Consumer As Advertiser: A Conceptual Perspective[1]

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ABSTRACT

The new mode of Internet, called Web 2.0, is a place which people actively use to share their emotions, thoughts, experiences, and memories on a daily basis. Additionally, they do not only share all of these in written format, but also express themselves visually by using photos and videos through social networks. In Web 2.0 and its phenomenon characteristic User Generated Content (UGC), consumers not only create their own advertisements but also act in them. This could be very beneficial for marketers in terms of understanding customers and reaching a wide range of target audiences. However, this situation shifts the balance of power from marketing practitioners to Internet users, which could create serious challenges for the marketing world. Consumers can promote a product but they can also jeopardize its brand equity, which can be mitigated by brand owners keeping close tabs on consumers. This article aims to provide a clearer understanding of user generated content platform, which would enables consumers to involve directly in advertising process. Additionally, the article discusses how user generated advertising (UGA) is an important and contentious issue, because in a positive context it enables companies to gain brand ambassadors if they are satisfied enough, while in a negative context it might create anti-brand spokesmen and activists when they are not happy with brands. This conceptual analysis is designed to provide companies the perspective needed to develop new advertising and marketing communications strategies using a new user-driven approach to marketing.

Key words: User generated advertising; Web 2.0; new media; user-generated-content

ÖZET

Web 2.0 olarak adlandırılan yeni internet ortamı, insanların duygularını, düşüncelerini, deneyimlerini ve anılarını günlük paylaşabildikleri bir platformdur. Yazılı formattaki bütün bu paylaşımların yanı sıra sosyal ağlar üzerinden aktarılan videolar ve resimler sayesinde kullanıcılar, kendilerini görsel olarak da ifade edebilmektedirler. Web 2.0 ve onun bir yansıması olan kullanıcıların ürettiği içerikte tüketiciler, kendi reklamlarını üretmekle kalmayıp ürettikleri reklamlarda yine kendileri rol alabilmektedirler. Bu durum, müşterileri daha iyi anlama ve daha geniş kitlelere hitap edebilme anlamında pazarlamacılara büyük fayda sağlamaktadır. Öte yandan, güç dengesini pazarlamacılardan internet kullanıcılarına doğru kaydırdığından söz konusu durum beraberinde ciddi kaygıları da getirmektedir. Tüketiciler, bir ürünü markayı yüceltebilecekleri gibi marka değerine zarar verici de olabilirler. Olası olumsuzluk ise ancak marka sahiplerinin tüketicileri yakından takibi ile minimize edilebilmektedir. Bu makalede tüketicilerin doğrudan reklam sürecine dahil olmasına olanak sağlayan kullanıcıların ürettiği içerik kavramına daha net bir anlayış getirmek amaçlanmaktadır. Kullanıcıların ürettiği reklamlar (KÜR), her geçen gün daha fazla dikkat çeken bir o kadar da tartışmalı bulunan bir kavramdır. Olumlu açıdan bakıldığında eğer yeterli tatmin yaratılmışsa KÜR, kurumun bir marka elçisi kazanmasını sağlayabileceği gibi herhangi bir memnuniyetsizlik karşısında marka aleyhine konuşanlar ya da aktivistler ile karşılaşılmasına yol açabilecektir. Bu kavramsal çözümleme, kurumların kullanıcı odaklı bir yaklaşıma sahip yeni reklam ve pazarlama iletişimi stratejileri geliştirmede gereken perspektifi ortaya koymak üzere tasarlanmıştır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Kullanıcıların ürettiği reklamlar; Web 2.0; yeni medya; kullanıcıların ürettiği içerik

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Introduction

New technologies, particularly recent developments in the Internet, provide an effective communication platform for companies. In the age of digitalization not only conventional media tools but also digital media tools such as blogs, social networks, and viral videos are considered as important means of sustaining consistent brand strategies. Carter (2010) states that brands are keen to find ways of using digital media to exploit content related, not just to their own brand or products, but to sponsored events and other assets. With this kind of implementations, brands are able to gain the opportunity to engage people and create dialogue, where the consumer is able to experience the brand, rather than focusing solely on direct promotion.

The Internet plays a significant role in consumers' daily life where they read newspapers and magazines online, manage their bank accounts, share their ideas or experiences widespread, shop for products, and develop social networks through online channels such as blogs, forums or social networks. Marketing communications have thus changed considerably in order to find new ways to communicate with consumers through cyberspace in light of their common online activities (Rogers and Allbritton, 1995) and benefit effectively from this new Internet environment. These changes have encouraged marketing communication practitioners to find most advantageous ways to use Internet when promoting their products. So just like consumers, marcom practitioners should also dive into this social media in order to benefit effectively from this environment. Internet can be considered as social forum, a living, responsive, interactive community, which provides an opportunity for marketing communications practitioners to gain insight into customers.

