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LEVERAGING AI AND USER-GENERATED CONTENT IN SPORT TOURISM: HOW ENGAGEMENT AND FAMILIARITY DRIVE PURCHASE INTENT FOR FOOD BRANDS IN EMERGING MARKETS

Abdullah RASHED [1], Samar SHILBAYEH [2], Yasir FADOL [3], Perihan SALAH [4], Haidar ALMUBARAK [5], Alshymaa ELMASHAD [6], Mayar Farrag ELSAYED [4], Dalia ATEF [4*]

[1] Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University; Marketing Department, College of Business Administration, Al-Kharj, Saudi Arabia; a.rashed@psau.edu.sa (A.R.)
[2] Higher Colleges of Technology, Business Analytics Department, Dubai, United Arab of Emirates; Sshilbayeh@yahoo.com (S.S.)
[3] Qatar University, College of Business & Economics, Department of Management and Marketing, Doha, Qatar; yasir.yasin@qu.edu.qa (Y.F.)
[4] Egyptian Chinese University ECU, Faculty of Economics and International Trade, Marketing and Innovation Department, Cairo, Egypt; sperihn@ecu.edu.eg (P.S.); mfarrag@ecu.edu.eg (M.F.E.); dalia9845977@gmail.com (D.A.)
[5] Saudi Electronic University, Department of Information Technology, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia; h.almubarak@seu.edu.sa (H.A.)
[6] Mansoura University, Faculty of Commerce, Department of Business Administration, Mansoura, Egypt; Department of Business Administration, Arab East Colleges, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia; Aeelmashsd@arabeast.edu.sa (A.E.)

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Abstract: This study investigates the complex role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and User-Generated Content (UGC) in enhancing Online Brand Equity (OBE) within the food industry, focusing on the emerging sport tourism markets of Saudi Arabia and Egypt. It specifically explores how AI-driven digital environments and word-of-mouth reshape brand loyalty among fans and tourists during major global sporting events. Employing a quantitative research design, the study utilizes a primary dataset collected via questionnaires from 606 consumers across both countries. The participants were specifically screened to include consumers who actively follow or participate in sport tourism activities, ensuring the data reflects the intersection of sports travel and food brand consumption. The theoretical model posits Brand Familiarity as a moderating variable and Consumer Engagement as a mediating variable, with data analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). Results and Discussions: The findings validate that UGC is pivotal in strengthening OBE, with a marginally stronger effect in Egypt compared to Saudi Arabia. Notably, Consumer Engagement mediated the relationship between brand promotion and OBE differently in each country: Saudi consumers favored low-engagement, brand-initiated promotions, while engagement fully mediated the effect in Egypt. In both contexts, Brand Familiarity acted as a psychological anchor, reinforcing trust when fans seek familiar food brands like 'Blabn' or 'Baheeg' during sporting events. This research contributes actionable insights for food industry marketers by providing a robust, comparative model for leveraging UGC in emerging tourism markets. It highlights the necessity of tailoring engagement strategies based on specific cultural preferences and the regional sport tourism calendar. The study proves that while digital tools are global, the psychological path to loyalty varies significantly across borders. Marketers are encouraged to launch UGC-driven campaigns during major events to convert spectator enthusiasm into sustainable brand advocacy.

Keywords: Emerging Tourism Markets, User-Generated Content (UGC), Online Brand Advocacy (OBA), Customer Engagement, Brand Familiarity, Online Brand Equity (OBE)

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INTRODUCTION

User-generated content (UGC) is recognized today as one of the most potent sources that influence and even transform consumers' brand perception, sentiment, and behaviors in online social contexts. For instance, a few studies underlined the significant influence of such content on consumers' buying decisions in the realm of experience-driven industries, especially the food sector, where the power of online reviews, star ratings, and people's sharing their eating experiences is immense in attracting new customers (Wilk, 2020). With the changing face of digital communication, consumers are no longer a passive group getting fed with information by a brand; they even create and share content themselves which not only changes the image of the brand but also affects consumer preferences and the extent of their brand loyalty.

Therefore, by functioning as a medium for expression and freedom of opinion, user-generated content opens the door to individuals going one step further than being consumers and becoming content co-creators (Gandhi & Ubba, 2025). Thus,

* Corresponding author

TripAdvisor is one of the platforms which promotes this idea by providing a virtual environment where users may display their skills, accumulate social capital, and be part of communities of people who share their interests (Mathew, 2021). In other words, UGC is not only a means to obtain information but also a channel through which people are able to create socially acceptable online identity, therefore, self-presentation turns out to be the main reason for posting content (Scholz et al., 2019).

Besides these changes in behavior, the way we experience digital content has been radically altered, especially in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Through the increased closeness of different groups and communities, reliance on online channels was greatly stimulated, particularly, the majority of networks to which content is accessed are through mobile phones (Wilk, 2019). On top of that, this phenomenon is clearly visible in the case of Egypt and Saudi Arabia, the pace of digital adoption is so fast here that it surpasses many other countries. In Egypt, it is estimated that mobile users account for almost 110 million, alongside 96.3 million internet users and close to 50 million social media users. On the hand, Saudi Arabia recorded around 48.1 million mobile subscriptions, 33.9 million internet users, and 34.1 million active social media users (González-Rodríguez et al., 2021). Such statistics not only confirm how digital platforms have become an integral part of people's daily lives but also UGC is the key driver of brand-marketing and communication in both of these markets (Rezaee, 2023). In the specific context of Sport Tourism, this digital adoption plays a crucial role. As Egypt and Saudi Arabia host major global sporting events, tourists rely heavily on UGC to discover food brands that align with their event experiences. This makes the food sector an integral part of the sport tourism ecosystem in these emerging markets.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. User-Generated Content (UGC)

Social media and digital platforms have revolutionized the interaction of brands with people in Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Egyptian brands mainly use Facebook and Instagram for their interaction with the audience. While in Saudi Arabia, Twitter and Snapchat are the top-most communicative channels. Citizens of both countries are very much inclined towards sharing their experiences on the internet in the form of ratings, recommendations, or reviews, and this has had a significant impact on their perception of brands (Burmann & Zeplin, 2005; Alalwan et al., 2017). One of the main factors which has led to a significant increase in the creation and sharing of user-generated content is the highly interactive environment on social media, throughout which people spread their content, i.e. reviews and comments describing their experiences with specific products or even giving general information about them (Roma & Aloini, 2019).

