantitative methodologies are not applicable to our study.

Interpretive methods are used in qualitative research to address the topic matter. According to this kind of study, the researcher's job is to interpret the circumstances by considering the perspectives and opinions of individuals who are affected by them (Hammond and Wellington, 2012). Thus, the researcher actively contributes to the situation's interpretation. Qualitative research aids in understanding the social reality of brand-related user-generated material on social media by providing insights into the perspectives of those impacted by such content. As a result, individuals and groups are investigated in their natural environments in qualitative research.

Qualitative methodologies will be used in the investigations. Qualitative research offers rich, thorough data on complex phenomena like consumer attitudes and behaviour. Important topics and methodologies are examined by qualitative research in a way that is not possible by quantitative or numerical analysis (Hennink et al., 2020). A qualitative study can look into the varying opinions that fashion retail customers have on UGC. Both literature analysis and content analysis are used. Understanding a phenomenon from the perspective of individuals who are impacted is the aim of qualitative research. This tactic enhances concepts and resolves issues by comprehending the context and nuances of customer decision-making.

3.3. Data Collection

Secondary data sources are used in the study's data collection process. For unconnected reasons, other investigators or institutions gather and study secondary data. Researchers and suggested data can be found in secondary sources. The research will employ academic papers, industry studies, market research journals, online databases and UGC to examine consumer decision-making in fashion retail. There are various sources available on consumer behaviour, market trends, historical studies, and theoretical frameworks. This content will serve as the basis for the research study. Secondary data gathering reduces the requirement for significant original data collection since the research makes extensive use of pre-existing knowledge and expertise. Secondary research aids in the explanation of the historical conditions and attitudes of a market.

Table 2: Secondary Data Sources

Books	Books about the purpose of UGC on social media and consumer buying decisions.
Journals	Articles addressing the use of social media to create consumer personas have undergone peer review. Peer-reviewed papers about fashion brands' use of UGC on social media.
Web Articles	Articles on the web discussing how social media and UGC influence fashion brand selections.
Social media	Social media about how UGC influence what customers buy from fashion brands.

3.4. Data Analysis

Qualitative content analysis will be employed to study the research data. Qualitative content analysis carefully examines textual or visual material to identify themes, patterns, and meanings (Lindgren et al., 2020). Influencer relationships, product evaluations, and social media postings will all be qualitatively analysed on this research site. In the retail fashion industry, UGC may showcase the tastes, routines, and opinions of customers. This approach enables researchers to study qualitative data in-depth and make inferences.

Material analysis is a popular qualitative research approach or instrument for assessing the characteristics of materials. This approach of quantifying qualitative data entails grouping data and comparing distinct informational aspects in order to distil it into useful conclusions. Simple words, text and images may be included in the content along with information gleaned from websites, books, journals and social media platforms. A growing number of businesses are using content analysis to automatically identify and categorise information using machine learning and other technologies. A method for research known as content analysis is used to pinpoint particular terms, ideas or themes in an article or collection of qualitative data (Drisko and Maschi, 2016). The process of content analysis is divided into five key steps.

There are several ways to collect the data required for a qualitative content analysis. Secondary data sources such as journal papers, online articles can provide information for study.

3.4.1. Choose the Categories for Coding

Content analysis measurement is based on structured observation, which is a rigorous examination of specified written criteria. The material's classification scheme is laid out in these recommendations. The categories that have been established for the analysis should not overlap with one another. Replication ease and better reliability are benefits of these established principles.

3.4.2. Data Coding

The name you give the text that has to be reviewed which could be a single word or a string of words is called a code. For example, if a political figure is mentioned in the text, the keyword "politician" is applied.

3.4.3. Using Codes to Define the Themes

Evaluating the designed codes is the next stage. It is imperative to confirm the reliability of the codes. To make sure the code measures the items it says it will monitor and that the results are trustworthy, testing the code is essential.

3.4.4. Outlining Findings

When the analysis is done, a number of files with different kinds of information will be available. This needs to be explained in a structured and understandable manner to the audience.

The study can make use of content analysis to look at the frequency, importance and relationships between particular phrases, subjects or concepts associated with UGC on social media that influence the purchasing decisions of customers for fashion stores. For example,

scholars might search for the primary data that these papers give. After that, academics might conclude the content of the writings, their intended audience, and even their cultural and historical context. Understanding these elements can help the fashion retail industry modify its offerings, policies and practices to align with contemporary advertising. Beyond mere interpretation, the research transforms those results into actionable strategies that might impact the ways in which UGC on social media platforms improves the customer experience in the retail fashion sector. According to Driko and Maschi (2016), it means looking deeper into the interpreted data to uncover possibilities, variations, trends, and hidden patterns.

3.5. Ethical considerations

Research ethics guides researchers regarding how to carry out their investigations while abiding by the law. All researchers must follow these guidelines, which are relevant to their work. Following specific research ethics is necessary to finish the study process. The study aims to preserve moral and social values, such as the notion of causing no harm to others and to promote justice and mutual respect. Communication about research should always be done honestly and ethically. The inquiry was carried out in a way that ensured reliable data collecting and produced results that could be trusted. In addition, sincere protocols were adhered to for data analysis and to avoid data manipulation. According to the survey, the following moral guidelines were upheld.

3.5.1. Confidentiality

The confidentiality of the study's data was maintained throughout the investigation. There must be no fabrication of the research objectives or purpose. Safeguarding data privacy is also crucial (Gajjar, 2013). To stop future researchers from using the data, it is also imperative that it be kept for a certain period before being deleted.

3.5.2. UGC and Consumer Buying Decision

User-generated content, or UGC, is any online content that is generated, started, shared and viewed by users. It is described as media content produced by users who are from the general public (Kim and Johnson, 2016). Previous studies demonstrate how important UGC is for anticipating customer reactions and influencing their decision-making (Khalil et al., 2020). Research that tackles UGC as a comprehensive idea has mostly concentrated on analysing the specific attributes of the material (Daradkeh, 2021). In this context, Owusu et al. (2016) looked at the correlation between UGC features and online purchase decisions. They found that the relevancy, timeliness and dependability of the UGC information may have the biggest influence on the web buying decision. Some research looked into particular types of UGC, such as eWOM, and measured how it affects consumer purchasing and behavioural intentions (Al-Gasawneh and Al-Adamat, 2020). Additionally, Torlak et al. (2014) discovered that eWOM significantly increases customer purchase intention in their investigation of Turkey's cell phone market. In a similar vein, Wang (2015) investigated the impact of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) on travellers' intentions to visit and found that eWOM had a considerable influence on travellers' intentions to visit certain global destinations.

Depending on the nation and the type of product, UGC may or may not have a varied impact on customer reactions. When UGC appears on well-known websites, it usually possesses a higher level of source trust (Muda and Hamzah, 2021). Additionally, research indicates that UGC has a greater impact on consumer behaviour than marketing-generated material. This becomes especially important when purchasing high-risk, high-engagement goods in a highly social setting like Jordan, like makeup. That is, if the wrong brand is selected, there is a significant chance that the product will negatively affect consumers' mental and physical health (Nepomuceno et al., 2014). Judgements of Information seekers are influenced by their information diet throughout this cyclical scatter-gather process. Still, they are also influenced by the immediate contextual factors such as the diversity and ambiguity of the information patches. Perceptions of information seekers' odours at each step are shaped by the information environment, which also influences their ultimate decision. Online forums typically have a louder information environment than other webpages. For instance, unlike the neatly arranged content seen on product web pages, the content of a discussion board is developed by users and

is self-managed. This might lead to divergent viewpoints, open-ended themes and disorganised product suggestions (Lu et al., 2020).

