

THE EFFECT OF USER GENERATED CONTENT ON CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE:
AN ANALYSIS OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN FASHION INDUSTRY

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Abstract

This study examines the implementation of user generated content within the South African fashion industry and analyzes themes that contribute to overall customer experience with fashion brands. To provide context on analysis, the literature review provides insight into the fashion industry, user generated context, social media, and the fashion industry in South Africa, as well as the intersections between these topics. The survey data within this study was collected by Dr. Rejoice Jealous Tobias-Mamina and Dr. Elizabeth Kempen of the University of South Africa. Results were found through the completion of a series of t-test comparative analyses, searching for the statistical significance of relationships between the questions belonging to each theme. The results indicate that out of a total of 51 comparisons, 27 were deemed to have a strong relation, 2 comparisons no relation, and 22 comparisons having inconclusive correlation. Further study within this area should examine the effect of differing user generated content formats on the customer experience of differing industries.

KEYWORDS: UGC, fashion industry, customer experience, social media

JEL CODES: M31, M37, M39

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1. Introduction

As an aspiring marketer following the completion of my secondary education, I have had the privilege to work for multiple companies doing product, brand, and social media marketing. One of my positions held was a social media content producer and marketer for a local small business named A-Spoonful. A-Spoonful specialized in recycling spoons into rings, sold on social commerce platforms. Since I was an employee of this company within its beginning stages, much experimentation and revisions were thought over and executed to best reach our target customer segment. After applying multiple marketing techniques such as short form content, reels, and paid media, I was left with little results and a diminishing marketing budget. With a small existing customer base consisting of primarily early adopters, I began to share the content A-Spoonful's customers were creating, showcasing the rings or brand through Instagram stories and reels. This content included close-up shots of the rings that we were tagged in, daily "fit check" Instagram reels, to bloggers and influencers writing reviews regarding their experience with our brand. Implementing this new marketing strategy and integrating the blogger and influencers' reviews increased follower count, click through rate, as well as purchases.

Although I did not know at the time, I was utilizing the power of User Generated Content (UGC) in my marketing role at A-Spoonful. According to Forbes, UGC is defined as "any kind of original content related to a product or service that is created by individuals and not the brand itself" (Duke, 2023). This marketing phenomenon has gained traction and usage in the recent decade following the growth of social media, which serves as the primary platform for sharing this type of advertising and marketing. Since UGC is still in its early stages of adoption, there is

currently little formal studies regarding the topic, or its effect and success with consumers. This study seeks to provide insights regarding the application and consumer emotion surrounding the use of UGC within the fashion industry in South Africa.

The fashion industry has been a particular passion of mine, as a self-proclaimed sneaker and streetwear enthusiast. Apart from my own personal involvement and interest in the industry, the fashion industry has historically utilized UGC campaigns with success. Examples of this usage include Calvin Klein with their #MyCalvins campaign, Asos with their #AsSeenOnMe campaign, and Shein with their promotion of user created “clothing haul” videos within their social media profiles (Bojkov, 2023). The application of UGC within this industry, such as customer reviews and the reposting of customer photos and videos featuring the products, has contributed immensely to growing this category (King, 2023).

My null hypothesis (H_0) is that the integration of consumer-generated content within the South African fashion social commerce industry has no effect or worsens overall customer experience with the brand and product. My alternative hypothesis (H_1) is that the integration of consumer-generated content within the South African fashion social commerce industry improves the overall customer experience with the brand and product. By looking at South African UGC social commerce campaigns, I hope it will provide useful to campaigns in the United States of America. By providing insight into the emotions felt by the customers that encounter UGC, information will be revealed that would be of use when developing future UGC marketing campaigns. With UGC being a new yet rapidly growing marketing strategy, this thesis looks to provide helpful insight regarding the efficacy of UGC within the fashion industry.

The method used to prove my hypothesis is the implementation of multiple correlation analyses. The data being analysed is a raw inferential statistical data set. This data set is comprised of survey data from a survey given to South African young adults (Tobias-Mamina, 2000) regarding social commerce fashion apparel shopping. The survey examined the impact that perceived usefulness, trustworthiness, knowledge, and competence has on attitude towards the use of consumer generated content within the Johannesburg geographical area. Through this thesis, I expect to show that the integration of consumer-generated content within the South African fashion social commerce industry improves the overall customer experience with the brand and product.

This study is structured as follows. It begins with a literature review, further informing the research question and hypothesis. It then investigates the theory and methodology implemented in the analysis of the data. Finally, the paper concludes with an analysis of results and conclusion.