Although marketers research various areas, including viral marketing, electronic word-of-mouth marketing (eWOM), online advergames, and interactive advertising (Fong and Burton, 2006; Porter and Golan, 2006; Winkler and Buckner, 2006) in order to understand Internet's virtual communication role and use it efficiently, yet they have only recently begun to study online content generated by users and its implications as Goldsmith and Horowitz (2006) noted. As mentioned by Daugherty et al. (2008, p.2) "the creation and dissemination of content has been a constant for hundreds of years, but the potential for an ordinary consumer to communicate with and influence a mass audience was only recently put within reach given the advent of Web 2.0 technologies". Currently this situation has created a new form of expression in the Internet world called User Generated Content (UGC). Now, consumers suddenly become a driver in the virtual marketing communications field and start to control

the market. And this could be considerably threatening for the marketing world. This is still unknown territory, and communication practitioners hesitate to take an active role in this new schema. Undoubtedly, it is impossible for companies to turn their faces away from their interactive consumers. On the contrary, companies and marketers should closely watch these consumers and the social web sites they use. They should follow consumers' opinions, comments, and experiences about brands and products. All these changes might mean that it is necessary to review and restructure almost all communication strategies. Every passing day, the content generated by users is improving technically. Also everyday more and more of these social networks are created and more users are getting involved. The popularity of these web sides are continuing to increase. Clearly this trend has indefinitely changed the concept of media and advertising. However, advertisers still have lots of doubts and questions about how to benefit from this dynamic environment. Since there is lack of research on user generated advertising, this analysis will contribute to our understanding of both problems and opportunities encountered in using new media technologies and platforms by the consumers.

New Communication Landscape: Web 2.0

Significant changes and developments in the digital era have change the way companies communicate with their targeted groups. Unlike the early days of Internet, when the websites were used to generate one-way communication mainly for informative purposes, the new form of Internet, referred to as Web 2.0, allows users to generate content themselves. In other words, rather than being a static web page, this new dynamic form enables users to create, edit and view the content. Mulhern (2009) likens new communication platform formatted by Internet to an open, free marketplace when compared with conventional centrally controlled, top-down rigid one of mass communications and describes it as a networked information system.

With the collapse of dot-com companies the Web 2.0 has become popular (O'Reilly, 2005). Kaplan and Haenline (2010, p.60-61) indicate that Web 2.0 is a term first used in 2004 to describe a new way in which software developers and end-users started to utilize the World Wide Web and define it as "a platform whereby content and applications are no longer created and published by individuals, but continuously modified by users in a participatory and collaborative fashion". Web 1.0 applications, such as personal web pages, Encyclopedia Britannica Online, and the idea of content publishing have been replaced by blogs, wikis, and collaborative projects in Web 2.0 (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). While the original Internet websites, called Web 1.0, allowed only one-way communication through static web pages, the

new form, Web 2.0, allows for sharing, linking, collabrating, and inclusion of user generated content (Thackeray et al., 2008, p.339).

Miguéns, Baggio, and Costa (2008, p.1) identify 'Web 2.0' with its strong characteristic, which is "an unprecedented ease of interactivity that fosters the formation of communities and the generation of user-driven content" and relate blogs being counted in billions with its rapid and widespread diffusion. As Thackeray et al. (2008, p.338) stated, Web 2.0 applications can directly engage consumers in the creative process by both producing and distributing information through collaborative writing, content sharing, social networking, social bookmarking, and syndication.

Web 2.0 describes the second generation of Web-based services that have gained massive popularity by letting people collaborate and share information online in previously unavailable ways and includes social networking sites, wikis, blogging and podcasting (Reactive, 2007, p.3). The common bond of social networks, wikis, podcasts et al, is that Web-based information is now in the hands of the public, and they can create, share, listen, read and even sell this information in ways that suit them. This new form of Internet offers various opportunities to marketers who are eager to adopt and use it in order to engage with customers and develop loyalty which also requires strategic way of thinking.

It can be easily observed that during the last few years, users have spent more time on the web and shared more information with each other (Enders, et al., 2008). Following these changes today, consumers have become an essential participants of market value co-creation processes (Lusch and Vargo, 2006; Peňaloza and Venkatesh, 2006; Vargo and Lusch, 2004), and gain power on other consumers' decision making processes as they create and spread viral messages through social networks (Çelen, Kariv, and Schotter, 2010). Many studies indicated that new Internet media landscape has democratized and equalized market structure in favour of consumers (Hoffman, Novak, and Venkatesh, 2004; Kucuk and Krishnamurthy, 2007; Urban, 2004).