Word-of-mouth (WoM), which occurs when users and customers publish comments, evaluations and suggestions, is one of the most important aspects of UGC. These take the form of an online forum where contributors can post reviews of brands. This enables later users to base decisions on past customer interactions, impressions of brands and impressions about products. Other users then utilise the information they have obtained to make decisions about what to buy (Muda and Hamzah, 2021). Businesses can get ideas for new items as well as a clearer understanding of what consumers think and feel about their current offerings. It involves more than just writing product reviews. Users often utilise social media networks to share knowledge on a wide range of topics, such as daily living, computer troubles and financial concerns. Since the shared material is based on personal experience rather than firm-created knowledge, I find it to be more reliable and helpful. Online shoppers use UGC to inform their decisions (Bae and Lee 2011).

3.5.3. Integrity and Honesty

Every communication related to the study was conducted honestly and with integrity. A biased falsification of the secondary data was not required. When assessing the data, the investigator must give accurate information and may employ one or more methods to verify the validity of the data by consulting a variety of sources. Additionally, it was ensured that the findings of the analysis would prevent participant identification and that the usage of secondary data would not be harmful (Gajjar, 2013).

3.5.4. Ethical Approval

Based on the source and type of data, human participants in secondary data usually require ethical approval. The authenticity of the review is determined by the type and source of the data (Stommel and Rijk, 2021).

3.6. Chapter Summary

The research design, gathering data strategy, and data analysis method were all covered in detail in this chapter. The purpose of this section was to explain the selected research approach and provide support for the methods that were chosen. The chosen research approach was used to gather data and carry out analysis. The findings and related interpretations are given in the next section.

4. Findings and Analysis

4.1. Introduction

This section of the study presents a content analysis to help identify patterns in a variety of scientific domains and scrutinize the factors that influence the Role of UGC in Shaping Online Consumer Decision-Making in the Fashion Retail Sector. In this regard, a content analysis is presented below that generated major themes to accomplish the research objectives.

4.2. Content Analysis

The generated themes, as per the defined research objectives and questions, include

4.2.1. To investigate the types and prevalence of user-generated material that fashion stores employ.

4.2.1.1. Reviews and Ratings

Concerning the above, one of the major themes that was identified was Reviews and ratings that fashion retailers employ to increase their sales. To access this type of UGC, findings from different papers were taken as shown below.

Table 3 Sub Theme Generated for Reviews and Ratings

Author	Major Findings	Sub Theme
(Tran and Strutton, 2020)	The article reveals that reviews and ratings as a part of the fashion industry's offerings are crucial nowadays. It can be noted that they are not simply metrics for measurement, but they have profound implications concerning consumer trust, decision-making on purchases, and brand understanding. By providing positive reviews, companies also gain support among customers and how they make their choices. These reviews remain effective platforms for introducing new products, as well as creating the spirit of belonging and sharing purposes with other individuals interested in the fashion industry.	Positive reviews
(Rawat, 2023)	The study identifies e-commerce websites, brand websites, brand blogs, and third-party review sites as potential sites where consumers can participate in the discussions of purchase experiences and product usage. Thus, reviews and ratings have gained popularity as a highly effective marketing and sales instrument that affects consumers' decisions. Most clients can choose between the products they need by reading reviews, and it can influence the sale of consumer products. Specifically, the study looks at reviews/ratings and their influence on consumer's decisions to purchase products.	Consumer reviews

(Yang et al., 2019)	Due to the increasing popularity of social media, many firms use these sites to communicate with consumers and promote consumption commentaries of their merchandise. In this paper, the authors investigate factors that affect what users post and how such posts differ from online reviews through an analysis of Facebook business pages belonging to multiple companies. Altogether, the study reveals that the business's Facebook page posts convey a form of UGC different from the more typical consumers' feedback.	User-generated posts
(Hilal and Astuti, 2022)	The 2022 research targeted Indonesian consumers and targeted those who have made their purchases through social media or applications. Some of the data collected included the following: The target population was 400 respondents, and primary data was collected from the same. The SEM provided an analysis of the data collected from the distribution of the questionnaire. The results concluded that there is a significant relation between online consumer reviews and trust; it was also identified that there is a more obvious emphasis on reviews altering impulse buys when considering trust. Finally, it mentioned that trust has a moderately powerful effect on reviews and impulse purchases.	online consumer reviews

4.2.1.2. Social Media Content:

Another major theme was the social media content, which included pictures and videos that were posted on social media by fashion stores to attract the attention of the audience. To support this theme, different published journal and web articles were explored, and their findings are reported below.

Table 4 Sub Theme Generated for Social Media Content

Author	Major Findings	Sub Theme
(Kusumasondjaja, 2020)	This paper aims to understand the relationship between visual appeal and presentation format and consumer response to luxury fashion brands' posts on Instagram. Static posts received less engagement than the videos that were posted on the targeted pages. There was also a combined effect of both visuals and format on response probability. The expressive aesthetic and audio-visual posts elicited more response probability than did classical aesthetics, although classical aesthetics fared better in the purely visual format.	Visually aesthetic content
(Rachmah and Mayangsari, 2020)	The objectives of this research were to examine which types of communication consumers are more involved with from local fashion brands on Instagram and to analyze the relationship between posted content and involvement level. It is important to mention that actual users of Instagram were asked to fill in an online questionnaire. The research ascertained that post features, specifically the type of content shared, affect increasing customer interaction. There are three clusters of content: entertainment, informative, and remuneration contents separately produced differences in the level of engagement: entertainment had the highest level of engagement.	Viral content types

(Fetais et al., 2023)	Branded luxury and designer fashion have become actively involved in creating as much digital content, including branded entertainment, as they are in designing products and apparel. This article seeks to find out whether or not fashion film aptly captures the utilization of moving images in the promotion of brands such as Gucci, Burberry, and Louis Vuitton on Instagram, YouTube, and Snapchat. Such content combines media with design. The author places fashion films as a thing of the past of what is called 'content' in today's social media visual and realistic feed, content which at times seems to override the film narrative. Unlike from a film history point of view, the author positioned contemporary fashion-moving images based on digital interactivity or interaction, branding, and celebrity.	Mobile platforms
(Sornapudi and Srivastava, 2021)	There are social media sites such as Instagram, TikTok, and Pinterest where stylists, influencers, designers, and ordinary people show various styles through pictures and videos, leading to the creation of trends. The study found that, as the notion of social media progresses, which it is, its impact on fashion will only grow even further, subverting the narrative. In this aspect, the industry can adopt social media as a key tool for creating innovations and engaging consumers to embrace new standards in the global market.	Social content

4.2.1.3. Hashtag Campaigns

With the popularity of social media, hashtags have become an increasingly popular way of conveying important information. This technique is also used by fashion stores, as can be seen below.