2. Literature Review

This literature review seeks to provide context and supplementary information in an effort to further inform the research question and analysis. All literature mentioned and cited were deemed to be from reliable authors or publishers and were cross referenced to determine credibility. First, a definition of user-generated content (UGC) is provided along with the benefits gained through successful utilization of this growing marketing strategy. Next, an explanation of the social commerce landscape is presented, exhibiting the advantages and timeliness of this evolving commerce strategy. Additionally, the current state of the fashion industry is discussed, which allows for background information regarding this critical industry to the global economy. The use of UGC within social commerce and the fashion industry is

examined, proving the relevance of UGC within these respective fields. Lastly, a glimpse into the social commerce and fashion industry specific to the South African region is presented, offering a geographically specific frame to view these elements discussed within this analysis.

User Generated Content

User Generated Content, commonly known and referred to by the acronym UGC, falls under the larger category of earned media (Hivency, 2021). Another term used interchangeably with UGC is Consumer-Generated Content (CGC), however UGC remains the more popular term among business and marketing professionals. For the sake of simplicity and consistency, this thesis will use the term UGC. While the technical definition of UGC is often unfamiliar to consumers, the implementations of this marketing strategy can be easily and readily found, specifically within social media platforms. Forbes defines UGC as “any kind of original content related to a product or service that is created by individuals and not the brand itself” (Duke, 2023). UGC is not limited to one form of content and can be observed as user-generated social media posts, reviews, blogs, videos, pictures, and as other forms as long as it is not created by the brand directly. UGC can come from a variety of sources including customers, brand loyalists, employees, or creators (Beveridge, 2023).

The motivation for users to post their own generated content on social platforms differs depending on the individual. However, there are some common motivators for customers of brands to share UGC showcasing their favorite brands. One reason is that humans have an innate desire to belong, and UGC fosters a sense of belonging and community by welcoming individual voices with shared interests

(Duke, 2023). In addition, UGC is an avenue for two-way conversations to exist between the brand and the consumer, allowing for an added motivator of increased brand connection and interaction between the customer and the brand. Lastly, UGC allows for the opportunity for consumers to become creators and have the potential for the brands they value to share their content to a larger audience with the potential for future and lasting collaboration (Beveridge, 2023).

In a world becoming increasingly digital, consumers are attracted to content that is genuine, real, and authentic. According to a study conducted by Stackla, consumers are 2.4 times more likely to view UGC as authentic compared to content created by brands (Beveridge, 2023). In addition, UGC helps to build brand loyalty and affinity as it provides the opportunity for the consumer to become a participating member of the brand instead of being assuming the natural role of spectator (Duke, 2023). When brands share UGC, this is not only a free marketing stream to take advantage of, but also serves as a kind of digital word of mouth advertising and provides a diverse range of content for brands to utilize. UGC traditionally builds brand authenticity and trust with its customers as it allows consumers to relate with a brand through genuine and trustworthy content created by their peers (Ragno, n.d.). In addition, UGC provides avenues for a brand's customers to organically promote their product or service to others within their personal networks which can help drive engagement rates and increase a brand community with their consumers (Ragno, n.d.).

Social Commerce

Social commerce exists at the intersection of commerce and social media. Investopedia defines social commerce as “a form of e-commerce that involves the sale of products and services using social networking sites like Facebook, Instagram, and

X” (Investopedia, 2022). This emerging and seemingly ever-expanding avenue for commerce has taken the world by storm. Of the 4.8 billion worldwide internet users in 2022, 4.5 billion of them were additionally users of at least one social media platform, which makes up 57% of all people in the world users of social media (Danziger, 2022). In addition, the typical social media user averaged 151 minutes on their platforms a day, which was an increase from the year prior (Dixon, 2023). Given the number of social media users combined with the amount of time spent on given platforms, the social commerce market doesn’t seem to be going anywhere for a while.

Additionally, social commerce exists as a solution to a preexisting problem within e-commerce. Social media has been a channel that marketers have utilized since its inception. However, the problem that exists with social media advertising is it directs the user away from the social media platform they want to be, to a website where they can purchase thus providing opportunity for users to get lost or click away (Danziger, 2022). Social commerce allows for a centralized shopping avenue integrated into the social channels they use. This has been utilized by many leading social media applications such as Instagram, Facebook, X, and TikTok. Social commerce allows users to shop while continuing to interact with friends, watch videos, and view posts, thus limiting steps required to purchase and streamlining the customer experience (Danziger, 2022).

UGC Integration Within Social Commerce

People trust people, not brands (Talent Brand Alliance, 2021). This saying accurately depicts the benefits gained by brands that choose to utilize UGC within their social commerce. UGC fosters authenticity and trust, further strengthening the

connection between the consumer and the brand. One of the more tangible benefits to the consumer that is a form of UGC is product reviews. According to a study conducted by Nielsen, 66% of consumers trust opinions posted online (“Digital formats”, 2022). Social media provides the platform for reviews and ratings to be featured and viewable to other consumers. This allows social commerce businesses to showcase their credibility as well as help them to ensure customer satisfaction (Agarwal, 2023). Testimonials can contribute to a brand’s image and help the brand be easier to trust due to the human connection UGC can provide. The best part about UGC within social commerce is that it exists as a no cost option, as brands don’t have to pay their customers for UGC, rather it is organically formed (Uzuegbu, 2022).

