

## The Role of User-Generated Content in Shaping Consumer Trust: A Communication Psychology Approach to E-commerce

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### Abstract

User-Generated Content (UGC) plays a vital role in shaping consumer trust within the dynamic realm of e-commerce. This study aims to explore the psychological mechanisms through which UGC influences trust, employing a communication psychology framework. The research investigates how UGC impacts trust and the psychological factors involved. Using qualitative methods, data was collected through semi-structured interviews with 10 frequent e-commerce users as the informants. Thematic analysis was applied to identify key themes, including perceived authenticity, community engagement, and content creator reliability. The results reveal that genuine and relatable UGC enhances transparency and trustworthiness, distinguishing it from traditional advertising. Additionally, social proof and cognitive biases were found to significantly influence trust formation. These findings suggest practical strategies for e-commerce platforms to foster authentic UGC and encourage active community engagement, thereby enhancing consumer trust. The study contributes to the theoretical framework of communication psychology while offering actionable insights for bridging theory and practice in digital marketing.

**Keywords:** User-Generated Content (UGC), Consumer Trust, Communication Psychology, Perceived Authenticity, E-commerce

### Abstrak

*Konten Buatan Pengguna (User-Generated Content/UGC) memainkan peran penting dalam membentuk kepercayaan konsumen dalam dunia e-commerce yang dinamis. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi mekanisme psikologis yang memengaruhi bagaimana UGC membangun kepercayaan dengan menggunakan kerangka kerja psikologi komunikasi. Penelitian ini menyelidiki dampak UGC terhadap kepercayaan serta faktor psikologis yang*

*terlibat. Dengan metode kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan 10 pengguna e-commerce aktif sebagai informan. Analisis tematik digunakan untuk mengidentifikasi tema utama, termasuk persepsi keaslian, keterlibatan komunitas, dan keterkaitan dengan pembuat konten. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa UGC yang autentik dan dapat diterima meningkatkan transparansi dan kepercayaan, membedakannya dari iklan tradisional. Selain itu, bukti sosial dan bias kognitif ditemukan memiliki pengaruh signifikan dalam pembentukan kepercayaan. Temuan ini menyarankan strategi praktis bagi platform e-commerce untuk mendorong UGC yang autentik dan mendorong keterlibatan komunitas aktif, sehingga meningkatkan kepercayaan konsumen. Studi ini berkontribusi pada kerangka teoritis psikologi komunikasi sekaligus menawarkan wawasan praktis untuk menjembatani teori dan praktik dalam pemasaran digital.*

**Kata Kunci:** *Konten Buatan Pengguna (UGC), Kepercayaan Konsumen, Psikologi Komunikasi, Keaslian, E-commerce*

## INTRODUCTION

E-commerce has dramatically transformed consumer behavior, making it possible to purchase goods and services with the click of a button. The rapid growth of internet connectivity and the proliferation of smartphones have fueled this expansion, enabling consumers to shop from anywhere at any time (Nguyen & Simkin, 2020; Liu, Cheung, & Lee, 2019). The convenience, variety, and often competitive pricing found in e-commerce have driven its widespread adoption. However, this digital shift also comes with challenges, particularly around building and maintaining consumer trust in a virtual environment where personal interaction is minimal (Patel & Sharma, 2021; Cheng, Wu, & Chen, 2020).

In traditional retail settings, consumers can physically examine products, interact with sales personnel, and instantly receive purchased items. These tactile and immediate experiences naturally build trust. In contrast, e-commerce relies heavily on digital representations and descriptions, which can sometimes lead to skepticism and uncertainty among consumers. This highlights the critical role of trust in online shopping, where the lack of physical interaction must be compensated by other means (Savelli, Cioppi, & Tombari, 2017; Smith & Anderson, 2021).

Consumer trust is the cornerstone of successful e-commerce operations. Trust influences a consumer's willingness to make purchases, share personal information, and remain loyal to a brand. It encompasses various elements, including the perceived reliability and integrity of the e-commerce platform, the accuracy and quality of product descriptions, and the overall user experience (Belanche et al., 2021; Jia, Friedkin, & Bullo, 2020).

Building trust in an online environment involves multiple facets. Security and privacy measures are paramount, ensuring that consumers' personal and financial information is protected (Goes, Lin, & Au Yeung, 2020). Transparent and honest communication about products and services also plays a vital role. Additionally, post-purchase support, such as reliable customer service and clear return policies, reinforces trust and encourages repeat business (Li, Tian, & Wang, 2023).

