The Influence of Content Generation on Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention Within Visual Social Media.
Declaration

I declare that this research report is my own, unaided work, except as indicated in the acknowledgments, the text and the references.

It is being submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree.

It has not been submitted before, in whole, or in part for any degree or examination at any other institution.

Signed: ________________  Date: ________________

Kerri Murphy  22nd August 2014
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Abstract

The advent and adoption of social media networking sites have radically altered the creation and dissemination of marketing messages within the online marketplace. Consumers are being empowered within these social media platforms and are taking on a more active role as creators, facilitators and editors of online content, as opposed to being merely passive recipients of information. It is now possible for one consumer to create and share content with thousands of other people which have greatly magnified the growth of the user generated content phenomenon. The social Web is changing traditional marketing communications processes. Traditional media and brand communications that were once controlled and administered by brands and marketers alike are gradually being shaped by consumers and the impact of this new reality can have a massive impact on certain marketing outcomes.

The aim of this research is to assess how consumers’ interactions with user generated content and brand generated content affect brand attitude and purchase intention, with a specific focus on the emerging world of visual social media sites; Instagram and Pinterest. Through an extensive examination of the existing literature surrounding this area, the author has identified a number of key theories and conceptual frameworks which provide the foundation for this research. The resulting framework proposed by this author is structured on the three areas addressed in the research question and research objectives; content generation within visual social media sites Instagram and Pinterest, the influence of this content exposure on consumer’s attitude towards brands and finally, the impact this has on creating purchase intention.

To test this model, there were a total of 253 responses to the questionnaire collected and analysed. The findings indicate Instagram and Pinterest as extremely powerful mediums of user generated content and as influencers of brand attitude and purchase intention among users. Other findings
highlighted issues such as source credibility between types of user-generated content as another major influence of brand attitude and of creating the ultimate intention to purchase.

Finally, this paper offers potential areas for future work in the development of this topic area and also identifies the main implications for managers such as knowing your audience and being active on social media.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 The Rise of Instagram and Pinterest

This study aims to focus on content generation on imagery based social media sites, namely Instagram and Pinterest. A study conducted by social analytics company Simply Measured (2013) identified Instagram as the fastest growing social networking site with 150 million users and 40 million photos being uploaded daily. This study showed that Instagram holds uncapped potential for companies looking to expand their brands’ online portfolio, as levels of brand engagement on the site have increased 350% since 2012. Instagram also registers consumer engagement 18 times that of Facebook and 48 times that of Twitter (Shea, 2013). Similarly, Pinterest represents another imagery based site that many brands looking to engage and connect with their customers online are capitalising on. Pinterest users spend twice the amount of money on follow-through purchases than users on other networks (Cooper, 2013). Perhaps the most interesting aspect of both of these sites, however, is the trend in the amount of consumer generated content that is circulated through them, as opposed to content published by the brand itself. Over 70% of brand engagement on Pinterest is generated by the community (user generated content) versus brands (brand generated content), (Curalate Insights, 2013). Similarly, Shea (2013) draws attention to the fact that although luxury brand Chanel does not have an official Instagram account, over 2.7 million images on the popular social networking site have been branded with the Chanel ‘hash tag’.

1.2 The Paradigm Shift and the Decline of Traditional Media

In the past, the traditional communication paradigm allowed for elements of the promotional mix to be coordinated and developed into an Integrated Marketing Communications strategy, with limited flow of information outside of this structure (Mayzlin, 2006; Mangold and Faulds, 2009). The long shelf life of this IMC framework can largely be attributed to the high levels of control enjoyed by
businesses as a result. This has long since diminished in the social media world of today, as marketing communication features such as content, timing and frequency of information are increasingly being controlled by individual consumers on social media networks. The past several years have seen an undeniable shift in the way in which brands connect and communicate with their customers. Traditional advertising methods are on the decline, with television ads down 10.1%, radio ads down 11.7% and newspaper ads down a significant 18.7%, according to a report carried out by The Aesoph Group (2013). In stark contrast, the use of online marketing is on the rise, and in 2012 online advertising spend overtook that of print newspaper for the first time, cementing its title as the 2nd biggest media category in Europe (IAB Europe, 2012). More specifically, a study carried out by IAB Ireland (2012) showed that there were 2.9 million Irish people online, accounting for 80% of the population which is well above the European average of 65%. With such extensive growth that is forecast to continue, one of the major factors fuelling the online initiative is social media.

The online media landscape has undergone dramatic change largely attributed to the efficient creation and distribution of user-generated content (Daughtery, Eastin and Bright, 2008). This trend towards the use of social media represents a paradigm shift for marketing communications as a whole, as brands that were once subject to high levels of control are increasingly being shaped by consumers (Christodoulides, Jevons and Bonhomme, 2012). The understanding of the drivers of consumer online content creation and their subsequent impact on brands is, therefore, of the utmost importance to managers and marketers alike (Christodoulides, Jevons and Bonhomme, 2012). These authors affirm that despite the rapid increase in user generated content and its potential impact on brands, there has been limited research to date on the impact of consumer generated content on how brands are perceived, and subsequently little theory or frame of reference for managers.

Recently brand management has been facing a challenge of two opposing tendencies; faltering brand authenticity and also the rise of the empowered customer (Burmann and Arnold, 2008).
Consumers tend to trust user generated content, for example peer-recommendations or customer reviews, on social media more than messages from traditional mass media (Chung and Austria, 2010). This research will focus specifically around this area, firstly by looking at how user generated content and firm generated content on Instagram and Pinterest affect attitudes towards brands and secondly by examining how these attitudes translate into purchase intention.

1.3 Research Question and Objectives

This study aims to compare and contrast the effects of user generated content and firm or brand generated content on consumer attitudes and purchase intention.

The author will also look to test the research by creating a conceptual framework based on existing theories available in the literature which will allow the author to make in-depth observations into the areas of content generation and consumer attitudes deriving from these two content sources. The study will examine the attitudes of users of Instagram and Pinterest and how the opposing types of content generation can either successfully or unsuccessfully influence their decision to purchase.

**Research Question**: How does consumers’ interactions with user generated content and brand generated content affect brand attitude and purchase intention on Instagram and Pinterest?

In order to comprehensively answer this question, the author has identified the following key research objectives:

1. To identify the key trends of user-generated content within the context of imagery based social media sites Instagram and Pinterest.
2. To assess the level of influence both user generated content and brand generated content on Instagram and Pinterest have on consumer attitude towards brands.
3. To assess the level of influence both user generated content and brand generated content on Instagram and Pinterest have on purchase intention of a brand.

Following on from the proposed research question and supporting objectives the researcher hypothesises as follows:

**H1:** Brand created content on Instagram and Pinterest positively affects user attitudes

**Independent variable:** brand created content on Instagram and Pinterest

**Dependent variable:** positive attitude creation.

**H2:** User generated content on Instagram and Pinterest positively affects user attitudes:

**Independent variable:** user generated content on Instagram and Pinterest.

**Dependent variable:** positive attitude creation.

**H3:** Brand attitude arising from content on Instagram and Pinterest positively affects purchase intention:

**Independent variable:** brand attitudes arising from content.

**Dependent variable:** purchase intention.
1.4 Scope of the Researcher and Limitations

This paper intends to explore the impact of content on social media on consumer behaviour and as such the author will examine the existing literature surrounding these areas by referencing books, articles, websites and journals. The social media space is vast, however in order to develop appropriate benchmarks this study will focus primarily on the areas of Instagram and Pinterest use with very little emphasis on other social media platforms, which represents a main limitation of this paper.

1.5 Dissertation Structure Overview

Chapter two contains a detailed review of the existing and relevant literature surrounding the topic area at hand. Within this section of the paper the author seeks to define the main concepts of the study, identify the core facets of content generation, attitude composition and the consumer decision making process, look to identify exactly what social media is, the main motives behind its rapid growth, and identify where it sits within an integrated marketing communication context. This area will also look at available research around the visual social media sites, how they are coming into the forefront of the social media interface and how they are influencing consumer attitudes and buying behaviour.

Chapter three will look at the research methodology employed as part of this dissertation in order to satisfy the research objectives and sufficiently answer overlying research question. The areas covered in this chapter will follow the pre-set process prescribed by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012) in their Research Onion, a popular and commonly used approach for those undertaking research of this nature. The areas detailed during this chapter include the research philosophy, research approach, research choice, time horizons, data collection, data analysis and any potential limitations of the research.
Chapter four will look at data analysis and findings where the researcher will present the results of the primary research questionnaire. These findings are predominantly quantitative in nature and as such will be analysed using the appropriate software. This section will also contain the discussion on the analysis and examine the areas where the findings relate back to the literature and the areas which present new and unexpected results.

In chapter five the researcher will seek to draw relevant conclusions from the data previously analysed and discussed. These conclusions are formed with the overall aim of satisfying the original research question.

In chapter six the researcher will discuss potential implications of the findings, making reference to certain areas which have become apparent from this study which would make interesting areas of future research and also identifying the main implications for managers identified in this dissertation.

Chapter seven will be an area of self-reflection where the researcher will give an overview of the valuable lessons learned, not only in completing this dissertation but also throughout the entirety of the year at Dublin Business School. Through the use and reference of existing learning theory, the author will apply relevant findings to this experience and outline some of the main skills obtained.

1.6 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an introductory overview of this research topic, as well as the core aims of the author in undertaking the study. The research question and supporting research objective will act as a continuing point of reference and guidance for the remainder of this study as they form the basic fundamentals of what purpose this research will serve and how it will build on and develop existing theory and literature. By constantly and consistently referring back to the research question and objectives, the author can also focus this research in a more concise and logical manner. The
scope of the researcher has detailed the main secondary resources utilised over the course of this work, while also acknowledging that the proposed research area which focuses on Instagram and Pinterest represents only a small semblance of the social media arena. Finally the overview of how the dissertation is structured is to facilitate the reader in understanding the layout and flow of this work.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This section of the study aims to look at what the existing literature says about the different ways that user generated content (UCG) and brand generated content affect consumer attitudes and furthermore whether these influence purchase intention. As is detailed in the coming chapter, certain areas under discussion contain extensive theory which spans over decades of research while other areas, such as the topic of visual social media sites Instagram and Pinterest, represent emerging fields of study and therefore have little defined theory to make reference to. As such, the author draws from a broad and expansive set of sources in order to compile a literature review that provides a relevant and coherent overview of the research topic.

2.2 The Need for Further Research

Though many scholars and practitioners alike agree that user generated content has seen an explosive growth in recent times, there exists only limited research to date focused on the impact of consumer generated content on how brands are perceived. Research thus far has undoubtedly been growing but the limited number of studies exploring the full potential of user generated content on social media and its implications serve to emphasise the need for further investigation (Mikalef, Giannakos and Pateli, 2012; Christodoulides, Jevons and Bonhomme, 2012). There is also a limited understanding on the part of both researchers and brand managers surrounding the effects of user generated content and brand generated content on brand equity, brand attitude and purchase intention (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2013). Early studies which focus on the impact of marketing communications on marketing outcomes tended to be one sided in their research, taking into account only traditional sources of communication (Bruhn et al, 2012). A study carried out by Trusov et al. (2009) was one of the first of its kind to attempt to understand and measure side-by-side the
relationship between these two opposing marketing communications methods. The outcome of this study showed user generated content in the form of word of mouth referrals to have a positive influence on membership growth of a social media network and, furthermore, that this form of content has a substantially higher impact than traditional marketing activities.

Research of the literature highlighted two highly relevant and applicable conceptual frameworks. The first of these frameworks was devised by Bruhn et al. (2012) in a study which examined the effects of traditional media and social media on brand equity. This study focuses on two streams in existing literature; the impact of consumer-to-consumer communication on consumer behaviour (user generated content) and the impact of marketing communication on marketing outcomes (firm created content). The findings of the study showed that both traditional methods of communication and user generated content in the form of social media communications have a significant impact on brand equity. The study also highlighted a difference between the impacts of both types of content generation (firm generated vs. user generated). A second framework relevant to this study was conceptualised by Schivinski and Dabrowski (2013) based on their study of the effect of social media communication on consumer perceptions of brands.