In addition, UGC can be implemented within social commerce to humanize their product, and brand. A common implementation of said humanization is the utilization of customer photos, videos, and posts in their marketing and social commerce user interface and experience. Created by users themselves, this form of UGC aids in building a direct relationship with the consumer and can help showcase the community of a brand to potential customers. Additionally, UGC inspires brand loyalty by providing credibility, authenticity, and trustworthiness to the consumer (Agarwal, 2023). UGC has the potential to go viral due to the shareability and relatability of the content used for marketing (Uzuegbu, 2022). UGC harnesses the benefits gained from word-of-mouth marketing and brings it to the digital age.

The \$1.7 Trillion Dollar Global Fashion Industry

The global fashion industry valuation in 2021 was estimated to be worth over \$1.7 trillion dollars (Global Fashion, n.d.). Fashion exists as one of the biggest industries in the world. A 2017 report titled “*The State of Fashion*” produced by

McKinsey & Company states, “Fashion is one of the world’s most important industries, driving a significant part of the global economy. It is one of the key value-creating industries for the world economy. If it were ranked alongside individual countries’ GDP the global fashion industry would represent the seventh-largest economy in the world” (McKinsey & Company, 2017). The size of this industry is tied directly to a consumer want or need for clothing. Globally, fashion consumers purchase over 80 billion new articles of clothing a year, which represents a 400% increase in consumption when compared to the amount of new clothing purchased two years ago (Global Fashion, n.d.).

In a world that was seemingly stopped by the global pandemic COVID-19, the fashion market has had to adjust to stay afloat and accessible. One of these ways was to implement more focus and strategy surrounding fashion social commerce. In a report by McKinsey & Company, it estimates that the fashion industry had six years of the forecast growth curve for e-commerce in 2020 alone (Chufani, 2021). Social media platforms have historically served as venues responsible for shaping fashion trends through the influence of influencers and celebrities. From creating new styles to sharing the “fit of the day”, social commerce has allowed fashion brands to capitalize on this influence by creating streamlined customer purchasing experience, turning inspiration into action, and ultimately sales (Wahool, 2023).

Use of UGC within the Fashion Industry

The usage of UGC in marketing within the fashion industry is extremely effective as fashion itself is nothing without the user or consumer. Because of this, authenticity and trust between the brand and the consumer is one of the most significant advantages that is offered by UGC to the fashion industry (Medium, 2023).

Consumers want to see real people like themselves modeling the clothes they want to purchase, rather than a model. In an industry saturated with creators already in the space, collaborating with influencers to produce UGC provides a new lane for customer acquisition that comes with a layer of trust and authenticity (King, 2023). UGC also has the potential to show products in action through telling the narratives of faithful and loyal users and customers. These real-life use cases showcased through UGC make the marketing in the fashion industry often more impactful to the consumer (Uzuegbu, 2022).

UGC can also be utilized to improve product development and marketing strategies to best reach potential and existing customers. Through monitoring how customers are styling and wearing a brand's product, trends can be identified in their early stages and can be capitalized on, improving brand appeal and relevance (Medium, 2023). One common UGC technique used in the usage of hashtags. Brands will form hashtags relevant to a product line, marketing campaign, or simply the brand name (Wahool, 2023). This allows brands to track and find customers who are not brand-affiliated influencers that are creating content with their product (Wahool, 2023). Hashtags also provide the potential to acquire new customers through the network of existing consumers who can click on the hashtag to be directed to view more of the brand's content as well as UGC (Medium, 2023).

Social Media Usage in South Africa

In 2023, there were approximately 43.5 million active internet users out of the 59.4 million total people residing within South Africa (Cowling, 2023). However, there is projected growth expected within the internet landscape in this country. 25 million people were connected to the internet in 2013, and this number grew to 44

million in 2023. In addition, in 2022 78.7% of the South African population utilized mobile devices to access the internet (Cowling, 2023).

According to the same report, approximately 25.8 million internet users in the country used social media, which amounts to approximately 43% of the total population. The country's most popular social media platform was WhatsApp with Facebook and Instagram following respectively. Additionally, South Africans between the ages of 18-24 make up 17% of all social media users in the country, with an even share of female users to male (Cowling, 2023).

Social media trends additionally mirror the trends seen within the global social media landscape. According to an extensive survey of South African social media marketers, these trends include an increase in short-form content, increase in business focus and ad spend, and a higher dependency on audience engagement (McInnes, 2023). In addition, in-platform selling and influencer endorsement were listed in the survey results to be an increasing factor within social media in the coming years. The social media landscape in South Africa is growing in demand and users, and the future is bright.

