

What do we know, and what will we know, about user-generated content in marketing?

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to examine the contribution that user-generated content (UGC) has made to marketing science over 2007–2025. Firstly, it assesses UGC research output in marketing. Secondly, it conducts scientific mapping, through co-word analysis and bibliographic coupling, to identify the main research themes, their evolution and trends. Based on the insights, an integrative theoretical framework and a research agenda are proposed to guide future studies.

Design/methodology/approach – The two main bibliometric analysis techniques, performance analysis and science mapping, were used to analyse UGC-focused research in marketing and to identify its main themes, evolution and current trends.

Findings – Research into UGC in marketing has evolved into ten themes: reviews, engagement, tourism, trust, motivations, machine-learning, quality, communication, image and topic modelling. These themes align with key research trends in the field: artificial intelligence, UGC effects, platform mechanisms, UGC vs FGC, multimodality and destination image.

Originality/value – This study goes beyond descriptive bibliometric mapping by providing the first longitudinal, field-wide synthesis of UGC research within marketing. It proposes an integrative framework that organises the field's intellectual structure, current research trends and future directions.

Keywords User-generated content, Bibliometric analysis, Science mapping, Co-word analysis, Bibliographic coupling

Paper type Literature review

Qué sabemos y qué sabremos sobre el contenido generado por los usuarios en marketing?

Resumen

Objetivo – Este estudio examina la contribución que el contenido generado por los usuarios (User-Generated Content, UGC) ha realizado a la disciplina del marketing durante el período 2007–2025. En primer lugar, evalúa la producción científica sobre UGC en marketing. En segundo lugar, lleva a cabo un análisis de mapeo científico, mediante análisis de co-palabras (*co-word analysis*) y acoplamiento bibliográfico (*bibliographic coupling*), con el fin de identificar los principales temas de investigación, su evolución y las tendencias emergentes. A partir de los hallazgos obtenidos, se propone un marco teórico integrador y una agenda de investigación para orientar futuros estudios.

Diseño/metodología/enfoque – Se utilizaron las dos principales técnicas de análisis bibliométrico, el análisis de rendimiento (*performance analysis*) y el mapeo científico (*science mapping*), para analizar la investigación centrada en el UGC dentro del ámbito del marketing e identificar sus principales temáticas, evolución y tendencias actuales.



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Resultados – La investigación sobre UGC en marketing ha evolucionado hacia diez grandes temáticas: reseñas (*reviews*), engagement, turismo, confianza, motivaciones, aprendizaje automático (*machine learning*), calidad, comunicación, imagen y modelado de temas (*topic modelling*). Estas temáticas se alinean con las principales tendencias de investigación del campo: inteligencia artificial, efectos del UGC, mecanismos de las plataformas, comparación entre UGC y contenido generado por las marcas (Firm-Generated Content, FGC), multimodalidad e imagen de destino.

Originalidad/valor – Este estudio va más allá del mapeo bibliométrico descriptivo al ofrecer la primera síntesis longitudinal y global de la investigación sobre UGC en marketing. Además, propone un marco integrador que organiza la estructura intelectual del campo, las tendencias actuales de investigación y las futuras líneas de desarrollo.

Palabras clave Contenido generado por los usuarios (UGC), Análisis bibliométrico, Mapeo científico, Análisis de co-palabras, Acoplamiento bibliográfico

Tipo de papel Revisión de literatura

关于营销领域用户生成内容, 我们已经知道什么, 又将会知道什么?

摘要

研究目的 – 本研究考察了 2007 年至 2025 年期间用户生成内容 (User-Generated Content, UGC) 对市场营销学科发展的贡献。首先, 研究评估了营销领域 UGC 相关文献的学术产出。其次, 通过科学知识图谱分析方法, 包括共词分析 (co-word analysis) 和文献耦合分析 (bibliographic coupling), 识别该领域的主要研究主题、演化路径及发展趋势。在此基础上, 本文提出一个整合性理论框架和未来研究议程, 以指导后续研究的发展。

研究设计/方法/途径 – 本研究采用两种主要的文献计量分析方法—绩效分析 (performance analysis) 和科学知识图谱分析 (science mapping), 系统分析营销领域以 UGC 为主题的研究成果, 并识别其核心主题、发展历程以及当前研究趋势。

研究发现 – 营销领域关于 UGC 的研究已逐渐形成十个主要研究主题: 在线评论 (*reviews*)、用户参与 (*engagement*)、旅游、信任、动机、机器学习 (*machine learning*)、内容质量、传播、形象以及主题建模 (*topic modelling*)。这些主题与当前领域的重要研究趋势高度契合, 包括人工智能、UGC 效应、平台机制、UGC 与企业生成内容 (Firm-Generated Content, FGC) 的比较、多模态内容以及目的地形象研究。

原创性 – 本研究突破了传统描述性文献计量分析的局限, 首次对营销领域 UGC 研究进行了纵向且全面的综合分析。同时, 研究提出了一个整合性框架, 用于系统梳理该领域的知识结构、当前研究热点以及未来发展方向。

关键词 用户生成内容 (UGC), 文献计量分析, 科学知识图谱, 共词分析, 文献耦合分析

文章类型 文献评论

1. Introduction

User-generated content (UGC) has attracted increasing attention in marketing since the advent of social media. It has been defined as digital content created and disseminated by common users through online channels (Dos Santos, 2022).

On social media, users create, share and consume peer-to-peer communication in text, audio, visual and audiovisual formats. As products and services are part of peoples' daily lives, much consumption experience-related content is produced and spread on social media. UGC is perceived by consumers as more credible and trustworthy than firm-generated content (FGC) (e.g. Hong *et al.*, 2022) and, therefore, strongly influences their decision-making (e.g. Grosso *et al.*, 2024; Li *et al.*, 2024).

Marketers are aware of the potential benefits and challenges of brand-related UGC and, therefore, encourage consumers to create and distribute content consistent with the desired brand image. This has transformed integrated marketing communications (IMC) into a hybrid paradigm where consumers and firms co-create brand messages. By prompting

individuals to engage in positive brand-related UGC, organisations enhance consumer-brand relationships while obtaining persuasive material for promotional marketing campaigns (Martínez-Navarro and Bigné, 2025). UGC also represents a valuable source of consumers' insights, warranting its integration into companies' market analyses (e.g. Ali *et al.*, 2022).

The growing importance of UGC for consumers and companies has captured increasing academic attention, reflected in a 331% rise in marketing-related publications indexed in the Web of Science 2015–2024 (Web of Science, 2025). Given its expanding importance, a comprehensive bibliometric mapping that structures and synthesises relevant research is timely and valuable.

Recent bibliometric and review studies have focused on specific UGC formats, such as user-generated videos (Polat *et al.*, 2023) and UGC–FGC comparisons (Yaprak, 2024). Other review-based contributions have examined methodological issues, including data extraction methods (Iswari and Nunik Afriliana, 2022) and fake review detection (Gupta *et al.*, 2024). Broader review studies have examined domains related to, but distinct from, marketing, such as hospitality (Kitsios *et al.*, 2022), services (Wąsowicz-Zaborek, 2023) and communications (Naab and Sehl, 2017). To the authors' knowledge, no previous research has offered a field-wide and longitudinal synthesis of UGC research within marketing.