Miguéns, Baggio and Costal (2008, p.2) indicate that the rich wealth of user-generated content feature of Web 2.0 applications can prove highly influential in directing consumers' choices, but can be also of extreme value for the comprehension of preferences, needs and reactions, which can inform many decisions from a management point of view. Web 2.0 enables consumer to be named as creators or co-creators, and offers customers an active participation instead of being a passive recipient (Thackeray et al., 2008).

The Rise of User Generated Content (UGC)

User generated content (UGC), also referred to consumer generated media or consumer generated content, is defined as "a variety new sources of online information that are created, initiated, circulated, and used by consumer intent on educating each other about products, brands, services, personalities, and issues" (Blackshaw and Nazzaro, 2004, p.2). Gaining popularity in 2005, the term "is usually used to describe the various forms of media content that are publicly available and created by end-users" (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p.61). According to Daugherty, Eastin, and Bright (2008, p.2) UGC refers to "media content created or produced by the general public rather than by paid professionals and primarily distributed on the Internet.

Although there is no one common definition of UGC, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development -OECD (2007), highlighted the three basic characteristics of UGC: first, it needs to be published either on a publicly accessible website or on a social networking site accessible to a selected group of people; second, it needs to show a certain amount of creative effort; and third, it requires to have been created outside of professional routines and practices.

Based on the information given about Web 2.0 and UGC, social media can be defined as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content" (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p.61) and include Wikipedia, YouTube, Facebook, and SecondLife. Hansen, Shneiderman, and Smith (2011, 12) define social media as "a set of online tools that supports social interaction between users". As Kietzmann et al. (2011) indicate, social media presents an enormous challenge, as many established management methods are inappropriate for customers who no longer want to be talked at, but listened to, engaged with and responded to. However, managers should not forget to consider social media as one integral part of overall marketing communications strategies, and thus avoid risk and achieve consistency when involving this new media in overall.

User-generated content constitutes the data, information, or media produced by the general public rather by professionals on the Internet (Arriga and Levina, 2008; Daugherty, Eastin, and Bright, 2008). Digital video, blogging, podcasting, mobile phone, photography, wikis, social networks, and user-forum posts can be given as examples of such online content (Çelen, Kariv, and Schotter 2010). According to eMarketer (2007)'s research results,

approximately 69.6 million Internet user generate content and 75.2 million users used or visited UGC web sites in the United States, and this figure is expected to increase up to 101 million in 2011. In 2007 approximately 60% of European online users used UGC (Carrera et al., 2008).

As an increasing number of people use and generate UGC it can be said that Web 2.0 is providing consumers with many tools to find information, examine alternative offers, share ideas and/or experiences, make comments in large variety of forms, influence others, and so on. Examples of UGC activities that people are using on the web include: reading or writing blogs, reading or writing customer reviews, taking part in social networking sites, listening to podcasts and setting up RSS feeds (Carrera et al., 2008). UGC web sites are expected to generated $4.3 billion by 2011, more than four times what U.S. user-generated content sites generated in 2007 when more than 70 million U.S. Internet users created content online (eMarketer, 2007). According to Lenhart and Madden (2007) more than 55% of teens online use social networks, and 48% of them visit those sites daily or more.

As stated in Interactive Advertising Bureau's Platform Status Report (2008), the initial form of UGC can be noticed in early days of Internet. But due to developments in technology and the upgrade of Internet entry speed in recent 5 years, UGC web sites rapidly grew and considered as an important media by marketing communications practitioners. The historical development of UGC is summarized in IAB's report as follows (2008, p.1):

> UGC has been a staple of the peer-to-peer experience since the dawn of the digital age. The earliest forms arrived in 1980 with Usenet, a global discussion network that allowed users to share comments and experiences of a given topic. Early versions of Prodigy, a computer network launched in 1988, also facilitated user discussions and comments, as did early versions of AOL. The late 1990s saw the rise of 'ratings sites,' which allowed users to rate subjects based on any number of criteria, from physical appearance (ratemyface.com and hotornot.com) to professional competence (ratemyprofessors.com). These spread quickly across the Internet, and brought with them controversy over the impact they could have on the lives of private people often unwittingly exposed to public scrutiny. Such controversies have increased as UGC sites have become more common and influential. Another early form of UGC are forums; areas within content websites that allow readers to communicate with each other around topics related to the content. Even in this era dominated by social media sites, forums continue to be robust, controlled areas of user content.