Fashion Industry in South Africa

The fashion industry in South Africa parallels the growth as seen in the global fashion industry. According to a MarketLine industry profile regarding apparel retail in South Africa, in 2018, the South African Apparel Industry ended the year with a total revenue of \$9.8 dollars (MarketLine, 2020). This represents a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 7.7% between the years of 2014 and 2018. According to this profile, the growth of the apparel industry in the country is explainable due to the rising employment, improving living standards, and increasing urbanization in the

geographic area. Brand consciousness in this industry within South Africa is substantial, however the loyalty of consumers to specific brands is not always the overriding factor in their decision-making process. The profile adds that, “brand loyalty is relatively low in the industry especially amongst international powerhouses; in the top end of the industry loyalty is connected more with specific designers rather than the retailer as a whole” (MarketLine, 2020).

The MarketLine report indicates that the growing popularity of e-commerce and social commerce is a key factor that has impacted the apparel retail industry. It goes on to state, “Customers have been won over by the convenience, variety and cheaper prices which online apparel retailers can offer” (MarketLine, 2020). However, MarketLine explains that the small percentage of total industry revenue that e-commerce provides is due to the lack of digital payment options and internet usage, which are typically culturally seen as higher income commodities. The profile adds that South Africa is classified by World Bank to have a high-income inequality (MarketLine, 2020). However, it sees the potential for online apparel retail to grow the industry due to its growing accessibility and low prices. There is still much potential for increased growth of the industry and time will tell over the coming years as e-commerce “will encourage growth in the apparel retail industry but also cause a slight deceleration over the forecast period as the penetration of online retail sales becomes close to saturation and leads to increased downward pricing competition” (MarketLine, 2020).

Customer Experience

According to McKinsey & Company, customer experience is defined as, “everything an organization does to deliver superior experiences, value, and growth

for its customers” (McKinsey & Company, 2022). It is important for brands to realize the contributors that their customers value when viewing their overall customer experience. In an analysis of Volkswagen, Wells Fargo, and six other notable national corporations, it was calculated that a company loses 30% of its value when it loses consumer trust (4 Questions, 2022). The study also noted that brand loyalty is built on consumer trust and cannot exist without it. In a 2019 survey, the primary frustration customers had in their experience with a brand or company was having to wait long, or there being long response times (Customer Experience, 2023). Therefore, it can be deduced that having a prioritization of ease-of-use aids in overall customer satisfaction with their experience. Satisfaction with a customer’s overall experience is ultimately achieved when a brand can successfully inspire and maintain customer enjoyment and happiness throughout the customer experience (Customer Experience, 2023). This study focuses on if and how UGC can provide a positive customer experience within the fashion industry.

3. Theory & Methodology

Data Overview

This section discusses the data source and its usage in the correlation analysis provided within this thesis. This study uses data from the Department of Consumer Sciences within the University of South Africa. The dataset utilized in this study provides raw inferential statistical data regarding the use of user generated content for online apparel shopping among young adult consumers in South Africa. The data was gathered through a survey conducted within the Gauteng Province metropolitan area of Johannesburg, South Africa. Respondents were randomly selected for this survey but were limited to exclusively young adults residing within the metropolitan area of Johannesburg. The surveys were administered to respondents found at public

facilities, such as university campuses and malls, and conducted between the months of May and August of 2019. A total of 300 unique and valid responses were collected. Below is a table containing a detailed breakdown regarding the demographics of respondents included in the study.

Table 3.1 Respondent Profile

	%
<i>Age</i>	
18–24	72
25–31	25
32–40	3
<i>Monthly Expense</i>	
<1000	28
1001–2000	46
>2000	26
<i>Year of online shopping</i>	
< 1year	10.1
1–2 year	66.8
>3 years	23.1
<i>Internet Frequency</i>	
Once a day	15
Several times a day	80
A few times a week	5

Note: From “Data Modelling Consumer-Generated Content Usage for Apparel Shopping,” by R.J. Tobias-Mamina, E. Kempen, 2020, Data in Brief, Vol. 31, p. 106035 (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dib.2020.106035>). CC The Authors.

This cross-sectional research survey design provides a lens to view UGC. The lens is specifically focused on the psychological factors and behavioural intention to use UGC as a source of information when conducting social commerce for apparel

shopping. The prompts provided to respondents are broken down into seven unique themes regarding customer experience with UGC for social commerce apparel shopping. These themes include perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, perceived enjoyment, knowledge and competence, perceived trustworthiness, attitude, and usage intention. Within each of the listed themes, three to five questions regarding the overarching theme were asked to the respondents, ranging from three to five unique questions depending on the specific theme. The following themes are defined below, informed by the scope and intention of research.

- Perceived Ease of Use
 - The degree to which an individual believes that using a particular technological platform would be free from effort.
- Perceived Usefulness
 - The degree to which an individual believes a particular technological platform would be beneficial to their specific needs.
- Perceived Enjoyment
 - The degree to which an individual believes a particular technological platform would enhance their productivity.
- Knowledge and Competence
 - Knowledge informs the practicality or theoretical understanding of a brand or their products and content while competence is determined by the ability to interact with the brand informed by prior knowledge.
- Perceived Trustworthiness
 - The degree to which an individual subjectively deems a brand, product, or content trustworthy.