Table 5 Sub Theme Generated for Hashtag Campaigns

Author	Major Findings	Sub Theme
(Karamalak and Cantoni, 2021)	Hashtags should not be underestimated as they play an important role in fundraising, advocacy, and, generally, social movements. Sustainability or what might be described by the terms 'green' and 'environmental and social friendliness', is one of the most common aspects of fashion for which perceived injustice is noted. Several hashtags that start from the top, such as #FashionRevolution, #WhoMadeMyClothes, and #slowfashion, initiated by Fashion Revolution, contribute to the fight against pollution, overconsumption, racism, sexism, working conditions, and low wages. The linguistic and digital properties of hashtags that increase control over netizens, can be effectively used to popularize awareness of environmental and ethical causes in fashion.	hashtags' linguistic
(Jinnie Yoo, 2021)	Today, due to the increased popularity of Instagram, the administrators of profiles and brands use hashtags (#) to promote their profiles and products. This study explores the use of hashtags and captions by fashion brands on Instagram and users' reactions to various patterns. It also compared the changes in the levels of customer involvement. Key findings were that hashtags used extensively reduced affectivity; when used with captions, hashtags produced more likes and comments than	Hashtag frequency

	standalone hashtags, and branded hashtags received lower affectivity compared with other types of hashtags.	
(Sehgal et al., 2022)	Hashtags amplify and quickly disseminate or relay information regarding an issue. It helps to connect to the data within the platform regarding the searched topics. This article provides information on fashion production movements on social media; and awareness creation. The garment industry is, however, destructive to the environment, yet most garment manufacturing takes place in developing nations, and consumers are little aware of concerns related to it. This study's goal is to minimize the discrepancy between people's self-reported attitudes toward sustainability, their knowledge of sustainability, and their buying behaviour.	Sustainability hashtags
(Martínez-López et al., 2022)	Hashtags separate content types and increase visibility and brand exposure by allowing users to find brands amid posts and famous people. They easily pass the time by converting the audience to the campaigns and gaining more followers. Another advert that can be described as similar to Nike's Finding Your Greatness is Adidas' #HereToCreate from 2018, which attracted over 450 posts. They reached approx. 2 million views in thirty days.	Viral hashtags
(Tjandrawibawa, 2024)	Fashion labels are trying to figure out how to advertise their newest collection of items. They want the launch of their new collection to feel special, and one of the greatest ways to achieve this is by starting a TikTok hashtag campaign that is currently trending. TikTok is starting to have a major role in consumers' shopping decisions. A recent survey found that 37% of users bought a product right away after seeing it on TikTok. In the meantime, 38% of respondents claimed to have engaged with a brand's video while conducting product research.	Trending hashtags

4.2.2. To determine how and to what extent user-generated material (UGM) influences the decision-making of online consumers and their purchase intentions, it's essential to consider several factors:

4.2.2.1. Consumer Trust and Credibility

For the second objective, one major theme that was identified was the trust and credibility that consumers have in user-generated material that supports their purchase intention. The findings of the papers and web articles are reported below.

Table 6 Sub Theme Generated for Consumer Trust and Credibility

Author	Major Findings	Sub Theme
(Harrigan et al., 2021)	Since trust is a key determinant of consumers' purchase intention towards fashion products via social media, this research aims to determine unique factors that have influenced its factors. It looks at the antecedents of attitude toward fashion brand social media and peer communication, where the perceived usefulness of a fashion brand's social media and peer communication on the brand's social media are moderating variables that lead to trust in the brand's social media and purchase intention, respectively. Based on the analysis of the technology acceptance model and the concepts of consumer socialization, the author completes a survey of 150 European respondents to confirm or reject the hypotheses associated with these notions. Perceived usefulness was identified as having a direct influence on trust toward the brand and its social computing, additionally moderated by atmospheric signals. This is true because perceived usefulness and trust are affected by peer communication in networked environments. Namely, they found that trust in the brand and social media accounts of the brand both positively affect purchase intention, but trust in the brand only has a direct impact on purchase intention.	Trust in the brand
(Cuong, 2020)	This research empirically investigated the role of brand credibility and perceived value on customer satisfaction and purchase intention of fashion products in Vietnam. The study collected data from the 285 customers who were involved and employed PLS-SEM to analyze the data. When tested, brand credibility came out highly significant and positively affected the level of customer satisfaction, purchase intention, and perceived value. Indeed, perceived value directly affected the level of customer satisfaction and purchase intention positively. Furthermore, customer satisfaction was another variable found to have a positive influence on a customer's intention to purchase. In the context of the study, the author debates the implications that managers can derive from the presented findings.	Brand Credibility
(Lăzăroiu et al., 2020)	This study contributes to knowledge in the areas of trust and perceived online risk in the decision to engage in social commerce purchases.	Online trust

	The paper reviews and analyses consumer purchase decision-making, factors influencing positive attitudes towards purchase intention on E-commerce platforms, perceived risk on shopping intention to shop online, and influence of trust and buying behaviour on online retailing sites. The findings of the research advance understanding of consumer attitude and intention for internet purchases, perceived shopping risk and repurchase intention, and the role of perceived consumer trust on purchase behaviour on the internet. Based on the results, areas for further investigation concern psychological factors, assessing the price and types of perceived risk, as well as behaviours and attitudes toward repurchasing online.	
(Huang et al., 2020)	Focusing on brand credibility is an effective approach to generating loyalty and loyalty, especially within volatile markets. Consumers' imperatives include confidence, dependability, credibility, and faith, which act as the bridge between commercial image makers and faithful enthusiasts. Through the containment of trust, organizations gain customer advocacy, which can a result of long-term business relationships, as the organizations benefit from market dynamics evolving.	Customer loyalty and trust

4.2.2.2. Social Proof and Influence

Another major theme was the social proof and influence that fashion retailers have on the general public with respect to attracting consumers to their stores. This plays a critical role in the consumer's decision-making process and is explored below.

Table 7 Sub Theme Generated for Social Proof and Influence

Author	Major Findings	Sub Theme
(Meents et al., 2020)	While getting customers to physical stores appears to be a growing priority, if not a concern, location-based messaging that can send a message to a recipient when they are nearby the sender has been said to enable attraction. However, as mentioned in the prior research, there is not much guidance for retailers on which location-based persuasion approach they should apply. This exploratory study intends to examine how scarcity and social proof can affect customers and store visits. It used survey data from cross-sectional research and gathered data from actual customers of a Dutch fashion retailer. The findings indicate that scarce appeals are better because the scarcity appeals were perceived as being informative and entertaining and as being less irritating, thus having more utility and being more likely to induce a store visit.	Peer influence
(de Bruijn, 2020)	Fast fashion is environmentally unsustainable, yet it is a popular trend. Sustainable fashion lowers pollution rates and creates better working conditions for employees. Most consumers do not purchase sustainably. This assesses whether and how consumers classified as 'self,' 'social,' and	Social influence

	‘sacrifice’ differ in their willingness to engage in sustainable fashion consumption. It also seeks to test whether “liking,” “social proof,” and “consistency” social influence techniques are different in terms of efficiency and whether any technique is optimal for a certain consumer category. A survey targeted at assessing consumer types was conducted. It was found that compared to “self” or “social”, “sacrifice” consumers have a higher willingness. Techniques demonstrated no variations in effectiveness, and none among the various techniques were superior for a particular type. It is, as such, possible for self and social types to overlap because their behaviours may not be different.	
(Roy, 2021)	This paper starts from the assumption that perfect legal knowledge does not exist, and it uses social psychology to analyze imperfect information legal compliance decision-making. It incorporates elements of the ‘social influence conception’ of criminal deterrence more generally from an informational perspective. Going beyond the clear purpose of presenting the appearance of dissuasion, social psychology is instrumental in explaining sufficient social persuasion where an individual decides to conform. Legal compliance perceptions can be organized by compliance, and non-compliance cascades across the rules and guides new laws. In this regard, it can create high/low compliance equilibria through which societies function in the long run. Clarifying the informational function of social influence furthering motivations, law, and policy for voluntary and incentive/sanction compliance.	Social influence conception
(Naeem and Ozuem, 2022)	From shopping on crowded, popular high streets to posting selfies with fashion icons on Instagram, consumers like getting the crowds’ collective wisdom when it comes to purchasing decisions. This "social proof" phenomenon is not just psychological influence: customers believe that social proof plays a significant role in decisions made while shopping. Notably, most fashion/footwear brands fail to embrace easy social-proof strategies. It explores three ways brands can boost engagement with social proof: to persuade with social media content, to gain credibility with ratings/reviews, and to create a time-constrained demand with popularity. Beauty is using content and information that is already present to optimize for better conversion rates.	Social influence tactics

4.2.2.3. Community and Engagement

By building communities around fashion and engaging consumers, fashion retailers can increase their sales and take part in making some key changes. This theme is further elaborated below.