In the absence of face-to-face interactions, e-commerce platforms must find innovative ways to instill confidence in their customers. One such method is through User-Generated Content (UGC), which includes reviews, ratings, testimonials, and social media posts created by consumers. UGC serves as a digital word-of-mouth, providing prospective buyers with first-hand accounts and opinions from other consumers, thereby enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the platform (Belanche et al., 2021; Savelli et al., 2017).

The primary objective of this study is to explore the role of User-Generated Content (UGC) in shaping consumer trust within the e-commerce sector. By employing a communication psychology approach, this research seeks to understand the psychological mechanisms through which UGC influences consumer perceptions and trust levels. The study specifically focuses on qualitative interviews to gather rich, detailed insights from consumers who actively engage with UGC in their online shopping experiences.

The scope of this study includes an examination of various forms of UGC, such as product reviews, ratings, testimonials, and social media interactions. By delving into the experiences and perceptions of consumers, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how UGC contributes to building and sustaining trust in e-commerce platforms. The insights gained from this study will offer valuable implications for e-commerce businesses seeking to leverage UGC to enhance consumer trust and loyalty.

This study is guided by the following hypotheses and research questions:

1. Hypothesis 1: UGC significantly enhances consumer trust in e-commerce platforms.
2. Hypothesis 2: The authenticity and relatability of UGC are key factors in its impact on consumer trust.

The key research questions in this study are as follow:

1. How does UGC influence consumer trust in e-commerce platforms?
2. What psychological factors underpin the relationship between UGC and consumer trust?
3. How do consumers perceive the authenticity and credibility of UGC?
4. What role do social proof and cognitive biases play in the trust-building process through UGC?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Overview of User-Generated Content (UGC)

User-Generated Content (UGC) encompasses a wide range of digital content created and shared by consumers, rather than by brands or professional content creators. The unique appeal of UGC lies in its authenticity and relatability, providing genuine insights and experiences from actual users, which often resonate more with other consumers compared to polished corporate messaging (Akbar & Tracogna, 2018). The value of UGC extends beyond mere content; it represents the voice of the consumer, fostering a sense of community and trust (Muntinga, Moorman, & Smit, 2019).

### Types of UGC

**1. Product Reviews and Ratings:** These are detailed feedback provided by consumers about their experiences with specific products or services. Reviews often include both positive and negative aspects, ratings on a numerical or star scale, and sometimes additional photos or videos showcasing the product in use. This type of content is highly influential, as potential buyers look to these firsthand accounts to make informed purchasing decisions (Cheung, Lee, & Rabjohn, 2019). For example, a well-articulated review on a major e-commerce site can significantly impact a product's sales and reputation (Zhu, Yin, & He, 2020).

**2. Testimonials:** Testimonials are personal stories or endorsements that highlight the effectiveness or quality of a product or service. Unlike reviews, testimonials are usually more in-depth and focus on the transformative impact of the product on the user's life. These are often found on company websites, social media pages, and marketing materials, and serve as powerful tools for building credibility and trust (Mangold & Faulds, 2018). For instance, a compelling testimonial on a skincare product's homepage can reassure new customers about its efficacy (Bashir, Papamichail, & Malik, 2021).

**3. Social Media Content:** This includes posts, tweets, images, and videos shared on social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok. Social media content is often spontaneous and real-time, reflecting users' immediate thoughts and experiences. Influencer endorsements, user mentions, and hashtag campaigns are common forms of social media UGC (Dessart, Veloutsou, & Morgan-Thomas, 2020). Such content can rapidly go viral, greatly amplifying a brand's reach and engagement (Yang & Ghose, 2021). For example, a trending hashtag on Twitter can create widespread visibility and foster community discussions around a product.

**4. Blogs and Forums:** Blogs and forums provide a platform for users to share long-form content, including detailed opinions, in-depth reviews, and extensive discussions about products and services. Blogs might include

tutorials, personal experiences, and product comparisons, offering valuable information to readers. Forums, such as Reddit threads or specialized product forums, allow for interactive discussions where users can ask questions, provide answers, and share experiences in a community-driven environment (Wang & Chang, 2018). These platforms are essential for niche markets and dedicated communities.