There coexist many different platforms, each with their separate nature, and the companies are going through various strategies to figure out the best way to utilise this content. This phenomenon can especially be largely seen when the case of discussion is open social media platforms like X, which used to be called Twitter (Rezaee, 2023; Guillen et al., 2025). In the same manner, on closed or semi-closed social media networks, for instance, private Facebook groups or WeChat in China, marketers should concentrate on personal relationships which are formed in these virtual worlds, as stated in the research by (Wijaya et al., 2023). This condition is very significant in Egypt, where consumers are heavily dependent on digital content for their buying decisions. As a result, with social media and review platforms becoming pervasive, brands that are operating in Egypt need to be conscious of this issue and give it their proper attention (Roma & Aloini, 2019). The significance of user-generated content in influencing the views is obvious, and by its nature, it has a major influence on more extreme behaviors, such as being a brand advocate online.

2. Online Brand Advocacy (OBA)

In Egypt, the brand trust that customers have is the main factor that influences how much the customers will support the brand. Also, online word-of-mouth (eWOM) and reviews are the most influential channels for the brand's reputation (Wilk et al., 2019; Hutzinger, 2021). The case in Saudi Arabia is a bit different; there, support is more strongly associated with the brand's prestige and rarity, which, in turn, leads to the creation of a different kind of relationship. In both areas, people are inclined to react positively to authentic and genuine content, particularly when it is their social and cultural values that are being mirrored (Aljarah et al., 2024). According to social exchange theory, the relationship with consumers is created by companies through social interaction, where consumers give to brands good feedback and support in return for a feeling of being valued, emotional satisfaction, or gratitude (Acharya, 2020). The rise in digital communities in Egypt has made online brand endorsement a key factor as Egyptian consumers have become more engaged in discussions, writing reviews, and giving recommendations that help the decision of buying (Wijaya et al., 2023).

3. Customer Engagement (CE)

Basically, customer engagement is the mental condition when a customer mentally, physically, or emotionally interacts with the brand and co-experiences the activities with the brand (Wijaya et al., 2023) Such interaction tremendously influences people's perception of the brand, their trust in it, and hence, their loyalty over time (Liao et al., 2024; Colicev et al., 2019). A few days ago, it was recognized that customer engagement is not only one kind of behavior but rather the combination of actions, thoughts, and feelings of the customer towards the brand (Kim et al., 2012; Kar et al., 2024).

To companies, it is crucial to develop a strong connection with their customers, as this deepens brand loyalty and makes people more likely to interact with the brand. Engaged customers are also very supportive and even become online brand advocates; thus, they contribute to the increase of the brand's value. In a market like Egypt, where the brand reputation largely depends on digital interaction among consumers, the influence of customer engagement on user-generated content and brand advocacy is still a vital and fascinating issue (Liao et al., 2024; Colicev et al., 2019).

Establishing a strong relationship with customers is a must-have for companies, especially with the proliferation of mobile-first platforms and the increase in influencer marketing campaigns in Saudi Arabia. Such campaigns are designed to establish genuinely engaging and valuable relationships between people and brands (Aljarah et al., 2024). In this sense, engagement serves as a link that connects the content with customer feedback. Hence, it is very important to figure out the impact of customers' previous knowledge about the brand on their trust and brand loyalty (Kim et al., 2022; Sutiadiningsih et al., 2024).

4. Brand Familiarity (BF)

Visibility and familiarity are the two aspects that mostly affect brand familiarity, which in turn lead to trust of the brand and the willingness to be its advocate. Namely, in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, familiarity is very much dependent on visibility (Agina et al., 2025) In Egypt, brands that are rooted deep and have a local heritage are the ones that get more familiarity, recognition, and even visibility. As an example, Baheeg and Laban brands have evolved and become so popular that many people now know and trust them. In Saudi Arabia, the old and well-established brands employ recognition and visibility to gain familiarity. When the brands start using influencer advertising to connect with the consumers, then trust gets built, which is why they are increasing consumer interaction and engagement (Goh, et al., 2013; AlRahman, 2025). Brand familiarity comes from the consumers' past experiences with a brand, the ads they have seen, or their interactions with it. It is a measure of how much a consumer knows, recognizes, or remembers a brand Familiarity is one of the main factors that influence consumers' choices (Al Zein et al., 2025). It lowers a consumer's perceived risk, views the brand with greater trustworthiness, and enhances trust in the brand (Kim et al., 2022). Schema theory explains the cognitive methods that consumers employ for encoding and recalling memories related to brands. These frameworks influence and shape consumer preferences, attitudes, decision-making, and loyalty (Aljarah et al., 2024). Within Sport Tourism, Brand Familiarity acts as a psychological anchor. Fans visiting for events often seek food brands they 'know' through social media to reduce perceived travel risks. Schema theory suggests that seeing a familiar brand like 'Blabn' or 'Baheeg' in a sporting context reinforces the consumer's trust and enhances their willingness to engage and advocate for the brand online. In the Egyptian market, competing firms are equally consistent and purposeful with user-generated content, cultivating the kind of brand loyalty that starts with familiarity and progresses to trust and advocacy, thereby enhancing market share and loyalty.