Table 8 Sub Theme Generated for Community and Engagement

Author	Major Findings	Sub Theme
(Aziz and Ahmed, 2021)	Even though there is increasing concern about engaging customers, prior research in this area is scarce and mainly focuses on drivers and outcomes. In this research, the relationship of brand interactivity, intimacy, involvement, psychological ownership and brand trust with the engagement of the customers with the fashion apparel brands of Pakistan will be explored. It also assesses the impact that engagement has on purchase intention. Participants in the current study were 443. An Online survey was used to administer the data to a convenience sample. In sum, the obtained findings contribute to the increase of knowledge about these topics in the context of fashion. This study adds to the existing understanding of customer engagement and policy-making because it reveals that brand managers should engage non-customers because of the role of engagement in building purchase intention.	Brand interactivity
(Gutiérrez-Rodríguez et al., 2024)	This research paper adopts a structural framework proposing the direct and indirect impact of customer brand engagement influence through consumer happiness acting as the mediate on purchase intention. It introduces measures of a few components of consumer brand engagement and of the constructs of consumer happiness that emerged as more relevant in the literature.	Consumer brand engagement
(Kim et al., 2020)	This research aimed to understand the role of social power and social capital on the purchase intention of sustainable fashion products in a particular fashion material on the YouTube application. Korean YouTube users 230 were surveyed to test the mediated moderation model with social power as the first moderator, parasocial interaction as the second moderator, and social capital as the last moderator for the relationship between parasocial interaction and purchase intention. Social capital has a significant impact on purchase intention, and findings depict that social capital has a very high impact on purchase intention.	Social power
(Batidzirai et al., 2021)	“Community engagement” is the process through which different and complex issues involving the community can be solved through high-level participation from the community members so that they can have their share in decision-making, thus providing equity. The four concepts here are to increase knowledge on the position, to co-develop knowledge for making issues better, to develop future engagement with the position, and to ensure timely and effective communication. Although the government often employs the principles to address environmental and social concerns, they can also be used for business concerning corporate social responsibility. Sustainable, ethical fashion is now critically demanding the involvement of every stakeholder across sectors. Relevant stakeholders can effectively implement these to facilitate consumer consumption shifts in the market.	Consumer attitudes

4.2.2.4. Influencer Partnerships

Fashion brands, by partnering with influencers, can increase their reach to the general public. This is an important theme of user-generated material influencing purchase intention and is further explored below.

Table 9 Sub Theme Generated for Influencer Partnership

Author	Major Findings	Sub Theme
(Nascimento et al., 2020)	Through social media, the number of endorsements has increased and has become even more sophisticated due to the ability of ordinary users to be considered influencers. Although literature explains that influencers are dynamic, there is not much literature available that explores how career progression patterns connect endorsement behaviours. This research outlines three evolving endorsement relationships: There appeared to be a number of them; experimenting, partnership, and bonding. As a result, the study posits brands are involved in the provider, partner, and hiring capacities in the influencers' entrepreneurial endeavours.	Endorsement
(Jacobson and Harrison, 2022)	The rise of influencer marketing has created sustainable fashion social media influencers as sustainable fashion content-producing individuals. As for the terminology, it includes concerned content creation personnel as influencers with ethical and sustainability in the posts. Exploring the intricacies of establishing a relationship between sustainability and entrepreneurship, challenges are brought to the forefront, and the utilization of influencers to change purchasing and consumer viewpoints in the evolving sustainable fashion sector emerges as the focus of the research.	Influencer marketing
(Jin et al., 2021)	This paper aims to find out factors influencing the impact of the post, depending on the account type (brand or influencer) and the content type, and whether or not the photo contains human figures. Parasocial interaction and social presence research discover that, even though these fashion influencers did not participate in branded content posts, the effects generated by their posts are the same as other influencer posts.	Brand content
(Mariani, 2020)	Brand partnerships vary from a simple post on a social media platform to a long-term brand alliance where the celebrity whose appearance/details/content becomes the face /voice of the brand. Five typical collaboration types are: sponsored posts on social media, sponsored blogging, product placement, endorsement, sponsored marketing personality, and product gifts. Business partnering can be used effectively as a tool that can benefit sales and enhance profiles in the market.	Brand partnerships

4.3. Discussion

4.3.1. Types and prevalence of user-generated material that fashion stores employ.

The analysis of themes and sub-themes aims to find out the types of UGC that fashion retailers employ and their prevalence.

4.3.1.1. Theme 1: Reviews and Ratings

Reviews and ratings have always had a significant impact on shaping consumer behaviour and brand perception in the fashion industry. For instance, if the customer has a word to say something good about a certain product or brand, it would be possible to make the potential buyer gain confidence to buy a certain product (Tran and Strutton, 2020).

These reviews come in the form of ratings and can be found on E-Commerce websites, the official websites of the brand, and other third-party review websites. It is important to underscore that the reviews provided are true and contain plenty of information, which indicates that fear of the perceived risk will be lower among those who are planning to buy the product (Rawat, 2023).

Social media networks also contributed to the impact of UGC by extending more platform space to brands to engage and encourage people to contribute more content. It is important to understand that the type of UGC created by individuals in posts on Facebook business pages is not the same as the more standard type of UGC known as online reviews (Yang et al., 2019).

Reviews and ratings are very highly relevant, as research has indicated that these factors play a highly persuasive role in influencing consumers' level of trust and decisiveness when making impulse purchases. For instance, when analyzing the impacts of reviews on trust concerning online shopping in Indonesia, the research indicated that, apart from its direct effect on trust, online buying impulsive behaviour also has an indirect inclination to do with it ((Hilal and Astuti, 2022).

For example, take the reviews as shown in Figure 1, where customers have given relatively bad ratings and conveyed issues like bad customer service, which was difficult to reach and created frustration in customers. These negative reviews can cause a potential loss of Zara's sales.

