Research Article

Customer Behaviour On Synthesising Of Firm Generated Content And User Generated Content Along The Dimensions Of Trust: A Literature Review

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received- 02-03-2024. Accepted: 13-04- 2024	With the advancement in Digitisation and Internet technologies encompassing internet availability, accessibility, connection speeds, and affordability, there is a wealth of information. The availability of Firm Generated Content (FGC) and User Generated Content (UGC) gave rise to a melting pot wherein the information was not controlled by any one person or entity. Everyone had an equal opportunity to own, post, edit information- a reflection of democratisation of information. The ascent of Social Media (SM) against the backdrop of increased penetration of Smartphones has led individuals to create online communities. The ability of these communities to express opinions / viewpoints based on personal experiences or of those around them have given a whole new dimension to consumer influence. More importantly, each one of us had an equal chance to either influence others or be influenced by them. Increasingly consumers are looking at information coming through UGC with a degree of trust, believability and reliability which was earlier associated only with FGC. Above all, the Professionally Generated Content (PGC) put forth on streaming SM UGC platforms especially Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, has given consumers alternate benchmarks / yardsticks for decision making. While there have been studies on FGC and UGC (including PGC) in isolation, we have tried to understand the simultaneous synthesis of FGC and UGC by consumers based on the past studies. Various frameworks related to FGC and UGC have been perused to understand the nuances of their interaction with consumers based on various variables. Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMA) encompassing technology acceptance, source credibility, consumer interactions, storytelling and influencing consumer intentions through electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) present an interesting web of understanding consumer behaviour on social media. **Keywords**: Social Media, Professionally Generated Content, e-WOM, Decision making Process, Source Credibility, PEOU

Introduction

Historically, whenever there have been life changing events, it has resulted in human behavioural change. The period after World War 1 and World War 2 witnessed fervent industrialisation followed by advancements science & technology especially space technology. The times succeeding the Pandemics viz Spanish Flu, Asian Flu, Hong Kong Flu, in last century resulted in increased focus on vaccines and molecular biology.

The Millennials (popularly known as Generation Y), Zoomers (popularly known as Generation Z) and Generation Alpha had their first experience of Pandemic in the form of Covid-19. By the very intrinsic nature, Pandemics spread very fast across geographies, giving the population hardly any time to take any evasive or precautionary action. As in past, the times succeeding this pandemic resulted in advancements of vaccines

formulation, proliferation and adoption of digital technologies and human behavioural changes w.r.t zest for living life a.k.a living in the moment. The human mindset tilted slowly towards an attitude of Now or Never.

Digitisation, pervasiveness of internet, accessibility to hardware, affordable data plans and smartphones straddled across price points created a whole new era conducive to democratisation of information. No longer was the information purview of the selected few or the companies. The emerging platform for customer communication and engagement are the Social Networking Sites (SNS) (Buckley, 2008), (Burns, 2008). Customers receipt of information and their reactions are reflective of the changing information controls (T. Singh, 2008). Present times are characterised by customers demanding instant information quickly (Precourt, 2008). Social Media (SM), under whose realm SNS, falls, may be envisaged as a group of internet-based applications built on the foundation of Web 2.0 enabling the creation, addition, alteration, sharing, storage, and reaction of user generated content (UGC) (Andreas M. Kaplan, 2010). UGC is reflective of the varied mannerisms of usage of SM given the varied content formats which are either publicly available or created by the users themselves.

The usage of SM is all pervasive and transcends the traditional boundaries of private and public sector entities. However, the beauty of SM lies in the fact that the tag of influencer lies at the doorstep of the user / individual and not at technology (Gonzalez, 2010). While UGC is at one end of the spectrum of information available to the consumer, its other end is characterised by Firm Generated Content (FGC). Messages which directly emanate from Brands on their official SM platforms enabling interactivity with customers through use of text, voice, video, images, or any combination thereof form the ambit of FGC (A. Kumar, 2016) (Santiago, Borges-Tiago, & Tiago, 2022) (Poulis, Rizomyliotis, & Konstantoulaki, 2019).