Figure 1. Social Media’s Influence on Brand Perceptions, Bruhn et al. (2012, p774).
Both of the aforementioned studies have investigated in depth the effects of user-generated content and firm-created content on the various aspects of a brand. However, there are some noted differences between the scope of these theorists and the aim of this paper. Firstly Bruhn et. al. (2012) focused their study on social networking sites Facebook and Twitter. These authors also included firm generated content in the form of offline communications such as TV advertising in their research, while this study seeks only to assess firm created communications within a social media context. This distinction can be seen in the ‘communication source’ field in the conceptual framework seen in figure 1. Schivinski and Dąbrowski (2013) on the other hand centred their work entirely on Facebook users. Both of the aforementioned studies make reference to these limitations of their work and in both cases, suggest the use of a different range of social media sites as a recommendation for future research. This study aims to develop these conceptual frameworks, as proposed by the above authors, and apply them instead to the emerging world of imagery based social media sites coming into prevalence namely; Instagram and Pinterest. For this section of the paper, the author will focus predominantly on the following key areas which will contribute most to successfully answering the research question; user generated content, firm created content, brand attitude and purchase intention.
2.3 User generated content and Firm Generated Content

The importance of differentiation between user generated content and content generated by the firm itself is an important concept for the purpose of this study. IAB (2008) offers up the following definition of user generated content; ‘User generated content, also known as consumer-generated media (CGM), refers to any material created and uploaded to the Internet by non-media professionals’. Other definitions refer to user generated content as ‘the new currency of relationships between business and consumers’ (Blackshaw 2011, p.108) and as ‘a rapidly growing vehicle for brand conversations and consumer insights’ (Christodoulides, Jevons and Bonhomme 2012, p.53) which highlight the rise of user generated content in today’s social media interface.

User generated content is rarely discussed without also making reference to what has been described as its ‘normative opposite’, which can be defined as ‘the professionally produced content that is supported and sustained by commercial media businesses or public organizations’ (Lobato, Thomas and Hunter, 2011 p.899). In this context user generated content can be seen as ‘a disruptive, creative force, something spontaneously emerging from the creativity of individual users newly enabled as expressive agents by digital technologies’ (2011, p.900). The notion of user generated content and equally its counterpart in the form of professionally produced content (brand generated) are both important concepts to highlight for the purpose of this study, which will call into question the differences in consumer attitudes arising from these contrasting sources of content on Instagram and Pinterest, and the ultimate effect this has on purchase intention.

Prior to the dawning of the internet era, consumers were highly restricted in their sources of information, relying largely on content and communication that was controlled by firms, or in other words, traditional media (MacKinnon, 2012). Internet users are increasingly turning away from traditional media and turning their attention towards social media channels to search for
information and opinions regarding brands and products (Mangold and Faulds 2009; Bambauer-Sachse and Mangold 2011). This movement away from traditional media has resulted in drastic changes to how businesses communicate in terms of style, contents and also participants (Anwar and Rehman, 2013). Traditional advertising and media have moved through evolutionary lifecycles since their inception and the same can now be said for the online media landscape which has evolved into a robust information space facilitating efficient and timely communication. With the development of more interactive media, brands are being confronted with the challenge of integrating their offerings with those created by consumers themselves (Daugherty, Eastin and Bright, 2008). The creation of advertisements is no longer solely the prerogative of the organisation, as has long been the assumption and the impact of this new reality is significant (Berthon, Pitt and Campbell, 2008). In the past, the dissemination of a firm’s marketing communications was in the control of the firm, with traditional elements of the promotional mix acting as the tools to exert this control namely; advertising, personal selling, public relations and publicity, direct marketing, and sales promotion (Mangold and Faulds, 2009).

The increasing trend of user generated content, particularly in a social media context, marks the incorporation of a two-way dialogue between brands and consumers, allowing for a more interactive and instantaneous flow of communication. However, by its very definition this two-way relationship also means that companies have diminishing levels of control over the online content surrounding their brand. The emergence of Internet-based social media has made it possible for one person to communicate with hundreds or even thousands of other people about products and the companies that provide them resulting in consumer-to-consumer communications that have been greatly magnified in the marketplace (Mangold and Faulds, 2009). Within this new online arena consumers are no longer merely passive recipients of information, but rather their role has now been elevated from observers to editors and creators of online content. In this light, consumer’s opinions and experiences of various brands, products and services are coming into prevalence, as opposed to the traditional one way system of communication from content circulated by the company or brand.
itself (Blackshaw, 2011). Formerly controlled brand communications are now being shaped by the consumer (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2013) and media activities generated by consumers or communities that are neither paid for nor induced by brand owners are claimed to have a potentially game-changing impact on communication and brand building (Corstjens and Umblijis, 2012). In sum, the role of the consumer is now no longer to simply ‘consume’ information and content, but rather to act as creator and facilitator of content (Heinonen, 2011).

2.3.1 Word of Mouth Marketing (WOMM)

The term ‘word of mouth marketing’ can be defined as ‘the intentional influencing of consumer to consumer communications by professional marketing techniques’ (Kozinets et al., 2010, p. 71). Word-of-mouth information transmitted from one individual to another is often perceived as more reliable and trustworthy than information received through more formal or traditional marketing channels and represents a powerful source of user-generated content in terms of both influence and efficiency (Belch and Belch, 2003). Originally considered a naturally occurring phenomenon, WOMM has been recognised to impact the vast majority of all purchase decisions (Keller and Fay, 2009). With the explosion of online social media and web 2.0 technologies, however, WOMM has been capitalised on by marketers who recognise the potential to influence and target customers through the word-of-mouth process (Kozinets et al., 2010). In an increasingly saturated marketplace where consumers are experiencing an overload of information and an overwhelming amount of choice when it comes to making the final purchase decision, word-of-mouth has been identified as a means of ‘cutting through the noise effectively’ (Bughin, Doogan and Vetvik, 2010).

Much of the existing literature points to an early study conducted by Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) on personal influence, in which they argue that marketing messages were not delivered in the traditional ‘hypodermic needle’ style whereby marketers directly influenced consumer
conversations and purchasing behaviours. Instead, the aforementioned authors affirmed that these messages were received and interpreted first by opinion leaders who then disseminated the message to the larger population, leading to what is known as a ‘two-step communication flow’ (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955; Brown, 2010). It was found that mass communication, or content generated directly from the firm, was more likely to reinforce marketing messages among current supporters rather than convert new ones (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955).

Kozinets et al. (2010, pp. 71-72) have identified 3 evolutionary stages of WOMM, in which they build on existing studies (including the work of Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955) to review the development of both WOMM theory and practice:

Stage 1 is entitled the ‘Organic Interconsumer Influence Model’. Organic in this context refers to the fact that consumer-to-consumer communication occurred independently of influence or measurement from marketers. It is motivated by a desire to help and warn other customers about poor service (Arndt 1967; Engel, Kegerreis and Blackwell 1969; Gatignon and Robertson 1986).

Stage 2 is the ‘Linear Marketer Influence Model’. During this time marketers began to actively influence consumer WOM using traditional methods, such as advertising and promotions. They would do this by identifying and targeting ‘opinion leaders’ who were seen as influencers that could transmit marketing messages with little to no deviation (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955; Brooks 1957; Engel, Kegerreis, and Blackwell 1969).

Stage 3 the ‘Network Coproduction Model’, is the most recent stage, coinciding with the explosion of the Internet. This stage represents a new trend for marketers engaging in WOMM activity through targeted one to one communication programs, with the Internet enabling unprecedented new levels of management and measurement. Kozinets et. al (2010) note two important distinguishing features of this third stage of WOMM development. The first is the new tactics utilised by marketers to influence consumers (ie. Firm controlled) and secondly is the recognition that in this internet era,
marketing messages do not flow one way, but rather are also exchanged between consumers in a network (ie. user generated content).

2.3.2 Word-of-Mouth Categories

As WOM represents a central aspect to the study, in that it represents a major source of empowerment for the consumer and as such, an important facet of the user-generated content phenomenon. According to Bughin, Doogan and Vetvik (2010) it is possible to distinguish three main forms of WOM in an attempt to explain and further understand the extremely complex nature of word-of-mouth.

The first form identified by these authors is ‘Experiential WOM’ which represents the most common form, accounting for between 50%-80% of total word-of-mouth activity in any given particular category of product. This type of WOM is derived from and created by a customer’s own experience with a product or service. When experiential WOM is negative it can have serious repercussions from a marketer’s standpoint and reduce consumer receptiveness to a brand’s own traditional media and marketing initiatives (Bughin, Doogan and Vetvik, 2010). The research at hand will focus predominantly on this type of word-of-mouth as it is concerned with the consumer perspective with regard to attitude and purchase intention arising from content on social media.

‘Consequential WOM’ is word-of-mouth activity which has been a result of a traditional and brand controlled marketing initiative, or in the context of this study; brand generated content. According to Bughin, Doogan and Vetvik (2010) the effect of this type of WOM has a much greater impact on consumers and marketers should consider this when embarking on a new marketing campaign initiative. The final and least common word-of-mouth category is ‘Intentional WOM’. An example of this would be when celebrities are employed for endorsement purposes to create a ‘buzz’ around a certain product (Bughin, Doogan and Vetvik, 2010).
This study is primarily concerned with the first category of ‘experiential WOM’ which is reflective of consumer’s direct experiences with products and services. Consequential WOM is also applicable to this research, as the researcher will also seek to gain an understanding of how consumers are impacted by official brand content within visual social media sites Instagram and Pinterest. For the purpose of this study, the third category of ‘intentional WOM’ is not directly applicable as the use of celebrity endorsement represents an additional area of brand-generated media that is not explored within the boundaries of the proposed framework.

2.3.3 The Complexity of WOM

As is evident from the development process presented by Kozinets et. al (2010, pp.71-72) and the distinguishing categories of word-of-mouth presented by Bughin, Doogan and Vetvik (2010), WOMM represents a complex and multi-faceted source of content. Having undergone several transformations, the most recent phase indicates WOMM as a hybrid cross between both user generated content and firm generated content. WOMM or ‘electronic word-of-mouth’ (eWOM) as it is referred to in the online interface, has been heightened with the introduction of social media and social networking sites which give consumers the ability to communicate with other consumers without traditional boundaries of physical location and space. Brands need to recognise the new context in which WOMM is occurring and learn to properly engage consumers in such a way that balances relationship-building, product promotion, and sales pitching. Furthermore, brands need to understand the role and influence of a new classification of opinion leaders and influencers within these social networks. This is also a challenge for marketers and brands due to the variability of the levels of power associated with the different categories of WOM. For example, the likelihood that a consumer will buy a product based on the word-of-mouth recommendation of a friend will be significantly greater than if the recommendation was made by a stranger (Bughin, Doogan and Vetvik, 2010). It is by properly leveraging relationships and engaging social network influencers to
spread brand messages through content sharing, re-tweeting, and commenting to encourage purchasing behaviours, that social media strategies can be considered successful (Brown, 2010).

Despite the early study and findings presented by Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) which show advertisements to be more likely to reinforce existing marketing messages rather than convert new customers, the vast majority of advertising in the following decades still continued to focus attention on reaching a mass audience in an attempt to create awareness, preference and purchase intention. These advertisements looked at first attracting consumers and then converting them into actual customers (Keller and Fay, 2009). In recent times, however, these findings are coming to the forefront of marketing activities. A number of studies have even gone so far as to announce the death of advertising as we know it, largely due to the rise of the internet and with it, the social media phenomenon. Although awareness surrounding the complex nature of these new interactive relationships has grown, marketers are only beginning to understand and appreciate the formation, reaction and effects of communal based marketing initiatives (Kozinets et al. 2010). There is also a challenge for marketers and brands due to the variability of the levels of power associated with the different categories of WOM. For example, the likelihood that a consumer will buy a product based on the word-of-mouth recommendation of a friend will be significantly greater than if the recommendation was made by a stranger.