Consequently, this study evaluates the intellectual structure of UGC research in marketing and identifies its main research themes, emerging trends and avenues for future investigation. Rather than providing a purely descriptive overview, the article provides a broader and more integrative understanding of the field's development, its structural themes and its defining research trends. It provides a holistic framework of UGC within the marketing domain, a foundational reference for future scholarship and actionable managerial insights. Four research questions (RQs) are posed:

- RQ1. How has the publication of scientific documents about UGC in marketing evolved?
- RQ2. Which are the most impactful scientific documents?
- RQ3. What have been the main research themes on UGC in marketing?
- RQ4. Which research trends currently define the UGC in marketing field, and which avenues warrant future investigation?

1.1 Conceptual foundation

UGC early emerged on internet-based applications that enabled users to create, exchange and consume content online (Web 2.0). Social media provided the technological and interactional infrastructure which enabled the participation, and UGC was the output circulating across these environments (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

As the field developed, marketing scholarship increasingly treated UGC as an umbrella concept. Adjacent constructs, such as electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), user-generated ratings and consumer reviews represent narrower manifestations of the broader UGC phenomenon, each with its own process logic (Dos Santos, 2022; Wang and Rodgers, 2011). In particular, eWOM research has been progressively organised around creation, exposure and evaluation stages (Babić Rosario *et al.*, 2020), while consumer review research has evolved into a stream examining review formats, reviewer identity, managerial interventions and platform design (e.g. Pocchiari *et al.*, 2025).

More recent marketing research has further expanded the scope of UGC by examining multimodal, visual and platform-contingent expressions, including images, videos and

hybrid brand–consumer communication formats (e.g. [Hartmann et al., 2021](#); [Kübler et al., 2024](#); [Li et al., 2024](#); [Singh and Pandey, 2024](#); [Xie et al., 2014](#)). Accordingly, UGC is now understood as a heterogeneous domain comprising multiple content typologies, persuasive mechanisms and managerial uses. This conceptual breadth fragments the field and reinforces the value of a longitudinal bibliometric synthesis.

2. Method

2.1 Bibliometric analysis

Bibliometric analysis is widely used to summarise large quantities of bibliometric data and to examine the intellectual structure and trends of research fields ([Paule-Vianez et al., 2020](#)). In this study, the two main bibliometric analysis techniques, performance analysis and science mapping, are used.

Performance analysis measures the scientific output and impact of a research topic ([Donthu et al., 2021](#)). Science mapping was conducted using co-word analysis and bibliographic coupling. Co-word analysis assesses the frequency with which two keywords co-occur, quantifying the number of documents in which they appear together ([Rojas-Lamorena et al., 2022](#)). Bibliographic coupling assesses the degree of shared citations between publications, on the basis that greater overlap reflects greater content similarity ([Kessler, 1963](#)). Comparisons are made between documents published over a relatively short period; bibliographic coupling mitigates some limitations of co-word analysis and enriches insights into recent literature ([Donthu et al., 2021](#)).

2.2 Data collection

Data were extracted from the WoS Core Collection database, widely considered the highest-quality and most impactful collection of academic publications. In addition, WoS provides cleaner data (less duplications) than Scopus ([Strozzi et al., 2017](#)). The search covered 2007–2025, taking 2007 as the start-point because the first relevant document appeared then. The following search query was applied:

TS = (“user-generated content”) OR TS=(“consumer-generated content”) OR TS=(“consumer-generated media”) OR TS=(“user-generated media”) OR TS=(“brand-related UGC”) OR TS=(“brand-generated content”) OR TS=(“user-generated branding”) OR TS=(“UGC”) OR TS=(“CGC”) AND ALL =(marketing).

Keywords were defined through a preliminary review of relevant journal articles. Related, but conceptually distinct terms (e.g. “eWOM”), were deliberately excluded to ensure conceptual precision. The authors verified that the selected terms have been consistently used to describe UGC ([Wang and Rodgers, 2011](#)), and are in line with [Dos Santos \(2022\)](#)’s definition.

Using the Boolean operators TS and OR, the search retrieved documents containing the specified terms within their titles, abstracts and keywords. The AND ALL operator was used to restrict results to records also containing the term “marketing”, thereby ensuring disciplinary relevance. This procedure yielded 4,311 English-language documents in the specified period. The search was conducted in October 2025, publications appearing after that being excluded.

Following the [PRISMA \(2020\)](#) framework, the retrieved records were filtered and screened. As shown in [Figure 1](#), automatic filters using database functions were applied to limit document types and research fields, followed by a manual screening to exclude documents outside the study’s scope. The process provided a final sample of 1,819 documents.

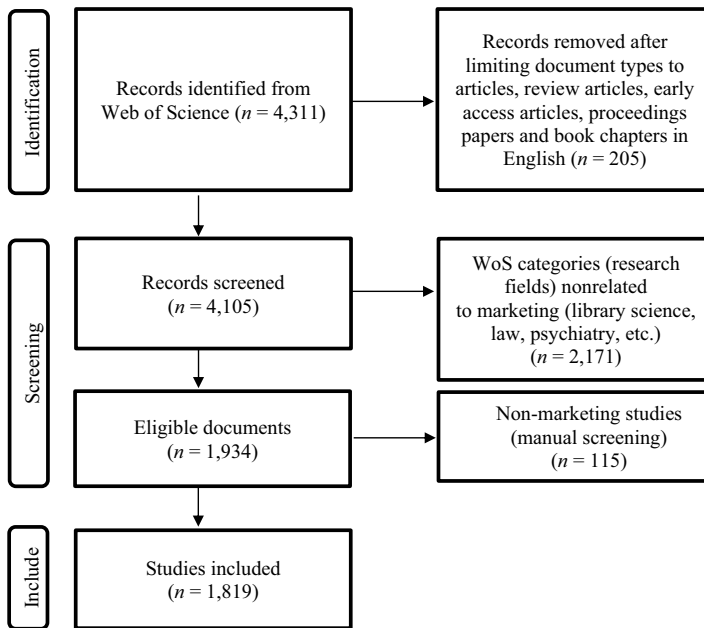


Figure 1. PRISMA framework adopted in the study

2.3 Data analysis

SciMAT and VOSviewer were used to conduct the performance analysis and science mapping. WoS data were imported to SciMAT (Cobo *et al.*, 2012) to conduct the performance and co-word analysis, and to answer RQs 1–3. SciMAT offers extensive pre-processing capabilities to refine bibliometric records (Paule-Vianez *et al.*, 2020) and is particularly suitable for longitudinal analysis.

The pre-processing stage involved identifying records with missing keywords, inserting appropriate keywords and data normalisation. Singular and plural forms were merged. In addition, abbreviations and their full forms (e.g. e-WOM vs electronic word-of-mouth), and alternative spellings (e.g. social networks, social network sites, social networking sites, SNS), were manually unified to ensure consistency.

The period 2007–2025 was divided into decades, a common practice in bibliometric studies (e.g. Rojas-Lamoren *et al.*, 2022):

- an emerging period 2007–2015 (254 publications); and
- a growth period 2016–2025 (1,565 publications).

As in most bibliometric studies, more documents were published in the later period. This decade-based division aligns with the publication trend in the data set, as 2016 marked a substantial increase in research output – specifically, a 46.6% rise over 2015. Co-word analysis results for both periods are depicted in strategic diagrams.