Firms are increasingly using the power of SM to engage in Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMA). In the process, FGC has been seen to positively impact the customers propensity towards greater recognition, favourable attitudes, repurchase intentions, (E. Djafarova, 2017) (J. Colliander, 2018) and customer engagement (CE) (M.C. Perreault, 2018) . Given the fact that firms can control FGC, it is only paramount that relevant, truthful, simple to peruse and easy to comprehend content is put up by firms so that Brands find positive e- Word of Mouth (e-WOM).

This paper will study some of the models of UGC and FGC with a perspective to see how consumers synthesise the information from the diverse ends of the spectrums.

Literature Review

Firm Generated Content (FGC) has been known to play a pivotal role in swaying customer values and attitudes (Ma & B.Gu, 2022). Setup against the backdrop of positive experiences with products and services, FGC has the potential to sway prospective customer sentiments favourably towards the brand (Nisar & Prabhakar, 2018). Thus. the impact of FGC spreads beyond the immediate expectations of engaging the customer. Engagement can be high level wherein content is generated or low level wherein the customer only interacts with content (Agostino, 2016) (S. Boulianne, 2015).

Engagement can be visualised as taking place along various dimensions such as Immersive, Passive, Active, Expressive, Valence (a.k.a. sentiment), Scope, Nature of Impact, Influencer, Purchaser, and Referral. Multiple viewpoints exist on the definition of engagement in social media. It can be construed as an act of liking, forwarding, sharing, re-tweeting, commenting, sharing content encompassing emojis, chats, videos, and pictures (Oviedo-García, 2014) (B. Schivinski, 2016). It would not be out of place to say that mere act of purchasing a product or service is not the only yardstick for measuring engagement in SM platforms (Pillai, 2013). If interaction is representative of engagement (Oh, 2017), then it's fair to state that content is the key which drives interactivity (A. Rapp, 2013). Some of the reasons driving customer interactions with brands are to find out about products and services; to receive exclusive offers, coupons, or other discounts; to show support for their favorite brands; to rate or review a product or service; and to gain access to VIP or members-only events (Nielsen, 2016).

Customer Engagement (CE) holds the promise of providing sustainable competitive advantage for brands (V. Kumar, 2016) having it's antecedents in customer participation and customer interactivity (Brodie, 2011) (Hollebeek, 2014). CE with FGC on social media has been known to positively affect customer intent to follow brand advice (Fang, 2016). An interesting way for the brands to increase CE and consequential positive e-WOM, could be to co-create content which makes customer feel a sense of brand ownership. Firm content created or shared by users on an online platform tends to stimulate more brand awareness and loyalty than 'likes' (Bennett, 2013). Increase in internet usage has led to increase in e-WOM (Word of Mouth) which may be defined as any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet (Hennig-Thurau, 2004). e-WOM can potentially alter customer preferences and behavioural intentions (Tien, 2019).

Researchers have deduced that a key driver of consumers use of social networks is perceived enjoyment (Lin, 2017). Brands can increase and stimulate enjoyment through visuals based social networking sites (Muntinga,

2011). Aided by interactivity, CE help consumers generate relational links with brands, through recommendations, intention to visit and loyalty (Dessart, 2015). Firms may employ four broad social media strategies to drive CE in the SM landscape viz, the predictive practitioner strategy, the creative experimenter strategy, the social media champion strategy, and the social media transformer strategy (James Wilson, 2011).

FGC is produced or generated by professionals under some official brief and supervision. Over time, there has been a gradual but certain shift towards video generated content. Firms are increasingly investing in videos, known as Firm generated video (FGV) as they have the potential to create higher levels of CE. Interestingly, in a research study it was shown FGC works synergistically with both television advertising and email marketing and that the effect of FGC is greater for more experienced, tech-savvy, and social media prone customers. The study showed that FGC has a positive and significant effect on customers behaviour. Behaviour of customers towards FGC may be studied along three different components viz, valence / sentiment, receptivity, and customers susceptibility (A. Kumar, 2016).