- Attitude
 - The way in which an individual views and evaluates a brand or content.
- Usage Intention
 - Measure of the strength of an individual's intention to perform a specific behaviour regarding technological platforms.

Within the perceived ease of use category, the prompts seek to understand the overall user satisfaction when utilizing social media platforms in general as well as for fashion shopping specifically. The customer experience when utilizing UGC and social commerce in fashion shopping is discussed within the perceived usefulness and enjoyment categories. The knowledge and competence and trustworthiness categories discuss the perceived knowledge, sincerity, humility, and reliability of UGC within online fashion commerce platforms. Additionally, prompts under the attitude category seek to understand the overall consumer attitude surrounding the implementation of UGC within social media for fashion commerce. Lastly, the usage intention prompts surround the future influence and personal usage intentions of further utilizing social media for fashion shopping. Each prompt was answered by each of the 300 respondents and coded in the dataset utilizing a five-point Likert scale with 1 representing strongly disagree, 2 representing disagree, 3 representing neutral, 4 representing agree, and 5 representing strongly agree.

Methodology

The hypotheses to be tested in this analysis are:

H_0 = The integration of consumer-generated content within the South African fashion social commerce industry has no effect or worsens overall customer experience with the brand and product.

H₁ = The integration of consumer-generated content within the South African fashion social commerce industry improves the overall customer experience with the brand and product.

To test the hypotheses above, a series of t-tests will be conducted. According to Investopedia, a t-test is defined as, “an inferential statistic used to determine if there is a significant difference between the means of two groups and how they are related” (Hayes, 2023). Six different comparisons will be analysed in an attempt to prove the hypotheses. A series of t-tests will be conducted to test the relationship between the following themes as informed by the dataset:

1. Knowledge and Competence → Perceived Trustworthiness
2. Perceived Usefulness → Perceived Ease of Use
3. Attitude → Usage Intention
4. Perceived Enjoyment → Attitude
5. Perceived Ease of Use → Perceived Enjoyment
6. Perceived Trustworthiness → Perceived Usefulness

The themes selected to be examined through this study were purposefully and intentionally chosen due to their relation to the study’s hypothesis. All the questions within these themes help to inform the respondents’ overall customer experience when UGC is encountered during their online fashion shopping experience. By assessing whether or not there is correlation between the responses given for any two combinations of questions within the above themes. The correlation between responses will help to determine and inform the effect that UGC has on these key themes that all contribute to the overall customer experience with the brands people interact with products that people purchase.

As informed by the data set utilized within this study, each question asked to the respondents has a particular coded abbreviation associated. These abbreviations all begin with the first letter of each word in the theme, followed by a question number. Below is a table listing the questions asked, as well as the abbreviation for the prompt.

Table 3.2 Survey Questions regarding UGC usage for apparel shopping

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
	Perceived Ease of Use					
PEOU1	Using social media for fashion shopping is effortless					
PEOU2	Interacting with social media is clear and understandable					
PEOU3	It is easy to become skillful at using social media					
PEOU4	It is possible to use social media without expert help					
	Perceived Usefulness					
PU1	Information shared by consumers online about fashion products help me solve doubts when I shop online					
PU2	Online fashion website help me plan my shopping more efficiently					
PU3	Information shared by consumers online about fashion products make shopping easier					
PU4	Using social media platforms for fashion shopping is effortless					
	Perceived Enjoyment					
PE1	Computer-generated fashion creations are enjoyable					
PE2	I enjoy the interactive nature of the fashion platforms					
PE3	As a shopper I enjoy browsing other fashion consumer's photographs and comments.					
PE4	online fashion platforms provide enjoyable online shopping experience					
	Knowledge & Competence					
KC1	Consumers who share information on social media are experienced in fashion					
KC2	Consumers who share information on social media are experts in fashion					
KC3	Consumers who share information on online fashion platforms are knowledgeable about fashion					
KC4	Consumers who share information on online fashion platforms are skilled					
KC5	Consumers who share information on online fashion platforms are qualified to offer fashion advice if needed.					
	Perceived Trustworthiness					
PT1	Information shared by consumers online about fashion products is reliable					
PT2	Information shared by consumers online about fashion products is trustworthy					
PT3	Information shared by consumers online about fashion products is sincere					
PT4	Information shared by consumers online about fashion products is honest					

PT5	Information shared by consumers online about fashion products has integrity					
	Attitude					
ATT1	For me information shared by consumers online about fashion products is good					
ATT2	I find information shared by consumers online about fashion products to be logically presented					
ATT3	When shopping, looking for information and style online help me to decide what to buy					
ATT4	I think using social media for shopping is a positive idea.					
ATT5	I like the idea of using social media as information source for fashion products shopping					
	Usage Intention					
INT1	I will use or continue using social media for fashion shopping					
INT2	I intend to continue using social media for fashion shopping					
INT3	I will recommend others to use social media for fashion shopping					
	Gender (indicate where applicable)					
Female						
Male						

Note: From “Data Modelling Consumer-Generated Content Usage for Apparel Shopping,” by R.J. Tobias-Mamina, E. Kempen, 2020, Data in Brief, Vol. 31, p. 106035 (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dib.2020.106035>).