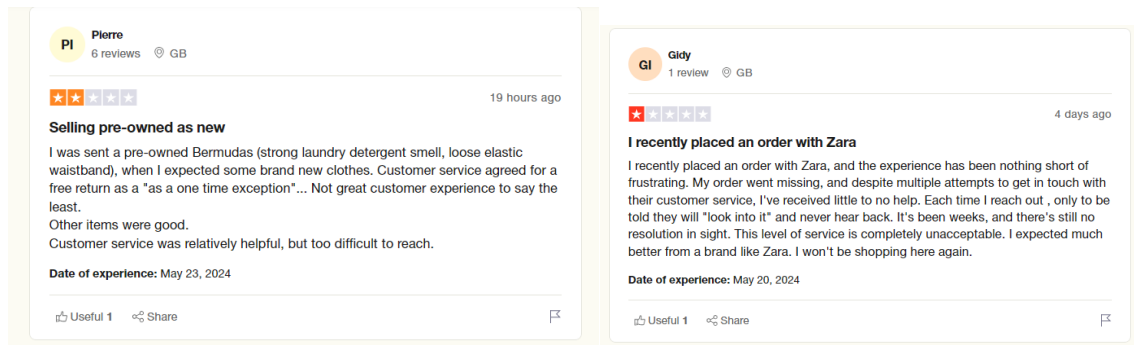


Figure 1 Zara's customer reviews

Source: Trustpilot

<https://uk.trustpilot.com/review/www.zara.com> (Accessed: 25 May 2024)

4.3.1.2. Theme 2: Social media content

It is noted that social media content plays a vital role in fashion retailing. Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Pinterest play the role of fashion catwalks that display influencers, designers, and fans through photos and videos that make up trends and dictate people's choices (Sornapudi and Srivastava, 2021).

Certainly, high levels of engagement on social media and dynamic, visually appealing content are significant assets of social media activity. Engagement subsequently increases when audio-visual modalities are used, thereby emphasizing the need to use multiple content strategies to sustain consumer interest (Kusumasondjaja, 2020).

Depending on the choice of the social network, its content could be different, meeting the preferences of certain consumers. Specifically, entertainment content has the highest level of engagement in contrast to informative or posts with remunerations indicating that fashion should focus more on animated and vibrant content to create a strong online brand identity (Rachmah and Mayangsari, 2020).

Fashion brands such as Gucci, Burberry, and Louis Vuitton engage in the creation of ample digital assets and branded videos with Instagram, YouTube, and Snapchat integration with design and media to appeal to the audience. The following trend shows that contemporary fashion marketing processes differ from classic aesthetics and emphasize digital interactivity and celebrity influence (Fetais et al., 2023).

For example, take the snapshots as shown in Figure 2, in which Gucci created a campaign showcasing actor Ryan Gosling as he travels from a motel to the beach with all his possessions in Gucci bags. This video was generally well-received and gained 3.2 million views on YouTube.



Figure 2 Gucci campaign

Source: (YouTube.com)

<https://www.youtube.com/@gucci> (Accessed: 26 May 2024)

4.3.1.3. Theme 3: Hashtag campaigns

Hashtag campaigns are important components in fashion businesses as they contribute to enhancing brand awareness, engaging target customers actively, and supporting social and environmental movements. Hashtag utilization is another important aspect for fashion retailers as it ensures the categorization of content available in endless feeds. This can mean more people will become familiar with it, leading to its growth and more people following it through social media, which will improve the brand's online presence (Sehgal et al., 2022).

Social platforms such as Twitter are filled with relevant hashtags like #FashionRevolution, #WhoMadeMyClothes, and sustainable fashion, among others, that play a key role in raising awareness of unethical and unsustainable practices. These top-down hashtags, endorsed by some organizations like the Fashion Revolution, help create a Social activism agenda that creates awareness on issues like environmental pollution, over-consumerism, and exploitation of labour. As linguistic and digital, these hashtags mobilize participants consistently, taking up the same interest and cause as others (Karamalak and Cantoni, 2021).

Hashtags are used effectively because they create engagement. Then again, using hashtags in conjunction with captions or using only the captions can be more impactful in the way it drives more likes and comments. This emphasizes the significance of the proper usage of hashtags

that would play a crucial role in increasing the engagement rate; its key guidelines for the use of hashtags are relevance and conciseness (Jinnie Yoo, 2021).

Moreover, the use of hashtag campaigns within sites, including TikTok, is quite efficient in changing customer buying behaviour. Hashtags that are popular on TikTok can make the presentation of new types of fashion products seem like a large-scale event in an attempt to force instant sales and high engagement (Tjandrawibawa, 2024).

In Figure 3, shown below, some viral hashtags for renowned fashion brands can be seen as trends on social media.

PRO HASHTAG DATA FOR #VERSACE

Professional data for instagram #versace hashtag

Popular hashtags

Related hashtags to versace that have the most posts we could find. Trending hashtags for #versace.

Copy

#versace #fashionblogger #vintage #luxury #fashionista #shoes #nike #streetstyle #designer #adidas
#fashionstyle #chanel #gucci #mensfashion #dior #prada #hermes #louisvuitton #fendi #luxurylifestyle
#givenchy

Figure 3 Popular hashtags

Source: (Best-hashtags.com)

<https://best-hashtags.com/hashtag/versace/> (Accessed: 26 May 2024)

A comprehensive view of all the themes is shown in Table 10:

Table 10 Themes Generated for Types and prevalence of user-generated material in fashion stores

Theme	Sub-theme	Explanation
Theme 1 Reviews and ratings	1. Positive reviews	Allows brands to take leverage from good reviews to build consumer trust and give insights for new products.
	2. Customer reviews	Customers are encouraged to make buying decisions based on reviews on different e-commerce or brand websites.
	3. User-generated posts	UGC on social media sites like Facebook helps businesses to develop an effective marketing strategy.
	4. Online consumer reviews	Companies can leverage online consumer reviews as the more people read them, the more trust they build in the product offerings, which leads to impulse buying.
Theme 2 Social media content	1. Visually aesthetic brands	Brands that leverage visually aesthetic content on sites like Instagram build more responses than when they utilize written or audio content. Videos and visuals are key to holding users' attention.
	2. Viral content types	From the three content types, entertainment, informative, and remuneration posts on Instagram, customer engagement can be achieved most effectively through entertainment content.
	3. Mobile platforms	Luxury brands use tactics like creating fashion videos and uploading them on various websites, thereby creating entertainment content for consumers.
	4. Social content	Fashion brands can include different social media sites as they help build innovation and inclusivity.
Theme 3	1. Hashtags' linguistic	Hashtags can be used as powerful tools for collective action to influence collective change. Many environmental and ethical issues can be raised using hashtags.

Hashtag Campaigns	2.Hashtag frequency	Hashtags help to increase brand visibility and reach. Hashtags must be unique and not too long to gain the attention of users.
	3.Sustainability hashtags	To know the consequences of fast fashion and its impact on the world, hashtags can provide an easy way for consumers to gain knowledge about the persisting issues.
	4.Viral hashtags	Brand awareness and brand distinction can be built by using hashtags.
	5.Trending hashtags	Platforms like TikTok can be leveraged by fashion brands when introducing a new line of clothes.

4.3.2. Impact of user-generated material (UGM) in the decision-making of Online consumers and their Purchase intentions

The analysis of themes and sub-themes aims to find out how UGC influences buyers' decision-making and purchase intention.

4.3.2.1. Theme 1: Consumer Trust and Credibility

Customer trust and brand credibility: the ultimate combination of customer trust and brand credibility are components that can greatly affect customers' decisions, including their purchase intention. In a world where there is an overload of options, consumers are always constantly making decisions between products, and this is where trust is the key to linking brands and consumers together and providing them with reasons to make repeated purchases (Huang et al., 2020).