Bibliographic coupling was conducted using VOSviewer to address RQ4, as this technique is particularly suited to identifying recent developments in a research field (Donthu *et al.*, 2021). Accordingly, only documents published between 2023 and 2025 were analysed, yielding 641 records, in line with prior studies (e.g. Rojas-Lamoren *et al.*, 2022).

3. Results

3.1 Scientific performance

Regarding the evolution of the publications (RQ1), Figure 2 shows an important increase, particularly from 2016. Publications appearing 2016–2025 account for 86% of 2007–2025 production. The documents attracted 98,292 citations, an average of 54 citations per document.

Table 1 lists the ten most impactful studies in the field (RQ2). The article “Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media” (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010) had the highest impact. This work offered a conceptual definition of social media, distinguishing it from adjacent constructs such as Web 2.0 and, especially, UGC – emphasising that UGC is the foundational element through which users create, share and exchange information online. It also categorised social media platforms and provided guidance for firms seeking to leverage UGC-driven environments strategically.

3.2 Scientific mapping

The main themes in each period were assessed using SciMAT (RQ3). To identify current research trends and avenues for future inquiry (RQ4), bibliographic coupling was applied to publications over the most recent period (2023–2025), using VOSviewer.

3.3 Strategic diagrams

Strategic diagrams (Figures 3 and 4) depict the main themes in the field based on centrality and density. Centrality reflects the importance of a theme in the overall development of a research field, and density its level of internal development (Cobo et al., 2012). Combining these dimensions allows themes to be classified into four quadrants. Themes with high centrality and density appear in the upper-right quadrant (Q1) of diagrams and represent well-developed “motor themes”, mainstream topics very important in the research field. “Peripheral themes” appear in the upper-left quadrant (Q2, low centrality, high density), indicating specialised but relatively isolated topics. “Marginal themes” appear in the lower-left quadrant (Q3, low density, low centrality) and represent emerging topics. Finally, “basic

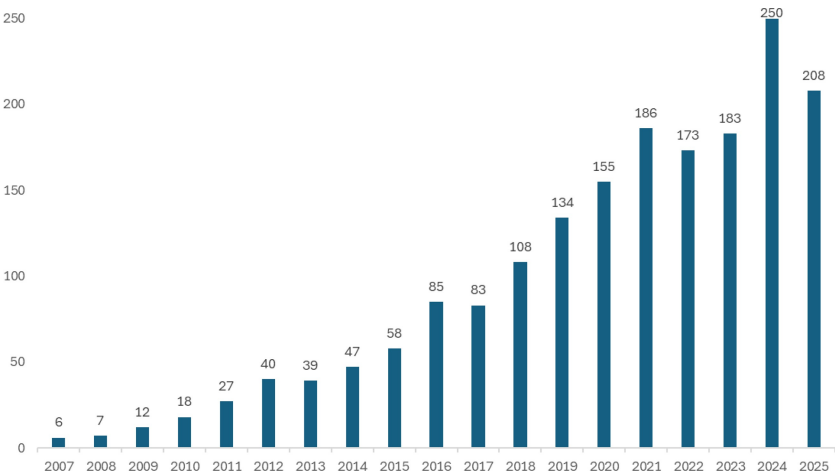


Figure 2. Evolution in volume of scientific publications (2007–2025)

Table 1. Documents with the highest impact in the research area

Title	Author(s) and year	No. Cit.	Journal
Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media	Kaplan and Haenlein (2010)	7,270	Bus. Horiz.
Social media? Get serious!	Kietzmann <i>et al.</i> (2011)	2,186	Bus. Horiz.
Understanding the functional building blocks of social media			
Social media: The new hybrid element of the promotion mix	Mangold and Faulds (2009)	1,654	Bus. Horiz.
Examining the relationship between reviews and sales: The role of reviewer identity disclosure in electronic markets	Forman <i>et al.</i> (2008)	1,156	Inf. Syst. Res.
Why people use social media: a uses and gratifications approach	Whiting and Williams (2013)	929	Qual. Mark. Res.
Social media brand community and consumer behavior: quantifying the relative impact of user- and marketer-generated content	Goh <i>et al.</i> (2013)	889	Inf. Syst. Res.
The influence of user-generated content on traveler behavior: An empirical investigation on the effects of e-word-of-mouth to hotel online bookings	Ye <i>et al.</i> (2011)	763	Comput. Hum. Behav.
What makes a useful online review?	Liu and Park (2015)	710	Tour. Manag.
Implication for travel product websites			
Mining meaning from online ratings and reviews: Tourist satisfaction analysis using latent Dirichlet allocation	Guo <i>et al.</i> (2017)	704	Tour. Manag.
Motivations for sharing tourism experiences through social media	Munar and Jacobsen (2014)	660	Tour. Manag.

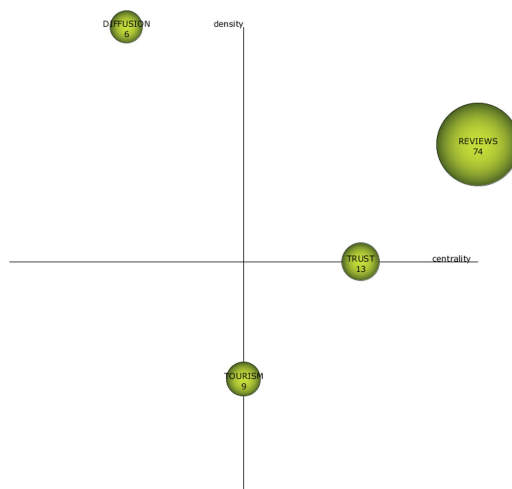


Figure 3. Strategic diagram (2007–2015)

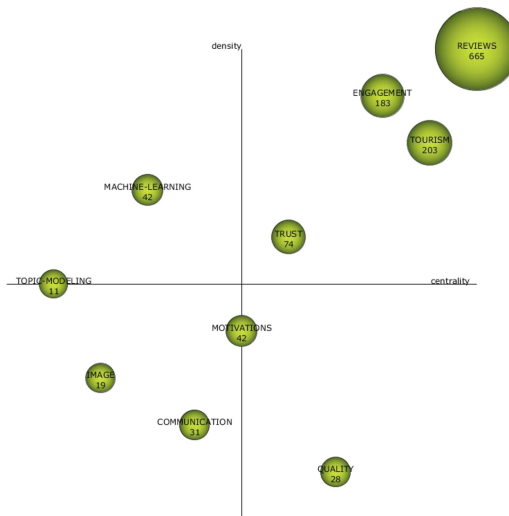


Figure 4. Strategic diagram (2016–2025)

themes” appear in the lower-right quadrant (Q4, strong centrality, low density); while underdeveloped, they are important in the field. It is important to note that the sizes of the spheres representing the themes reflects the number of articles published on each theme.

3.4 Emerging period (2007–2015)

Addressing RQ3, early research on UGC in marketing focused on four themes, *reviews* clearly dominating.