T-tests were executed between every question for the given six theme comparisons. The two variables used in these t-tests were the 5-point Likert scale responses from each prospective question. A total of 112 unique t-tests were reordered between the 30 questions asked within the survey data. After, the data was assessed for patterns of statistically significant p-values and correlation between one particular question and all questions belonging to the theme of comparison. A comparison was considered statistically significant if the t-test resulted in a p-value of less than 0.05, the most commonly used significance level in studies similar to this one. Additionally, patterns were identified when a particular question had absolutely no statistical significance with any questions belonging to a particular theme of comparison. The questions that had a combination of statistically significant and statistically insignificant p-values when compared to the theme being compared to were considered inconclusive and not further examined in the results of this study.

4. Results and Analysis

In the process of comparing each question to all questions within the theme under comparison to find patterns of all statistically significant or insignificant p-values, a total of 51 comparisons were completed. Of those 51 comparisons, 27 were deemed to have statistical significance with all p-values being less than 0.05, resulting in the question having a strong relation with the theme of comparison. Two comparisons had no statistical significance with all p-values being greater than 0.05, resulting in the question having no relation with the theme of comparison. Lastly, a total of 22 comparisons had a combination of statistically significant and non-significant p-values, resulting in the question having inconclusive correlation with the theme of comparison. These questions resulting in inconclusive results were absolved by the study, and the remaining questions with a strong relation or no relation with the theme of comparison were further analysed.

Table 4.1 Theme Comparison T-Test Results

Strong Relation	Inconclusive	No Relation
KC3 --> PT	KC1 --> PT	PU2--> PEOU
KC5 --> PT	KC2 --> PT	PU3 --> PEOU
PU1 --> PEOU	KC4 --> PT	
PU4 --> PEOU	PT1 --> KC	
ATT1 --> INT	PT2 --> KC	
ATT2 --> INT	PT3 --> KC	
ATT3 --> INT	PT4 --> KC	
ATT4 --> INT	PEOU1 --> PU	
ATT5 --> INT	PEOU2 --> PU	
INT1 --> ATT	PEOU3 --> PU	
INT2 --> ATT	PEOU4 --> PU	
INT3 --> ATT	PE4 --> ATT	
PE1 --> ATT	ATT2 --> PE	
PE2 --> ATT	ATT5 --> PE	
PE3 --> ATT	PT1 --> PU	
ATT1 --> PE	PT2 --> PU	
ATT3 --> PE	PT4 --> PU	
ATT4 --> PE	PT5 --> PU	
PEOU1 --> PE	PU1 --> PT	
PEOU2 --> PE	PU2 --> PT	
PEOU3 --> PE	PU3 --> PT	
PEOU4 --> PE	PU4 --> PT	
PE1 --> PEOU		
PE2 --> PEOU		
PE3 --> PEOU		
PE4 --> PEOU		
PT3 --> PU		

First, the questions with results leading to a strong relation and statistical significance with the theme of comparison will be analysed and discussed. When comparing the answers given for the Knowledge and Competence (KC) theme compared to those belonging to the Perceived Trustworthiness (PT) theme, two questions coded as KC questions resulted in statistical significance. The first question was KC1 which states, “Consumers who share information on social media are experienced in fashion”. When UGC in the online fashion industry is shared on social platforms and seen by consumers as being information determined by first-hand experience, the overall perceived trustworthiness of the brand increases through the brand’s manifestation provided by its users. When a brand’s trustworthiness improves, so does overall customer experience as trustworthiness provides added value in brand interaction and experience with their customers. KC5, which states, “Consumers who share information on online fashion platforms are qualified to offer fashion advice if needed”, additionally exhibited a strong relation between the question and the brand’s trustworthiness regarding information. When UGC creators are deemed as qualified sources providing fashion advice, these creators can serve as a bridge between the brand and the consumer. This connection can be leveraged by brands to naturally attract people towards the solutions that their fashion products provide their users and provide an elevated customer experience.

Next, there were two questions within the Perceived Usefulness (PU) theme that produced results leading to a strong relation when compared to all questions within the Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) theme. PU1 states, “Information shared by consumers online about fashion products help me solve doubts when I shop online”. The correlation between PU1 and ease of use of social media shows that the implementation of UGC aid in the accessibility and useability of social media as a

tool for fashion brands. This helps in further strengthening the customer experience with the brand's online commerce and presence. PU4 states, "Using social media platforms for fashion shopping is effortless", providing more evidence for the increased usage of UGC. With a mean response of agree to this prompt, this shows that social media in the fashion sector is being easily adopted and seen as a tool that aids in the fashion shopping experience, allowing social media to be an opportunistic avenue to share and display UGC.