All mentioned definitions underline two common aspects of new Internet form: First, the Internet is no longer maintained and controlled by professional media members and distributers but by users themselves, and secondly it is an open platform that everyone can access without time and place limitation. Therefore, it can be said that in the Internet a new form of communication shared among large groups (many-to-many) is gaining importance, at

the expense of the traditional one-way model (one-to-many). In this new environment, users are the centre-pieces, not only consumers of the content but also both creators and distributors. Thus, the Internet enables its users to benefit from a more interactive, personalized, collaborative platform, and consequently, gain unprecedented powers on the web. Geoff Ramsey, CEO of eMarketer, summarizes the big picture of new Internet landscape as his saying: "There is a new paradigm where consumers drive the conversation and have the control" and advices companies "to let go of the marketing speak and let people communicate with each other in an unfettered environment" (Wharton, 2006).

As UGC becomes more prevalent, identifying the motivational reasons for creating such media also becomes increasingly important. Therefore, understanding consumer attitudes toward UGC, especially motivational sources, should result in a better model of behaviour, which is increasingly important to researchers focused on Internet marketing (Daugherty, Eastin, and Bright, 2008). According to George and Scerri (2007) there are three main reasons why individuals generate content on the Internet: analysis and commentary, entertainment, and review. Prior studies (e.g., Hagel and Armstrong, 1997) of online communities (a precursor to UGC media) classify user motives into two broad categories: rational (e.g., information, transactions) and emotional (e.g., relationships, fantasy). Expanding on their topology, Krishnamurty and Dou (2008, p.2) categorized UGC according to the main purpose for which Internet users participate in UGC activities: Rational motivations may include sharing knowledge with the world (knowledge sharing) and advocating a particular stand toward an issue (advocacy); emotional motivations may include building social connections with friends, relatives, or other Internet users (social connections) or entertainment (self-expression). Furthermore, according to the level of communal involvement in creating UGC, Krishnamurty and Dou, suggested that UGC can be grouped into two types: that created (largely) through group collaborations and that created mostly by individual users. Their classification typology is summarized in Table 1, which also contains examples of UGC Web sites.

It is not easy for companies to reach their customers with only traditional marketing methods and communication tools in view of the empowered consumers. Today's consumers have the ability to generate content and to make it easily and rapidly visible by millions of others. Since UGC is in essence 'created for the people by the people' or 'by the users for the users' (Thackeray et al., 2008, p.340), user's comments and evaluations in such sites become an important influencer in others' decision making process. In that sense, UGC refers to online

word-of-mouth, which is "owned and controlled by consumers, and often carries far higher credibility and trust than traditional media, especially as media channels become more fragmented and less trusted" (Blackshaw and Nazzaro, 2004, p.2).

Table 1: Typology of UGC Classification and Exemplars

		Psychological Motivation for Engaging in UGC Creation			
		Rational		Emotional	
		Knowledge Sharing	Advocacy	Social Connections	Self-Expression
Platform base	Group	Wikis (e.g., Wikipedia)	Issue-centric communities (e.g., Rachel Ray Sucks Community)	Multiplayer online games (e.g., socio town)	Virtual presences (e.g., secondlife)
	Individual	Blogs by experts (e.g.,askanexpertblog.com)	Consumer reviews (e.g., Epinions)	Social networking sites (e.g., MySpace, Facebook)	Consumer creative inventions (e.g., Jumpcut)

Source: Krishnamurthy and Dou (2008).

Regarding the important role of UGC in consumer's daily life it is not possible for companies to stand against such a powerful media. Instead, they should better adopt this fact and try to benefit from UGC's offer. Shea (2008, p.16-17) indicates 5 reasons about why a company should embrace UGC:

1. *Gain customer insight*: The greatest benefits of engaging customers through UGC.

2. *Boost brand loyalty*: The process of making customers feel so good about a company and its products that they'll stick with it no matter what.

3. *Build brand awareness*: Consumers can shut out traditional advertising; DVRs allow people to skip through commercials, browser plugins allow users to remove online advertising, and today's 'constant connectedness' means it is hard to predict when something will be read or seen. Users control where and how they consume information. This means the ability to 'create time' with customers by providing them an engaging community experience is critical.

4. *Increase sales*: It stands to reason that increasing sales should be a primary driver when integrating user generated content and social networking.

5. *Reduce costs*: Providing an open support platform is just one way that can be used user generated content to help to reduce costs.

The Internet thus dictates that "advertisers adjust to a new medium that is not bound by either space or time and that has the capability to involve and engage the consumer" (McMillan, Hwang, and Lee, 2003, p.400). In other words, there is no denying that UGC as one of the main applications on the Internet represents various opportunities and challenges to marketers since the advent of the Internet itself. One of the main benefits in the eyes of clients and agencies using UGC is its ability to form a two-way conversation with the consumer while giving them some ownership of the brand. From a traditional point of view, advertising can be defined as buying time or a space on a particular media in controlled context (Belch and Belch 2007). This format gives to advertisers the opportunity of knowing when and where the ad will be appeared, how it will be published or broadcasted, and perhaps most important, in what context it would be seen. With UGC revolution no one can guarantee to get answers to those conditions. Today it can be easily observed that the creation of ads is no longer the privilege of marketers and their advertising agencies (Nowak , Szamrej, and Latané, 1990).