Positive UGM is also beneficial as it is perceived as a type of social proof. As the customers share their experiences and satisfaction, the credibility of the brand being advertised is greatly boosted. This is especially valuable in peer communication coming from social media platforms because it can shape the perceived usefulness of the resource and the level of trust in the brand. For instance, a study with Europeans revealed that the level of usefulness in an

identified brand's social media, influenced by atmospheric stimuli and word-of-mouth communication, majorly affects levels of trust in the brand and its online media (Harrigan et al., 2021).

This is because the brand's depth of trust directly influences purchase behaviour. This has brought the aspect of managing high brand credibility to ensure people stick to the brands due to their quality and satisfaction feeling (Counig, 2020).

Furthermore, perceived risk, which is a non-financial barrier, may also discourage consumers from shopping online. Trust minimizes this risk in that it helps to get consumers to engage in online shopping and make repeated transactions (Lăzăroiu et al., 2020).

4.3.2.2. Theme 2: Social proof and influence

Social proof is an effective way of impacting people's nature and purchase decisions, especially in the fashion business. It takes advantage of the people's powers as people tend to consult others before making decisions. This phenomenon originates from social psychology, whereby whenever we see other people behaving in a certain way, we are bound to believe that it is the right thing to do, especially in any unclear circumstances (Roy, 2021).

When it comes to clothing, social proof can also be very effective. Fashion is fundamentally an art of appearance and interaction; the improvement and satisfaction of the consumer rely on endorsement and ideas from others. By using their captions, approving the pictures, sharing, and posting, these brands can be active on social media platforms and encourage their customers to make the right purchase through the appeal of belonging. Also, you can show that certain products are trending right now or underline some goods' popularity; it will encourage more people to make the purchase as soon as possible (Naeem and Ozuem, 2022).

However, it is also necessary to note that using social proof is not always effective. Dutch fashion retailers' research conducted on Dutch fashion clothing revealed that social proof is widely used and that, at times, scarcity-based appeal messages are more influential than store visit appeals. It also indicates that the implementation of multiple persuasion techniques, such as social proof and scarcity, would help provide the best results for consumer attraction and conversion (Meents et al., 2020).

4.3.2.3. Theme 3: Community and engagement

Building a partnership with the community makes a significant impact on the decision-making of the consumers. This makes the people involved in the discussion and decision-making process feel that they are working on something greater than just themselves. This feeling serves to enhance brand familiarity as well as a positive approach to the products due to the relation (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez et al., 2024).

Review, social media participation, and online communities guarantee a firm fan base for the consumers to express their experiences. Discussions with peers present real information; they seem more believable than publicity campaigns. For instance, the studies on fashion brands in Pakistan reinforce the fact that brand interactivity, brand intimacy, and psychological ownership result in customer engagement and, hence, greater demand. Once consumers establish a sense of belonging that is related to brand communities, it becomes highly probable that they will purchase and recommend the brands (Aziz and Ahmed, 2021).

The concept of social capital also gives importance to social relations. Higher social power and Parasocial interactions mean that the audience feels connected with the content creator, leading to enhanced social capital; this has a very strong positive correlation with purchase intentions, especially for sustainable fashion products. This means that fashion marketers need to incorporate social capital management in their brand communication to make consumers take particular actions on the brands and make purchases (Kim et al., 2020).

By emphasizing equity of choices and bringing awareness about sustainable consumption within communities, brands can drive the public's behaviour change and help to build an inclusive and sustainable society. That is why the things that have been mentioned, such as the co-production of knowledge and permanent communication, are crucial for the start of change and the inclusive transformation of the community to sustainable consumption (Batidzirai et al., 2021).

For example, take Gymshark, one of the fastest-growing fitness apparel brands in the world; by using their Gymshark Central blog, as shown in Figure 4, they have created a community around fitness enthusiasts.

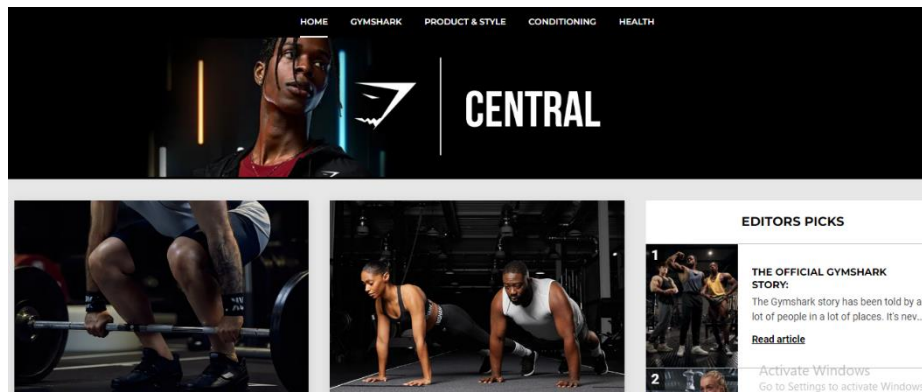


Figure 4 Gymshark community

Source: Gymshark.com

<https://central.gymshark.com/category/gymshark> (Accessed: 27 May 2024)

4.3.2.4. Theme 4: Influencer partnership

Many individuals have several followers on social platforms, and everybody usually relies on social influencers when it comes to brands. Thus, having such endorsements and getting authentic material may help alter consumer perception and decision-making to some extent. First of all, they are people's advocates. Consumers hear from those influencers like friends do instead of from organizations, and therefore, their recommendations are more persuasive. This trust is required, especially in sectors like fashion, because people care about their appearance. Influencers can affect the decision-making of consumers even if they are not trying to do so (Jin et al., 2021).

Also, influencer partnerships facilitate the possibility of directly marketing the chosen product to the target audience on behalf of the brand. Therefore, it remains clear that influencers are currently working with target audiences that have a particular niche and interest that helps brands promote segments. This way, the conversion rates can be improved since the content developed will be appropriate and relate to the theme of the site (Jacobson and Harrison, 2022).

From the processes of experimenting, partnering, and bonding with the brands, as observed by influencers, it is seen that these relationships are dynamic and not permanent. Some influencers use different endorsement procedures and collaborations as an effective strategy for consumers. It gives brands the ability to be a supplier, a partner, or an employer for the influencers and

offers any aspect that would be beneficial for each side that would help the growth of both parties (Nascimento et al., 2020).

The three major categories of influencer collaborations are as follows: sponsorship, brand ambassadors, and guest appearances to determine how they affect consumers. These partnerships also help increase brand recognition and link the brand to an identity of influencers that consumers would want to associate themselves with (Mariani, 2020).

For example, take Aimee Song, a notable fashion blogger with over 7 million followers on Instagram, who has partnered with fashion brand Valentino, as shown in Figure 5.



Figure 5 Aimee Song in Maison Valentino

Source: Instagram

<https://images.app.goo.gl/uHvPN1AV9UqjQSsH9> (Accessed: 27 May 2024)

A comprehensive view of all the themes is shown in Table 11:

Table 11 Themes Generated for user-generated material (UGM) in the decision-making of online consumers and their Purchase intentions

Theme	Sub-theme	Explanation
Theme 1 Consumer Trust and Credibility	1.Trust in the brand	Brands should be encouraged to build trust in the brand as well as its social media channels in the mind of the consumer, which can be influenced by peer communication.
	2.Brand Credibility	Brands can take advantage of brand credibility to achieve customer satisfaction and increase their purchase intention.
	3.Online trust	By reducing perceived risk in online shopping and evaluating pricing strategies, brands can gain customers' trust.
	4.Customer loyalty and trust	By providing authentic and reliable products to the consumer, brand trust and credibility can be enhanced.
Theme 2 Social proof and influence	1.Peer influence	Brands that leverage social proof and scarcity messaging to attract customers to their stores.
	2.Social influence	Different social influence techniques, including social proof, can be applied to all types of consumers regardless of their preferences.
	3.Social influence conception	Social influence and proof are a great way of adhering to regulatory compliances and building effective policies.
	4.Social influence tactics	Customer engagement can be built using social proof as trust in reviews and attractive media content is generated.
	1.Brand interactivity	Fashion brands can increase their success rate by focusing on non-brand owners through engagement.