When examining the statistical significance and correlation between the Attitude (ATT) and Usage Intention (INT) themes, all questions within both themes hold a strong relation to one another. The INT questions (INT1, INT2, INT3) ask if the respondents will use, continue to use, and recommend others to use social media specifically for fashion shopping. The ATT prompts (ATT1, ATT2, ATT3, ATT4, ATT5) attempt to highlight consumer attitudes regarding the acceptance of UGC online when fashion shopping as well as the attitudes surrounding overall usefulness of social media when shopping in general. The correlation between all these questions exhibits the opportunity that UGC presents, only if executed in a way that successfully aids and delights the user. If a shopper has a positive interaction with a brand or product through UGC on social media platforms, the likelihood of continuing to use the platform for shopping and potentially recommending social media shopping to others is significantly increased. However, this is a double-edged sword as if a user has a negative experience with a brand's UGC on social platforms, the likelihood of them continuing to use or recommend social media for fashion commerce significantly decreased. UGC has massive potential to boost social media fashion commerce but is reliant on positive user reaction to the content posted in order to benefit the longevity of fashion social commerce.

Additionally, six questions were found to have strong relations within the comparison between the Perceived Enjoyment (PE) and Attitude (ATT) themes. PE1, PE2, and PE3 all are regarding the enjoyment associated with computer-generated fashion creations, the interactive nature of fashion platforms, and browsing fashion UGC photographs and comments. These three PE questions are all statistically significant and correlated the questions belonging to the ATT theme. ATT1, ATT3, and ATT4 are all correlated and statistically significant with the questions associated with the PE theme. These questions once again attempt to highlight consumer attitudes regarding the acceptance of UGC online when fashion shopping as well as the attitudes surrounding overall usefulness of social media when shopping in general. The correlation between the listed questions belonging to the PE and ATT themes reveal that user attitudes associated with UGC and its effect on social fashion commerce are closely associated with the interactive and creative natures of such content. When UGC actively invites users to participate in the brand, it helps to mitigate the hesitation many people have regarding the relatively new world of social and online commerce. The fashion industry is always pushing the limits and thrives around innovation, and UGC can be naturally incorporated into the industry by continuing to encourage users to think outside of the box and be creative in the avenues they exhibit their individual personality through fashion brand association.

All of the questions within the Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) and Perceived Enjoyment (PE) themes exhibit a strong relation and correlation to one another. The PEOU question prompts (PEOU1, PEOU2, PEOU3, PEOU4) all are related to the effortlessness of social media fashion shopping and the level of ease of use associated with social platforms. The questions within the PE theme (PE1, PE2, PE3, PE4) highlight the enjoyability associated with UGC within the fashion social media

landscape. The correlation between these two themes shows the influence that ease of use regarding social media and social fashion shopping has on overall enjoyment of the experience with the brand and their UGC specifically. The easier it is for users to interact with brands and their social media presence allows for increased enjoyment and interaction with brands and more increased reception of their UGC. Given that social media skews to a younger, internet native audience, people unfamiliar to social media have a hard time fully participating in a brand's intended customer experience if elements of the intended customer journey intersect with social platforms. If brands take the time to make their social presence and UGC easily interactive and intuitive, there is an opportunity to capture a larger and more holistically representative audience.

Lastly, one question was discovered to have a strong relation and correlation within the Perceived Trustworthiness (PT) and Perceived Usefulness (PU) themes. That one statistically significant p-value was associated with the question PT3 which states, "Information shared by consumers online about fashion products is sincere". The correlation between PT3 and the overall usefulness of UGC within the fashion industry and social media hinges on the sincerity of the UGC shared by fashion brands. Although UGC revolves around the perceived separation the content has from the brand itself, as UGC grows many brands have created initiatives to financially compensate influencers to make positive content regarding their brand and products. As UGC becomes more and more used within marketing and brand exposure and education, it is important for brands to ensure their UGC maintains a level of sincerity in order to preserve the usefulness of the content they share. When sincerity within a brand's UGC can be felt by the user, the customer experience can be effectively and positively improved for the benefit of the user.

Finally, the two questions with results leading to no relation and statistical insignificance with the theme of comparison will be analysed and discussed. When comparing the answers given for the Perceived Usefulness (PU) theme compared to those belonging to the Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) theme, two questions coded as PU questions resulted in statistical insignificance with their t-test p-values resulting in values greater than 0.05. PU2 states, “Online fashion websites help me plan my shopping more efficiently”. All the questions regarding PEOU are regarding the user’s ease of use of a fashion brand’s social media platforms and UGC. Since there is no relation between PU2 and the questions under PEOU, this can lead to the idea that a brand’s online presence is separate from that of their social media presence. This can be leveraged to fashion brands’ benefit as they can therefore target different audiences through their different online platforms. This makes it that much more important that the UGC produced for different online marketing streams are created and positioned properly to meet their target audience existing on those particular platforms.