Although UGC brings lots of opportunities, for example instead of broadcasting one-way messages at their audiences, advertisers are compelled to engage in a conversation; lack of control can be a source of great anxiety for marketers.

While all advertising on the Web is interactive by nature, but UGC sites offer a unique and more complex level of engagement. Instead of inviting individual consumers into an environment of their own making, marketers advertising on UGC sites are entering a conversation initiated, maintained, and 'owned' by consumers themselves. This requires those marketers to behave differently, or risk what can be very vocal disapproval from those consumers (IAB, 2008, p.6). As noted in IAB report, many advertisers and publishers are still experimenting with ways to reach consumers on UGC sites. On the other hand, many techniques have become common practice. There are two ways for brands to leverage the UGC/Social Networking platform: by placing commercial messaging in and around the content or by becoming a part of the content itself.

Following are a few prevailing methods for advertising on UGC sites (IAB, 2008, p.8-9): 'Overlay' video ads, conversation targeting, custom communities, dedicated channels, brand profile page, branding wrappers, widgets. These UGC advertising applications are the ones that are created by the company itself. In addition to these forms, consumer can be invited or encouraged directly to generate an ad on behalf of a certain brand. In some cases

even brand's owner –company-is unaware of by whom the ads created. In other words, the commercial has a new format as being the product of one of the advertising industry's latest trends: *user-generated advertising-UGA* that also refers to *consumer generated ads-CGA*.

Web 2.0 is Redefining the Advertising Process

Recent developments in the Internet environment and regarding emergence of consumer generated advertising predicts revolutionary changes in the definition of advertising and the way it is practiced (Muñiz and Schau 2007). In a conventional manner, advertising is seen as messages that organizations use, particularly in broadcast or print media, in order to inform, persuade or remind current and potential customers of their offerings or of the organization itself (Moriarty, Mitchell, and Wells, 2012; Lane King, Reichert, 2011; Belch and Belch, 2007). In the new digital era, consumers are now generating, rather than merely consuming advertising, which means that the creation of ads is no longer the prerogative of marketers and their advertising agencies (Berthon, Pitt, and Campbell, 2008).

User-generated advertising (UGA) refers to advertising that extensively uses consumer-generated media such as blogging, podcasting, video, and wikis (Çelen, Kariv, and Schotter, 2010) and defined to "include any 'user-generated brand-related content', in the form of online brand testimonials, product reviews and user-generated commercials" (Steyn, Wallström and Pitt, 2010, p.51). UGA, a typical extension of UGC, can be also defined in accordance with traditional advertising as specific instances where consumers create brand-focused messages with the intention of informing, persuading, or reminding others (Berthon, Pitt and Campbell, 2008).

As Çelen, Kariv, and Schotter (2010) stated in the light of many different UGA definitions, it is possible to generalize that user generated advertising is analogous to transmitting information in the form of advice, which is crucial for the functioning of UGA as it offers an important channel in which marketers and consumers interact in value co-creation processes.

Due to the fact that consumers are less likely to trust company provided and controlled form of communication (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003), consumer-generated messages play a more powerful and credible role in consumers' choices than marketer-generated messages on the Internet (Bickart and Schindler, 2001). Thus, it can be concluded that today's savvy consumers are willing to trust their friends or the ones like themselves rather than an advertisement provided by companies. Regarding this characteristic, UGA can be accepted as

online form of word-of mouth (Blackshaw and Nazzaro, 2004), spreading rapidly throughout the entire population (Çelen, Kariv, and Schotter 2010) with one click.

There are many reasons for companies in order to integrate user generated content into their marketing communications strategy: First, when compared with any production executed by professional agencies the cost of UGA is seen lower since they are produced by amateurs (Klein, 2008). On the other hand, "these unconventional ads stand a good chance of breaking through the clutter of conventional advertising in markets that are increasingly suffering from advertising overload syndrome" (Steyn, Wallström and Pitt, 2010, p.51). In a sense, as they represent feedback of consumer perceptions related with the brands they provide a better understanding of how consumers view their products or companies (Klein, 2008). Additionally, these kind of practices, referring to online word-of-mouth (Blackshaw and Nazzaro, 2004), can increase brand awareness much faster than traditional advertising (Muñiz and Shau, 2007). Furthermore as UGA is peer-created it may have higher credibility and trustworthiness than company provided messages (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003).