2.3.4 Electronic Word of Mouth

In the traditional sense, WOM has been described as fleeting in nature because it ‘vanishes as soon as it is uttered’ and ‘occurs in a spontaneous manner and then disappears’ (Breazeale, 2009, p.298). With the onset of the internet and the explosion of social media, however, this caveat is no longer the case. Electronic word of mouth or ‘eWOM’ can be defined as ‘the knowledge exchange consumers carry out online’ (Wu and Wang, 2011 p. 448). Within the online landscape eWOM
represents a constant stream of content and information that is both facilitated and fuelled by social networking sites (Riegner, 2007). There are undoubtedly both emotional and practical implications when consumers participate in discussions online, but conversations of this nature also have substantial commercial implications as consumers exert a greater control over their role within the marketplace (Riegner, 2007). Due to the perceived source credibility and authenticity associated with eWOM, it exerts a substantial impact on consumer attitudes towards brands more so than any other source of influence (Godes and Mayzlin, 2004; Wu and Wang, 2011). This means that consumers have the ability to achieve high levels of transparency in the marketplace and furthermore, that consumers can obtain a more active and powerful role of influence in the value chain, which in turn incentivises the eWOM initiative (Park and Kim, 2008; Wu and Wang, 2011).

2.4 Brand Attitude

Attitude is a highly popularised concept featuring in many past studies and marketing research papers (Mitchell and Olson, 1981; Banytė, Jokšaitė and Virvilaitė, 2007; Schivinski and Dąbrowski, 2013). For this reason, there are many definitions available for the term. Louton and Della Bitta (1993, p.788) broadly define attitude as ‘how for or against, positively or negatively, favourably or unfavourably a person regards a particular object’. Mitchell and Olson (1981, p.318) also offer up their definition, describing attitude with a more specific reference to brands as ‘an individual’s internal evaluation of an object such as a branded product’. A firm’s brand is an extremely valuable asset and more often than not is almost equal in value to the products and services offered by the firm (Steinman and Hawkins, 2010; Judson, Devasagayam and Bluff, 2012). Brand attitude is made up of the overall evaluation of the brand, which encompasses factors such as brand awareness, brand image, and brand based associations of attributes and benefits (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; Bruhn et al, 2012). There are also a multitude of reasons for the long-term interest into the area of brand attitude, one of which can be attributed to the fact that attitudes are relatively stable and
enduring so therefore are useful predictors of consumer behaviour (Mitchell and Olson, 1981).

Attitudes are also important to marketers as they provide a summary of a consumer’s evaluation of the product/service/brand (Belch and Belch, 2003).

Brand attitudes, and equally how they are formed, both impact on the ultimate goal of creating a purchase intention among consumers (Sicilia, Ruiz and Reynolds, 2006). Many researchers have argued the fact that firm generated content or traditional media in the form of advertising are predominantly used to create positive attitudes (Mitchell and Olson 1981; Belch and Belch 2003; Mangold and Faulds 2009; Bruhn et al. 2012). This is largely due to the substantial levels of control possessed by firms over this type of content generation and circulation. User generated content, on the other hand, has drastically changed the strategies and tools used for consumer communication, magnifying the impact consumer-to-consumer conversations have in the marketplace (Mangold and Faulds, 2009). As user generated content on social media are not susceptible to the same levels of control firms have over traditional media, it can be assumed that this source of content can be either positive or negative. Therefore, user-generated content can either create a positive or negative portrayal of a brand, which in turn can have an effect on consumer’s attitude towards that brand. It is most advisable that user-generated content in the form of social media must be used in tangent with traditional or firm generated content, as both exert an important impact on a brand’s success (Bruhn et al. 2012).

The inclusion of the brand attitude aspect in the proposed conceptual framework aims to develop the researchers understanding of evaluations held by users of Instagram and Pinterest towards brands on these social networks.
2.4.1 Attitude Formation

Attitude formation refers to the shift from a consumer having no attitude towards a brand/product/service, to having some attitude towards the brand/product/service (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2012 p. 243). Schiffman and Kanuk (2012, pp. 233-234) outline the major important attributes of attitude. Firstly, these authors note that *attitudes are learned predispositions*. These predispositions are formed by consumers through a combined result of their own direct experience with the product, word-of-mouth information from others, firm generated and traditional media, and also through online resource such as social media and the internet. Secondly, according to Schiffman and Kanuk (2012) *attitudes are consistent*, though this does not mean they are permanent and consumer attitudes are still subject to change. Finally, these authors state that *attitudes occur within a situation*. This means that they occur within a particular time, event and circumstance.

The ‘tricomponent model of attitude’ presented by Schiffman and Kanuk (2012, p. 234) shows that attitude consists of three main components; a cognitive component, an affective component and a conative component. The cognitive stage refers to the knowledge and perceptions acquired by consumers due to a combination of direct experience and relevant information from various sources both user-generated and firm-generated. The affective component is the stage during which consumer’s develop emotions and feelings about a brand/product/service. The third and final component refers to the likelihood that the consumer will carry out an action or behaviour. This conative component is often regarded as the consumers purchase intention (Schiffman and Kanuk 2012, p. 234).

Although this tricomponent model has enjoyed a degree of acceptance from various textbooks and authors (Baron and Byrne, 1977; Krech, Crutchfield, and Ballachey, 1962; Lambert and Lambert, 1973; Solomon et al., 2010) the actual impact of the model on the area of attitude research appears to be minimal. A popular criticism of this model is based on a series of studies carried out in the 1970’s which proposed that attitudes were in fact only one variable out of a multitude of possible
variables that were deemed to affect behaviour (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980). Another strong criticism of this model identified in the literature highlights the level of uncertainty surrounding the links between the three components of the model (Wicker, 1969).

2.5 Purchase Intention

The successful influencing of a consumers purchasing behaviour is inextricably linked to an understanding of consumer behaviour (Belch and Belch, 2003). Consumer behaviour can be defined as ‘the process and activities people engage in when searching for, selecting, purchasing, using, evaluating, and disposing of products and services so as to satisfy their needs and desires’ (Belch and Belch, 2003, p.105). A good understanding of consumer behaviour can allow researchers and marketers to identify the key factors which lead to the final purchase of a brand, product or service. Elements such as what needs consumers are looking to satisfy, how consumers gather information and how they compare competitor products are all important considerations when determining purchase intention. Some purchase decisions may be the result of a long and detailed process while others may be influenced by nothing more than an in-store discount, otherwise known as ‘impulse purchases’ (Belch and Belch, 2003).

2.5.1 The Consumer Decision Making Process

Consumers are required to make countless decisions every day and therefore, in today’s expansive marketplace, need to cope with an increasing information overload. Brands play a crucial part in this as they offer a certain reassurance which can guide consumers in the process of making a purchase decision (Keller, 2008).
Belch and Belch (2003, p. 105) have developed a conceptual framework which looks in detail at the different stages undertaken by consumers in the lead up to a final purchase. These authors identify the various stages in the consumer decision making process and also the corresponding psychological processes. According to the model, a purchase intention arises as an outcome of the information search and alternative evaluation stages, once consumers have satisfied their comparison with competitor products (Belch and Belch, 2003). This stage signifies the part in the decision making process when the customer makes up their mind, based on both user generated content and firm generated content, about whether or not they will ultimately purchase a product.

Despite its popularity among researchers and theorists, a number of critiques of this model were revealed during the literature review process which must be taken into account. The majority of these critiques stem from the overly ‘analytical’ approach towards consumer behaviour represented in the model (Bray, 2008). For example, it has been noted that there is an assumption of the ‘rationality of consumer decision making’ (Bray, 2008 p. 33) which is relied on heavily in the model. Consumers engage in non-conscious and opportunistic behaviours that do not fit appropriately within the model’s boundaries and there is also a lack of acknowledgment of emotional elements and other heuristic factors which come into play during this process (Erasmus, Boshoff and Rousseau 2001; Bray, 2008). On the whole, however, the consumer decision making process is regarded as providing a clear and concise depiction of the consumption process which has evolved over the years to correspond with the advancing theory of consumer behaviour (Erasmus, Boshoff and Rousseau 2001; Bray, 2008).
2.5.2 The Hierarchy of Effects Model

Another process widely used in determining the mental steps taken by consumers in the lead up to a final purchase is the Hierarchy of Effects model. Hierarchy of Effects refers to the fixed order in which consumers perceive and process advertising and other marketing communication information: first cognitively (think), second affectively (feel), and third conatively (do) (Barry and Howard, 1990). One of the most widely recognised Hierarchy of Effects model was conceptualised by Lavidge and Steiner (1961, p.61). Similar in theory to the ‘tricomponent attitude model’ discussed earlier, their process involves seven stages which start with the consumer being unaware of a brand and then gaining awareness and knowledge through information derived from firm generated content and/or user generated content. It is during the affective stage that a consumer then uses the information to determine whether or not they like the brand and form favourable or unfavourable attitudes towards the brand. After the affective stage the consumer develops a conviction of the usefulness of the purchase, and therefore an intention to purchase (Hutter et al., 2013).
2.5.3 The Online Consumer Decision Making Process

The advent of social media has disrupted the traditionally established consumer buying behaviour process, whereby consumer purchase decisions are impacted by traditional communication channels and various other stimuli or ‘noise’ such as demographic and societal factors (Lee, 2013). The development of web 2.0 and with it the social media landscape, has resulted in attitudes towards purchase decision that are now also impacted by online platforms, most commonly social networking sites. This means that decision making is influenced by additional factors that are outside the control of online marketing initiatives and represent content that is generated by the consumer rather than by the brand. Constantinides and Fountain (2008) have developed a framework to detail the new decision making process undertaken by consumers within the digitally focused marketing environment. These authors assert that there exist two new inputs in this model which influence the
buying behaviour; the first is the online marketing mix which is described as an online experience that is controlled and monitored by a brand or firm and secondly, is the new input from the web 2.0 which includes social media and social networking sites, online experiences which are largely beyond the control of marketers and are shaped instead by consumers (Constantinides and Fountain, 2008).

Figure 5. Stimuli Response Model: Factors influencing the decision-making process in an information-based marketplace (Constantinides and Fountain, 2008, p.240).

The above models are all applicable to this study as the author seeks to determine how users of Instagram and Pinterest are influenced by the different sources of content or ‘information’ available to them as they pass through the various stages and processes highlighted in a social media context. In today’s dynamic marketplace, there are multiple channels that consumers can turn to in their quest for information and alternative evaluation, and not just the one sided information produced by firms through traditional marketing tools. An area of increasing interest for marketers is identifying both when and why consumers turn their attention to social media outlets in their purchase decision making process (Powers et al., 2012). Social media alone represents a vast spectrum of word of mouth forums such as blogs, chat rooms, product and service rating forums, discussion boards and social networking sites (Mangold and Faulds, 2009). The author aims to
further investigate the differences and similarities between the influences of user generated content and firm generated content as consumers move through the various steps involved between information generation and the final purchase intention.

2.6 Social Media

Research of the literature largely attributes the growth of social media as the main driver behind the User generated content initiative. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p.61) define social media as ‘a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User generated content’. Social media have emerged to redefine the digital media landscape and, in the process, have changed the way we think about the dissemination of marketing messages (Lipsman et al., 2012). This new age platform has revolutionised the world of marketing, taking it from a one dimensional system to a two-way interaction between brands and consumers. The advent and adoption of social media changes the way brands and consumers interact (Tuten and Solomon, 2013) and a growing number of e-commerce sites are now incorporating the use of social networks in tangent with their original product network sites (Goldenberg, Oestreicher-Singer and Reichman, 2012). This is carried out through user-generated links that appear on individuals social-network pages directing traffic to the product network. These links, which may appear in the form of conversation or personal opinion, can be created by a single individual without any intervention of a recommendation algorithm or aggregate data, in other words they are generated by consumers and are not controlled by firms (Goldenberg, Oestreicher-Singer and Reichman, 2012).

Initially, focus on social media marketing was viewed as merely another way for firms to communicate with consumers. With the explosive growth of social media networking sites, however, social media is now widely regarded as the ‘glue’ that holds together a firm’s marketing campaign
because it touches across each promotional medium. Integration of the individual into a brand community positively impacts satisfaction with the brand on many levels: brand image, marketing communications, overall marketing strategy, relationships built through social media and with social media in general (Judson, Devasagayam and Buff, 2012). The dawning of the online era that is upon us has brought with it an undeniable and significant shift in the way brands communicate and connect to consumers. As highlighted previously, with offline advertising on the decline, and online advertising reaching unprecedented levels of engagement and usage, it is no wonder that brands are increasingly incorporating the use of social media networks into their marketing communication efforts. These social media have also become a highly influential driving factor behind many aspects of consumer behaviour such as awareness, information acquisition, opinions, attitudes and purchase behaviour (Mangold and Faulds, 2009).