Reviews, the most developed theme, accounts for the most publications and citations. Related research established online reviews as market signals influencing consumer behaviours and company performance. Early work showed that reviewer cues changed how readers processed the information in the reviews and influenced their purchase decisions; this research highlighted the role of heuristic cues in consumers’ information-processing (Forman *et al.*, 2008). This stream built on the seminal findings of Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006) and the broader eWOM literature, which established the link between online reviews and sales, demonstrating that negative reviews impact more on consumer behaviours than do positive reviews. At the content level, review informational quality and ratings were shown to explain review helpfulness (i.e. diagnosticity) and information adoption, thereby integrating dual-process theory and consumer behaviours into UGC effects research (Filieri, 2015).

In services, reviews were shown to directly influence bookings and company performance, while managerial responses to reviews created measurable business value (e.g. Xie *et al.*, 2014); this body of work links services marketing with online reputation management.

Trust emerged as the second most important theme in this first period. Research in this cluster conceptualised how users assess credibility and trust in UGC platforms, and how these beliefs translated into information adoption, attitudes and behavioural intentions. Source credibility theory (Hovland *et al.*, 1953) predominates in this cluster.

Studies examined the antecedents of the trust consumers develop towards UGC platforms, such as information quality, website quality and prior experience, demonstrating that greater trust enhances information. Channel comparison studies consistently revealed that UGC is trusted more by consumers than are marketer-controlled channels, particularly for experience goods (e.g. [Dickinger, 2011](#)). In e-commerce, UGC ratings were found to mitigate perceived transaction risk, and enhanced perceptions of product quality and purchase intentions ([Flanagin et al., 2014](#)). Taken together, these studies positioned trust as a mechanism through which UGC becomes persuasive and central to consumers' decision-making.

Diffusion. Studies in this cluster explained how UGC spreads through platform architectures and social connections, linking diffusion dynamics, social contagion theory ([Christakis and Fowler, 2013](#)) and network analysis to marketing communications, media planning and brand management.

Studies conducted into video-sharing platforms emphasised how the size, structure and network position of creators and viewers determined both the reach and impact of UGC, challenging traditional peer-effects literature and earlier diffusion models (e.g. Bass model) which failed to distinguish among different types of social processes ([Susarla et al., 2012](#); [Yoganarasimhan, 2012](#)). Cross-platform analyses showed that brand-related UGC adopts different communicative functions on YouTube, Facebook and X, offering actionable insights for content strategy management ([Smith et al., 2012](#)).

Finally, the theme *tourism* positioned UGC as both a behavioural influence on travellers and a valuable data source for destination and hospitality intelligence. Early studies recognised blogs and Web 2.0 platforms as tools for market intelligence and relationship building by destination management organisations (DMOs). Subsequent research used hotel reviews to benchmark customer satisfaction ([Zhou et al., 2014](#)) and to analyse brand equity dimensions in hospitality settings ([Callarisa et al., 2012](#)). These studies evidenced the importance of UGC for companies' quality control and positioning.

Experimental evidence from consumer behaviour research demonstrated that, during trip planning, friends' social media comments influenced travellers' perceptions of website quality, and hotel booking intentions, through trust and attitudes ([Ladhari and Michaud, 2015](#)). Complementarily, mixed-methods findings indicated that the influence of UGC on travellers' behaviours depends on perceived content value, its credibility and creator-audience similarity ([Herrero et al., 2015](#)).

3.5 Growth period (2016–2025)

The research covered ten themes ([Figure 4](#)), *reviews*, *tourism*, *engagement* and *trust* emerging as the most important, impactful and well-developed.

Reviews. Research published on reviews in the growth period evolved from establishing review effects to systematising analytical pipelines encompassing prediction and managerial action, while identifying boundary conditions, such as device type and response strategies. This cluster integrated computational text analysis with managerial outcomes, positioning reviews as operational inputs for companies' decision-making in areas such as pricing and service improvement (e.g. [Guo et al., 2017](#); [Li et al., 2023](#)).

In the service sector, large-scale text analytics (e.g. latent Dirichlet analysis – LDA) were used to extract satisfaction drivers and differences across consumer segments, transforming unstructured data into diagnostic quality indicators (e.g. [Guo et al., 2017](#)). Consumer review-based studies also quantified companies' performance elasticities and managerial levers, with evidence showing that review valence is more impactful than is volume on hotel performance ([Yang et al., 2018](#)), and that reviews predict company survival ([Li et al., 2023](#)).

Engagement. Research examined how UGC activates engagement, and how engagement translates into persuasion and purchasing behaviours. Reviews conceptualised engagement as a multidimensional construct, and proposed integrative frameworks linking its antecedents and consequences (e.g. [Babić Rosario et al., 2020](#); [Saikia and Bhattacharjee, 2024](#)) to dominant theories, such as uses and gratification theory ([Blumler and Katz, 1974](#)) and social identity theory ([Tajfel and Turner, 2004](#)).

Empirical findings indicated that engagement patterns depend on UGC valence and type, and on personality traits. For instance, negative posts predominate on Facebook business pages, and behavioural engagement varies according to post characteristics ([Yang et al., 2019](#)). Similarly, studies showed that UGC creators are more likely to engage in positive brand advocacy than in negative posting, confirming the asymmetry of engagement behaviours ([Bilro et al., 2019](#)). Complementary evidence showed that UGC capable of eliciting engagement increases purchasing behaviours, positioning engagement as a measurable driver of marketing performance (e.g. [Malthouse et al., 2016](#)). Overall, this cluster reflects a shift from regarding engagement as the user's online reaction, to conceptualising it as a central mechanism linking exposure to UGC to persuasion and marketplace outcomes.

Tourism. Research into tourism instrumentalised UGC as a decision-support system for destinations and hospitality firms. At the destination level, UGC has become a tool for strategic intelligence and image auditing, enabling comparisons to be made between supply-side projected images and demand-side perceived images (e.g. [Lee and Park, 2023](#); [Marine-Roig and Ferrer-Rosell, 2018](#)). This stream also advanced place branding research through visual and semantic analyses of place attributes, practices and personality ([Taecharungroj and Mathayomchan, 2019](#)).

Methodologically, there was a focus on enhancing measurement validity in text mining and sentiment analysis. [Kirilenko et al. \(2018\)](#) compared four automated sentiment analysis methods applied to travel-related UGC and found that support vector machines achieved the highest accuracy and most closely approximated human ratings, while SentiStrength performed best on short social-media content.

Trust. Research in this cluster integrated algorithmic diagnostics (e.g. machine learning, neural networks) with classic persuasion frameworks, such as the elaboration likelihood model (ELM), to explain when and why UGC is perceived as credible, trustworthy and persuasive (e.g. [Cheng et al., 2019](#); [Moradi and Zihagh, 2022](#); [Srivastava and Kalro, 2019](#)).

In sharing-economy contexts, [Cheng et al. \(2019\)](#) modelled trust formation, revealing aesthetic appeal, host reputation, service location, repurchase intentions, overall evaluations and service descriptions as key antecedents of guests' perceived trust. Complementary research, using cognitive heuristic approaches, showed that reviewer expertise and review features (i.e. message content and style, rating consistency, review extremity, valence and length) explain perceived review credibility and helpfulness ([Filieri, 2016](#); [Lo and Yao, 2019](#)).

Beyond explicit cues, latent semantic features also improved predictions of review helpfulness, suggesting that trust is also influenced by deeper linguistic and argument-quality signals ([Srivastava and Kalro, 2019](#)), thereby underscoring the importance of ELM-based persuasion factors. Indeed, a meta-analysis by [Moradi and Zihagh \(2022\)](#) confirmed the importance of ELM mechanisms in explaining how consumers process and adopt UGC, highlighting perceived usefulness and credibility as key drivers of behavioural outcomes.