User-generated ads become prevalent by nature as a result of social media outlets and the availability of professional-grade tools for non-professional producers. Many of such examples can be found on Internet sites like YouTube and Google Video, which were created by users to satire existing advertisements or to promote a brand they like. UGA started to gain popularity particularly in 2004 when an Apple user created an advertisement that many believe was better than Apple's many other official commercials (Brusa, 2007). Following this, numerous companies began intentionally thinking UGC, due in large part to the explosion of consumer-generated videos and sites such as YouTube.

UGA can take various forms, depending on whether or not a company has involved in the process. According to Bishop (2007) companies differ by the degree to which they sponsor, support, or encourage user generated advertisements. Bishop cited three examples of the varying levels of company direction over customer-generated advertisements are *contest, sponsored* and *nonsponsored* applications. Whether it is in the form of solicited or unsolicited UGA, revolutionary development, which is still happening, in the advertising field is eroding the distinction between producer and consumer, and challenging the traditional form of advertising characterized as non-personal, controlled, and paid for communication (Berthon, Pitt, Campell 2008).

As Mike May mentioned, an interactive media analyst and consultant with The Acorn Group, there are three criteria for determining if a product or brand can successfully support a

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consumer-generated campaign, including having consumers who (1) feel passion for a brand and want a relationship with it, (2) are inclined to be creative and (3) have enough spare time and the technological means to participate (Moskowitz, 2006).

Bishop (2007) stated contests as the most popular methods of encouraging customer-generated advertisements. Not only these contests receive numbers of UGC submissions but the contests also were well-recognized and appreciated among the public audience. A typical and one of the well-known examples of holding a contest can be given as Doritos applications (Thackeray et al., 2008).

In 2007, during the Super Bowl, the National Football League (NFL) of US, Doritos started the "Crash the Superbowl" project, inviting people to submit 30-second spots to its website and giving them the opportunity to win a $10.000 cash prize. After selecting the top five participants the company allowed the public to vote to determine the winner. Over 1.000 entries were achieved for viewing and the users were given the opportunity to leave comments on a blog. The cost of the project was only $10.000 covering almost eight-hour content and the production of its website (http://promotions.yahoo.com/doritos/). Most probably, the company was so happy with the result that in 2009 they raised the bar and offered $25.000 for the top 6 participants where the winner would win $1.000.000, the second $600.000, and the third $400.000 according to users vote results. (http://www.crashthesuperbowl.com/official_rules.html).

Figure 1: Doritos' Crash the Superbowl ad campaign web site

Source: http://www.crashthesuperbowl.com/

Today, UGC enables advertisers and marketing professionals to discover and experience the creative and attractive power of consumers. The content created by consumers serves many purposes. Moskowitz (2006) stated that "by using UGA to harness the love of a target

audience for a specific brand or product, an advertiser can position itself on the receiving of vast amounts of grass roots creativity, industry buzz, media attention and consumer interest. UGA, the idea and the executions have been spreading like a virus, to the point where millions of consumers have generated or voted on hundreds of hours of product-centric material, most of it unlike anything you could extract from your favourite agency."

In order to take the advantage of UGA, which is diffusing in the social media, companies should react more rapidly. Although UGA is incredibly increasing its usage, many advertisers and their clients are still reluctant to participate in this environment due to lack of control of whole concept (Clark, 2007).

In the early applications of consumer-generated ads the contents were just like a user's own parody or spoof of a product or company. Bob Liodice, president of the Association of National Advertisers indicated, "While customer input harkens to the early days of jingle-writing contests, today's level of interaction is unprecedented… Computer-savvy consumers, many already crafting personalized Webpages, blogs and streaming videos, have the ability to make near professional-level commercials." (Tanaka, 2007).

Today brands of all sizes are eager to experience UGA and numbers of marketers are inviting users to produce, alter, and generate such productions for their brands are increasing day by day. This type of engagement moves beyond merely allowing a user to view an ad with interactive features and it's far removed from presenting users with just static images of an item on a brand's website. Many brands like, Chevrolet, Converse, Doritos, Frito-Lay, Dove, KFC, Heinz, and MasterCard, have all invited consumers create ads for their brands and initiated consumer-generated ad campaigns (Petrecca, 2007).

Here are some examples of well-known UGA applications: Heinz invited consumers to produce homemade commercials about its ketchup products, and then upload them onto YouTube as part of its Top This TV Challenge. The winning video was aired on the September 2007 Emmy Awards show, and the amateur producer won a $57,000 prize. Over 8,000 videos were submitted (Story, 2006).