With more and more consumers becoming fans of, liking and/or following brands on social media, one can assume that the incorporation of social media, as well as the use of traditional media, is an important factor of a brands success (Bruhn et al., 2012). There are many studies focused on all the integral aspects of how sites such as Facebook and Twitter are utilised in this arena [see Kaplan and Haenlein (2009), Lipsman, Mudd, Rich and Bruich (2012), Bennett (2013)], but despite the perceived dominance of the aforementioned social networks, they represent only the tip of the iceberg in terms of marketing potential for brands. This study aims to instead focus on imagery based social media sites Instagram and Pinterest which are coming into prevalence, and look at both user generated content and firm generated content on these social networks.
2.6.1 Consumer trends on Social Media

The increasing trend of social media usage marks the incorporation of a two-way dialogue between brands and consumers, allowing for a more interactive and instantaneous flow of communication. Within this new online arena consumer’s opinions and experiences of various brands, products and services are coming into the forefront, as opposed to the traditional one way system of communication from content circulated by the company or brand itself. In other words, traditionally controlled brand communications are now being shaped by the consumer (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2013). Media activities generated by consumers or communities that are neither paid for nor induced by brand owners (user generated content) are claimed to have a potentially game-changing impact on communication and brand building (Corstjens and Umbljjs, 2012). Studies show that there exists a number of varying factors which may influence consumers’ to create their own content (Christodoulides, Jevons and Bonhomme, 2012). For some the motivation relates to self-promotion and intrinsic enjoyment (Berthon et al., 2008) while others suggest a desire to collaborate, information dissemination, interaction, and creativity (Burmann and Arnhold, 2008). Users also tend to be more trusting of content produced by other users as they are seen as less biased and this impartiality is perceived as more authentic (Anwar and Rehman, 2013). This can be contrasted with the issue raised by Cheong and Morrison (2008) who draw attention to the fact that content generated by a brand usually communicates only positive information, due to their undoubted commercial interest. Consumers can also ‘consciously differentiate’ between these two sources of information on social media (Bruhn et. al., 2012).

The new role of the empowered customer does not fit comfortably into any Integrated Marketing Communication model currently available (Ewing, 2009). Even though social media has been recognised as the most potentially powerful medium in business practice, there is lack of understanding in terms of why people use social media and how they perceive social media
marketing messages (Chung and Austria, 2010). Though many scholars and practitioners alike agree that user generated content has seen an explosive growth in recent times, there exists only limited knowledge to date on the impact of consumer generated content on how brands are perceived (Christodoulides, Jevons and Bonhomme, 2012). Research thus far has undoubtedly been growing, but there are only a limited number of studies which seek to explore the full potential of social media and its implications on business (Mikalef, Giannakos and Patelii, 2012). There is also a limited understanding on the part of both researchers and brand managers surrounding the effects of user generated content and brand generated content on brand equity, brand attitude and purchase intention (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2013).

2.6.2 Instagram and Pinterest

Despite the dominance of Facebook in the social media arena, its reign is seeing strong competition from fast growing social media sites promoting the sharing of visual material, driven mainly by two social media platforms, Instagram and Pinterest (Lane, 2013). Duggan and Smith (2013) also assert the dominant player position held by Facebook but emphasise that an increasing number of social media users are now diversifying onto other platforms.

Instagram was launched in October 2010 and describes itself as ‘a fast, beautiful and fun way to share your photos’ (Lane, 2013). A study conducted by social analytics company Simply Measured (2013) identified Instagram as the fastest growing social networking site with 150 million users and 40 million photos being uploaded daily. This study showed that Instagram holds uncapped potential for companies looking to expand their brands’ online portfolio, as levels of brand engagement on the site have increased 350% since 2012. Analytics company SumAll (2013) offered similar sentiments in a study where they compared data from Instagram, Twitter, Google+ and Facebook, citing Instagram as the clear winner in terms of return on investment. Instagram users are also nearly as likely as
Facebook users to check the site on a daily basis, which serves to further emphasise its growing prevalence in the social media arena (Duggan and Smith, 2013).

Pinterest, which was launched in March 2010, is a virtual pinboard that lets users share and organise pictures, or ‘pins’, from the web. Research carried out by Sevitt and Samuel (2013) asked 3,000 social media users across North America and the UK about their shopping habits. The results highlighted Pinterest as an especially popular driver of in-store sales, with 21% of Pinterest users surveyed admitting that they bought items in-store after ‘pinning’, ‘re-pinning’ or liking it on the popular site. Pinterest users also spend twice the amount of money on follow-through purchases than users on other networks (Cooper, 2013). Pinterest is all about users telling the brand story with 70% of brand engagement on Pinterest generated by the community versus brands (Curalate Insights, 2013).

Although the world’s top 100 brands, as defined by Interbrand (2013), are all operating a Facebook page, brands are increasingly turning their attention towards Pinterest and Instagram and incorporating them into their social media strategies (SimplyMeasured, 2013). The Instagram presence of the top 100 brands on Instagram grew considerably from 2012 to 2013 with an increase from 42% to 65% of active accounts and over 19% recording a following of more than 100,000 followers (Fox, 2013). Pinterest is also coming to the forefront in terms of brand adoption and usage, with 69 of the top 100 brands having a Pinterest account in 2013, an increase from 63 the previous year (Smitha, 2013). With over 70 million users worldwide, ‘pinners’ as they are referred to, are spending an estimated 1 hour and 17 minutes per month on the site (Piqora, 2013).

2.7 Conclusion and Conceptual Framework

Having conducted an extensive review of the existing literature surrounding the area of content generation, brand attitude and purchase intention it is possible to deduce a number of key areas relevant to this research.
The first area highlighted is that there is a need for further study and exploration into the effects of user-generated content, particularly in a social media context. According to the literature past studies looking at content generation have focused on traditional media, while those researchers that have turned their attentions towards user-generated content on social media (see Bruhn et. al, 2012; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2013) have focused predominantly on Facebook and Twitter. This leads into the next area of importance; consumers are diversifying onto new social media platforms that are, in some cases, challenging and surpassing the once dominant position held by Facebook and Twitter (Duggan and Smith, 2013). There has been little to no research to date examining how Instagram and Pinterest, which operate through the use of only images and short captions, are affecting and being affected by both user generated and brand generated content. This study aims to build on the foundation blocks provided by the initial conceptual frameworks previously discussed and instead apply these theories to the emerging field of visual social media. Research of the literature shows that content created by the user has a substantially higher impact than traditional marketing activities (Trusov et al, 2009), while traditional media has shown to be more likely to reinforce existing marketing messages rather than convert new customers (Kozinets et. al, 2010).

This study aims to test these assumptions by applying them instead to the fast-paced and dynamic world of social media. Within the new age social media platform marketers are facing new hurdles as they attempt to incorporate the use of social networks in tangent with their original product network sites (Goldenberg, Oestreicher-Singer and Reichman, 2012). This has led to new process inputs for attitude formation and the online decision making process, as detailed in the literature review. This means that decision making is now influenced by additional factors that are outside the control of online marketing initiatives and represent content that is also created, edited and generated by the consumer rather than exclusively by the brand (Constantinides and Fountain, 2008).
In sum, the review of the existing literature asserts that user-generated content, both in the form of consumer-to-consumer communications (WOMM, eWOM) and content in the online arena that is created, edited and generated by the user (user generated content uploaded to social media), greatly impacts many of the marketing outcomes discussed in this chapter. This study aims to extend and build on many of the theories and findings presented throughout the literature review, and instead compare the growing phenomenon of user-generated content with what has been referred to as its ‘normative opposite’ namely; brand generated content. This area represents, as of yet, a rather unexplored aspect of research and as such there is a need for further study in this field (Mikalef, Giannakos and Pateli, 2012; Christodoulides, Jevons and Bonhomme, 2012; Bruhn et al, 2012). In this research, the author will attempt to compare user-generated social media communication with content on social media that is generated by marketers and official brands, and furthermore to investigate the effect this content has on certain stated marketing outcomes; brand attitude and purchase intention.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Methodology Introduction

This chapter will begin by developing a conceptual framework based on the findings from the review of the existing literature. The remainder of the chapter explains the author’s choice of research method, how the data was collected and processed and details the main elements of research methodology that were undertaken for this research project. The objectives of this research are twofold; firstly to look at how consumer attitudes on Instagram and Pinterest are impacted by the different sources of content they are exposed to on these sites, and secondly to assess how these attitudes affect purchase decisions. This research aims to develop a theoretical framework which ‘provides the basis of explanation, permit the anticipation of phenomena, predict their occurrence and therefore allow them to be controlled’ (Hussey and Hussey 1997, p.52.).

This research will follow the process as detailed by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012, p. 128) in the Research Onion, as can be seen in the figure below. This figure depicts the issues underlying the choice of data collection methods, which step by step, the researcher will attempt to interpret and apply to the specific topic area.
3.2 Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis Development

Based on key findings identified and discussed in the existing literature, the following conceptual framework was devised in order to contribute to the successful answering of the research question and research objectives. This conceptual model will be tested throughout the course of this research to identify how the different sources of content generated on Instagram and Pinterest effect consumer attitudes and purchase intention:
Some of the studies referenced in the literature review of user-generated content highlight that consumers contribute to the process of content creation for reasons such as self-promotion, intrinsic enjoyment, and desires to change public perceptions (Berthon, Pitt, and Campbell 2008; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2013). In this proposed framework study, the researcher focuses on brand-related user generated content, looking solely at content generated by users of Instagram and Pinterest, in an attempt to add to and develop the current literature on this topic. The brand generated content refers to all brand created and controlled communication within these social networks. The inclusion of the brand attitude aspect in the conceptual framework proposed in this study aims to enhance the researcher’s understanding of the effect that this content has on consumer perceptions of brands within these social networks. Finally, the purchase intention element is included in this framework as research of the literature has indicated that the different sources of content generation on social media and the varying brand attitudes this creates both exert an impact on purchase intention.
3.3 Research Philosophy

There are three major ways of thinking about research philosophy according to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012); positivism, interpretivism and realism. For the purpose of this topic, the research philosophy this study intends to follow is positivism.

The positivist philosophy, also known as the scientific approach, employs the use of existing theory to develop hypotheses which are then tested and either confirmed or denied. Positivists believe that the only valid data are quantitative data. A positive research is based on statistics and a structured methodology. As this theory represents an objective approach that is deductive in nature, positivism would be most appropriate within the sciences because it deals mainly with measurable, statistical data (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012).

The positivist philosophy is appropriate as the author has identified some key theories and conceptual frameworks in the review of existing literature (for example Bruhn et. al 2012; Schivinski and Dąbrowski, 2013) that have helped to form the foundation of research for this paper. It is from this analysis of secondary information that a number of hypotheses have been developed and the primary data undertaken at this stage will seek to test these hypotheses.

This research will be measured empirically using quantitative methods and SPSS software, which is in keeping with the positivist philosophy. The interpretivist theory can also be appropriate in business and marketing research situations but is associated predominantly with qualitative data and is therefore not a suited philosophy. The aim of the primary research is to gather facts based on observations and on the chosen sample’s experiences and attitudes and quantify them using SPSS software. There will also be two open ended questions included in the questionnaire administered to the sample. This will allow respondents to add a qualitative element to the data collection. The quantitative aspect aims to evaluate the propositions as highlighted by the literature review, while the qualitative aims to identify possible themes and patterns emerging from the respondents. The
qualitative information will be not be analysed using second level coding, but rather the author will derive the main themes and relate them back to findings in the literature.

3.4 Research Approach

According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012) there exists two main types of research approach which build on the research philosophies examined in the first layer of the Research Onion; the inductive approach and the deductive approach.

The research approach undertaken over the course of this study is the deductive approach. Under this approach, the theory and research question comes first. It is an approach of testing theories via scientific hypothesis as part of a ‘top-down’ analysis and is often associated with the positivist philosophy which is deductive in nature. An important aspect of deduction is that it seeks to explain casual relationships between concepts and variables (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012). Selection and appropriate justification of the correct research approach is highly important to the overall goal of answering the research question. It will enable a more informed decision to be made about the research design and the intended research strategy. This study aims make assumptions and form hypothesis based on theory, test these assumptions and then to make conclusions based on the results. The author seeks to form relationships between certain variables under examination. For example; the relationship between user generated content and consumer attitude towards brands on Instagram and Pinterest, the relationship between firm generated content and consumer attitude towards brands on Instagram and Pinterest and the relationship between these attitudes and purchase intention.