**5. Visual Content:** Visual content such as images and videos created by users showcase products in real-life scenarios. This includes unboxing videos, tutorial videos, and photos of products being used or worn. Platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and Pinterest are popular for sharing visual UGC. Visual content is particularly compelling because it provides a tangible sense of what the product looks and feels like, often influencing purchasing decisions more effectively than text alone (Lee, Hosanagar, & Nair, 2021). For instance, a well-produced unboxing video on YouTube can attract thousands of views and potential buyers.

### Communication Psychology Theories Relevant to UGC

Understanding the role of User-Generated Content (UGC) in shaping consumer trust requires a dive into various communication psychology theories. These theories provide a framework to explain how UGC influences perceptions and behavior. Here are some key theories:

- 1. Social Proof Theory:** Social Proof Theory posits that individuals often look to others to guide their own actions, especially in situations of uncertainty. In the context of e-commerce, UGC such as reviews, ratings, and testimonials serve as social proof. When potential buyers see positive reviews from others, they are more likely to trust the product and the platform. This principle is particularly relevant in online shopping, where direct interaction with products is not possible (Cialdini, 2009; Reingen & Kernan, 1993).
- 2. Source Credibility Theory:** Source Credibility Theory suggests that the persuasiveness of a message is heavily influenced by the perceived credibility of its source. UGC often comes from fellow consumers who are seen as more credible and relatable than traditional advertising. This credibility is built on two main factors: trustworthiness and expertise (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Ohanian, 1990). Trustworthy sources are viewed as honest and unbiased, while expertise pertains to the perceived knowledge or experience of the source.
- 3. Cognitive Dissonance Theory:** Cognitive Dissonance Theory explains the psychological discomfort individuals feel when they hold conflicting beliefs or when their behavior is inconsistent with their beliefs. In e-commerce, consumers often seek out UGC to reduce cognitive dissonance. For example, a consumer unsure about a purchase decision might read multiple reviews to confirm that their potential purchase is a good one. Positive UGC helps align their beliefs

with their intended actions, reducing discomfort and increasing confidence in their decision (Festinger, 1957; Harmon-Jones & Mills, 1999).

4. **Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM):** The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) describes how people process persuasive messages via two routes: the central and the peripheral. UGC can influence consumers through both routes. Detailed, informative reviews (central route) provide substantial information that can lead to a strong conviction about a product, while simple ratings or endorsements from popular influencers (peripheral route) can sway consumer opinions (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; McGuire, 1985).
5. **Uses and Gratifications Theory:** Uses and Gratifications Theory focuses on why and how people actively seek out specific media to satisfy various needs. When applied to UGC, this theory suggests that consumers engage with user-generated reviews, testimonials, and social media content to fulfill their informational and social needs (Katz et al., 1973; Rubin, 1986). This engagement can significantly influence trust, as consumers feel more informed and connected.
6. **Social Identity Theory:** Social Identity Theory posits that individuals derive a sense of self from their membership in social groups. This can influence how they perceive UGC and the brands associated with it. When consumers identify with the group that supports a particular product or brand, their trust in that brand may increase, as they feel a sense of belonging and validation (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Abrams & Hogg, 1990).

### Previous Research on UGC and Consumer Trust

1. **The Influencing Mechanism of Interaction Quality of UGC on Consumers' Purchase Intention:** A study by Geng and Chen (2021) explored how the interaction quality of UGC affects its credibility and usefulness, and how it influences consumers' online purchase intentions. The research involved 272 social media users in China and found that high-quality UGC interactions positively impact purchase intentions, mediated by perceived usefulness and trust. Interestingly, the study also revealed that consumers' product involvement negatively moderates the effect of perceived usefulness and trust on purchase intentions.
2. **Influence of UGC on Online Trust and Purchase Behavior:** Sethna, Hazari, and Bergiel (2017) investigated the influence of UGC on online trust and purchase behavior, with a focus on gender differences. Their research, which surveyed 232 undergraduates in the United States, found that UGC has a greater impact on purchase intentions and trust for females compared to males. However, no gender differences were observed for gender-neutral products. The study emphasized the

importance of understanding the target audience to enhance marketing efficiency.

### 3. **Psychological Ownership and Communicative Presence in UGC:**

Research published in MDPI (2024) examined the role of psychological ownership and communicative presence in UGC's effect on purchase intentions. The findings indicated that UGC emotions, quality, and their interaction significantly and positively affect purchase intentions. Psychological ownership and communicative presence were identified as mediators in this relationship, suggesting that consumers feel a sense of ownership and connection when engaging with UGC, which in turn boosts their purchase intentions.