Firms' equity building efforts towards brand and nurturing of customer relationships, may be driven through social media platforms (Gensler, 2013). In a business report it was suggested that contrary to traditional media, social media enabled interaction between customers and firms is perceived as mutually beneficial (Lea, 2012). Firms return on investment in Social CRM may be evaluated on the parameters of investment in SM and customers level of engagement with firms SM page (Hoffman, 2010). FGC measurement may be determined along the parameters of valence (sentiment), posts receptivity (popularity) and susceptibility towards posts – valence capturing firm's effort in creating meaningful content that facilitates more positive customer-firm interactions, while receptivity and susceptibility capturing the extent to which customers' interest is piqued by FGC and their predisposition to using social media (A. Kumar, 2016).

The interactive nature of FGC allowing the customers to freely express themselves through social endorsement has the potential to positively shift the perceptions of other consumers (Zhang, Chen, Wang, & Shafi, 2023). This then also means, that arguably, marketers have partial control over their brands in terms of the communication in the marketplace amongst customers (Berthon, 2007). In essence then building relationships with the customers is the key for the firms which means firms need to shift from "trying to sell" to "making connections" with the customers (Gordhamer, 2009). Firms would do better to steer clear of 'big campaigns' and stick to 'smaller acts' as small campaigns may reach a sizeable number of people to accomplish objectives in a small time (Coon, 2010).

Researchers have shown that trust between customer & marketer (C2M) and between customers (C2C) are known to favourably determine customer engagement thereby impacting brand trust (Liu L. L., 2018). Social Media Brand Communities (SMBC's) are a potential tool in the hands of firms for development and maintenance of relationships between their brands and customers (Zaglia, 2013) (Muniz, 2001). An interesting way to view SM is on the lines of static or dynamic interaction possibilities such as many-to-many, one-to-one, participatory, user owned, conversational, open, mass collaborative, relationship oriented, and free and easy to use (Khan, 2015). There are multiple metrics capturing actions which are used to analyse interactivity on SM platforms which are mentioned below in Table 1 (Khan, 2015).

Table 1

Social Media Action	Interpretation of actions by Users
Like	Express symbolic positive reaction to social media content.
Dislike	Express their negative feelings of disliking certain content.
Share	Allows social media users to distribute the content posted over social media to other users.
Visitors, Visits, Revisits	Also known as sessions, these capture unique visitors, average bounce rate, & session duration.
View	Each time a SM content or a page is viewed by a visitor.
Clicks	Pressing or clicking on hyperlink content of website- used to reduce bounce rate & improve site traffic.
Tagging	Act of assigning or linking extra pieces of information to social media content.
Mentions	The occurrence of a person, place, or thing over social media by name.
Hovering	Act of moving a cursor over social media content - considered proxy for attention.
Check-in	Announce and share their arrival at a location.
Pinning	Pin and share interesting content using a virtual pinboard platform.
Embeds	Act of incorporating social media content into a website or blog.

Endorsement	Let's people endorse and approve other people, products, and services.
Uploading & downloading	Act of adding new content or receiving data from SM platform.

User generated content (UGC) is bereft of any briefs and hence, is more reflective free airing of opinions, views, and perspectives. Various studies have pointed out that UGC serves as an effective source of word of mouth (WOM) (Godes, 2011) while also serving as an indicator of product quality (Tirunillai, 2014). The ecosystem driving growth of UGC, apart from the technology advancements, is represented by the increase in social networking sites (SNS) and online brand communities (Gangadharbatla, 2008). Increasingly, UGC is turning out to be mainstay for consumer insights and brand conversations (Christodoulides, 2012).