The inductive approach is not appropriate in the context of this study as it works from observation in order to build a theory. In this way it is the opposite of the deductive theory as it operates as a ‘bottom-up’ analysis. This approach usually starts off looking at a particular area and then develops
the understanding around it, essentially one looks at existing data, with no real structure in place yet, and then seeks to develop themes around these findings (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012).

3.5 Research Choice

This area refers to the three choices of research methods highlighted by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012) which include: the mono method, the multi method and the mixed method.

The research choice employed is that of the mono method. This method is most appropriate due to the use of a single quantitative data gathering method and corresponding analysis procedure (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012). This quantitative information will be gathered using a questionnaire and will be analysed using SPSS software. For additional insight purposes, there will also be two open-ended questions present in the questionnaire which will give respondents the chance to qualify certain key areas which are relevant to the research.

3.6 Time Horizons

There are two types of time horizons which include cross-sectional and longitudinal studies (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012).

In order to select the appropriate type of time horizon, it is important to determine if there exists any time constraint which may require the research to be undertaken within a specific period of time. If this is the case, then the cross-sectional time horizon is the appropriate selection.

Longitudinal time horizons require a longer period of time as a main characteristic of this type is its ability to monitor change development (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012).

For the purpose of this research the time horizon utilised will be cross-sectional. This is usually the case for academic papers which must be completed within a given time frame. Cross-sectional
studies also often employ the use of a survey or questionnaire, which is apt for the research strategy employed in this research. This is also in keeping with the ‘snapshot’ element of the cross-sectional time horizon.

3.7 Research Strategy

A research strategy can be defined as a plan of how a researcher will go about answering her or his research question. It is the methodological link between the researcher’s philosophy and subsequent choice of methods to collect and analyse data (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012). There are 7 dominant approaches to the research strategy component of the dissertation, as prescribed according to the Research Onion (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012). They are; experiment, survey, case study, action research, grounded theory, ethnography and archival research.

For the purpose of this study, the use of the survey strategy will be employed by administering questionnaires. Questionnaires are the most widely used technique within the survey category and according to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012) this method proves an efficient means of data collection, particularly from potentially large groups, as is the case for the research topic at hand, which refers to users of Instagram and Pinterest.

These will be standardised and contain closed-ended questions in order to facilitate easy comparison. The questionnaires will also be self-administered as they will be predominantly administered via online mediums i.e. email, social media and LinkedIn groups. Due to the fact that this study aims to discover information about a certain percentage of the chosen sample population standardised questionnaires will help to draw statistical and quantifiable results. This method of research strategy is widely used to assess attitudes and characteristics of a wide range of subjects, and is therefore an appropriate choice for this research which will involve the study of
consumers/end users. The questions will be category style answers whereby respondents will be required to choose only one option from a given set of categories. The style of questions will include; dichotomous questions where respondents will be asked to answer either yes or no, closed-ended questions where respondents are restricted to choosing an answer among a given set of multiple choice options and finally open ended questions which will allow participants the opportunity to express their thoughts and opinions in a free flowing manner.

The questionnaire also underwent pilot testing prior to administration to refine and eradicate any unforeseen errors or misinterpretations. The pilot test was sent to 20 respondents to allow the author to generate and apply any feedback from this group and make changes accordingly before the final version of the questionnaire was circulated. The pilot questionnaire contained only 21 questions and the revised questionnaire contained a total of 24 questions. Two of the additional questions that were added following the pilot test were open-ended questions. After gathering the data from the pilot questionnaire, there was a need for a more detailed insight into some of the questions as a closed-ended question was not sufficient information in these two instances. Some of the questions were also revised due to poor or unclear wording which was confusing to some of the participants. Other questions needed a wider scope of answers, for example a ‘neither’ option and a ‘not applicable’ option were both necessary additions to certain questions.

The questionnaire seeks to identify three sets of important data variables.

- Opinion variables record how respondents feel about something (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012).

Many of the questions included in the questionnaire require the personal opinion/sentiment of target respondents. Much of the research depends on consumers attitudes pertaining to content generation on Instagram and Pinterest and as such, the personal opinions of respondents is crucial to the primary research of this work.
Behavioural variables contain data on what people have done in the past/do in the present/will do in the future (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012).

Unlike the opinion based questions, the behavioural data collected from the questionnaire will highlight the behaviour and actions of the respondents. These questions will not require an opinion but rather aim to capture concrete behavioural patterns. Questions surrounding number of accounts respondents follow on Instagram and/or Pinterest, time spent on either/both of these sites and the type of accounts most time is spent on all reflect this variable.

- Attribute variables record data about the characteristics of respondents (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012).

The questionnaire contains profiling questions in order to collect attribute variable data (See Appendix 1, Q.1-Q.3). Questions such as age and gender are required fields for respondents to fill out in order to complete the survey.

3.8 Selecting Respondents

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012, p. 207) set out 2 different types of sampling techniques; probability sampling and non-probability sampling. For this study, the method of non-probability, or judgemental sampling as it is sometimes referred to, has been selected as the most appropriate. As it is not feasible to get an appropriate sample of the entire population of Instagram and Pinterest users, this technique provides a sufficient alternative. The researcher used the volunteer sampling method which involves both self-selection sampling and snowball sampling in the case of contact made with potential participants through social media outlets. Links to the online questionnaire were posted on Facebook and in LinkedIn groups where people were encouraged to take part in the questionnaire for research purposes, this represents the self-selection method as the need for respondents was publicised and data was then collected from those who did respond. The snowball
sampling aspect refers to the instances when the link to the questionnaire was subsequently passed on to other users identified by respondents. Additionally, potential participants were also contacted through email and in this case the sampling technique used is more appropriately classified as convenience sampling.

**Population:** All active users of social media sites Instagram and Pinterest.

**Sample:** Female users aged 18-30 in the Dublin area, between 200-250.

More specifically, this research intends to use the stratified random sampling method. In order to add more structure to the methodology, it is possible to further divide the population into strata corresponding to factors such as highly active users of Instagram and Pinterest, those who have an account but do not use it, those who use these sites actively but do not participate or interact with the site (or with brands, more specifically) etc.

The selection of the proposed sample population is derived from a study carried out by Duggan and Smith (2013) entitled ‘The Social Media Update 2013’. This study is based on findings from the Pew Research Centre, which highlights that while Facebook has a diverse demographic following in terms of user profiles, Instagram and Pinterest appeal to a more unique or niche demographic. The aforementioned research carried out by the Pew Research Centre showed the following trends surrounding the main users of imagery based social media networks Instagram and Pinterest; firstly is that women are 4 times more likely than their male counterparts to use Pinterest (33% vs. 8%) with adoption rates increasing among the 18-29 year old demographic (27% vs. 24% among 30-49 year olds). Similarly, Instagram also appeals more to the 18-29 year old age group (37% vs. 18% among 30-49 year olds). As the female demographic within the outlined age bracket represent the most active users and adopters of both Instagram and Pinterest, this demographic was targeted as the prime respondents for the research questionnaire.
3.9 Research Ethics

All data collection from respondents within the sample was carried out in an ethical manner and with full consent. Confidentiality and anonymity of participants was maintained at all times and the researcher remained objective at all times in order to ensure the most valid data possible was collected. No respondent had access to the answers of any other respondent so that data collected was not swayed or influenced by what the consensus of the majority was. As the questionnaire was administered via the internet, the author aims to abide by the ‘netiquette guidelines’ prescribed by Hewson (2003) which involves ensuring all emails are relevant and not spam, create a more personal distribution method to avoid cross-posting or imposing on respondents and avoiding email attachments that may cause harmful viruses.

3.10 Data Collection Instruments

The main data collection instrument used was the questionnaire. This was designed based on the research objectives outlined in the first chapter of this paper. As detailed previously, there was a pilot questionnaire administered to 20 respondents prior to finalising the actual questionnaire and circulating it to the entire target sample. This pilot testing contributed greatly to the successful design of the final questionnaire and highlighted some potential flaws and errors that were corrected. Some questions were re-written and others required a more wide range of answers to choose from. It was only after the pilot testing period and analysis of feedback and data collected during this time that the two open-ended questions were also added. In the final version, there were a total of 24 questions included in the questionnaire. This was not a pre-set number target, but rather the author felt that these 24 questions would sufficiently contribute the required data and information to the study. Out of this total, 22 were closed questions while 2 of them were open-
ended and required a written contribution from the participants. For full copy of the questionnaire see Appendix 1.

One of the practical issues which was likely to arise during the course of this research was the risk of a low and unmotivated response rate due to the lack of incentive for respondents. Therefore to reach the target outlined of 200-250 respondents, there was a higher amount of questionnaires distributed in an attempt to combat this issue. Links to the online questionnaire were posted on Facebook and LinkedIn groups, while other participants were contacted via an email containing a cover letter and the questionnaire link. A total of 300 questionnaires were circulated during the primary research phase, with a response of 253 actual respondents that successfully completed the survey. This equals a total response rate of 84% which was a positive outcome and meant that expectations regarding the number of participants were not only met, but were surpassed. Of the 300 questionnaires there was 200 circulated via social media outlets and the remaining 100 via email. The emails sent were much more time consuming to send and monitor and for this reason there was a greater amount of 200 questionnaires circulated on social media groups, pages etc. Questionnaires administered via email contained a cover letter explaining the nature of the study and thanking the participant for their time (see Appendix 1). Participants contacted through social media were also given a brief on the research topic area but as some of these were members of a particular group on social media it was not addressed to a specific person by name, as it had been with the email.

The questionnaires was self-administered and distributed through online sources such as email, social media and LinkedIn groups. There were no monetary incentives and there was follow-up contact made once an appropriate amount of time has passed without a reply from desired respondents in the sample. As the research question itself is concerned with users of social media applications which are obviously internet dependent, this is an appropriate distribution method, and one which target respondents may likely be already familiarised with.
3.11 Data Analysis Procedures

Once the required amount of questionnaires were collected, the data was then analysed using SPSS software. The quantitative data can be divided into two different groups; categorical data and quantifiable data. Due to the nature of the study at hand (i.e. the analysis of content creation and consumer attitudes) the most appropriate selection was that of categorical or descriptive data. The use of predominantly closed, standardised questions also means that the results of the data collection and examination was easily measured and compared. The first step involved defining the variables and assigning pre-set codes and labels to the corresponding answers. Secondly, with the variables defined, the data was input into the SPPS data editor which counted and quantified the data. The final step in the analysis procedure required transferring the data into graph format so the results can be easily displayed and comprehended.

3.12 Limitations of Methodology

The first limitation to the methodology is that respondents in my chosen sample may not be aware of the difference or be able to distinguish between content they are exposed to that falls into the user generated content category, and that which is classified as brand generated content. The primary research in this study aims to uncover attitudes towards these opposing types of content and therefore this may prove problematic during the questionnaire process. There is a question within the survey which directly asks respondents if they are aware of these opposing sources of content (see Appendix 1, Q.7) but as the questionnaire is self-administered and the author cannot know for certain if this is in fact the case; it still represents a relevant limitation to the research.

The questionnaire, as outlined, will be administered via the internet but the different channels employed in the circulation of the questionnaire may impact on the responses collected. For example, respondents contacted through social media channels are possibly more likely to have an
aptitude for social media, and therefore their answers may be different than those respondents contacted via email. Another issue stemming from this area is that the anonymity of the questionnaire means relying on the validity and truthfulness of the responses from participants, that the information they contribute is in fact correct and that they do not affect research outcomes by answering otherwise.

Another limitation arises in the highly current and recent nature of the research topic in question. Sources used as references must be up to date in order to ensure there is no time lapse or error in findings. Furthermore, there was a lack of theory and journal articles about Instagram and Pinterest available as valid secondary sources to provide a frame of reference.

The outlined sample itself also provides a limitation as it proposes to question only a given demographic namely; females aged 18-30 in the Dublin area. This may lead to skewed outcomes when compared with Instagram and Pinterest users from different demographics who are presented with a similar issue.