5. The impact of user-generated content (UGC) information dimensions and online brand advocacy

Normative According to (Hermanto et al., 2023), user-generated content (UGC) mirrors the opinions and views of former customers. Favorability is one of the most commonly described representation techniques in the normative dimension and can be calculated in terms of the likes and dislikes of a given product. Successful branding of a company on social media hinges on the positivity of comments and feedback a consumer provides (Goh et al., 2013). Trust in a brand and positive user-generated content (UGC) improve social media branding (Makrides, 2019).

Favorability is the social standing of a product or service offered within a peer group (Li, 2020). We recommend that you carry out the following operations: Online user reviews are considered a prominent signal of valuable user-generated content (UGC) by (Hermanto et al., 2023). The user-generated content (UGC) pieces have a massive influence on the view of potential buyers (Lu, 2014). A body of research in the eWOM area reveals that informational text attributes, that is, length, subjectivity, readability, and the emotional tone (positive or negative), can be used as the main characteristics for evaluating the quality of the information (Zhao et al., 2022). Negative reviews may elevate the level of uncertainty and the feeling of risk associated with making purchases online. This is because consumers, according to the negativity bias, tend to consider unfavorable information more than positive ones (Labrecque et al., 2022).

The research supporting this notion, indicates that shorter or more vague messages are usually regarded as less persuasive and of lower quality, whereas longer and more detailed texts help to dispel ambiguity and bolster the confidence in the decision-making process (Bevan et al., 2020). Purely subjectively oriented statements based only on personal preferences may look as if the communicators are concealing something from the consumers, thus leading to a decrease in credibility and trust (Scholz et al., 2019; Yu et al., 2021). Additionally, research concerned with how easily messages can be read indicates that extensively complicated materials might give a sense of higher authority; however, at the same time, they can lower the practical use of the materials and negatively impact product sales (Shen, 2022). Besides content characteristics, peer interactions have a decisive influence on the formation of consumer demand as well; for instance, on a platform like YouTube, users can get close to their peers through interactive communication and the comments (Kim, 2010). The first of these findings to be underlined is that both the quality and social aspect of UGC have the most considerable impact on consumer trust and their choice of buying.

6 .UGC and online brand advocacy and customer engagement:

Previous research has been studied cognitive consistency theory. The theory of cognitive consistency also postulates that customers, when they are subjected to psychological pain seek the harmony between their thoughts and their behavior and try to avoid the dissonance cognitive (Donsbach, 2008). Therefore, if a customer notices good while others are bad in accompanying (e.g., customer involvement), he or she will be more likely to do, other compatible actions with his or her beliefs, attitudes and behaviours (e.g., online brand advocacy) (Aljarah et al., 2024).

Theoretically, data support this position. (Samala & Singh, 2019) found in their study that customers who engage with a brand are more likely to promote it. Exposing customers to digital content marketing may lead them to brand involvement (Aljarah et al., 2024), which in turn may generate a belief-confirmation experience like online brand advocacy.

Therefore, it is logical that customer engagement acts as a facilitator between digital content marketing and online brand advocacy. Hence, we propose the subsequent hypothesis

7. UGC and online brand advocacy And Brand familiarity

Schema theory gives an insightful explanation of the impact of brand familiarity on consumer reactions. Consumers depend on mental frameworks (schemas) which are formed from their past experiences and these enable them to process familiar brand stimuli faster and with less cognitive effort, whereas unfamiliar stimuli need more evaluation and adjustment (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987). Therefore, knowing a brand is one that lessens uncertainty, increases trust, and makes it easier for good words and customer advocacy to spread (Acharya, 2020; Colicev et al., 2019). Recent research has similarly acknowledged that brand familiarity leads to customer engagement because it opens the customer's mind to the already existing mental connections, which in turn increases the brand's credibility and the customer's perceived value (Aljarah et al., 2024). Hence, using schema theory as a basis, the present research foresees that consumer advocacy behavior through digital content marketing will be affected by brand familiarity to different extents.

8. Customer engagement and OBA and brand familiarity

Brand familiarity has been identified as a key factor that brand marketers need to consider when they are targeting consumers through digital content marketing and social media. When consumers have little knowledge of a brand, digital content communication has a direct effect on brand advocacy since users are in need of more informational cues and are willing to try new experiences (Acharya, 2020). On the contrary, in situations where consumers are highly familiar with the brand, they can rely on their existing mental representations and previous experiences of trust, thus content marketing may have a reduced effect on the increment of brand advocacy (Aljarah et al., 2024).

The discoveries imply that brand familiarity may strengthen the relationship of digital content marketing and brand advocacy or it may weaken it, depending on the consumer's prior knowledge and trust in the brand. Consequently, the theory mentioned below is proposed: Continuing with the argument from the prior paragraph, one can clearly infer that User-Generated Content (UGC), Online Brand Advocacy (OBA), Customer Engagement (CE), and Brand Familiarity (BF) are interpersonal interaction models that significantly determine customer behavior in the digital market.

However, extant research has predominantly treated these factors as separate variables or single-market contexts, thus the interplay of these variables across culturally diverse but digitally connected regions like Egypt and Saudi Arabia still remains unexplored. This study answers that gap by creating a detailed model that looks into how user-generated content influences online behavioral advertising, environmentally friendly consumer behavior, customer engagement as a mediator and brand familiarity as a moderator. The comparative approach provides the valuable insight into cross-market consumer engagement and advocacy behavior in the food industry.