UGC is synonymously referred to a User Created content (UCC) and may be defined as i) content made publicly available over the Internet, ii) which reflects a certain amount of creative effort, and iii) which is created outside of professional routines and practices (Vickery, 2007). UGC serves to satiate various customer desires such as intrinsic enjoyment, self- promotion, and changes in public perception (Campbell, 2013)

Conversations on SNS have been known to help a customer make the right choice by influencing collective intelligence (Malone, 2010). More importantly, change in attitude towards a product and improvement in product knowledge may be resultants of increased discussion about product on SNS (Verma, 2013). In a research study, it was demonstrated that the antecedents of UGC usefulness are source credibility factors, with both expertise and perceived trust worthiness wielding significant influence on perception of usefulness (Ayeh, 2015). Certain business sectors are known to have profound influence of UGC such as hospitality and tourism. Tourists tend to rely heavily on UGC as they use this information to reduce purchase risks and modulate their travel behaviour (Cox, 2009).

Trust in online environment can be viewed along the dimensions of honesty, dependability, ability, predictability, and kindness (Molinillo, 2017). UGC has been known to impact customer cognitive trust more than FGC thereby affecting more significantly customers cognitive and emotional trust of online reviews in a closed social network service (Choi, 2017). Inherent to the nature of UGC, the customer interactions happen outside the control of any company (marketer) (Duangruthai Voramontri, 2019).

UGC may be viewed as a customer's personal stance or opinion on a particular aspect which has the potential to influence the opinion of others and vice versa. The aspect that opinions can be modulated or influenced basis views of other user(s), has also aided in rise of Influencers on social media. UGC content is not just restricted to text, graphics, animation but extends to video. Yet another aspect of UGC is gradual increase of Professionally Generated Content (PGC) over the last decade. Increasingly, influencers and PGC are creating a strong community of followers who trust and believe in the content shared by them.

In various literatures, the terms UGC and Consumer generated media have been used as synonyms whereby CGM has been defined as media impressions created by consumers, typically informed by relevant experience, and archived or shared online for easy access by other impressionable consumers (Gretzel, 2008).

The customers' acceptance of the UGC is influenced by the customers perception of the source of information, the presentation of the information, the content of information and the manner of sharing. Customers who derive high levels of enjoyment and involvement from online reviews are more prone to accept them than those who do not (Chung, 2015) (Sotiriadis, 2013). The customer strives for trust based on the information in UGC (Mishler, 2002).

Framework Analysis

Both FGC and UGC have given a whole new dimension to sharing of information. Information has become Democratized. Customers having access to SM, can receive, send, alter, respond, express emotions online, without the restrictions of message format, time, permission, place and archiving or storage provided they conform to social media platform (SMP) guidelines. Users have the freedom to create their own communities, join any community, exit any community, without restrictions of geography, demography, economic status, with the freedom of being an active, passive, or even silent member. To top it all, you can choose the format of messages best suited to your sensibilities, such as text, audio, video, emoticons, and graphics. Every customer in their individual capacity has an equal power to either influence or be influenced with the perspectives or opinions shared.

An important aspect of FGC and UGC is the element of Trust. Not only has trust various dimensions but it is also the bedrock and secret of a longstanding and deep-rooted relationship. Ample researchers and researches have delved into this. Since there are many business or industry verticals, we shall narrow our analysis of frameworks to the travel industry. One reason for choosing the travel industry is that it has been well researched, both from FGC and UGC perspectives across various continents. Moreover, it has been established

through various researches that FGC and UGC play an important part in driving customer sentiments and decisions when it comes to travelling.

The first framework we study has been proposed by Julian K. Ayeh (Ayeh, 2015) based on TAM theory and SCM. The second framework we study, also based on TAM, has been proposed by Sakshi, Urvashi Tandon, Myriam Ertz, Harbhajan Bansal ((Sakshi, 2020). Interestingly, as part of source characteristics, trustworthiness has been shown as one of the determinants of UGC utilization for travel planning. Infact trust has been identified as having the strongest effect on attitude for usage of UGC. (Dandison C. Ukpabi, 2018).