The second question leading to no relation and statistical insignificance with the PEOU theme is PU3. PU3 states, “Information shared by consumers online about fashion products make shopping easier”. It can be seen through this comparison resulting in no relation that simply because a user or consumer is accustomed to social media platforms does not necessarily mean that a brand’s UGC will be useful. Similarly, if a user or consumer is not accustomed to social media platforms, this does not necessarily mean a brand’s UGC will not be useful. What is more important is the sincerity and trustworthiness of the content being presented, as mentioned previously. Despite the benefits associated with the growth of the internet and social platforms, there has additionally been an increase of fake and staged content positioned to be

believable. The UGC utilized and leveraged by brands provides an opportunity to reach a wide span of internet users, but what is of utmost importance to the success of UGC is deeper than likes, comments, and shares. What brands should consider focusing more on is producing content that aids in developing a deeper connection and relationship with their social following, further improving the user's overall customer experience.

As discussed previously, brand loyalty is low within the fashion industry within South Africa. However, there has been growth in the e-commerce and social commerce categories within the country. By effectively leveraging the use of UGC within brand and product marketing in South Africa, there could be an increased potential to gain brand loyalty. The key for increasing fashion brand loyalty through social platforms in South Africa is ensuring that the UGC created by brands is genuine and contributes to improving the overall customer experience, causing consumers to want to return to the brand for their products again. As for the rest of the world, the growth of UGC is also flourishing, and with social media continuously increasing in users as well, there is much opportunity to use social platforms as an effective avenue to increase overall customer experience. UGC, when implemented correctly and effectively, can be a very natural and convincing tool for fashion brands to utilize within their marketing strategies to better reach and satisfy their consumer.

Through the results and analysis of the survey data provided within this study, multiple correlations were investigated and the case for the usage of UGC within the fashion industry in South Africa strengthened. These t-tests not only highlighted the effects that the implementation of UGC have on overall customer experience, but also revealed insights into the elements of UGC content that allow for customer experience to be positively affected. Through the t-tests conducted of the themes and questions

within the 29 comparisons investigated through this study, many elements and consumer emotions associated with UGC were found to have a positive effect on overall customer experience. Thus, the alternative hypothesis is accepted, and the null hypothesis is then rejected, and it is found that the integration of consumer-generated content within the South African fashion social commerce industry improves the overall customer experience with the brand and product.

4. Conclusion

This study aimed to provide insights regarding the application and consumer emotion surrounding the use of UGC within the fashion industry in South Africa. Through the series of t-tests conducted and comparison of the resulting p-values, it was found that the implementation of UGC within the fashion industry of South Africa has a significantly positive effect on overall customer experience with both the brand and product involved. In addition, many of the statistically significant theme comparisons included in the analysis of this study provided useful information regarding the specific of how UGC held a positive experience for the consumer through social platforms. The alternative hypothesis was found to be accepted; the integration of consumer-generated content within the South African fashion social commerce industry improves the overall customer experience with the brand and product. This study yielded results and provided insight that will help to grow and develop the academic material surrounding UGC based on statistical data analytics.

From the findings informed by the data, one of the most surprising findings was to find the correlation between the themes of Perceived Ease of Use and consumer Enjoyment. This comparison was enlightening because it highlights the importance of ensuring UGC is easily understandable and intuitive toward the

audience desired. One of the most reassuring and delightful findings was how the correlation between the responses to the Perceived Enjoyment and consumer Attitude pointed to the conclusion that a key element to the success of UGC is hinged on the interactive and creative aspect. UGC's success thrives around creating organic, genuine, and relatable marketing that can reach social platform users in a different and creative manner. Because of this, UGC has the potential to have a massive effect within online fashion marketing within the country of South Africa.

In future study of this topic, acquiring quantitative data regarding likes, comments, and shares of UGC posts directly from social platforms would allow for the effects of UGC to be quantified and future content strategy to be increasingly effective. In addition, studying the effectiveness of different forms of UGC (short form, reels, images, etc) in reaching differing industry's target audience would assist UGC to be able to reach its full potential within social platforms. Outside of the specific industry and geographical region provided by this study, there are further implications for this study. As the world turns to be increasingly digital, UGC holds a strategic positioning that plays into this seemingly inevitable transition. Additionally, social media is currently in the process of unlocking its full potential within the social commerce realm. UGC is a tool that allows brands to connect their product within social platforms and exists as a digital manifestation of a brand's personality. Lastly, UGC's positive effect towards the customer experience extends beyond South Africa and the fashion industry. UGC meets consumers on the human level and allows social platform users to further their connections with brands through unique and authentic experiences curated by people just like them. That is what sets UGC apart and how UGC can further promote and provide connections for brands through an organic and genuine form.

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