Research Model: (The effect of user-generated content on online brand advocacy mediated by customer engagement and moderated by brand familiarity).To address this gap, the study proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: User generated content (UGC) Information positively effect on Online brand advocacy.

H2: The positive effect of UGC and online brand advocacy mediated by customer engagement.

H3: The positive effect of UGC and customer engagement moderated by brand familiarity.

H4: The positive effect of UGC on online brand advocacy moderated by brand familiarity

The theoretical framework of the study is illustrated below in Figure 1.

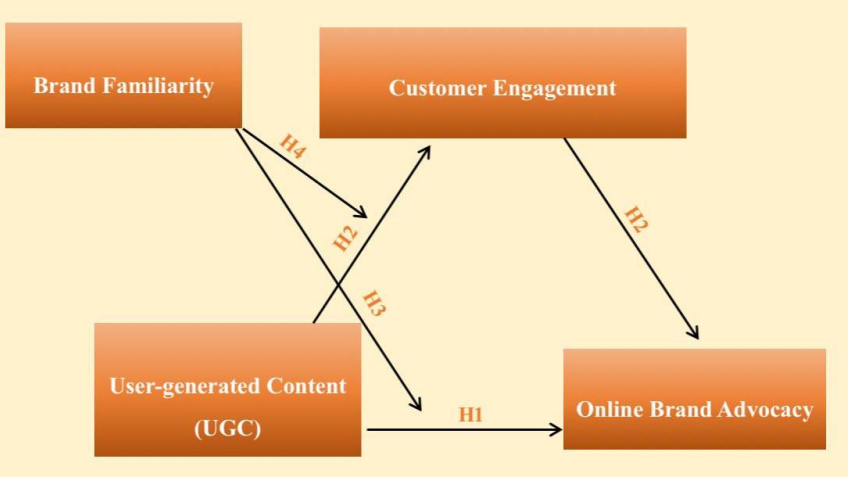

Figure 1. The study's conceptual model

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative method which is a research method where a participant discusses 3 food brand stores in Egypt and Saudi Arabia which were (1- Wahmy, 2- Blabn, 3- Baheeg) based on online surveys that primarily deal with the

collection and analysis of numerical data to explain phenomena, forecast, or test hypotheses by means of a convenience sample technique. Quantitative research frequently entails statistical analysis and is based on measurable units to arrive at conclusions that are capable of being verified and repeated, thereby ensuring objectivity, through the survey of 606 persons. The participants were specifically screened to include consumers who actively follow or participate in Sport Tourism activities and events in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, ensuring the data reflects the intersection of sports travel and food brand consumption."

The researchers relied on the questionnaire as the primary instrument for gathering data to analyze the relationships in the research model. The participants' answers were recorded on a five-point Likert scale (5 Strongly Agree and 1 Strongly Disagree). The scales used to measure the variables were taken from the literature and adjusted to be suitable for Arabic speakers. User-generated content is the independent variable. Customer Engagement, is the mediator, and Brand Familiarity, is the moderator. Finally, Online Brand Advocacy is the dependent.

RESULTS

This research led the way to combine survey data with an innovative statistical method named partial least squares-based structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) implying tool PLS 3.3 to deal with the problem of data normality. PLS-SEM was chosen as the primary analysis method because of its capabilities in managing situations of small sample sizes and non-normal data which are characteristics of exploratory research.

Additionally, it is a perfect method to be used in a study with such a complex model as this one that aims at detangling the effects of variables customer engagement as a mediator and brand familiarity as a moderator. Their use here is strongly supported by the complexity of the model and the need for indirect effect measurement through mediation.

Furthermore, PLS-SEM can accept data from any distribution and, thus, it is an appropriate instrument for an exploratory study like this one. "Normalcy-related problems" signify the issues that emerge when individuals or societies attempt to live according to what they consider norms or average practices. These problems include the social pressure to conform, the feeling of inadequacy when one cannot meet societal standards, the discrimination of those who oppose the norm, and the suppression of one's individuality under the guise of conformity.

To determine the reliability and validity of the measurement approach, a comprehensive testing program was conducted. Multiple indicators confirmed the discriminant and convergent validity of the model. Cross-loadings, Composite Reliability, Cronbach's Alpha, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and the Fornell-Larcker criterion were used to conduct reliability and validity tests. Collinearity among formative indicators was also tested using the variance inflation factor (VIF). Sample profile in total, 606 survey responses were used in the analysis collected from the learners to test the pre-determined hypothesis. According to the descriptive analysis for demographic variables, the results illustrate that most of the sample is female (55%), while males account for only (45%).

As for age, the results show that the age of the majority is ranging between (20-29) years old, with (53.9%), followed by the age (30-39) years old (19.3%). In addition, the analysis showed that the income of the majority ranges between (11.000-30.000) per month (33.5%), followed by those whose income is (31.000-50.000) per month with (26.1%). for the country, the majority are from Egypt with (80.6%) and only (19.4%) are from Saudi Arabia. Finally, concerning the education level, the majority are college graduates (39.9%), followed by those who are graduates (36.6%).

Egypt Model

First, for the Egyptian model, the measurement model has strong internal reliability and validity, as shown in Table 1 and Table 2 . All the Cronbach alpha values are 0.7. Moreover, every composite dependability (CR) value exceeds 0.8. The rho_A1 values of all latent variables are less than 1. Each of the AVE values in Table 1 is higher than 0.5. The square root of the AVE values is compared to the latent variable correlations in the Fornell-Larcker discriminant validity criterion.

