

User-Generated Content and Its Impact on Brand Perception and Purchase Intent: Evidence from Indian D2C Brands on Instagram

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Abstract—This study explores the impact of user-generated content (UGC) on brand perception and purchase intent, focusing on Indian Direct-to-Consumer (D2C) brands—boAt, Mamaearth, and WOW Skin Science—on Instagram. Using a mixed-method approach involving content analysis of Instagram posts and a structured survey of 95 users, the study finds that UGC significantly enhances consumer trust and positively influences purchase behavior. Visual and relatable content, particularly by micro-influencers and actual users, generates higher engagement and is perceived as more authentic than brand-created content. These insights provide practical implications for D2C brands seeking to leverage UGC as part of their digital marketing strategy.

Keywords—User-Generated Content, Brand Perception, Purchase Intent, Instagram, D2C Brands, India

I. INTRODUCTION

The rise of digital-first marketing and the exponential growth of social media platforms have transformed how Direct-to-Consumer (D2C) brands engage with audiences. In India, platforms like Instagram play a pivotal role in marketing, especially with younger demographics. Amid growing skepticism toward influencer endorsements and traditional ads, user-generated content (UGC) has emerged as a trusted alternative. This paper investigates how UGC affects brand perception and purchase intent in the context of Indian D2C brands using Instagram.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous research confirms that UGC fosters authenticity and trust (Pentina et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2012). The Source Credibility Theory and Elaboration Likelihood Model support UGC's impact on consumer attitudes. However, literature lacks platform-specific studies on Instagram and context-specific analysis for Indian D2C brands.

III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

Objectives:

- To evaluate how UGC influences brand perception.
- To assess its effect on purchase intent.
- To identify the most impactful UGC formats.
- To understand how UGC frequency correlates with consumer behavior.

Research Questions:

1. How does UGC influence brand perception on Instagram?
2. Does UGC exposure enhance purchase intent?
3. What types of UGC are most effective?
4. How does the frequency of UGC exposure impact engagement?

IV. METHODOLOGY

Design: Mixed-method

Quantitative: Survey (N = 95) via Google Forms

Qualitative: Content analysis of ~75–100 Instagram posts from boAt, Mamaearth, and WOW Skin Science

Sampling:

- Survey: Convenience sampling
- Content: Purposive sampling (non-sponsored, tagged, recent posts)

Analysis:

- Survey: Descriptive stats, cross-tab analysis
- UGC Posts: Visual appeal, engagement, sentiment classification

V. RESULTS

Survey Findings:

- 76% had seen UGC related to the selected brands.
- 68% viewed UGC as authentic; 61% were influenced to purchase.

- Trust score average: 3.9/5.

Content Analysis:

- Highest engagement and positive sentiment observed in boAt posts.
- Top UGC types: testimonials, unboxing, lifestyle use.
- 65% of comments were positive; higher engagement aligned with relatability and aesthetics.

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VI. DISCUSSION

Findings support that UGC builds trust and drives conversion. Consistent with prior research (Smith et al., 2012; Cheong & Morrison, 2008), consumer-generated content serves as a credible form of word-of-mouth. In India's D2C market, especially among 18–35 age groups, UGC has a measurable influence on purchase decisions.

VII. IMPLICATIONS

- Brands should actively encourage UGC via hashtags and campaigns.
- Highlight real customer stories and reviews in paid promotions.
- Use tools to monitor sentiment and engagement on UGC.
- Leverage micro-influencers for more authentic outreach.

VIII. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE SCOPE

Limitations:

- Small sample size (N=95); limits generalizability.
- Platform limitation (only Instagram).
- Self-reported survey data may carry bias.

Future research should explore other platforms, broader audiences, and longitudinal effects.

REFERENCES

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