Theme 3 Community and engagement	2.Consumer brand engagement	Fashion brands can leverage customer happiness in building consumer brand engagement and increasing purchase intention.
	3.Social Power	By focusing on building parasocial interactions with consumers, brands can increase engagement rates and buying potential.
	4.Consumer attitudes	The inclusion of community members can be a powerful tool that businesses can exploit in their favour.
Theme 4 Influencer partnership	1.Endorsement	Brands can get help from influencers by playing as providers to promote their products.
	2.Influencer marketing	Social media is a powerful tool impacting marketing strategies through digital influencers.
	3.Brand content	Influencers, sometimes without meaning, can promote a brand's content and products by just being present in their feed.
	4.Brand partnerships	By sponsoring social media posts of influencers or making them their brand's face, brands can increase their sales.

4.4. Chapter Summary

This chapter presents the results of using content analysis on secondary data. Analyzing the themes that have been generated provides valuable information about how user-generated content (UGC) influences online consumer choices in the fashion retail industry.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

5.1. Research Summary

The research has been carried out to determine how UGC has an impact on consumer decision-making in the fashion retail sector. The main goal of the research was to understand the factors that influence consumers in making buying decisions. According to the research aims, qualitative research on the various literature, such as journal articles and online publications, provided the information needed to investigate the role of UGC as it has multiple facets, each having some influence on the consumers. Based on the analysis, the research was able to accomplish the following objectives.

The findings of the research find close resemblance with the study done by Geng and Chen, (2021) that notes that social media content, hashtag campaigns, and reviews and ratings are the primary patterns seen for various forms of user-generated content (UGC). However, Gutiérrez-Rodríguez et al. (2024) and Hilal and Astuti, (2022) identified themes such as influencer relationships, social proof and influence, community and involvement, and brand credibility and trust as major variables affecting customers when it comes to elements impacting purchase intention. Conclusively, the research holds the point of view that social media based UGC has more influence on consumer perceptions as compared to UGC generated by physical means.

Based on this research, fashion firms who want to thrive in a cutthroat industry should prioritize developing trustworthy relationships with their customers. Therefore, drawing clients to high-end establishments requires a well-thought-out plan, and incorporating user-generated content (UGC) into marketing plans has significant administrative implications.

5.1.1. To investigate the types and prevalence of user-generated material that fashion stores employ.

A review of related literature and key research studies was made, which outlined the various types of UGC used by fashion retailers. There are various forms of UGC, but they can be broadly categorized into customer reviews, social media posts, and branded hashtag campaigns. Studying textual data provided by social media users on other brands, it was noted that UGC helps to build brand reliability and trust. People consider UGC to be more convincing than marketing information because what their peers post on various platforms is genuine.

Fashion brands smartly and effectively engage with this kind of UGC to prove product uniqueness and capture the attention of the audience. Companies benefit from social media networks as the platforms act as strong intermediaries to help brands enhance the UGC effect and increase consumer interactions. Consumers play an important role in sharing opinions on fashion retailers and products; brands must consider leveraging content from consumers to increase engagement and brand loyalty, which, in effect, will enhance the profits and popularity of the retailers.

5.1.2. To determine how and to what extent user-generated material influences the decision-making of online consumers and their purchase intentions.

The study focused on how UGC affects consumers purchasing decisions in the context of fashion retail. Experimental findings show that when consumers come across positive UGC, this aspect affects their perception and their intention to purchase. Consumers are likely to take the word of their fellow consumers and the recommendations made by the community, which makes UGC more credible and real. In this way, brands also build credibility and trust in themselves, which is also improved if the perceived risk with online shopping is reduced.

Furthermore, it is argued that UGC enhances an engaging shopping experience whereby consumers contribute to the telling of a brand's story as well as the identification of relevant products. By building communities around a brand story and its influence on people, brands can leverage UGC in their favour and raise awareness around present social, ethical, and environmental issues. Another way is influencer collaborations, which stand out as highly effective types of UGC since they increase tangible brand awareness and appeal to target consumers via organic recommendations. People who follow these influencers are greatly impacted by their opinions and views. This notion is also validated by the social identity theory, which conveys that groups influence conduct and self-perception. This analysis thus establishes the engagement point that UGC plays in supporting the consumer engagement journey from the early stages of awareness and consideration to the time of purchase and beyond.

5.2. Implications

5.2.1. Managerial Implications

The research is coherent with the study conducted by Mayrhofer et al. (2020), which lays down the proposal that people engage their recognition of persuasion cues within persuasive messages posted to social media if the brand is the source. Furthermore, the research presents that if a user performs brand-related content without the need for the ad for any reason, then this type of content has the potential for persuasion without the intention to do so. Further, as hidden advertising techniques must be adequately disclosed to consumers, fashion brands can justify higher regulation of campaigns to engage more users. For instance, posts created in those environments that respond to an issue and include a promoted hashtag or caption should be considered commercials. This would, in a way, help to enhance the transparency of the advertisement and the visibility of the content generated by end users.

Research also proves that consumer trust in a brand is built when normal people create UGC, which is sometimes ranked higher than branded messages. According to Jin and Ryu (2020), fashion retailers should identify and implement effective methods of displaying UGC from actual consumers to enhance their credibility. Reposting customer photos as strategic marketing on Instagram creates awareness and prompts similar behaviour. UGC also enables active engagement-based shopping where consumers co-create and engage with brands for community and discovery. They can use a range of promotions in which customers are willing to provide UGC in exchange for some reward, such as photo booths within the store. This provides free advertising material for retailers and enhances the social element of buying.

Therefore, fashion retailers should intensively use and popularize UGC much more than the formal, official brand-generated materials that have been explored in this research study. With regards to UGC, the form of customer photographs, comments, or testimonials has a more powerful impact on creating a valuable form of online brand advocacy. Managers have to be aware that the positive impacts of UGC are a result of efforts that lead to raised engagement levels among customers through participation. Metrics such as comments, shares, posts of the brand, and tags specifically from Instagram are significant and should be maximized as KPIs.

5.2.2. Theoretical Implications

The social identity theory resonates nicely with the study objectives, where the application of this theory is such that consumers are always and will continue to be impacted by the perception of distinguished social groups. Individuals feel more comfortable by belonging to a certain set of people or groups. This also has an impact on consumers buying decisions.

The study conducted by Matthews et al. (2021) examined sneakerhead consumer behaviour by analyzing the social identity theory to uncover the motivations and brand selection of male sneakerheads. Using the SIT approach could shed light on how sneakerheads obtain various self-categorizations from the group they belong to. The implications of the work for fashion marketers are significant as they provide insights into how consumers' social identities and feelings of belonging can be targeted. Thus, marketing initiatives that appeal to the norms, values, and status associated with the consumption of sneakers by the sneakerhead subculture should enhance brand connection. Supporting the ideals of social belonging and acceptance in the identities of sneakerheads through products, events, and virtual sites can be a very effective strategy for brand placement.