3.13 Conclusion

This section of the paper has outlined the methodology employed during this research in order to effectively and comprehensively answer the research question and supporting research objectives. This research has followed the process, as detailed by the Research Onion presented by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012). The research philosophy of this paper is that of both positivism and interpretivism. When testing the conceptual model under discussion for this research, the research has followed a positivist philosophy with a deductive due to the nature of the analysis required. The use of the survey strategy was selected as the most appropriate and viable option to gather the data, with a self-administered questionnaire being chosen more specifically. The research was carried out according to the cross-sectional time horizon due to certain constraints surrounding the
time-frame of the research. The data collected was then analysed using SPSS software, the results of which are presented and discussed in the following chapter.
Chapter 4. Data Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will present the results from the questionnaire administered to the sample population via online mediums; email and social media. The study was designed to gather information on how consumers’ interactions with user generated content and brand generated content affect brand attitude and purchase intention, with a specific focus on visual social media sites Instagram and Pinterest. These results were collected and measured quantitatively using SPSS software. To gain a more in-depth understanding of consumer attitudes towards brands on Instagram and Pinterest, the questionnaire also contained two open ended questions, giving respondents the opportunity to elaborate on and qualify their opinions. The questionnaire was sent to 300 potential participants to allow for the possibility of certain desired respondents who did not take part in the survey. The following results are based on the 253 respondents that did participate in the questionnaire. There were a total of 24 questions which were aimed at answering the research objectives set out at the beginning of the dissertation. Therefore the data collected, analysed and discussed in this chapter will be sub-divided in order to correspond to the relevant research objectives. The following sections will present and analyse the data collected. Conclusions and recommendations derived from this data analysis will be discussed in the next chapter. The findings will aim to either prove or disprove the framework proposed in this study which was devised based on the research objectives identified by the author and the review of the existing literature. As previously discussed, the framework was designed to correspond with the objectives and ultimately facilitate the successful answering of the overlying research question.
4.2 Profile and Relevance of Respondents to Research Findings

The sample, for the purpose of this research, comprised 253 respondents. The questionnaire contained a number of profiling style questions in order to filter those respondents that did not meet the sample population criteria and to determine certain qualities of the participants. There was an initial targeted age and gender of the participants; females aged between 18-30 years. As such, these questions simply allowed the researcher to create an even more specific profile for the study.

Out of the 253 people in the sample, only one respondent registered as male, equalling 0.40% of all respondents. This was as expected as the target sample referred only to females and as such the projected responses from the participants were forecast with this in mind. The questionnaire filled out by this respondent was not counted in the remainder of the analysis. The remaining 252 or 99.60% were females; and therefore part of the targeted demographic for this questionnaire. The target age bracket for the sample was between the ages of 18-30, as highlighted previously; this demographic records the highest usage of both Instagram and Pinterest, as well as the highest percentage increase in adoption rates when compared with their older counterparts (Duggan and Smith, 2013). Out of the 252 respondents, 39% fell within the 18-22 age category, 43% within the 23-26 category and 18% in the 27-30 category.

The boundaries set by the researcher with regards to the target demographic of females between the ages of 18-30 is based on trends identified in the literature which highlight this profile as the most active users of Instagram and Pinterest. For the purpose of comparison, the researcher makes reference to a study carried out by the Pew Research Centre (2013) on the landscape of social media users. This will allow for a comparison between the general population of Instagram and Pinterest users with that of the chosen sample for this research. The comparative study highlights that women are five times more likely to use Pinterest than their male counterparts. Although the contrast between male and female are not as distinct as with Pinterest, it was also found that women are the
more active users of Instagram by the Pew Research Centre (2013). The most popular age bracket observed in the comparative study was also users between the ages of 18-30.

4.3 Usage of Instagram and Pinterest

As was highlighted in the literature review, the dominant player position held by Facebook is experiencing strong competition from the increasing number of social media users who are diversifying onto other platforms (Duggan and Smith, 2013). Visual social media sites Instagram and Pinterest were identified in the existing literature as two of the main drivers behind this (Lane, 2013), a finding which is supported by results in the data collected as part of this study.

A series of questions were devised in order to ascertain quantitative data about participant’s usage patterns and habits on Instagram and Pinterest. Firstly, respondents were asked which of the two visual social media accounts they had (see appendix 1. Q. 3). The option of ‘Neither’ was included for filtering purposes as any respondent who selected this answer does not qualify as a relevant source for any of the proceeding questions, which require the use of at least one of either social media accounts. The highest percentage of respondents recorded having both Instagram and Pinterest, accounting for 63% of the sample. 21% of respondents recorded having an Instagram account, while 16% registered as having only a Pinterest account. None of the respondents registered as having neither account.

Respondents were also asked about their frequency of use on these social networks. This question devised in order to determine the levels of usage of Instagram and Pinterest among the sample in terms of time spent on these sites. When asked ‘How often do you check your Instagram/Pinterest account’ the highest percentage of respondents said that they check these accounts on a daily basis, accounting for 38% out of the 252. This further validates findings in the existing literature that despite the perceived dominance of Facebook within the realm of social media, its title is facing
strong competition as users continue to diversify onto other social media platforms. The next highest recorded response showed that 33% checked their Instagram/Pinterest accounts three to five times per week, 27% said they check their accounts on a weekly basis and only 1% of respondents were recorded as doing so less than weekly. This question allows the author to assume that the majority of respondents are active in their usage of the site, though not necessarily in their participation.

4.4 Research Objective 1: To identify the key trends of user generated content within the context of imagery based social media sites Instagram and Pinterest.

The aim of the first research objective was to identify the key trends of user generated content on Instagram and Pinterest. Due to the fact that this topic represents an extremely recent and emerging area of study there is little existing theory to act as a frame of reference. This provides a relevant motive behind the first research objective as there is a need for further study and development into the trends of user-generated content on visual social media. Based on the data gathered and analysed from the questionnaire, it is possible to derive a number of these trends, supported by findings in the existing literature. The review of the literature referenced a number of key studies based on a similar concept, but focused around other popular social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter (see Bruhn et. al, 2012; Schivinski and Dąbrowski, 2013). From this research it was already possible to identify some of the main trends and patterns of social media communication such as the fact that traditionally controlled brand communications are now being shaped by the consumer (Schivinski and Dąbrowski, 2013) and that this has a potentially game changing impact on both communication and brand building (Corstjens and Umblijis, 2012). Building on this, the primary research aimed to take a closer look at the key trends in how user generated content is being created, communicated, and shared within the context of Instagram and Pinterest.
4.4.1 Frequency of Creation

The first trend identified refers to how frequently users of Instagram and Pinterest are actively creating their own content and contributing to the user-generated content present within these visual social networks. Respondents were asked how often they ‘post’ or ‘pin’ in order to ascertain their actual level of participation, as opposed to their time spent using these sites from a spectator standpoint. In this case, ‘participation’ is defined as the uploading of visual content; more commonly referred to as ‘posting’ or ‘pinning’. The answers recorded for this question show that only 2% of respondents said that they posted on either/both of these sites on a daily basis, a huge decrease when compared to the 38% who check/use the site within the same time frame. A further 17% of respondents upload visual content 3-5 times per week, also a strong contrast to the 33% who said they check their accounts 3-5 times a week. The majority of 39% answered to pinning or posting on a weekly basis and an equal percentage said they upload content less frequently than weekly. The remaining 2% said that they never upload visual content, post or pin and therefore do not create their own content in this context.

This phenomenon or trend whereby fewer users actively participate in an online community than are present is referred to as ‘The 90-9-1 Principle’ (Morrison, 2009). This principle states that 90% of users in an online community or social network fall into what is deemed as the ‘audience’ category, in other words, those users who observe but do not necessarily contribute themselves. 9% of users are described as ‘partially engaged’ whereby they contribute from time to time, and the remaining 1% is referred to as ‘fully engaged’ and account for the majority of contributions. While the data here supports this theory in that a higher percentage of users fall within the ‘audience’ category than those who are actively creating content, it is evident that in general, users are more active on Instagram and Pinterest.
4.4.2 Brand Awareness Created By User-Generated Content

The second trend observed from findings in the data relates to the fact that content created and communicated between users on Instagram and Pinterest can actually facilitate brand awareness. User-generated content on these sites can create brand awareness due to the sharing and linking elements present within Instagram and Pinterest. The data findings show that 78% of users questioned said they uploaded branded images on to their accounts and 65% of these tag the affiliated brand, creating a direct link for other users to the brand page. The data collected also showed that 76% of people had been made aware of a brand that they were previously unaware of from user-generated content in the form of a photo uploaded by a friend linking the affiliated brand.

This trend, whereby content created by users is fuelling brand awareness as opposed to content generated by the official brand, relates to findings in the literature which indicate electronic word-of-mouth as a hybrid cross between both user-generated content and firm-generated content. This corresponds to stage 3 in the Evolution of WOMM Theory presented by Kozinets et al. (2010). In this most recent stage, the aforementioned authors assert that communication has developed into a two-way dialogue with information surrounding a brand now flowing not only from marketer to consumer, but also among consumers in the marketplace. The fact that a majority of 76% of respondents said they had been made aware of a brand due to a friend’s post (representing user-generated content) supports this theory and challenges the traditional one-way system whereby consumers receive information that is controlled directly by the brand.

In order to gain further insight into this point, it was followed by an open-ended question asking respondents who answered ‘yes’ to a friend’s post creating awareness about a brand to give further details if they so choose. As this question in particular represents a key area of focus for the study, it was necessary to also gain a more qualitative understanding of how this occurs within these visual
social networks. Of the total responses collected, there were 157 participants who replied to this open-ended question and gave a detailed answer equalling a response rate of 62%. One of the most frequent responses given for this open-ended question again relates to the ‘tagging’ or linking of official brand pages in user generated content. In simple terms, when users or ‘friends’ on Instagram and Pinterest upload their own content to their own page of a product and then proceed to link the brand in question using these online linking mechanisms, other users are given a direct access route to these brand pages. This further emphasises the new hybrid element to social media and word-of-mouth marketing where consumers are being educated about brands through other consumers, rather than by traditional brand-controlled media.

Another trend identified from the responses to this question is that some users may ‘re-post’, ‘re-pin’ or ‘re-gram’ photos and pictures from brand pages. This means that friends or fellow users who see these posts are still being exposed to official and brand generated content, yet they are receiving it through unofficial channels. Again, this supports the existing findings around the area of ‘eWOM’ and its potential within the social media arena. This feature relates back to what is referred to as the ‘two-step communication flow’ where brand marketing messages and initiatives are interpreted first by opinion leaders and then disseminated to the larger community (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955; Brown, 2010). In the instance described here by respondents who refer to the ‘re-sharing’ of brand generated content, it can be argued that this is in fact a positive manifestation of ‘consequential WOM’, which occurs when consumers are exposed to traditional or brand controlled marketing efforts and then pass on this information (Bughin, Doogan and Vetvik, 2010).
4.5 Research Objective 2: To assess the level of influence both user generated content and firm generated on Instagram and Pinterest have on consumer attitude towards brands.

A consumer’s overall evaluation of a brand is represented by brand attitude (Bruhn et al, 2012). The different effects observed as a result of firm-created content compared to user-generated content within these platforms demonstrates that consumers consciously differentiate between the sources of information with 89% of respondents confirming that they can tell the difference between them.

Although there is a sense of ambiguity in the literature surrounding the effects of user-generated content on social media and the influence it has on attitude, it can be seen both in the literature and the data collected that consumers place more trust and esteem in content created by other consumers and that this has a big part to play in consumer’s attitudes towards brands. This finding is as expected based on the many authors whose own research has showed a similar outcome (Mitchell and Olson 1981; Belch and Belch 2003; Mangold and Faulds 2009; Bruhn et al. 2012). The vast majority of 89% of respondents said they regarded a customer review as the more reliable source of information about a brand’s products or services, which also puts into context the power of user-generated content and word-of-mouth within the online interface. The reasons given by respondents were largely in keeping with existing literature theory; that customers were less-biased and less-incentivised to give a false or misleading review than official brand reviews. As user-generated content is thought of as neutral and independent of any official influence, other users accept these evaluations as credible and authentic, and as ‘external validations’ of the brand’s attractiveness.