Table 1 shows that, in accordance with the Fornell-Larcker criterion, the square roots of the AVE for each construct (which indicates convergent validity) are greater than their greatest correlation value with any other construct.

There are no cross-loadings displayed in Table 2, and loadings are around 0.7. Additionally, Table 2 indicates that the VIF proves that none of the measures are greater than five. The diagonal figures in Table 1 meet the Fornell-Larcker discriminant validity requirement because they are greater than their greatest correlation value with any other notion. The model's convergent and discriminant validity are confirmed by the absence of cross-loadings and well-loaded dimensions on their constructs, with 0.45 being the lowest loading see Table 2.

Table 1. Latent variables correlation, reliability and validity

	Brand Familiarity	Customer Engagement	UGC	OBA
Brand Familiarity	1			
Customer Engagement	.773	1		
UGC	.432	.636	1	
OBA	.503	.633	.793	1
Cronbach’s Alpha > 0.7	.823	.922	.787	.853
Rho_A < 1	.834	.926	.802	.872
Composite Reliability > 0.8	.873	.934	.840	.887
Average Variance Extracted (AVE) > 0.5	.536	.566	.573	.549

Table 2. Variables Loadings, VIF

	Brand Familiarity	Customer Engagement	OBA	UGC	VIF
BF1	0.771				1.789
BF2	0.719				1.716
BF3	0.85				2.434
BF4	0.634				1.643
BF5	0.756				1.834
BF6	0.638				1.496
CE1		0.651			3.158
CE10		0.774			2.603
CE11		0.766			3.999
CE2		0.692			4.363
CE3		0.758			4.307
CE4		0.792			3.605
CE5		0.781			3.054
CE6		0.881			4.521
CE7		0.811			3.095
CE8		0.626			2.557
CE9		0.705			2.738
OBA1			0.718		2.895
OBA2			0.719		3.653
OBA3			0.824		2.707
OBA4			0.647		1.85
OBA5			0.587		1.519
OBA6			0.764		3.45
OBA7			0.657		2.961
OBA8			0.784		2.341
OBA9			0.39		1.416
UGC1				0.621	1.725
UGC10				0.501	1.756
UGC2				0.561	1.783
UGC3				0.451	1.26
UGC4				0.545	1.455
UGC5				0.652	3.58
UGC6				0.763	2.222
UGC7				0.604	3.453
UGC8				0.479	1.769
UGC9				0.665	2.391

Structural model

The significance and direction of the hypothesised relationships were tested using the bootstrap method with 5000 subsamples. PLS-SEM indices, for model fit, involved SRMR=0.09 ≤ 0.12 and NFI=0.711.

Figure 2 and Table 3 show that the UGC, positively significantly, affect OBA with (β= 0.769). So, UGC is responsible for 63.5 % of the variation that happens in the OBA.

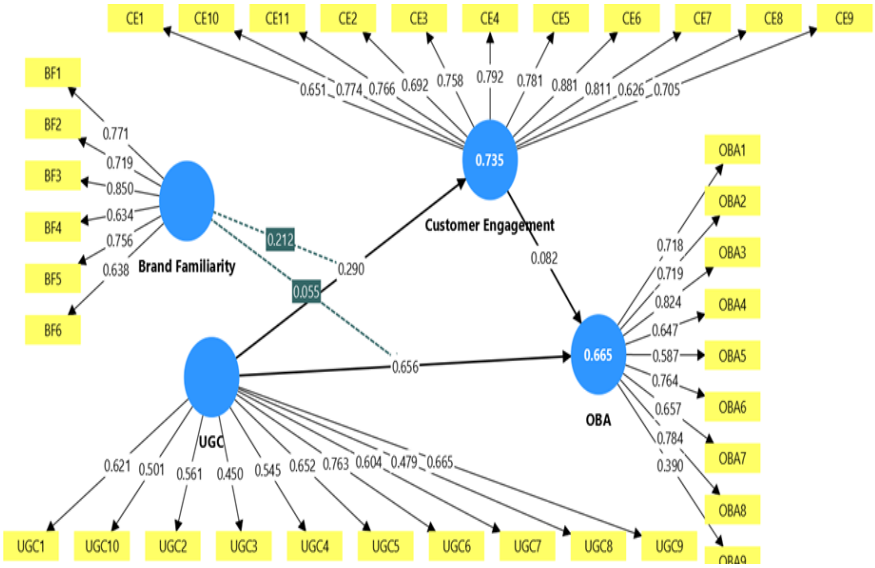

Figure 2. Model tested (Source: Smart PLS 3.3 output)

Direct and indirect relationships

First, for the direct relationship, Figure 2 and Table 3 show and confirm that UGC positively affects OBA. Hence H1: User-generated content (UGC) Information positively affects Online brand advocacy is accepted. Second, for testing mediation/ moderation relationships, bootstrapping with 5000, was conducted. Table 3and Table 4 is used in the mediation and moderation analysis. Table 4 shows significant indirect relationship between UGC and OBA (β=0.017, t= 3.317) through customer engagement, it ensures the mediation of customer engagement in the UGC and OBA relationship, indicating a full mediation. Hence, the mediation hypotheses H2: The positive effect of UGC and online brand advocacy mediated by customer engagement is accepted. In addition, Table 4 indicates a significant positive relationship between UGC and customer engagement (β=0.009 t= 4.119) moderated by brand familiarity, it ensures the moderation of brand familiarity in the UGC and customer engagement. Hence, the moderation hypotheses H3: The positive effect of UGC on customer engagement moderated by brand familiarity is rejected. Moreover, Table 4 also indicates a significant positive relationship between UGC and OBA (β=0.005, t= 2.129) moderated by brand familiarity, it ensures the moderation of brand familiarity in the UGC and OBA. Hence, the moderation hypotheses H4: The positive effect of UGC on online brand advocacy moderated by brand familiarity is accepted.