Figure 2: Heinz's "Top This TV" UGA contest website

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Converse has also successfully experienced with user-generated advertising. In the summer of 2004 Converse developed a campaign that allowed customers to send in homemade commercials to conversegallery.com. They intended to give customers the opportunity to express their feelings about Converse brand. 25-second films were gathered on "Converse Gallery". The campaign was so successful that it attracted about 1.500 submissions, several that Converse ran on television, and it generated buzz on the Web. The films that were ran on the web site increase the traffic on Converse Gallery around %66 while it was visited by almost 1.000.000 users. The online sales were doubled in a month (http://www.mynet.com/reklam/casestudy/cs18.asp).

Figure 3: Converse Gallery

Source: Hhttp://www.imediaconnection.com/content/9268.imc

Some Turkish brands such as Pınar, Turkcell, and Şölen have also initiated successful consumer-generated ad campaigns and built emotional bonds with consumers.

Figure 4: Pınar UGA campaign web site

Source: http://www.pinarcocuk.com.tr

UGA campaigns provide numbers of opportunities to companies as being able to save ad production costs, to generate buzz online and even offline, gain millions of page views during the public vote process, and to have the videos found their way to many other popular video Websites. However, not for all companies such campaigns resulted with success. As Campbell, Pitt, Parent, and Berthon (2011) mentioned, "UGA can be critical of, or complimentary to, a brand, so advertisers and brand managers have to think seriously about what they should do when their brands are targeted" (p.89). Consequently, working with user-generated content requires restraint on the part of companies that are accustomed to controlling their marketing messages. Due to the lack of control on UGA some brands faced with unexpected situations that had to be handled. One of the most famous failure cases was experienced by Chevy. Once, Chevrolet introduced a website and installed a feature on its, allowing visitors to piece together images and text to create a 30-second commercial for its Chevy Tahoe sport utility vehicle. The aim was to encourage visitors to share their creation and consequently to increase interest for the new car. But instead, the feature was quickly seized upon by anti-S.U.V. activists, who made videos condemning the vehicle, its low gas mileage and its impact on the environment (Bosman, 2006).

Figure 5: Example of an anti-S.U.V. activist content against Chevy Tahoe
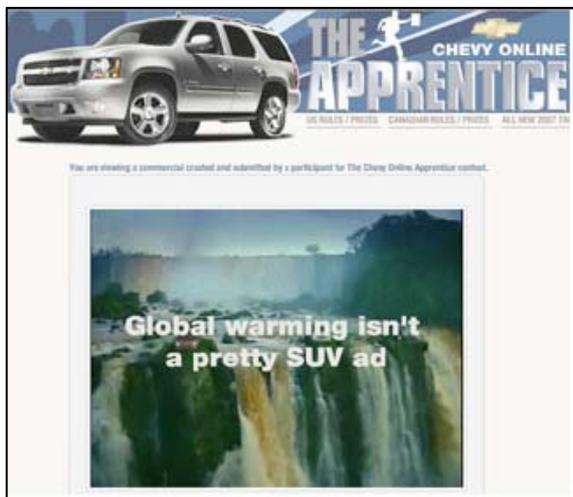
Just like in Chevy example, where anti-branding images were used, the Internet attracts activists due to its capabilities for simultaneous interaction and easy broadcast to a large consumer audience (Krishnamurthy and Kucuk, 2009). Similarly, in 2003, Puma received some unwanted attention, when one of their products was used in a sexually suggestive advertisement which became a very popular email that eventually went global. The origins of this advertisement and the adverts intent was not clear. Puma took legal action and served a

cease and desist order for the removal of this from the offending sites that carried this advert (Walker, 2003). Thus, it can be said that placed in unsympathetic hands, user-generated content can backfire, however.

Although many companies are eager to execute an UGA campaign still many of them have some concerns such as the level of trust the advertiser puts in this brand new advertising medium, the level of risk tolerance the advertiser has in displaying ads next to potentially unsavoury content and receiving candid advertising entries from UGC users, and the advertiser's experience with this new medium (Holahan, 2007). On the other hand some also question poor quality of commercials and the link to the messages and imagery (Ertimur, 2009).

Discussion and Conclusion

The recent technological developments make the Internet a quite sophisticated communication platform for marketers to manage and maintain their brand strategies. Companies should keep pace with this ongoing process in order to be engaged with their customers. There are many reasons for integrating user generated content into marketing communications strategy; however, not every type of UGC is appropriate for every type of business. Before diving into this new environment companies should ensure the product category or the service is appropriate for such sites, consider how to manage negative feedback, how to participate, and how to evaluate results and measure success. In other words, to avoid disappointment, rather than blindly developing a strategy, companies should set clear objectives and try to find ways to achieve these. The effect of UGA, if any, on their target audiences should also be considered in order to understand how to respond to this phenomenon (Steyn, Wallström and Pitt, 2010).