4. **Gender Differences in UGC Influence:** Another study by Sethna, Hazari, and Bergiel (2017) focused on gender differences in the influence of UGC on purchase behavior, trust, and intention to purchase. The research highlighted that UGC has a stronger impact on females' purchase intentions and trust, while no significant gender differences were found for genderneutral products. This study underscores the need for marketers to consider gender-specific strategies when leveraging UGC.

5. **UGC and Consumer Trust in E-commerce:** A study by Thoumrungroje (2014) delved into how UGC influences consumer trust in e-commerce. The research found that UGC helps reduce perceived risk and enhances trust by providing consumers with firsthand information from other users<sup>1</sup>. This study emphasized the importance of UGC in building consumer trust and reducing the uncertainty associated with online shopping.

## RESEARCH METHOD

### Research Design

To explore the role of User-Generated Content (UGC) in shaping consumer trust within e-commerce, this study adopts a qualitative research design (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach allows for an in-depth understanding of consumers' perceptions, emotions, and experiences related to UGC (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Smith et al., 2020). The data collection is conducted through semi-structured interviews, offering flexibility and depth in capturing participants' perspectives.

### Data Collection Methods

#### A. Participant Selection

Participants for this study were selected using a purposive sampling method to ensure that they were regular consumers of e-commerce platforms and engaged frequently with UGC. Participants were required to be 18 years

or older and had to have actively engaged with UGC, such as reading reviews or watching unboxing videos, within the last six months. The selection aimed for a diverse group, representing different genders, occupations, and shopping habits to capture a wide range of perspectives. A total of 10 participants were chosen to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under study.

## **B. Conducting Interviews**

The interviews were conducted via Zoom, each lasting approximately 30 minutes. This method ensured accessibility and convenience for participants, enabling them to join from their preferred locations. Each interview began with a brief introduction to the study's purpose and assurance of confidentiality. With participants' consent, interviews were recorded for transcription and analysis purposes. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the interview data manually, where significant statements were identified, coded, and grouped into patterns and emerging themes. These themes were refined and reviewed to ensure they accurately represented the data and aligned with the research questions.

The semi-structured interviews aimed to explore the participants' experiences and perceptions of User-Generated Content (UGC). The following questions were asked:

1. Can you describe your most recent experience with User-Generated Content (UGC) while shopping online?
2. How do you perceive the authenticity of UGC compared to traditional advertisements?
3. Can you provide an example of how UGC influenced your trust in a product or brand?
4. What elements of UGC do you find most persuasive and why?
5. How do you think UGC impacts your overall shopping experience?
6. Have you ever encountered negative UGC? How did it affect your trust in the product or brand?
7. In your opinion, what makes UGC credible or not credible?
8. How important is the community aspect (comments, discussions) in UGC for building trust?
9. How do you feel when you see that a product has a lot of UGC versus very little or none at all?
10. Do you participate in creating UGC? If so, what motivates you to share your experiences?

## **RESULT**

### **Interview Findings**



The major themes and insights gathered from the interviews are as follows:

### 1. Perceived Authenticity of UGC

- Participants widely agreed that UGC feels more authentic compared to traditional advertisements. Many noted that because UGC comes from real users, it appears less scripted and more relatable. *As one participant (P1) put it: "UGC feels more genuine because it's from real users, not paid actors."*
- Others emphasized the transparency of UGC. *P6 shared: "I find UGC more credible because it often highlights both pros and cons, which makes it feel more honest and less biased."*

### 2. Influence of UGC on Purchase Decisions

- Positive UGC, such as reviews and unboxing videos, significantly influenced participants' decisions. For example, *P3 mentioned: "The influencer's genuine skin improvements made me trust the product," indicating how personal experiences and visible outcomes drive trust.*
- Visual content, like user photos on platforms like Pinterest, was also noted for increasing confidence in purchasing decisions. *P6 stated: "Pinterest user photos showed the decor items in real homes, which helped me trust the product more."*