Machine learning is a highly specialised, yet relatively isolated, topic that extends beyond methodological benchmarking to improve how marketing scholars infer consumer evaluations from large-scale UGC. While studies did compare alternative approaches for automated sentiment classification and highlighted performance–validity trade-offs in model selection (e.g. [Alantari et al., 2022](#); [Hartmann et al., 2023](#)), their broader contribution lies in showing that machine learning

can identify latent evaluative patterns embedded in consumer expressions. Research captured not only sentiment polarity but also theoretically important marketing outcomes. For example, multimodal applications were used to predict engagement and purchasing outcomes (Hartmann *et al.*, 2021), while hybrid models combining genetic algorithms and artificial neural networks were applied to brand-related images to predict brand love, loyalty and WOM endorsement (Kaiser *et al.*, 2020). More recent research using generative artificial intelligence (AI) and transfer learning suggests that machine learning identifies functional, emotional and social dimensions of customer experience in naturally occurring UGC that influence customer satisfaction (Dahish *et al.*, 2025).

The theme *motivations* investigated why consumers engage in UGC, distinguishing between intrinsic and extrinsic incentives, while showing that platform design moderates both. In luxury settings, it was shown that UGC was driven by entertainment, brand love, perceived brand equity, self-enhancement and aesthetic appeal, alongside informational needs such as content relevance (Bazi *et al.*, 2020). In online communities, it was seen that personality traits and community dynamics influenced UGC creation (Soylemez, 2021).

In knowledge-sharing and review platforms, studies revealed that incentive hierarchies and reputation systems (e.g. status badges) increased contribution effort and probability, although these effects attenuated over time, leading to a decrease in contribution quality (e.g. Goes *et al.*, 2016). Monetary rewards, in turn, proved ambivalent, highlighting the need for careful incentive design (e.g. He *et al.*, 2023).

Overall, findings in this cluster align with the seminal works of Hennig-Thurau *et al.* (2004) and Muntinga *et al.* (2011), but extend them by showing that UGC creation is motive-driven and shaped by the socio-technical environments in which participation is rewarded, recognised and sustained.

Communication. In this cluster, brand-related UGC is conceptualised as a strategic marketing communication system, a heterogeneous set of persuasive message forms whose effectiveness depends on message design, source effects, contextual cues and platform-mediated exposure conditions. Kim and Song (2018) demonstrated that sponsorship interacts with content type to influence consumer responses: experience-centric UGC elicits more favourable reactions in unpaid settings, whereas promotional content performs better under sponsored conditions.

At the message level, studies into creative message strategies showed that emotional appeals in Instagram-based UGC elicited more digital engagement than did informative appeals (Rietveld *et al.*, 2020). Farace *et al.* (2017) showed that selfies are more likely to elicit comments, thereby identifying micro-mechanisms of participatory communication. Recent research further suggests that the impact of UGC is also conditioned by algorithmic curation, as recommendation systems shape exposure patterns, redirect attention and increase the visibility of socially central users and selected content (Liu and Cong, 2023).

Image. This emerging theme conceptualises UGC as a lens through which brand and destination images are perceived, constructed and audited, thereby positioning it as a strategic data source for marketing intelligence.

Strategically, UGC has been shown to co-create and reshape destination and event brand images through sentiment shifts and framing effects. For instance, during crises, negative sentiment was found to attach more strongly to host destinations than to events (Morgan *et al.*, 2021), while coupled framing and online brand advocacy helped protect and restore destination image (Wilk *et al.*, 2024). These findings underscore the need for real-time, adaptive image management in UGC settings.

Platform architectures play a decisive role in shaping brand image co-creation: UGC on TripAdvisor projected sincere brand personality, whereas Booking.com emphasised

excitement-oriented traits (Borges-Tiago *et al.*, 2021). Again, platform-specific monitoring and interpretation of UGC was shown to be important.

Recent studies have raised ethical concerns, particularly regarding indigenous locations and taking selfies in dark heritage sites, highlighting the need for responsible destination image governance on social media (e.g. Piscarac and Yoo, 2025).

Topic modelling, particularly through LDA-based approaches, was consolidated as a framework for identifying the latent thematic structure of UGC and translating unstructured consumer discourse into marketing insights. Consistent with Bendle and Wang (2016) call to “uncover the message” in big-data contexts, Guo *et al.* (2017) extracted dimensions of hotel service satisfaction from UGC and identified differences across demographic segments, showing that UGC can inform theory-building about how consumers structure service evaluations. Related studies combined topic modelling with sentiment analysis to identify tourists’ perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of destinations (e.g. Ali *et al.*, 2022), while others linked topic structures to behavioural and market outcomes, such as competitive spill-overs in service demand (e.g. Cho *et al.*, 2024).

Quality. This basic theme conceptualised UGC as a signal and a source for inferring and shaping perceived service quality. Research leveraged UGC to extract quality dimensions and connect them to consumer outcomes.

In hospitality, studies mined textual and rating data to identify the most predictive attributes of guest satisfaction (e.g. Lee *et al.*, 2020). They showed that UGC is a traceable proxy for quality evaluation and service improvement. At content level, emotional and rational cues in reviews were shown to enhance consumer perceived value, which in turn drives impulse buying and purchase intentions (Cheung *et al.*, 2022). From the company angle, recent SERVQUAL-related research demonstrated that, beyond traditional quality dimensions, price-place configurations and experiential factors are critical for achieving high service ratings (Rassal *et al.*, 2024). Taken together, this cluster positions UGC as an ongoing external audit of service performance, through which firms can monitor, interpret and respond to consumer-defined quality criteria.

3.6 Research trends and proposed agenda

This section identifies current research trends in UGC in marketing and avenues for future inquiry (RQ4). The results of the bibliographic coupling are depicted in a networked map (Figure 5), with each node representing a scientific article, and the links between the articles representing bibliographic couplings. Node size reflects relative importance, while distance indicates thematic proximity. The articles are coloured based on their cluster/stream of research. Articles belonging to one cluster (e.g. purple) may appear close, in the map, to articles from other clusters (e.g. yellow). This indicates thematic overlap or an intermediate position between adjacent research areas.

Six clusters were identified, corresponding to research trends in the field of UGC in marketing:

- (1) artificial intelligence;
- (2) UGC effects;
- (3) platform mechanisms;
- (4) UGC vs FGC;
- (5) multimodality; and
- (6) destination image.

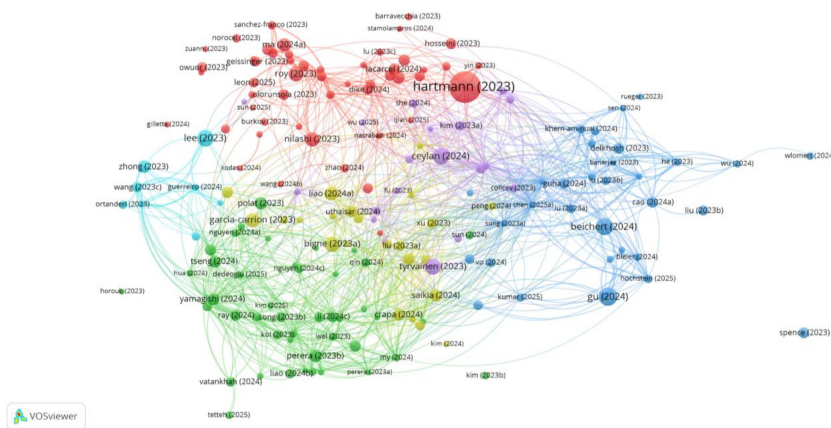


Figure 5. Bibliographic coupling results. Research trends network

Based on these trends, [Table 2](#) proposes a future research agenda.