The research leading to Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) theory as propounded by Fed D. Davis delved into two theoretical constructs viz, perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEOU). PU was defined as the person's belief of usage of a system leading to improvement in job performance and PEOU was defined as the degree of a person's belief that using a particular system would be free of effort (Davis, 1989). During this study, it was found that usefulness was significantly more strongly linked to usage than was ease of use which could be interpreted that useful functional performance cannot be replaced by ease of use. While PU is strongly correlated to user acceptance, one needs to understand that PU and PEOU are people subjective appraisals and not necessarily a reflection of objective reality (Davis, 1989).

Source Credibility Model (SCM) showed that while the amount of learning of information was independent of trustworthy & untrustworthy sources, the opinions of customers were significantly impacted in the directions sought by trustworthy sources. While there is an initial resistance to the acceptance of the information from an untrustworthy source, with passage of time this content could be forgotten slowly, leading to an increase in the extent of agreement with the untrustworthy source (Hovland, 1951-52)

Study by Julian K. Ayeh on travellers' acceptance of UGC showed that source credibility factors were antecedents of CGM; usefulness and trustworthiness wielded significant influence over perceived usefulness. Additionally, the attitude of customers towards UGC usage for travel planning was significantly impacted by trustworthiness (Ayeh, 2015). Perceived Trustworthiness influenced online travellers' behavioural intention to use UGC for travel planning by impacting PU. Any credibility concerns may be addressed by enhancing trustworthiness (Refer fig 1 in Appendix).

In another research study based on tourist usage of SM, it was found that while trust negatively influenced perceived risk, trust in combination with PEOU, exerted positive influence on PU and behavioural intentions. Interestingly, while trust strengthens PU, its effect on PEOU is absent which may be construed that trust is irrelevant in enhancing external motivation factors. Amongst the various factors predicting the perceived usefulness of social media, trust is one amongst them (Sakshi, 2020).

Information asymmetry related to perceived uncertainty and risk in the online environment can be reduced with Trust (McKnight, 2002). Moreover, trust in a brand is not just influenced by customers trust in other customers (C2C) but also consumers trust in marketers (C2M). In a social media brand community (SMBC), customers can also base their trust in a brand on factors not directly related to the brand, i.e. C2C trust and C2M trust. Infact, C2M trust exerts a greater impact on customer engagement, arousing customers positive feelings towards the brand, and enticing behavioural investment than does C2C trust (Linlin Liua, 2018).

Trust is closely and intricately linked to customer behaviour encompassing technology, brands, and interactivity. Information dissemination of a brand on SM sites is impacted by likes, shares, comments, and posts which in-turn have the potential to create e-WOM (Mersid Poturak, 2019).

Social presence, awareness, trust and seeking information for online shopping determine behavioural attitudes on social commerce platforms (Hajli, 2017). Purchase intention is consolidated by trust in social commerce websites which in turn strengthens the positive link between website appeal and purchase intention, simultaneously decreasing the positive link between product appeal and purchase intention (Liu D. a., 2017).

Results & Discussions

One aspect clear from the various past researches is that trust is vital factor in driving customer interaction in both the FGC and the UGC environment. It would be interesting to research customer experience along a continuum of FGC and UGC since most customers, especially in travel and hospitality industry, use both types of SM platforms for information seeking, planning and decision purposes.

The various frameworks perused have viewed customers experiences in either FGC or UGC environment albeit across SM platforms, industries, and countries. Customers have the options to weigh the information across both FGC and UGC platforms along various dimensions / factors including trust.