### 3. Impact of Negative UGC

- Negative reviews and critical comments had a notable impact on participants' trust. Participants expressed how they often avoided products based on negative UGC. For instance, *P2 remarked: "A critical YouTube review made me reconsider buying a laptop brand," highlighting the power of negative UGC to deter purchases.*
- *P10 explained, "Negative testimonials led me to question the supplement's effectiveness," showing the significant effect negative experiences can have on consumer trust.*

### 4. Community Engagement and Trust Building

- A strong theme emerged around the importance of community interaction in building trust in UGC. Many participants felt that community feedback, such as comments and forum discussions, added credibility to the content. *P9 mentioned: "Community feedback provides assurance through collective wisdom."*
- *P1 pointed out: "It's very important; it shows diverse opinions and builds confidence," emphasizing how a range of perspectives from different users strengthens the trustworthiness of UGC.*

## 5. Persuasiveness of UGC

- Detailed and comprehensive reviews, particularly those with a mix of pros and cons, were considered highly persuasive by the participants. *As P1 said: "Detailed reviews with pros and cons are very persuasive."*
- Visual and experiential content, like before-and-after photos or demonstration videos, were highlighted as particularly effective. *P7 commented: "Personal stories and detailed recommendations are persuasive, especially when they show real-life use cases."*
- Participants also expressed trust in testimonials that share specific results. *P10 explained: "Personal testimonials sharing health outcomes are persuasive," illustrating how user experiences with tangible results drive purchasing decisions.*

## 6. UGC and Overall Shopping Experience

- Participants noted that UGC greatly enhanced their overall shopping experience by providing reliable information that traditional advertisements might miss. *P4 noted: "UGC reduces the risk of buying and enhances my shopping satisfaction," while P7 mentioned: "UGC makes the shopping experience feel more interactive and personalized."*
- Several participants expressed that UGC made them feel more informed and confident in their purchases. *P8 stated: "UGC helps me make more informed and trusted purchase decisions," reinforcing the idea that consumer trust is built through shared experiences.*

## Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis of the transcribed interviews was conducted manually, following a structured process that included familiarization with the data, coding, and theme development. This process revealed five key themes:

- 1. Authenticity and Trustworthiness:** Participants generally perceived UGC as more authentic and trustworthy compared to traditional advertisements. This perception was attributed to the unbiased and genuine nature of UGC, which comes from real users sharing their experiences.
- 2. Influence on Purchase Decisions:** UGC significantly influenced participants' purchase decisions. Detailed reviews, video demonstrations, and personal stories were particularly persuasive, providing valuable insights and building confidence in the products.

3. **Community and Shared Experiences:** The community aspect of UGC, including comments and discussions, played a crucial role in building trust. Participants valued the diverse opinions and collective wisdom found in community interactions, which added depth to their decision-making process.
4. **Impact on Shopping Experience:** UGC enhanced the overall shopping experience by making participants feel more informed, confident, and connected. It added a layer of authenticity and reliability to their shopping decisions, reducing perceived risks.
5. **Motivation to Create UGC:** Participants were motivated to create UGC to help others make informed decisions, share genuine feedback, and contribute to the community. The desire to provide honest opinions and insights drove their participation in generating UGC.

### Key Findings

The analysis of the interview data yielded several major insights:

1. **Perceived Authenticity:** UGC is generally seen as more authentic than traditional advertising. This authenticity stems from the real-life experiences and unbiased opinions shared by users, which resonate more deeply with consumers.
2. **Trust Building:** Positive UGC, such as detailed reviews and personal testimonials, plays a significant role in building consumer trust. Conversely, negative UGC can deter potential buyers, highlighting the importance of managing and responding to negative feedback.
3. **Community Engagement:** The community aspect of UGC, where consumers engage in discussions and share experiences, enhances trust and provides a sense of belonging. This collective wisdom helps consumers make more informed and confident purchase decisions.
4. **Enhanced Shopping Experience:** UGC enriches the shopping experience by providing comprehensive and relatable information. Consumers feel more connected and assured when they can rely on the experiences and opinions of other users.
5. **Consumer Participation:** The motivation to create UGC is driven by a desire to assist others and share personal experiences. This active participation not only contributes to the wealth of UGC but also reinforces trust and credibility within the community.

## DISCUSSION

### Interpretation of Results

The findings from this study illuminate the significant role that User-Generated Content (UGC) plays in shaping consumer trust within e-commerce.