Cluster 1 (red) is the “*artificial intelligence*” theme. Articles examined how AI techniques transform UGC into indicators of service experience and connect the indicators to evaluative outcomes, such as satisfaction and trust. It also highlights the growing role of AI in generating synthetic reviews and other forms of seemingly organic content.

In tourism services, AI-driven sentiment analysis was used to align narrative tone with star ratings, identifying discrepancies between textual valence and numeric scores in reviews of destinations ([Bigne et al., 2023](#)). Advanced AI techniques identified the service attributes most important to satisfaction and trust in hospitality services (e.g. [Shahhosseini and Khalili Nasr, 2024](#)). Beyond tourism, integrated aspect-based sentiment analysis (ABSA), using pre-trained transformer models, supported recommender and decision-support systems by transforming aspect-level sentiments from reviews into ranked personalised recommendations (e.g. [Ray and Singh, 2025](#)).

This trend should not be understood only in analytical terms. Generative AI is also transforming the very nature of UGC, as it can help produce synthetic reviews and other forms of seemingly organic content, which may undermine perceived trust and authenticity ([Pocchiari et al., 2025](#)). Future research in this stream should enhance and diversify AI and deep learning models for UGC analysis, expand data sources and application contexts to strengthen the generalisability and depth of insights derived from UGC ([Hartmann et al., 2023](#)) and examine the consequences of AI-manipulated UGC.

Cluster 2 (green) covers “*UGC effects*”. UGC is examined as a form of market communication that drives consumer trust, brand-related activities and behavioural intentions.

In tourism branding, destination-related UGC posted in Instagram was shown to stimulate consumption, sharing and content creation behaviours, identifying which content configurations most effectively activate brand-related engagement ([Grosso et al., 2024](#)). In social commerce, UGC was associated with brand trust and engagement mechanisms in platform-mediated environments ([George et al., 2023](#)). Research on Gen Z travellers further revealed that UGC and interactive social atmospheres enhanced trust in UGC-based travel applications ([Tseng et al., 2024](#)).

Table 2. Research trends and related lines for future research

Area	Topic	Suggested lines for future research	References
Artificial intelligence	Leveraging advanced AI and transfer learning models	Investigate multi-modal methods for transfer learning, specifically by leveraging visual information (images and videos) to improve performance in tasks involving textual UGC	Hartmann <i>et al.</i> (2023) Qian <i>et al.</i> (2025)
		Enhance model precision by integrating advanced techniques such as retrieval-augmented generation (RAG)	
		Conduct comparative studies between innovative transfer learning/LLM approaches and traditional research methods to assess how well integrating them might capture the authentic lived experience	
	Addressing model challenges and biases	Enhance model capabilities to address complexities in unstructured text, such as sarcasm, spam and fake reviews	Qian <i>et al.</i> (2025) Wang and Liu (2023)
		Apply multi-label emotion detection algorithms to address the current limitation where models often assume a single emotion per user review/post	
		Apply new methodologies and algorithms (e.g. Naive Bayes or Random Forests) to capture complex, non-linear relationships in customer experience dynamics more effectively than do traditional linear models	
	Data source diversification and integration	Use data from multiple UGC platforms to mitigate platform bias and enhance the generalisability of findings	Bigne <i>et al.</i> (2023) Shahhosseini and Khalili Nasr (2024)
		Incorporate customer demographics, more settings and different consumer patterns when investigating customer satisfaction and service experience	
	Authorship and ethics	Examine how AI-assisted modification of UGC alters perceptions of authorship, accountability and the ethical legitimacy of modifying consumer-created content	Pocchiari <i>et al.</i> (2025)
UGC effects	Exploring new variables	Identify which specific emotional factors stimulate particular planning behaviour following exposure to visual UGC formats	Nguyen <i>et al.</i> (2023)
	Comparing UGC across different sources and endorsers	Compare the effects of human UGC with non-human endorsers, such as virtual influencers, avatars on Instagram and AI as endorsers, in offline advertising, online social media and the metaverse	Hariningsih <i>et al.</i> (2025)
	Refining methodological approaches	Collect behavioural purchasing data instead of relying only on self-reported data	Wei <i>et al.</i> (2023)
Platform mechanisms	Platform governance and moderation	Misrepresentation and missing content: investigate how consumers determine whether a body of content is systematically missing content due to platform interference Investigate how consumers make judgements about fake versus real information, and paid versus organic reviews Investigate consumer perceptions of human versus algorithmic platform content moderation and curation	Baier <i>et al.</i> (2025) Hochstein <i>et al.</i> (2025)
(continued)			

Table 2. Continued

Area	Topic	Suggested lines for future research	References
UGC vs FGC	Content formats	Examine whether transparency about UGC management (e.g. moderation, company reuse) influences users' trust in the content, with user-perceived control over their own UGC acting as a moderator	Khern-am-nuai <i>et al.</i> (2024)
		Study the behavioural side of Q&A systems, particularly how consumers incorporate Q&A into their purchase decision-making processes	
	Comparative influence and interaction mechanisms	Investigate the causal relationship and interactions between UGC and FGC in influencing consumer behaviours	Li <i>et al.</i> (2024) Barquero Cabrero <i>et al.</i> (2023)
		Examine the effects of FGC, UGC and co-created content on brand economic value and company revenues	
	Expand platforms and contexts	Assess the differential audience effects of brand campaigns integrating UGC vs FGC vs influencer content	
Multimodality	Expand platforms and contexts	Investigate the effectiveness of UGC and FGC on less-studied social media platforms, such as TikTok, Snapchat, LinkedIn and WeChat	Crapa <i>et al.</i> (2024) Li <i>et al.</i> (2024)
		Analyse empirical evidence of UGC and FGC effects across industries and in less-studied industries (e.g. durable goods)	
	Company intervention in consumer-led spaces	Investigate the effectiveness of UGC and FGC on less-studied social media platforms, such as TikTok, Snapchat, LinkedIn and WeChat	Pocchiari <i>et al.</i> (2025)
		Analyse whether consumers apply different ethical standards to company interventions in online reviews depending on whether the intervention is relational or commercially oriented	
	Combination of multimedia formats	Explore how rich content, such as live streams and short-format videos, for example, TikToks and Instagram reels, coexist with leaner mixtures (text and/or images) and how consumers derive value from these distinctive forms	Singh and Pandey (2024) Kübler <i>et al.</i> (2024)
	Content alignment	Examine how consumers resolve conflict when there is misalignment between photos/videos and text (valence incoherence)	Ceylan <i>et al.</i> (2024) Kübler <i>et al.</i> (2024)
		Investigate how images in fake reviews work in terms of helpfulness and trust	
	Capturing emotions through new technologies	Complement sentiment analysis of textual UGC with analysis of hidden emotions within UGC videos, through auto-emotion-detection AI technologies	Bigne <i>et al.</i> (2024) Jia <i>et al.</i> (2023)
		Use of neuromarketing techniques to assess consumers' emotional responses to the emotions expressed in both textual and video UGC	
	Simultaneous dimensions	Study complex relationships between all three content dimensions: format, source and platform	Singh and Pandey (2024)