Declaration of Interest:

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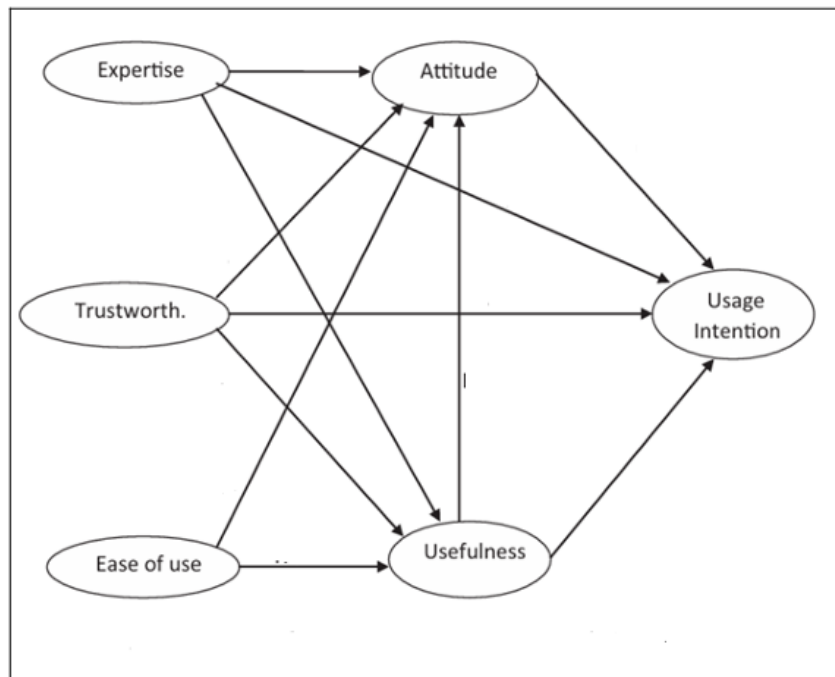
Appendix

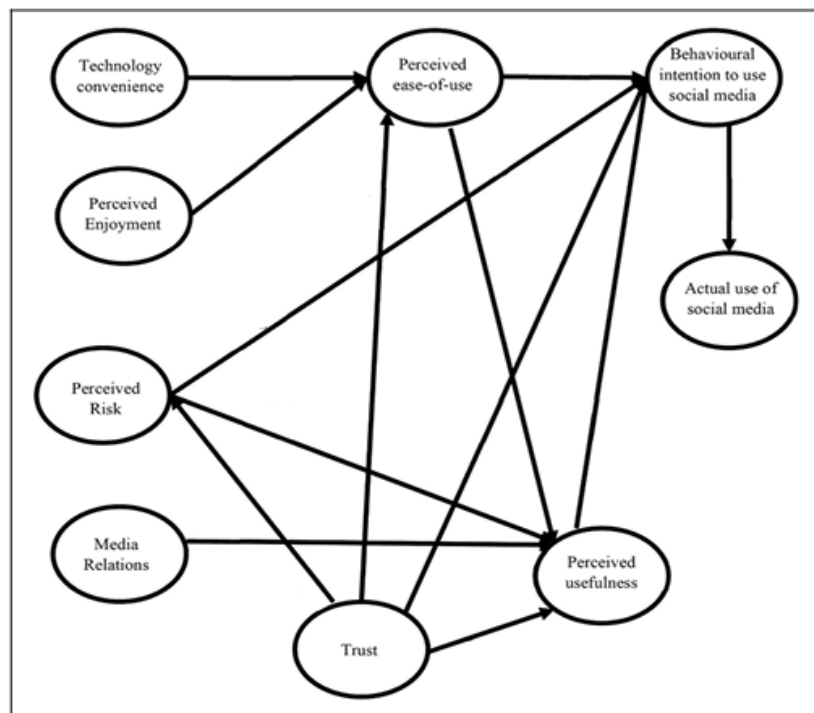**Fig 1: Proposed framework by Julian K. Ayeh with hypothesised relationships**