Table 3. Direct Relationships

Hypothesis		Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T-Statistic (|O/STDEV|)	P values	Accept / Reject
H1	UGC -> OBA	.769	.774	.092	8.366	0.000	Accepted

Table 4. Specific Indirect effects

		Original Sample (O)	**Sample Mean (M)**	**Standard Deviation (STDEV)**	**T-Statistic (|O/STDEV|)**	**P values**	**Mediation / Moderation**
H2	UGC -> Customer Engagement-> OBA	0.017	0.005	0.127	3.137	0.000	Mediation accepted
H3	UGC x Brand Familiarity -> Customer Engagement	0.009	0.02	0.079	4.119	0.000	Moderation accepted
H4	UGC x Brand Familiarity -> OBA	0.005	0.005	0.038	2.129	0.000	Moderation accepted

Saudi Arabia Model

First, for the Saudi Arabia model, the measurement model has strong internal reliability and validity, as shown in Table 5. All the Cronbach alpha values are 0.7. Moreover, every composite dependability (CR) value exceeds 0.8. The rho_A1 values of all latent variables are less than 1. Each of the AVE values in Table 5 is higher than 0.5. The square root of the AVE values is compared to the latent variable correlations in the Fornell-Larcker discriminant validity criterion. Table 5 shows that, in accordance with the Fornell-Larcker criterion, the square roots of the AVE for each construct (which indicates convergent validity) are greater than their greatest correlation value with any other construct. There are no cross-loadings displayed in Table 6, and loadings are around 0.6. Additionally, Table 6 indicates that the VIF proves that none of the measures are greater than five. The diagonal figures in Table 5 meet the Fornell-Larcker discriminant validity requirement because they are greater than their greatest correlation value with any other notion. The model's convergent and discriminant validity are confirmed by the absence of cross-loadings and well-loaded dimensions on their constructs, with 0.097 being the lowest loading.

Table 5. Latent variables correlation, reliability and validity

	Brand Familiarity	**Customer Engagement**	**UGC**	**OBA**
Brand Familiarity	1			
Customer Engagement	.459	1		
UGC	.541	.495	1	
OBA	.511	.591	.744	1
Cronbach's Alpha > 0.7	0.555	0.729	0.849	0.773
Rho_A < 1	0.563	0.767	0.864	0.828
Composite Reliability > 0.8	0.730	0.800	0.882	0.835
Average Variance Extracted (AVE) > 0.5	0.512	0.586	0.534	0.582

Table 6. Variables Loadings, VIF

	Brand Familiarity	Customer Engagement	UGC	OBA	VIF
BF1	0.614				1.311
BF2	0.479				1.319
BF3	0.547				1.222
BF4	0.601				1.230
BF5	0.598				1.252
BF6	0.497				1.261
CE1		0.649			1.403
CE10		0.415			1.373
CE11		0.097			1.38

CE2		0.595			1.371
CE3		0.544			1.358
CE4		0.558			1.275
CE5		0.483			1.539
CE6		0.624			1.247
CE7		0.529			2.417
CE8		0.722			1.556
CE9		0.396			1.346
OBA1				0.304	1.957
OBA2				0.541	1.564
OBA3				0.834	1.62
OBA4				0.765	1.607
OBA5				0.770	1.586
OBA6				0.597	1.663
OBA7				0.676	2.674
OBA8				0.527	1.522
OBA9				0.297	1.633
UGC1			0.392		1.467
UGC10			0.699		1.917
UGC2			0.787		2.376
UGC3			0.654		1.87
UGC4			0.666		1.958
UGC5			0.759		2.163
UGC6			0.722		2.414
UGC7			0.504		1.79
UGC8			0.616		2.242
UGC9			0.691		2.513

Structural model

The significance and direction of the hypothesized relationships were tested using the bootstrap method with 5000 subsamples. PLS-SEM indices, for model fit, involved SRMR=0.07 ≤ 0.12 and NFI=0.612.

Figure 3 and Table 3 show that the UGC, positively significantly, affect OBA with (β= 0.687). So, UGC is responsible for 60.2 % of the variation happens in the OBA.

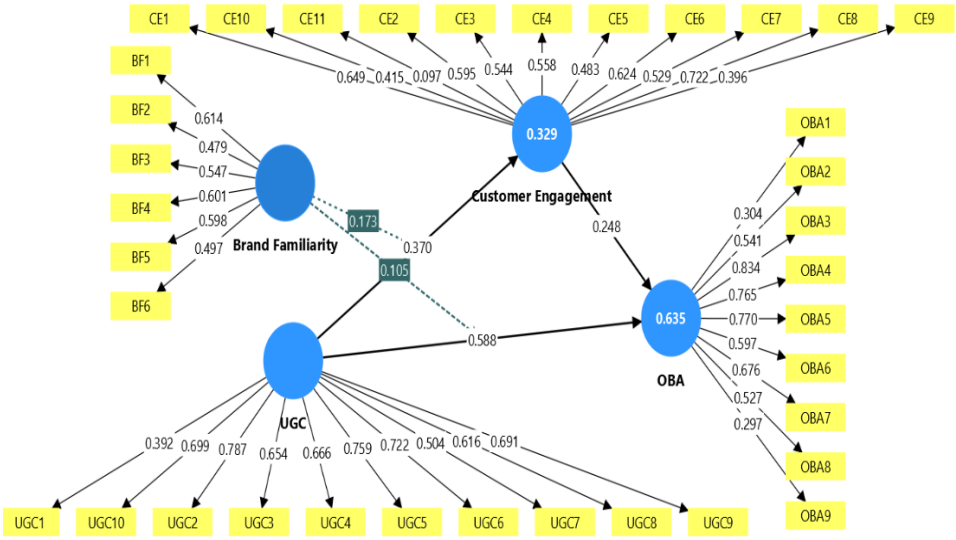

Figure 3. Model tested (Source: Smart PLS 3.3 output)