(continued)

Table 2. Continued

Area	Topic	Suggested lines for future research	References
Destination image	Destination image dissonance	Examine the interrelationships among the destination image projected by DMOs, image as portrayed by users through UGC and tourists’ perceptions of the image in visuals-based social media platforms	Torres-Pruñonosa et al. (2024)
	Destination image processing	Examine the hypothesis that most encounters with idealised destination UGC photographs in everyday life are processed via the aesthetics-only route, generating immediate positive aesthetic experiences rather than critical cognitive evaluations	Ortanderl and Bausch (2023)
	Cross-cultural studies	Assess the role of cultural concepts (religion, psychographic features) in destination image formation	Lee and Park (2023)

Overall, this cluster consolidates UGC as an influential form of market communication whose effectiveness depends on content characteristics and situational conditions. Future research should explore new variables, compare UGC produced by different sources and endorsers and refine methodological approaches ([Grosso et al., 2024](#); [Hariningsih et al., 2025](#); [Nguyen et al., 2023](#); [Wei et al., 2023](#)).

Cluster 3 (blue) covers “platform mechanisms”. Studies examined the platform-level mechanisms through which UGC influences consumer behaviours and company performance.

Evidence from Amazon Answer indicated that Q&A systems affect sales outcomes ([Khern-am-nuai et al., 2024](#)). Platform endorsement mechanisms, such as votes and badges, were found to stimulate users’ contribution activity ([Zhou et al., 2023](#)). Extending this perspective, [Hochstein et al. \(2025\)](#) conducted a meta-analysis that demonstrated that digital trust features moderate the UGC–performance relationship.

Overall, this cluster highlights how platform architecture and trust-enabling mechanisms mediate the economic and behavioural impact of UGC on consumers. Future research should examine how platform features, governance, moderation and curation practices shape consumers’ evaluations of, and digital trust in, UGC, and how specific UGC formats influence their decision-making processes ([Hochstein et al., 2025](#); [Khern-am-nuai et al., 2024](#)).

Cluster 4 research (yellow) addressed “UGC vs FGC”. Studies compared the influence of UGC and FGC on consumer engagement, satisfaction and decision-making.

At the message level, [Barquero Cabrero et al. \(2023\)](#) demonstrated that FGC achieves similar levels of likes as UGC, but significantly fewer comments. Textual analyses revealed that UGC and FGC contribute differently to satisfaction formation, UGC exerting a stronger effect. However, managerial responses to negative comments significantly improved satisfaction, underscoring the value of content-mix optimisation ([Li et al., 2024](#)).

Studies in restaurant and tourism contexts showed that consumers integrate UGC and FGC during pre-choice information search, relying on both sources ([Liu and Chong, 2023](#); [Uthaisar et al., 2024](#)). Overall, this cluster challenges the simplistic assumption that UGC always dominates FGC, suggesting instead that both forms operate through distinct but complementary persuasive functions. Future research should examine company intervention in consumer-led spaces ([Pocchiari et al., 2025](#)), new platforms and under-researched

contexts, with greater emphasis on interaction between UGC and FGC (e.g. [Crapa et al., 2024](#); [Li et al., 2024](#)).

Cluster 5 (purple) encompasses the theme “multimodality”. Studies explored how UGC combining text, images and videos, enhanced consumer understanding, engagement and persuasion. Multi-method studies demonstrated that incorporating photos into reviews increased their perceived helpfulness, with semantic congruence between image and text facilitating cognitive processing (e.g. [Ceylan et al., 2024](#)). Similarly, studies revealed that images enhance review helpfulness for hedonic or experience-based products, particularly when they depict product use and are accompanied by short text ([Kübler et al., 2024](#)). Furthermore, recent social commerce studies suggest the joint effects of text, images and videos must be examined, this integration being a key research gap ([Singh and Pandey, 2024](#)).

Overall, this cluster reflects a multimodal turn in UGC research, whereby consumer-generated meaning emerges from the interaction of verbal and visual cues rather than from text alone. Future research should examine novel multimedia combinations, assess content misalignment between textual and visual cues and improve emotion detection using emerging technologies ([Bigne et al., 2024](#); [Ceylan et al., 2024](#); [Jia et al., 2023](#); [Kübler et al., 2024](#)).

Cluster 6 (cyan) covers the theme “destination image”. This research conceptualised destination image as co-constructed through UGC, with travellers’ narratives and visual content collectively shaping place perception.

Mixed-methods approaches identified the cognitive and affective dimensions of destination image, while revealing cross-cultural differences in tourists’ evaluations ([Lee and Park, 2023](#)). In this line, content and social network analyses identified destination image attributes in UGC ([Guerreiro et al., 2024](#)), and analysed interrelations across these attributes, leading to a classification of destinations into urban, scenic and lifestyle categories ([Zhong et al., 2023](#)). In nature-based tourism contexts, [Araujo-Battle et al. \(2023\)](#) found that users iconised destinations through selfie posting; however, this practice conflicts with conservation objectives, as increased visitor numbers challenge sustainability.

Overall, this cluster advocates that destination image is a dynamic and collectively negotiated outcome of user practices and cultural interpretation. Future research should examine how destination images projected by DMOs and generated by users relate to tourists’ visual perceptions ([Torres-Pruñonosa et al., 2024](#)), and examine the predominance of aesthetics-driven processing of idealised UGC ([Ortanderl and Bausch, 2023](#)) and the moderating role of cultural and psychographic factors in destination image formation ([Lee and Park, 2023](#)).

4. Discussion and implications

The usefulness of UGC for marketing has been widely acknowledged. Since 2007, academics have contributed both conceptually and empirically to advancing knowledge on UGC within marketing. Although previous bibliometric studies have synthesised literature focused on specific contexts and methodological dimensions, no field-wide, longitudinal systematisation of the intellectual structure of UGC in marketing has been offered. Addressing this gap, this study not only catalogues prior work, it reorganises a body of knowledge into a comprehensive framework and structured research agenda for UGC scholarship.

Our findings reveal that UGC research in marketing can be synthesised in an inputs–typologies–processes–outcomes framework that captures, organises and theoretically interprets the field’s intellectual structure. As [Figure 6](#) illustrates, themes identified across the

periods, and corresponding research trends, can be positioned in one or more stages of the model. Across the framework, AI, particularly machine learning and topic modelling, emerged as a transversal stream. Tourism also is a cross-cutting domain, evidencing its enduring importance in comparison to other sectors.

4.1 Inputs/antecedents

The mapping of inputs and antecedents advances UGC research by showing that engaging in UGC cannot be reduced to a purely expressive or spontaneous act. Earlier works largely framed engagement in UGC as the outcome of individual-level drivers (e.g. self-expression, utility seeking, social approval) (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004; Muntinga *et al.*, 2011). The present study confirms these motives but also that users must trust UGC and the platforms that feature it before they will place reliance on them (Dickinger, 2011). Thus, the first stage of the framework captures the motivational and trust-related conditions underlying the generation of UGC and its persuasive power.