Fig 2: Proposed framework by Sakshi, Urvashi Tandon, Myriam Ertz, and Harbhajan Bansal
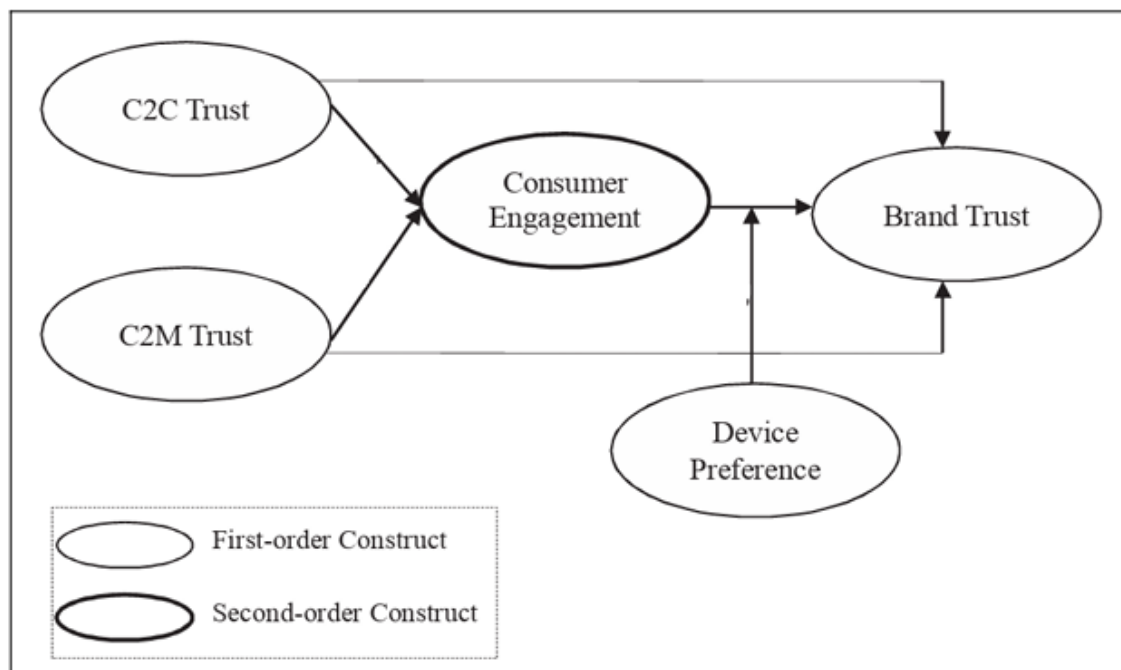
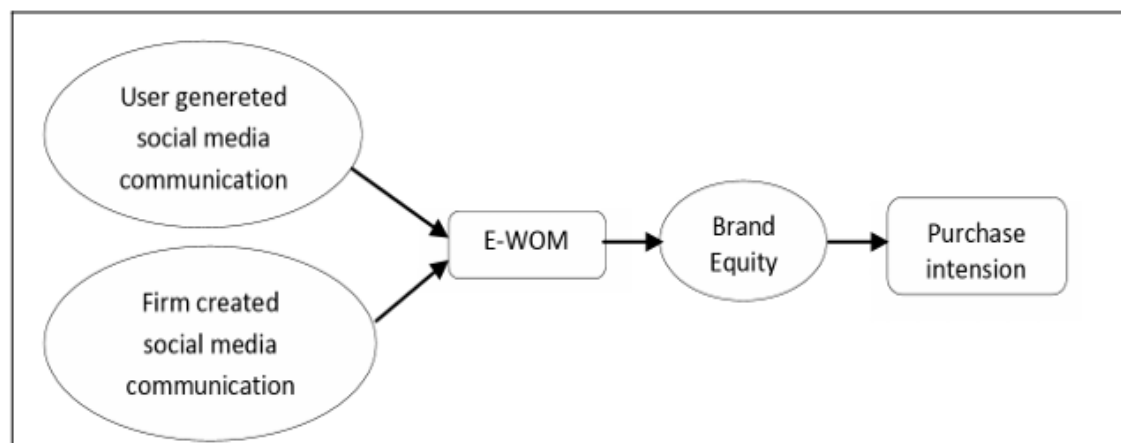**Fig 3: Proposed framework by Linlin Liu, Matthew K.O. Lee, Renjing Liu,and Jiawen Chenc**

Fig 4: Conceptual Framework by Mersid Poturak, and Sumeja Softic