Direct and indirect relationships

First, for the direct relationship, Table 7 confirms that UGC positively affects OBA. Hence H1: User-generated content (UGC) Information a positive effect on Online brand advocacy is accepted. Second, for testing mediation/ moderation relationships, bootstrapping with 5000 was conducted. Table 4 is used in the mediation and moderation analysis.

Table 8 shows an insignificant indirect relationship between UGC and OBA (β=0.091 t= 1.175) through customer engagement, indicating no mediation effect. Hence, the mediation hypotheses H2: The positive effect of UGC and online brand advocacy mediated by customer engagement is rejected. In addition, Table 8 indicates a significant positive relationship between UGC and customer engagement (β=0.117, t= 2.337) moderated by brand familiarity, which ensures the moderation of brand familiarity in the UGC and customer engagement. Hence, the moderation hypotheses H3: The positive effect of UGC on customer engagement moderated by brand familiarity is accepted.

Moreover, Table 8 also indicates a significant positive relationship between UGC and OBA (β=0.055, t= 2.155) moderated by brand familiarity, which ensures the moderation of brand familiarity in the UGC and OBA. Hence, the moderation hypotheses H4: The positive effect of UGC on online brand advocacy moderated by brand familiarity is accepted.

Table 7. Direct Relationships

Hypothesis		Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T-Statistic (|O/STDEV|)	P values	Accept / Reject
H1	UGC -> OBA	0.687	0.681	0.112	6.160	0.000	Accepted

Table 8. Specific Indirect Effects

		Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T-Statistic (|O/STDEV|)	P values	Mediation / Moderation
H2	UGC -> Customer Engagement-> OBA	0.091	0.101	0.078	1.175	0.240	Rejected
H3	UGC x Brand Familiarity -> Customer Engagement	0.117	0.135	0.088	2.337	0.081	Moderation accepted
H4	UGC x Brand Familiarity -> OBA	0.055	0.04	0.048	2.155	0.098	Moderation accepted

Comparing Saudi Arabia and Egypt, some of the significant differences and similarities between the role of User-Generated Content (UGC) towards Online Brand Advocacy (OBA) can be identified. In Egypt, the findings validate a stronger direct role exhibited by UGC towards OBA (β=0.769), explaining 63.5% variation in OBA, as opposed to Saudi Arabia, which exhibits a lower level of impact (β=0.687), explaining 60.2% variation.

In addition, customer engagement fully mediated the relationship between UGC and OBA in Egypt, while the moderation effect was not significant in Saudi Arabia, uncovering that customer engagement was not a necessary mediating variable. However, brand familiarity provided a significant moderation effect in the relationship between UGC and customer engagement as well as between UGC and OBA, affirming brand awareness is a significant driver of strengthening these relationships. Overall, while UGC is predominantly affecting both realms of OBA in a positive way, Egypt portrays a stronger and direct influence with the customer interaction being a pivotal mediating factor, compared to Saudi Arabia where its influence was constrained.

DISCUSSION

User-generated content (UGC) impacts online brand advocacy directly as a result of which researchers suggest that consumers are more willing to trust and support a brand when they find authentic content from other users (Aljarah et al., 2024). Also, UGC through emotional and cognitive connections can escalate advocacy (Bahtar & Muda, 2016).

But, the quality and the personality of UGC matter, as bad writing or negative content may reduce the power of such content (Zhao et al., 2022). The research in Egypt confirmed the effect of UGC on customer engagement, which later resulted in advocacy, where consumer engagement was the full mediator of the relationship, and consumers were more likely to advocate when they felt emotionally and cognitively engaged (Rachbini, 2023; Marbach et al., 2019; Sureddy et al.,2026). The authors have shown that brand familiarity contributes to the strengthening of the UGC influence on both engagement and advocacy, as familiar brands evoke quicker and deeper engagement when supplemented with user-driven content (Colicev et al., 2019). Although brand familiarity usually escalates the influence of UGC on brand advocacy, excessive familiarity may lower the rate of response to new UGC (Schivinski et al., 2020).

The degree of a consumer's trust impacts the effect of customer engagement on brand advocacy, with the brand familiarity through either facilitating or hindering the connection between engagement and advocacy (Aljarah et al., 2024) User-generated content (UGC) impacts online brand advocacy directly as a result of which researchers suggest that consumers are more willing to trust and support a brand when they find authentic content from other users (Aljarah et al., 2024). Also, UGC, through emotional and cognitive connections, can escalate advocacy (Bahtar & Muda, 2016). But, the quality and the personality of UGC matter, as bad writing or negative content may reduce the power of such content (Zhao et al., 2022). The research in Egypt confirmed the effect of UGC on customer engagement, which later resulted in advocacy, where consumer engagement was the full mediator of the relationship, and consumers were more likely to advocate when they felt emotionally and cognitively engaged (Ayele & Singh, 2024).