From a theoretical perspective, this first stage positions UGC research beyond a voluntaristic view of participation. UGC appears when users are willing to generate, attend to and rely on content within digitally mediated environments. From a managerial perspective, firms should appeal to the motivations that drive UGC creation among their target audiences while fostering baseline trust in the relevant environments.

4.2 Content typologies

The second stage of the model reveals a theoretical evolution in how UGC is conceptualised at message level. Reviews are no longer treated as a single format, but as structured persuasive artefacts whose content properties (text, ratings, justifications) determine credibility and diagnosticity. Consequently, firms/platforms should prioritise reviews containing concrete experiential justifications rather than relying solely on star ratings, as richer content is perceived as more helpful (Filieri, 2016; Lo and Yao, 2019). In this regard, the growing role of AI introduces a trust paradox: while AI enhances firms’ capacity to

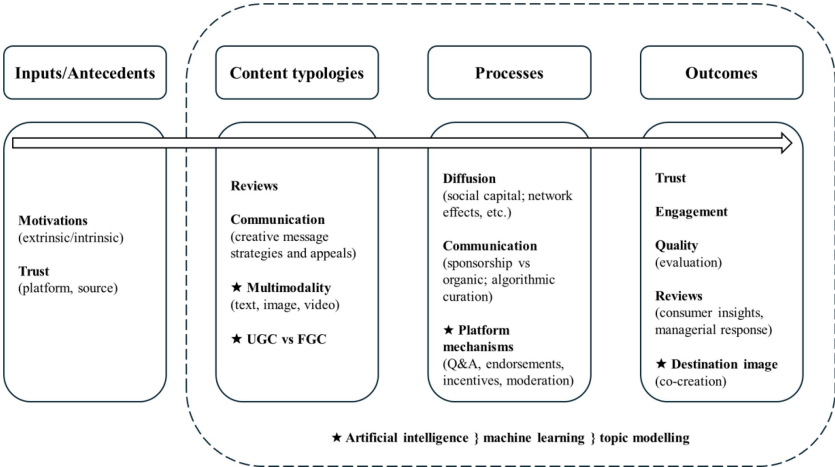


Figure 6. UGC in marketing: proposed theoretical framework

Note: ★ = identified research trend driving future research directions (see previous section)

analyse UGC, it may also weaken the authenticity and trustworthiness users traditionally attribute to it if they see it as AI-generated, or when it is manipulated through AI (Pocchiari *et al.*, 2025).

In parallel, research into communications demonstrated that UGC frequently deploys emotional, experiential, identity-based and authenticity-driven appeals, extending beyond functional information (e.g. Dahish *et al.*, 2025). Managerially, this suggests that brands should encourage consumer narratives conveying personal experience, authenticity and aesthetic self-expression to foster engagement in popular platforms such as Instagram (Rietveld *et al.*, 2020).

Two research trends emerged in this stage. Firstly, multimodality: UGC is no longer predominantly text-based; images, short-form videos, livestreams and other visual formats have been theorised as being extensions of consumer expression. This “multimodal turn” reconceptualises UGC as experiential evidence – showing rather than merely telling – and calls for an integrated analysis of textual and visual signals to understand how meaning is constructed (e.g. Singh and Pandey, 2024; Kübler *et al.*, 2024). Secondly, UGC–FGC comparisons challenge the assumption that peers are always more credible than brands; effective strategies complement brand statements with credible UGC.

4.3 Processes

The processes stage explains how UGC circulates and acquires influence through diffusion dynamics, communicative framing and platform mechanisms. The treatment of diffusion as a networked and orchestrated process marked an evolution beyond early WOM perspectives that assumed it spreads organically. Evidence showed that users’ social capital and network position condition reach and impact (e.g. Susarla *et al.*, 2012; Yoganarasimhan, 2012), making UGC visibility a function of who speaks and where they are positioned in the interaction network, not merely what is said. Research in the communication cluster also showed that consumer responses to UGC varied based on whether it was sponsored or unpaid, as its circulation is no longer understood as purely organic (Kim and Song, 2018). Recent research expanded this logic by showing that moderation systems, incentive architectures, Q&A features and platform curation also shape contribution activity and exposure patterns, as algorithms redirect attention and reorganise content visibility and user interest (e.g. Khern-am-nuai *et al.*, 2024; Liu and Cong, 2023; Zhou *et al.*, 2023).

Taken together, these findings suggest that UGC exposure and persuasive power are not based solely on content, but produced also through the interplay of social diffusion, communicative framing and technical structuring. Companies should treat initiator selection, sponsorship, amplification and visibility management as interdependent decisions, while recognising the credibility trade-offs that may emerge when intervention is misaligned with audience expectations.

4.4 Outcomes

The outcomes stage identifies how UGC creates value when it circulates in the marketplace: Firstly, treating trust as an outcome refines how credibility is understood: it is both a precondition for engaging in UGC and an outcome of UGC. This extends persuasion models showing that trust arises from how UGC is framed and articulated, not merely based on who produces it (Moradi and Zihagh, 2022).

Secondly, evidence showed that engagement operates as a proximal mechanism linking UGC to marketing results (e.g. Malthouse *et al.*, 2016). Moreover, engagement is not uniform, as different formats, and valence, elicit distinct participation patterns (e.g. Yang *et al.*, 2019). This advances the literature by treating engagement as a behavioural state.

Thirdly, quality-related research positions UGC as an external audit of service quality. Collective narratives identify attributes, failures and satisfaction drivers aligned with recognised dimensions (e.g. SERVQUAL), supporting continuous improvement rather than post hoc evaluation (Rassal *et al.*, 2024). Systematic UGC monitoring should therefore function as an ongoing quality-assurance mechanism, with spikes in negative narratives and abrupt rating shifts treated as early warning signals.

Similarly, research into reviews frames them as information infrastructure. Text analytics extract expectations, pain points and consumer needs, formalising reviews as a primary source of market intelligence. Review mining is a core input to product refinement, service-recovery design and communication strategies (e.g. Guo *et al.*, 2017; Li *et al.*, 2023).

Finally, destination image emerges as a key outcome and research trend. In tourism, UGC co-creates and shapes how destinations are perceived and enables image to be observed, tracked and interpreted through narratives and visuals, positioning it as a collectively produced construct (e.g. Araujo-Batlle *et al.*, 2023; Guerreiro *et al.*, 2024). DMOs should integrate UGC monitoring into brand governance and sustainability frameworks to proactively address reputational risks.

4.5 Limitations

A limitation of this research is that it draws on only one database. Although WoS is the most prestigious academic database, and it features the most impactful research, future studies might draw on other reputable databases, such as Scopus.

Secondly, the study used co-word analyses and bibliographic coupling to conduct the science mapping. Although these techniques are suitable, given the RQs posed, other bibliometric techniques (e.g. co-citation and co-authorship analysis) might enrich the analyses, the interpretation of the results and the knowledge obtained (Donthu *et al.*, 2021).

Thirdly, the contextual concentration of UGC research in tourism and hospitality, particularly in some clusters, limits the generalisability of the study's findings to less represented contexts such as B2B and non-service industries.

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