

A New Approach for Understanding Brand Selfies as an Engagement Strategy on Instagram

Naziyet Uzunboylu ^a, Yioula Melanthis ^b, Ioanna Papasolomou ^c and Demetris Vrontis ^d

^a *Department of Management, University of Nicosia, 46 Makedonitissas Av., Nicosia, Cyprus;
Email: nazli.uzunboylu@gmail.com*

^b *Department of Management, University of Nicosia, 46 Makedonitissas Av., Nicosia, Cyprus;
Email: Melanthis.y@unic.ac.cy;*

^c *Department of Management, University of Nicosia, 46 Makedonitissas Av., Nicosia, Cyprus;
Email: papasolomou.i@unic.ac.cy;*

^d *Department of Management, University of Nicosia, 46 Makedonitissas Av., Nicosia, Cyprus;
Email: vrontis.d@unic.ac.cy;*

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The lockdowns that have emerged with the Covid-19 pandemic made social media more relevant than ever and forced brands to adjust their offerings to help their customers engage with their brand and products from home (Naeem and Ozuem, 2021). Amidst this chaos and uncertainty, brands are naturally inclined to use their consumers' contents to effectively reach their audience, build trust for brand and business, improve brand awareness, enhance content strategy, add value for their audience and create stronger relationships. Of particular interest to marketers, therefore, are images that feature brands like brand selfies on Instagram. Brand selfies, consequently, could be seen as the new marketing strategy, which provide a good content of the brands, while consumers are the new marketers of brands (Barbro, 2019; Uzunboylu et al., 2020). This study, thus, focuses on the consumer-brand engagement process through brand selfies on Instagram with the aim of carrying out a netnographic research on Instagram to investigate the impact of brand selfies in consumer-brand relationship as a new form of engagement strategy and to develop a conceptual framework that would contribute to the consumer engagement strategy of brands.

In terms of methodology, a systematic review of relevant studies published in peer-reviewed academic journals was conducted in order to critically assess the social media marketing on marketing literature, devoting particular attention to the relationship between consumer engagement and brand-related UGC, as well as to identify the theoretical gap. A total of 49 articles, published between 2010 and 2021, were included to construct a robust understanding of this phenomenon, throwing light on the mechanisms underlying the appeal of brand-related UGC, particularly brand selfies, and their influential power in shaping consumer attitudes (Nanne et al., 2021) and engagement behaviour (Mohammad et al., 2020).

As opposed to marketer-generated contents, Br-UGC is considered more trustworthy (Hautz et al., 2014; Chari et al., 2016; Colicev et al., 2019), authentic (Ertimur and Gilly, 2012; Uzunboylu et al., 2020) and direct contact with potential consumers (Rossman et al., 2016). These effects might be even amplified for visual Br-UGCs since visual contents draw attention faster and is often remembered better than textual contents (Fox et al., 2018; Martensen et al., 2018; Nanne et al., 2021). Perhaps one of the latest and most effective types of visual Br-UGC is brand selfies (Presi et al., 2016; Uzunboylu et al., 2020). Moreover, both Cho, Huh, and Faber (2014) and Kim and Lee (2017) proposed that consumers' exposure to visual Br-UGC shared by people in their social circle positively influence attitudes towards the brand, which in turn influence preferences for a brand and positive associations, which subsequently lead to increased brand-related activity (i.e., reading and watching: consumption, commenting, sharing and 'liking': contribution and creating content). Therefore, in line with the concept of consumers' online brand-related activities, it is important to provide further insight into the brand selfie phenomenon as an engagement tool, not just as a new social trend. Furthermore, various research gaps on visual brand-related UGC (brand selfies) on the consumer decision journey was identified.

Based on the initial analysis, various research gaps on visual brand-related UGC (brand selfies) on the consumer decision journey were identified. Further, the need of an explorative method of research to expand the consumer-brand engagement literature was discovered and, correspondingly, a netnographic approach, based on Kozinets (2002), was emphasized appropriate so as to enable an examination of behavioural responses. Netnography, to date, has been adopted by few researchers in the marketing and consumer behaviour literature to investigate topics including developing trust (Ahuja & Alavi, 2018; Arif et al., 2020; Shaw, 2020), consumer attitudes (Rashid and Zeeshan, 2018; Sarnou, 2019; Ertimur and Gilly, 2012); and eWOM motivations (Rashid and Zeeshan, 2018; Uzunboylu et al., 2020; Brodie et al., 2013). It is therefore suggested that a netnographic research will further bring new insights to consumers' social media behaviours theory as it explores such behaviour from consumers' perspectives.

Notwithstanding its consistent growth in brand usage, Instagram has garnered relatively scant attention by researchers in the marketing field. Some of the previous researches focused on consumers' interaction in more traditional SNSs such as Twitter, Youtube and Facebook (Oliveira and Fernandes, 2020), but the relevance of Instagram appears to be greater as the amount of interactions with brands is much higher on Instagram (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017; Geurin, and Burch, 2017). Instagram is, therefore, an excellent online environment for studying brand selfies as Uzunboylu et al. (2020) suggests, because of its extensive user base (Nanne et al., 2021) and good opportunities for spreading content to many people (Oliveira and Fernandes, 2020). Moreover, its popularity is still growing day by day as brands tend to actively use this platform for their communication and advertising purposes (Oliveira and Fernandes, 2020).

The question of how Br-UGC's power to influence contributes to explaining the formation and development of consumer attitudes (e.g., Martensen et al., 2018; Sabermajidi et al., 2020; Nanne et al., 2021) and behaviours (Naeem and Ozuem, 2020) and has become a significant and inevitable topic for both practitioners and academics. In particular, although the broader field of consumers' engagement with Br-UGC has been reviewed by various scholars, a more grounded understanding of the 'brand selfie' (visual Br-UGC) concept in the marketing and consumer behaviour disciplines remain unclear. Consequently, the intention of the current study is to

underline the relevance of further research in the areas of brand selfies and consumer-brand engagement.

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