As discussed in the article, companies solicit consumers to generate advertising, enabling consumer-creators to create advertisement on behalf of advertisers, in order to benefit from its attractiveness on other consumers. In such situations, companies can still involve in the communication process. On the other hand, in some cases where consumers are no longer 'co-creating', but solely creating brand communications (Muñiz and Schau, 2007) companies are no longer in exclusive control of the message (Berthon, Pitt, and Campbell, 2008). Although it is not possible for marketers to control or manage the effects of source in such unsolicited UGA implementation it is crucial for companies following the conversation about the brand that takes place among consumers (Muñiz and Schau, 2007), because of the risk that may damage the brand equity and image.

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Mangold and Faulds (2009, p.358) argue that Internet-based messages have become essential in influencing various aspects of consumer behavior, such as awareness, information acquisition, opinions, attitudes, purchase behavior, and post-purchase communication and evaluation. So the rising empowerment of consumer on the Internet should not be underestimated since they bring some risks as well. Anti-branding attempt in the Internet environment, which can refer to online activism, is a typical threat that companies may experience at any moment. Online activism, sample form of which is given in Chevy example, may vary from cyber attacks to website defacement or from virtual sit-ins to massive e-mail campaigns including different proactive and aggressive online methods (Garrett, 1987; Vegh, 2003). These attacks should be accepted as potential risks, which create challenges for brand image and its equity.

It is clear that the ease-of-use technology obtained from recent development extends UGA implementations and allows anyone the ability to contribute them. Inexpensive software and powerful personal computers enable consumers to create their own ads for the brands they admire or even dislike, and then to distribute these via social networks (Steyn, Wallström, and Pitt, 2010). Nevertheless, this ability to spread up different brand related messages by different people may threaten companies if they are not consistent with the ones the company provided by expressing and delivering the brand promise consistently across all touch points and over time in order to create brand strength (Yohn, 2006).

Even cost efficiency of UGA is interrogated. In some cases encouraging UGA is accepted as a costly process since companies need to promote it and invite consumer to take part, evaluate all participant videos and select the winners. Doritos sample illustrated the mentioned concern clearly: "While the winners of the Doritos contest may have spent only $12, Doritos spent about $1.3 million on advertising in October, according to estimates from Nielsen Monitor-Plus. And that was when it was promoting the contest, which invited people to create a 30-second commercial that would run during the Super Bowl. Doritos received 1.020 videos and awarded prizes of $10,000 to five finalists. And then Doritos, a unit of the Frito-Lay division of PepsiCo, spent more than $8 million on advertising in February when it showed the top five commercials, more than any month in the last two years, according to Nielsen Monitor-Plus" (Story, 2007).

Some also question whether a two-way dialogue can ever be achieved while giving a cash prize to entrants. By deciding to hand out a big prize made a statement of intent about its desire to top the poll, but left some people questioning the consumer value in the work. Ewan

Paterson, the executive creative director at CHI & Partners, says: "If you have to pay so much for something, then it's not quite a two-way relationship -consumers aren't doing it because they like the brand, but because they are trying to win money. It only really works if there is a real benefit to the consumer" (Bussey, 2009).

UGC, in which the consumer is the creator, consumer and distributor of content, provides additional brand-building opportunities far beyond the ones that traditional advertising does. It is clear that advertising that is created by an actual user, who is passionate about a product would probably bring enthusiasm about that brand. On the other hand, these advertisements not only serve the purpose of generating interest as they are ran but also continue to create buzz afterwards. Therefore, taking advantage of those opportunities requires strategic thinking. Advertisers still hesitate to embrace this dynamic, lucrative new environment because of a lack of clarity over this new media, mainly due to a misunderstanding of its characteristics and function, which may cause advertisers to act with excessive caution.

In the light of discussed debate, it can be said that the Internet is rapidly diffusing, and technological evolution is still continuing at an incredible rate. With regarding to these developments user generated advertising will keep forming its content. As Sabin and Daniels (2001), indicated: "...listening to what consumers say does not create legitimacy. Meaningful consumer participation requires more than the kinds of appeals processes that form the centerpiece of legislative and regulatory reform" (p.462). Today, emerging UGA is a market reality where all form of consumer participation are at the top level, providing them ascendancy of empowerment. As stated previously, user-generated advertising will continue to influence consumer buying decisions as more people prefer it for information rather than company-generated sources. On the other side, there is a challenge for companies about harnessing this creative resource and leveraging it to enhance brand image and product loyalty. Therefore, taking advantage of UGA requires strategic thinking, which includes planning, implementation, measurement, and evaluation stages. It seems the discussion about the consequences and the effects of UGC sites and UGA applications will be an ongoing process, both for practitioners and researchers.

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