Brand awareness and perceived attractiveness both have a positive influence on brand attitude when subject to positive word-of-mouth for a number of reasons. Firstly, the fact that the communication about a brand takes place on a public platform such as on Instagram and Pinterest also increases the visibility and the attractiveness of a brand as it becomes the object of discussion. Secondly, consumers’ comments on social media platforms expressing a positive attitude towards a
brand can be seen as a public commitment and a confirmation of the brand’s attractiveness and desirability (Bruhn et. al, 2012). The results also highlight that 72% would stop following a brand altogether on Instagram and Pinterest if a friend had a negative experience with that brand. From these findings it is evident that user-generated content on these social networks has a very strong influence on a consumer’s attitude and how they think, feel and act towards a brand.

When comparing firm-created content on social media and user-generated social media communication it was revealed that source credibility has a strong impact on the attitudes of consumers on Instagram and Pinterest as only 13% of respondents said that they would stop following a brand if a customer they did not know had the same negative experience. This shows that the influence of user-generated content on brand attitude is in fact more multifaceted than previously believed by the researcher. Therefore, consumers are not only influenced according to the source credibility of user-generated content versus brand-generated content, but also by different levels within the realm of user-generated communication. This issue arose during the literature review when it was found that consumers were significantly more likely to believe the recommendations of a friend or family member than of a stranger (Bughin, Doogan and Vetvik, 2010). Thus, the 87% of respondents who would continue to follow a brand on Instagram and Pinterest despite the negative review from a stranger further emphasise the finding that the influence of user-generated content on consumer attitude is highly dependent on the credibility of the source.

Content generated by a brand within these social media outlets was also found to have an influence on consumer’s attitudes. Many researchers have argued the fact that firm generated content or traditional media in the form of advertising are predominantly used to create positive attitudes (Mitchell and Olson 1981; Belch and Belch 2003; Mangold and Faulds 2009; Bruhn et al. 2012).

The data shows that 83% of people said they would think favourably of a brand operating an official page on Instagram and Pinterest, while only 1% said this would cause them to think unfavourably or
in a negative way about the brand. This allows the assumption to be made that a brand’s presence on these sites has a positive influence on consumer’s attitude towards that brand. Although the influence is not as strong as that of user-generated content, mainly due to the perceived bias and commercial interest of a brand, the data supports the suggestion that it is most advisable that user-generated content in the form of social media must be used in tangent with traditional or firm generated content, as both exert an important impact on a brand’s success (Bruhn et al. 2012).

Research of the literature has shown that many of the world’s leading brands have already identified the potential to be gained from an official presence on these sites. Of the top 100 brand’s, as defined by Interbrand (2013) Instagram has experienced an increase from 42% to 65% of active accounts between 2012 and 2013 (Fox, 2013) while 69 of the top 100 brands are also now operating an official Pinterest account (Smitha, 2013).

4.6 Research Objective 3: To assess the level of influence both user-generated content and firm generated content on Instagram and Pinterest have on purchase intention of a brand.

According to the literature, a purchase intention arises once the information search and attitude formation stages in the consumer decision making process have been completed (Belch and Belch, 2003). The aim of this research question was to investigate the creation of purchase intention via visual social networks as a result of exposure to user-generated and brand-generated content. User-generated content was found to have a particularly strong influence on this aspect, as 98% of respondents in the primary research questionnaire said they regarded a positive customer review as a more effective incentive to purchase than a positive product description from the brand page itself. This finding reiterates the issue raised previously of source credibility, but in this context refers to the importance of this credibility when motivating consumers to purchase. Furthermore, 29% of people who look exclusively at user generated content when conducting research prior to purchase can be compared to the mere 9% who said they look exclusively at brand-generated content for the
same reason. Brand or firm generated content was also found to exert a strong influence on purchase intention. A majority of 60% said they had been directly motivated by brand-generated content to purchase which is a higher percentage than was expected by the researcher.

Another interesting conclusion which can be derived from this research is that the strongest influence on both attitude and purchase intention comes from a hybrid mix of both these sources of content as it was found that the majority of 63% prefer to research both user generated content and brand generated content on these sites before purchase. This finding further supports existing literature which calls for the use of social media to be used in conjunction with the traditional marketing plan of a firm or organisation (Bruhn et al. 2012). Building on this, the author advocates that social media not just be used as simply one part of the process in a larger integrated marketing communication plan, but rather take a more focal role in the marketing efforts of a brand.

4.7 Limitation of Findings

There are a number of limitations in the findings presented in this chapter which must be taken into account. Firstly, the sample is not reflective of the entire population of users of Instagram and Pinterest, and as can be seen from the profile of the respondents, there is an over-representation of females who fall within the age stated age category.

There is also an important limitation to be considered with reference to the open-ended questions discussed in this chapter. The opinions offered by those respondents that contributed a written answer in these instances are not representative of the entire population of respondents and as such should not be generalised as appropriate to every person who submitted a questionnaire (Garcia, Evans, and Reshaw, 2004).
Chapter 5. Conclusions

The advent of Web 2.0, and with it the dawning of the social media era, has revolutionised the way in which brands and consumers interact with one another in the marketplace. Social media have emerged to dramatically re-define the online landscape, empowering the consumer and elevating their role from passive recipients of information to active contributors and generators of online content. Consumers are now taking part in a multitude of online activities ranging from content consumption and creation, participation in online discussions, and the sharing of knowledge with other consumers, to influencing other consumers’ online activities. This new shift towards the more active consumer has drastically altered the marketing interface as consumers are increasingly invading the marketing space traditionally occupied and controlled by marketers (Berthon et al., 2008). With the enormous interest in social media and more specifically user-generated content within these sites, consumers are seen to be actively contributing to the marketing content and fuelling the new two-way communication style whereby information no longer flows one way from brand to consumer, but rather is also exchanged from consumer to brand and from consumer to consumer. Today’s dynamic marketplace has brought with it the birth of a new and more sophisticated consumer. Equipped with an infinitive and multi-faceted array of tools, modern consumers have instant and unrestricted access to the vast information space contained within social media. Visual social media platforms, Instagram and Pinterest, have heightened this concept by focusing on the visual element of the consumer’s information search process.

The main aim of this research is to build on these findings in the literature and develop knowledge about how consumers’ interactions with user generated content and brand generated content affect brand attitude and purchase intention on Instagram and Pinterest. Data collected as part of this study shows that user-generated content on these social networks is predominantly used to create positive reviews of branded products and services, and furthermore that content created by users can actually facilitate brand awareness. The literary review highlighted two relevant conceptual
frameworks which were analysed and discussed to determine how previous researchers have approached the examination of user-generated content and firm generated content within social media. Both of these studies indicated that user-generated content on social media networks have a significantly greater impact on certain stated marketing outcomes such as brand equity, brand attitude and purchase intention, than those resulting outcomes resulting from brand or firm generated content.

The literature highlights that brand attitude is made up of the overall evaluation of the brand, which encompasses factors such as brand awareness, brand image, and brand based associations of attributes and benefits. Brand attitude also exerts a substantial impact on the ultimate goal of creating a purchase intention among consumers (Sicilia, Ruiz and Reynolds, 2006). Due to the fact that consumers typically judge the information created by other consumers to be more trustworthy and credible, user-generated content within visual social media platforms Instagram and Pinterest was found to have a greater effect on consumer’s overall attitude towards a brand than brand generated content on these sites. Users of these sites regard positive content created by fellow users as external validations of certain key aspects that make up a consumer’s overall attitude towards a brand such as the brand’s attractiveness and desirability. Data collected as part of this study shows that user-generated content on these social networks is predominantly used to create positive reviews of branded products and services, and furthermore that content created by users can actually facilitate brand awareness which in turn positively affects brand attitude. Users think more favourably of brands that operate their own official page on Instagram and Pinterest, but the influence of brand generated content within these sites is not nearly as powerful when it comes to having an impact on a consumer’s over attitude towards a brand.

The social media phenomenon has also disrupted the longstanding consumer buying behaviour process, whereby consumer purchase decisions are impacted by traditional communication channels and various other stimuli or ‘noise’ such as demographic and societal factors (Lee, 2013). Content on
visual social media provide a pivotal example of how additional inputs are affecting the ultimate goal of creating purchase intention. Consumers are more inclined to purchase as a result of a positive customer review on Instagram and Pinterest, as opposed to official brand content in circulation on these sites.

It is evident from this research that the empowerment of the consumer has brought with it a significant shift from the traditionally firm-controlled one way process of communication to a more interactive dialogue that is being shaped by the consumer. This power is greatly magnified within the social media arena where consumers are exerting more control than ever before over the creation and generation of online content. Brands can facilitate positive word-of-mouth by being active and engaging in their social media presence but ultimately the main driver, shaper and influencer of consumer attitudes towards brands and purchase intention is that content which is communicated between users on Instagram and Pinterest. These conclusions provide sufficient support to identify the framework proposed in this research as an effective tool when planning future activities and gauging the validity of current approaches.
Chapter 6. Recommendations

Based on both the primary and secondary research conducted as part of this study, as well as the conclusions drawn in the previous chapter, the author has a number of recommendations to make.

6.1 Future Work

The author has identified a number of areas in this paper that provide a natural line of progression for future researchers looking to extend and build on this topic area. Firstly, there is an abundance of social media networks which each represent a different niche in their own right, both for consumers and for marketers. This research focused on visual social media sites Instagram and Pinterest, many studies referenced throughout the literature review centred their research on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, but these represent only a small percentage of the vast social media landscape available.

Another potential area for future work is to do a more comparative study between the genders. Visual social media have been proven to appeal more to the female gender, but perhaps a new perspective on this could be a refreshing concept for a researcher. Similarly, looking at both genders within the context of a completely new social media network is also a possible new line of focus.

A number of gaps in the literature and data collected as part of this study manifested during the research process that may also provide natural areas for future scholars to fill in and bridge the gap. One such area is a more in-depth look at source credibility on social networks. There has been noted research to date on this issue in the traditional sense but there is further development and understanding required on the part of both marketers and theorists alike as to how this translates into social media communications where issues such as anonymity and privacy mean new challenges for validating the trustworthiness of a source.
6.2 Implications for Managers

6.2.1 Be Active on Social Media

The data collected has proved that consumers respond favourably to brands that have a noted presence on social media. While user-generated content was found to have a somewhat stronger influence on consumer attitude and purchase intention, users of social media are still interested in and influenced by the brand generated communication they see online. By being more active and more engaging with your followers on social media brand attributes such as brand image and perceived attractiveness can be increased, both of which a have a positive impact on brand attitude and purchase intention.

6.2.2 Have the Necessary Resources in Place

It can be seen from this research that a firm has little to no control over user generated word-of-mouth, particularly within the online interface. While it is true that marketers cannot exert the same levels of influence over consumer-to-consumer communications on social media, it is possible to have necessary processes in place which can monitor what is being said and identify potential pitfalls for the brand. The implications for negative word-of-mouth resulting from a bad customer experience which go unnoticed or unanswered by a brand can be serious and damaging for the brand’s reputation. When incorporating social media into the overall integrated marketing communications plan, the company should invest in sufficient and proficient resources that can help to build and increase brand presence on social media.

6.2.3 Know Your Audience

The vast amount of comprehensive and analytical tools that are at the disposal of marketers today mean that it is more important than ever to be aware of who your customer is in order to be competitive in the marketplace. In the data collected, for example, it was shown that most people on Instagram and Pinterest visit a brand page to see what customers are saying even more so than
to see what the brand is saying. In this case, it may be more appropriate to make sure the brand page is up to date and accurate to facilitate positive word-of-mouth, rather than employing an aggressive selling technique on these sites.

6.2.4 Know Your Strengths

Some brand and product types are more suited to certain social media platforms and it is important for marketers to be able to distinguish and identify those which are most appropriate. Instagram and Pinterest for example, have a purely visual element to them and as such are best utilised by brands that fit in with this image and whose customers are likely to see them here. Other sites such as Facebook and Twitter are more conversational and probably appeal to a larger demographic and fan base.
Chapter 7. Reflection on Learning

7.1 Introduction

This chapter will detail the value I have gained throughout the past year on the MBA marketing program. I will consult the work of a number of the key theorists in the field of learning and apply them to my own experience. Furthermore, I will highlight the skills I have obtained from my time at Dublin Business School and how I have developed not only in this aspect but also in areas of my personal and professional life.