The authenticity and trustworthiness of UGC emerged as central themes, with participants consistently highlighting that real user experiences and unbiased opinions significantly enhance their confidence in products and brands. The detailed analysis revealed that consumers perceive UGC as more credible than traditional advertising due to its genuine nature and the relatability of fellow consumers' experiences.

Positive UGC, such as detailed reviews, video demonstrations, and personal testimonials, was found to be particularly influential in driving purchase decisions. Participants indicated that these forms of UGC provide valuable insights, helping them make informed choices and feel more secure in their purchasing decisions. Conversely, negative UGC had a noticeable deterrent effect, underscoring the importance of effective reputation management and prompt responses to negative feedback by e-commerce platforms.

The community aspect of UGC was also found to be critical in building trust. Participants valued the diverse opinions and collective wisdom shared through comments and discussions, which added depth to their decision-making process. This sense of community engagement not only fosters trust but also enhances the overall shopping experience by making it more interactive and personalized.

### **Implications for E-commerce**

The findings from this study offer practical applications for e-commerce businesses to enhance consumer trust and engagement. E-commerce platforms should encourage satisfied customers to share positive UGC through reviews, testimonials, and social media posts, using follow-up emails and incentives to facilitate this. Effective reputation management is crucial, with businesses needing to address negative UGC promptly by monitoring and responding to reviews and offering solutions. Collaborating with influencers who resonate with the target audience can amplify the reach of UGC, providing authentic endorsements that align with brand values. Building a sense of community through forums, discussion boards, and social media groups can enhance customer trust and loyalty. Finally, integrating visual UGC, such as photos and videos, into product pages and marketing can provide tangible proof of a product's benefits, making it more relatable and convincing.

### **Theoretical Contributions**

This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of communication psychology and consumer behaviour in the digital age. It extends the Social Proof Theory by showing how UGC acts as a social proof mechanism in e-commerce, influencing consumer trust and purchase decisions. The research also emphasizes the importance of source credibility in UGC, reinforcing the impact of perceived trustworthiness and expertise on consumer trust. Additionally, it provides insights into Cognitive Dissonance

Theory, demonstrating how consumers use UGC to reduce cognitive dissonance by seeking reviews to justify their purchases. The findings broaden the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) by showing how UGC influences consumers through both central and peripheral routes. Finally, the study highlights the role of community and shared experiences in building trust, contributing to the understanding of social aspects in consumer behavior.

### **Practical Recommendations**

To enhance consumer trust through UGC, businesses should integrate UGC into their marketing strategies, ensuring alignment with brand values. This includes encouraging reviews, content sharing, and using UGC in advertising. Customer service teams should be trained to effectively handle UGC-related inquiries, which can improve satisfaction and trust. Leveraging data analytics to monitor UGC trends can provide valuable insights into consumer preferences and inform marketing strategies. Transparency is crucial, with businesses ensuring UGC is authentic and clearly differentiating it from sponsored content. Encouraging user participation through incentives and engaging platforms can increase the volume and diversity of UGC. Lastly, building and nurturing online communities can strengthen the customer-brand relationship by fostering a sense of trust and belonging.

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **Summary**

This study highlights the significant role of User-Generated Content (UGC) in shaping consumer trust in e-commerce. Through qualitative interviews, several key findings emerged that deepen the understanding of how UGC influences consumer behavior and trust.

UGC is perceived as more authentic and trustworthy than traditional advertisements, mainly due to its unbiased nature and genuine insights from real users. Positive UGC, such as reviews, video demonstrations, and personal testimonials, greatly influences purchase decisions by providing valuable information that boosts confidence.

The community aspect of UGC, including comments and discussions, plays a vital role in building trust. Participants appreciated the diverse perspectives and collective wisdom within these communities, which enriched their decision-making process.

UGC enhances the overall shopping experience by making consumers feel more informed and confident, reducing perceived risks and making the process more interactive. Consumers are also motivated to create UGC to help others, share honest feedback, and contribute to the community, further strengthening trust and credibility.

## Future Directions

Future research should expand the sample size and diversity to improve generalizability, exploring different demographic and cultural contexts. Longitudinal studies could reveal how perceptions of UGC evolve over time. Investigating UGC on emerging platforms would provide a broader understanding of its impact. Integrating quantitative methods, such as surveys, could validate the findings. Research should also explore how UGC can be combined with traditional marketing strategies to enhance consumer trust and how businesses can manage negative UGC. Finally, studying the role of influencers in shaping consumer trust would offer valuable insights.

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