Following the social identity theory, the study done by Zuliarni et al. (2023) aimed at offering helpful tips to marketers to understand the consumer's social identification by establishing a connection between the consumers' social identification and their purchasing behaviour towards global as well as local fashion brands. The results further reveal that global competitor brands influence the intention to purchase local fashion because they pose a challenge to the social identity of local fashion consumers. The analysis of perceived substitutability based on social identifications does not fill the gap in explaining how domestic purchase intentions are formed. They also have social identity implications. Pricing is also another extrinsic characteristic that means affordability impacts perceptions of brand or product status in important social groups.

5.3. Limitations of the research

Some exciting findings have been collected through research on the impact of user-generated content (UGC) on online customer decision-making in the fashion retail industry. But there are certain restrictions that need to be taken into consideration. The study's first bias, selection, mainly impacts the whole fashion retail sector. These findings may be generalized and do not reflect the behaviour of individuals in specific demographics. Another bias this study supports is that it does not take into account the quantitative data, as it is the general perception that UGC helps increase fashion retail store sales, but to exactly what extent is still unknown.

Additionally, the majority of the research's qualitative data came from secondary sources including journals and internet publications. On one hand, this approach is beneficial as it provides a trend toward in-depth thematic analysis. However, the risk of information bias is present, as the perceptions of many may not be included and new factors impacting UGC not explored, which hinders the capacity to form wider assumptions. Also, the themes identified can be affected by the individual attitudes towards the topic.

5.4. Recommendations

Fashion stores and brands need to work on improving their UGC if they want to reduce the perceived risk with online shopping and support customers in making buying decisions.

According to Fernandes et al. (2022), consumer responses to online retail stores can be greatly influenced by UGC, especially reviews. It is also common for customers to look for reviews to make their evaluations before making a purchase decision. Thus, this research fills a gap by constructing a useful and easy-to-use scale for customers that online stores can refer their clients to while trying to make desired decisions. As consumers continue to engage in the shopping experience facilitated by retail websites, reviews grow in importance as the discrete feature that defines their particular shopping experience. In this schism, reviews work as an important utility offered by retailers for buyers, as it provides them with peer recommendations as well as recommendations.

Currently, social media has emerged as a popular tool for marketing the fashion industry since they are essential tools for brand promotion and customer referrals. Hsiao et al. (2020) examined the effects of social media interaction on the popularity and sale of private label and national brands through word of mouth. According to them, large fashion brands on social

media platforms have a positive impact on business since consumers are bombarded with more suggestions and opinions. Especially when national brands are engaged and come up with their new product offerings on the social media platform, their many followers can create conversations regarding related private label product suggestions mentioned in the same forum.

There is immense competition in the fashion industry that forces businesses to make compelling marketing strategies, all in order to grab the attention of consumers and increase their purchase intention. According to Chin et al. (2020), endorser credibility (EC) and brand credibility (BC) have a direct impact on customer attitudes towards brands.

With the increasing magnitude of online shopping, consumer brand integration must be tailored and achieved strictly in virtual spaces. Roggeveen et al. (2021) argued that posting UGC on social media is an effective way to support social proof regarding other people's experiences. Making use of superior images, feedback, or promos also shows that the products are well appreciated by others. This endorsement plays a vital role in pointing out a way to solve the anonymity and risks associated with internet purchases. Retailers have to consider both perceived and actual influence highlighted through social proof as a strong persuading tool for virtual decision-making based on the visible perception of those surrounding the consumers.

Electronic media has become the new platform for relationship marketing where online brand communities are adopted, hence making community engagement crucial in engagement techniques. Using the theoretical framework of social exchange theory, Kumar and Kumar (2020) developed a model that can point to how brand communities can positively assist their members. Other characteristics that also influence the level of interaction include the kind of investment personnel that members can devote by providing content to the community. This leads to enhanced perceived social relatedness and reasons to carry on engaging in the investment of personal money among individuals who use their own money more frequently.

As more brands are adopting influencer marketing, the impact that digital influencers have on consumers is being highly researched. The work done by Gomes et al. (2022) consisted of expanding upon the given characteristics of influencers and their relationship with intentions to purchase fashion products. More prominently, it examined the direct and indirect relationships of influencer trust, perceived expertise, content credibility, appearance similarity with the follower on the interpersonal interaction, and attitude towards paid sponsorships. Therefore, some of the influencer attributes that would enhance fashion purchase intent are the expertise of the influencer in the area, the type of content they produce, and how closely the

audience related to them. They also pointed out the need for advertisers to facilitate a positive perception of advertising messages.

5.5. Future research

Study on various types of UGC formats: While formats such as photos, videos, and augmented reality AR/ virtual reality VR are becoming increasingly more popular among consumers as UGC types, more research is required to determine the impact of such a format in comparison with text reviews. More formal interviews and surveys may give some indication as to which formats are considered to be the most useful, convincing, and entertaining. The focus groups consisting of industry professionals should also clarify how visuals are different from purely text content in the aspects of the information provided, the emotions it invokes, and how memorable it would be. As more brands experiment with immersive formats, understanding the audience's reaction will be beneficial in establishing the best action plans. Such inferences might be beneficial for future studies.

Cultural impact of UGC on the success of fashion stores: Since the recommendations given are likely based on social contacts, the persuasiveness of UGC may rely on cultural factors. This study would be beneficial in analyzing the behaviour of users originating from a collectivist culture who are more likely to trust familiar information sources. Interviews, surveys, and questionnaires could examine how and to what extent UGC has strong and weak ties to consumers as they are impacted by their wants and influence of powerful figures. This might prove to be advantageous in examining how contrasting views are favoured in a cultural setting. Thus, a quantitative assessment of UGC content itself might reveal the tendencies of the given culture in terms of style, appeals to reason, and patterns of social interactions.

UGC in Luxury Vs Fast Fashion Brands: Further research can be done to identify if UGC is more appropriate for highly engrossing products, which have risks and credibility in a high-price segment, or as an information source for low perceived risk, low involvement products like those of fast fashion. An exploratory study would involve using Website Analytics data and then relating it to consumer surveys by raising the question of whether luxury consumers are more receptive to UGC & reviews or are willing to spend more on it. Further research can examine the complex role that user-generated content (UGC) plays in influencing consumer decisions within the luxury fashion sector. The relationships between user-generated content

(UGC) and consumer trust, brand impression, and influencer and real customer testimonies may be the main emphasis of this study. It is critical to ascertain whether affluent consumers may derive inspiration and value from user-generated content (UGC), which include style guides, movies, and high-quality photos and videos of products showcased in luxurious surroundings, in addition to appreciating its visual appeal.

Another important topic of research is the risk that user-generated content (UGC) poses. Although negative comments or poor quality content may have the opposite impact, positive user-generated content can contribute to the development of a brand's reputation. Research should look into how upscale clothing retailers select and manage user-generated content in order to lessen these risks. To find out if luxury consumers value user-generated content (UGC) and how it affects their purchase decisions, research should be done on the efficacy of UGC as measured by website analytics, engagement metrics, and consumer surveys. This research would provide an in-depth analysis and a new perspective on how UGC impacts status, imagery, and craftsmanship in luxury fashion. Implications would help determine the best UGC strategies, such as paid influencer techniques based on the pricing of the products.

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