7.2 Learning Theory

Much of the research around the area of learning theory points to the work of a few key authors. The first and most notable of these is Kolb’s Experiential Learning Theory or ‘ELT’ (1984). This theory is based on six main propositions, inspired by the research of prominent and acclaimed scholars in this field namely; John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, Jean Piaget, William James, Carl Jung, Paulo Freire and Carl Roger among others (Kolb, 1984; Kolb and Kolb, 2005). These 6 propositions form the fundamental basis of the ELT and are as follows; learning is best viewed as a process and not in terms of outcomes, all learning is ‘relearning’, learning is driven by resolving conflict and disagreement, learning is a holistic process, learning results from synergistic transactions between the person and environment and finally learning is the process of creating knowledge (Kolb, 1984 pp.25-37; Kolb and Kolb, 2005 p.194). Kolb’s Experiential Learning Theory works on two levels; a four stage cycle of learning and four separate learning styles.

7.2.1 The Experiential Learning Cycle:

The first level of Kolb’s ELT is normally represented by a four stage model where the learner is deemed as ‘touching all the bases’. The model shows an integrated process in which each stage is relevant to and supportive of the following stage. The cycle can be seen depicted below in figure 10.
This theory states that effective learning occurs when the person has progressed through the four stages. Looking back at the Master’s program over the course of the year, it is possible to relate and identify with each stage outlined by Kolb and apply it to the experience.

In the context of my time on the MBA program, the ‘Concrete Experience’ stage refers to my being pro-active firstly at the very beginning in researching the course, applying and complying with entry requirements. It is also applicable to more-ongoing and continuous activities over the course of the year such as attending lectures, doing assignments, accessing information on Moodle and in the library and generally being active in my learning and experience of life at Dublin Business School.

‘Reflective Observation’, as the title suggests, refers to reviewing, reflecting and learning from experience. This is relevant to all the assignments, essays, papers and projects I completed during the year and most particularly to the challenge of writing this dissertation. After each assignment I strived to improve not only my grades, but also my approach and my process when carrying out academic research.

The ‘Abstract Conceptualisation’ stage occurs when the learner is able to draw relevant conclusions from an experience that they can take forward with them as they continue on in the cycle. Over the duration of the MBA I continued to make progress after each submission of work and once feedback was received I was able to apply this and improve my shortcomings for the next assignment. This stage is also important in the context of the dissertation which requires the learner to draw their own conclusions based on both secondary and primary research of the particular subject area.

The fourth and final stage in this model is ‘Active Experimentation’ where the learner seeks to test what they have learned in future situations. Having also recently started work in a professional environment, this stage of the cycle is highly relevant. I have taken everything I have learned during the other stages and my experiences throughout my time in college and applied it instead to the new challenges presented outside the field of academia.
7.2.2 Kolb’s Learning Styles

Kolb’s ELT also details four distinct learning styles which are based on the Learning Cycle. According to Kolb (1975) different people prefer different learning styles and this preference can be influenced by a number of factors including; education and social environment. These learning styles are presented as lines of axis, as shown in figure.11. I can relate most to the ‘diverging’ learning style, whereby a person prefers to gather information and view situations from multiple points of view. I work best only after conducting extensive research about a particular topic and like to have all the facts before I feel confident to take on a challenge and make a final decision. Idea generation is the part of the dissertation and indeed any assignment that I am best at, which at times proved problematic during the course of the research for this paper as it is sometimes hard to focus on the topic at hand and not be distracted by the new areas that manifest in the research process.
7.2.3 Honey and Mumford’s Learning Styles Questionnaire

Kolb’s work provided the basis for a large number of other theorists who took inspiration from his research. The Learning Styles Questionnaire (LSQ) by Honey and Mumford (1986) is one such example. These authors identify four types of learning style; reflector, theorist, pragmatist and activist. Honey and Mumford emphasised that in order for successful learning to occur one must understand which category they fall under and embrace it. To help people achieve this they devised a questionnaire to help people better understand what type of learner they are. These four learning styles are quite close in origins to those presented by Kolb and can be fitted in to the original model accordingly, as seen in figure. 12.

Figure 9. Kolb’s Learning Styles (1975).
Having taken the questionnaire myself to accurately identify the category which is most appropriate to my style of learning, I confirmed what I already suspected; that I am a ‘reflector’. This means I like to gather information and analyse things before making a decision. This past year has presented new challenges, however, and as such I have learned to be more adaptive and embrace new elements of other learning styles outside of my comfort zone. The theorist learning style was necessary during the planning stages of the dissertation where I had to set out step by step, the flow and structure of my research. The pragmatic approach refers to the testing of existing frameworks and theories and applying them instead to my new area of research, while the activist role was necessary to properly assess my own primary findings and draw relevant conclusions from them. By exploring these additional learning styles and taking on a new outlook to my work I felt that I was able to develop and hone my research and analytical skills and abilities to their full extent. As a ‘reflector’ decision making and action taking can at times prove a more difficult, frustrating and time consuming process than is necessary but throughout the year, with the submission of each assignment and ultimately undertaking the dissertation, I have learned to broaden my approach to these challenges as these are skills which require adequate time to develop and put to effective use.
7.3 Skills Obtained

The following provides a summary of the skills I have developed over the course of my time as part of an MBA student in Dublin Business School, and how they will be of service as I progress beyond my status as a student and into working life.

7.3.1 Time Management Skills

The first on the list and perhaps the most important skill I have developed is that of effective time management. Throughout my time as a student I have always supplemented my studies with a part time job which gave me an original insight into using my time wisely and the need for proper planning. The beginning of the third semester during which the dissertation was to be undertaken I secured a job in the field of marketing, which represented the greatest time challenge to date. The company in question is a busy and slightly under resourced start-up which required a lot of additional time outside of traditional office hours, often taking up evenings and weekends. I found, however, that this new challenge focused me as it meant I had to make use of every opportunity to do the necessary work.

7.3.2 Research Skills

While I have always felt my strengths lied in my ability to research, they were put to a new test this year when I began the master’s program. A post-graduate degree requires a new and more refined type of research approach. Particularly during the dissertation period where the research was vast, I felt I was more equipped to handle the information search process and identify the relevant information from the numerous secondary resources at my disposal.

7.3.3 Analytical Skills

The analysis part is always an area which I have struggled with more so than others. The higher level required as part of being a master’s student meant that it was not sufficient just to present an
accumulation of findings for a given assignment, but rather is was necessary to be able to conduct your own analysis of the subject area. I now feel more confident and comfortable with the ability to analyse and present information, a skill which has also proven useful in the working environment where a more practical set of skills is required than just researching and summarising.

7.3.4 Team Work Skills

Over the course of the year I have been part of a number of different group projects and assignments, each of which involved new members and new inter-group dynamics. This meant I was able to gain new value from each of the different group situations. Some required that I take on more of a leadership role within the group, while others meant allowing another group member to step up. Each group assignment allowed me to further develop my ability to negotiate, delegate, cooperate and communicate more effectively. I also now realise that different group members within my team possessed different learning styles and thus affected the approach used for each assignment. This meant a new and refreshing challenge was presented with each new group. Team work continues into the working environment, especially in the field of marketing. In my current role I am regularly part of a team or group situation and as such have been able to apply these skills to a professional context.
8. Bibliography

Books:


Articles/Journals:


Web:


9. Appendices

Appendix 1: Questionnaire

Consumers and Brands on Instagram and Pinterest.

Form Description

Q1. What is your gender?
   - Male
   - Female

Q2. How old are you?
   - 18-22
   - 23-26
   - 27-30

Q3. Which of the following accounts do you have?
   - Instagram
   - Pinterest
   - Both
   - Neither

Q4. How often do you check your Instagram and/or Pinterest account?
   - Daily
   - 3-5 times per week
   - Weekly
   - Less than weekly
   - Never

Q5. How often do you post/pin?
   - Daily
   - 3-5 times per week
   - Weekly
   - Less than weekly
   - Never

Q6. How many accounts are you following on either/both of these sites?
   - Less than 50
   - Between 50-100
   - Between 101-250
   - More than 250
Q7. Do you differentiate between posts uploaded by other users and official posts uploaded by brand pages on Instagram and/or Pinterest?
- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Q8. Do you spend more time looking at posts of friends or posts from official brand pages?
- Friends
- Brand pages
- Both equally

Q9. Has a friend's post on one of these sites ever made you aware of a brand that you were previously unaware of?
- Yes
- No

Q10. If yes, please give details

Q11. Do you post photos of branded images on either/both of these sites?
- Yes
- No

Q12. If yes, do you 'hash tag' or link the affiliated brand?
- Yes
- No
- Not applicable

Q13. Have you ever used Instagram/Pinterest to review a branded product?
- Yes
- No

Q14. If yes, was this review positive or negative?
- Positive
- Negative
- Not applicable

Q15. Does a brand operating its own official page on either/both of these sites make you think favourably/less favourably about that brand?
- Favourably
- Less favourably
- Neither
Q16. Would you stop following a brand on either of these sites if a friend had a negative experience with the product/service of that brand?
  ○ Yes
  ○ No

Q17. Would you stop following a brand on either of these sites if a customer you didn't know gave it a bad review?
  ○ Yes
  ○ No

Q18. In your opinion, which is the more reliable source of information regarding a brand's products/services?
  ○ A customer review
  ○ A brand's own product review

Q19. Please give a reason for your answer

Q20. In your opinion, which is the more effective incentive to purchase?
  ○ A positive customer review on Instagram/Pinterest
  ○ A positive product description from the brand page itself

Q21. Do you use Instagram/Pinterest as a means of online shopping/browsing?
  ○ Yes
  ○ No

Q22. Do you use Instagram/Pinterest to research a brand's products/services prior to purchase?
  ○ Yes
  ○ No

Q23. If yes, which of the following reasons is most applicable to you?
  ○ To see what others are saying about the brand's products/services
  ○ To see how the brand describes its own products/services
  ○ Both of the above
  ○ None of the above

Q24. Has an official brand page on either of these sites ever directly motivated you to purchase?
  ○ Yes
  ○ No
Appendix 2: Thank You Email Letter

Dear respondent,

Thank you for willing to participate and complete the following questionnaire. The purpose of my study is to analyse content on Instagram and Pinterest and how this affects consumer’s attitudes towards brands and purchase intention.

Your valued participation is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time without penalty. The following questionnaire will take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

This questionnaire will need to be completed by you on your own so we can get a true reflection of the results and you are not swayed by a third party. Please do not use secondary sources to help with or complete the questions.

Importantly all answers submitted to the author will be kept strictly confidential and will not be shared with any unnecessary third party. By completing the following questionnaire you have indicated that you are willing to volunteer for this research study. All responses will be kept strictly confidential and all results shown in aggregate form.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to get in touch. In advance thank you for your support and help.

Best regards,

Kerri Murphy

Email: kerrimurphy17@gmail.com

(Many thanks for filling out this questionnaire.

Have a good day ☺️)
Appendix 3. Data Analysis

Q1. What is your gender?

Q2. How old are you?
Q.3 Which of the following accounts do you have?

Q.4 How often do you check your Instagram and/or Pinterest account?
Q.5 How often do you post/pin?

Q.6 How many accounts are you following on either/both of these sites?
Q7. Do you differentiate between posts uploaded by other users and official posts uploaded by brand pages on Instagram and/or Pinterest?

Q8. Do you spend more time looking at posts of friends or posts from official brand pages?
Q9. Has a friends post on one of these sites ever made you aware of a brand that you were previously unaware of?

Q10. Do you post photos of branded images on either/both of these sites?
Q. 11. If yes, do you ‘hashtag’ or link the affiliated brand?

Q. 12. Have you ever used Instagram/Pinterest to review a branded product/service?
Q. 13. Was this review positive or negative?

Q. 14. Does a brand operating its own official page on either/both of these sites make you think favourably/less favourably about that brand?
Q.15. Would you stop following a brand on either of these sites if a friend had a negative experience with the products/services of that brand?

Q17. Would you stop following a brand on either of these sites if a customer you didn’t know gave it a bad review?
Q.18 In your opinion which is the more reliable source of information regarding a brand’s products/services?

Q.20. In your opinion which is the more effective incentive to purchase?
Q. 21. Do you use Instagram/Pinterest as a means of online shopping/browsing?

Q. 22. Do you use Instagram/Pinterest to research a brand’s products/services prior to purchase?
Q.23. If yes, which of the following reasons is most applicable to you?

Q.24 Has an official brand page on either of these sites ever directly motivated you to purchase?