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Implications

1. Theoretical implications

The paper is a significant theoretical contribution as it establishes the fact that user-generated content (UGC) is a major driver of online brand advocacy (OBA), whereby customer engagement is the most important mediating factor. The findings

of the research extend cognitive consistency theory (Donsbach, 2008; Ruiz-Equihua et al., 2023) by demonstrating that when consumers are positively engaged with UGC, they adopt more active advocacy behaviors in line with their attitudes (Aljarah et al., 2024). Besides that, the brand familiarity as a moderating factor enriches schema theory (Lang, 2000), since consumers accessing familiar brands from their pre-existing mental frameworks which, in turn, makes the influence of UGC on engagement and advocacy more potent. The findings further underscore that UGC is not only a source of trust and authenticity but also a theoretical link that connects consumer participation, engagement, and advocacy in the digital realm.

2. Practical implications

The results from a managerial standpoint indicate that food industry marketers should vigorously promote such as customer reviews, testimonials, and interactive videos as a strategic tool to influence advocacy behaviors positively. To be most effective, brands need to create customer experiences that not only invite customers to share genuine stories but also emotionally engage with the content, hence, turning engagement into advocacy.

For food industry marketers, leveraging Sport Tourism calendars is essential. Brands should launch UGC-driven campaigns during major sporting events to capture the emotional engagement of fans, thereby converting spectator enthusiasm into Online Brand Advocacy (OBA). The thing is that it would be of no small consequence to mention the point that investing in the establishment and ongoing of brand recognition is absolutely necessary as it has been shown that familiar brands have a positive impact both, engagement, and, advocacy levels. Simply put, this implies that new brands have to get their name out and win the trust via the consistent use of UGC strategies while already established brands can leverage their familiarity to obtain better results from digital marketing. Overall, it can be said that the appointment of managers to the board of directors is to implement UGC-driven strategies which not only merge engagement initiatives with trust-building procedures but also ensure customer loyalty and advocacy in the long run in competitive markets.

CONCLUSION

The research prominently presents how the towering impact of User-Generated Content (UGC) that is mostly responsible for Online Brand Advocacy (OBA) in the food industry is made to be very clear. It mainly focuses on the markets of Egypt and Saudi Arabia. The findings suggest that UGC positively influences brand advocacy; however, the routes differ between the two countries. Customer engagement in Egypt was found to be a full mediator between OBA and UGC, therefore indicating that brands need to focus most on interactive experiences and co-creation activities so as to convert user content into advocacy behaviors. Egyptian consumers are more likely to be influenced by authentic content that emotionally connects with them, and as a result, they become more engaged and loyal.

While UGC influences OBA significantly in Saudi Arabia, customer engagement did not mediate this relationship, therefore a more direct influence of UGC is suggested. Nevertheless, brand familiarity was very powerful in both cases as a moderator, indicating that positive consumers with a prior association to a brand are the ones who will do advocacy behavior upon seeing UGC. The passage stresses the importance for brands to invest in familiarity and trust-building activities through, for example, quality communication strategies that are consistent.

Besides that, the study points out that authenticity, emotional connection, and cultural aspects are the key elements when one is looking to get the most out of UGC. Food brands must be in a position to not only motivate UGC but also control it in a way that they strengthen brand-consumer relationships and at the same time increase brand equity, especially in highly competitive and digital-oriented markets. The research paper is a great resource for mastering concepts related to online consumer behavior. It establishes the connections among UGC, customer engagement, brand familiarity, and brand advocacy and offers a wide range of suggestions for the marketing professionals who want to effectively employ UGC to brand loyalty and sustainable advocacy in a digitally competitive market place.

Limitations and future research

The research did not address several aspects that could be relevant to other magazines about restaurants and beverages in Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Future research should consider these financial aspects and include other types of projects in different fields, potentially utilizing different geographical areas, while taking into account competitive pressures and market changes. By using both qualitative and quantitative research methods, clearer understanding may emerge about the influence of non-cash support services given by governments on the performance and innovation of entities.

To focus mainly on the comprehension of the role of support services in the creative process as well as in the growth of startups businesses in various sectors, the paper propounds that subsequent research should explore the mediating and modifying factors as well as the effect of financing and assistance on the enterprises at different phases of their development. In most research, it is quite common to acknowledge that there are certain limitations. The primary point is that this research only looked at the influence of user-generated content (UGC) on online brand promotion (OBA), where customer interaction was the mediator and brand knowledge was the mediator. Subsequent research might provide a new model to investigate various variables, e.g., by considering gender, age, sociocultural values, and emotional attachment, technology knowledge, and the influence of artificial intelligence, thus possibly unfolding a deeper understanding of consumer behavior across different contexts. Moreover, an added measurement was utilized in this research to assess online brand marketing, which is not merely a local examination of brand advocacy, information sharing, or liking, but is rather more focused on understanding how consumers perceive the content type. The article proposes that subsequent inquiries would benefit from exploring this issue interaction more in-depth to users; so that, the researchers could get a more detailed

and nuanced view, which could be easily generalized to the different marketing fields. Thirdly, a large portion of the study sample came from one generation, and thus the results of the study might not be applicable to other generations.

The reason for this is that there are significant differences between generations in the way they use technology and in their trust in the opinions of content creators. Hence, it is advisable for subsequent research to investigate the different generations. Additionally, this research was limited to the food industry in Egypt and Saudi Arabia only. We, therefore, propose that subsequent research assess other industries such as fashion or cosmetics where the user-generated content is electrifying brand promotion. Consequently, exploring different cultural or geographical contexts can be a way to understand the significance of socio-cultural differences in consumer interaction and advertising behavior.

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