HOW USER AND MARKETER GENERATED CONTENT ON FACEBOOK INFLUENCE BRAND PERCEPTION

Research into the influence of persuasion knowledge in contemporary media landscape

Fitria Jelyta
ANR: 189326

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Communication and Information Sciences
Specialization Communication Design

Faculty of Humanities
Tilburg University, Tilburg

Supervisor: Dr. M.L. Antheunis
Second Reader: Dr. A. Alishahi

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FOREWORD

الحمد لله رب العالمين

In the process of writing my Master’s Thesis, there were plenty of times that I imagined the end of it all. In fact, the thought of ending my Master’s Thesis and finally handing in the darn thing obsessively motivated me on most days. I imagined writing my foreword and thanks as though I was receiving an Oscar for Best Leading Actress, laughing and smiling on my big day. Now that I have finally come to the part where I get to write my words of gratitude at the end of my journey, I am at a loss of how to start and how to sum it all up, for words are limited to describe my experience of growth, understanding and most of all gratitude for all that I have been given.

As a tiny speck of dust in an immense reality that is our planet earth, I am but a humble servant of (Allah Azza wa jal, Glorified and Exalted is He). I present my ultimate gratitude and praise to the Lord of the Worlds. I do not have anything to be proud of for all that I have is provided by Allah and Allah alone. I will forever be grateful for this opportunity to increase my knowledge and capabilities, which I have never been able to take if it was not for the love and support from those that have been sent to me by Allah. I would like to thank my husband who has never been anything but kind, loving, supportive and patient to listen and comfort me in all my struggles during the process of concluding my studies. I would like to thank my mother, my role model, the woman I can only hope to become, who has taught me everything I need to know to survive this life and become successful in the next. I would like to thank my father for his immeasurable moral (and financial) support and understanding for everything that I choose to be. Naturally, I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Marjolijn Antheunis, who has motivated and inspired me from the beginning till the very end of this process.

I look back to my journey towards becoming a Master of Science in Communication Design as a long, but fruitful journey. At times, it frustrated me. It challenged me and lifted me up, but most of all, it humbled me. It’s funny how it does not feel like the end of a journey, but more like a closing of a chapter, for my thirst for knowledge has only grown after my experience at the Tilburg University. I can only pray that my degree in the field that I chose to master, will not only be valuable for my future career perspectives, but mostly valuable for others as I contribute to society.
ABSTRACT

The Persuasion Knowledge Model describes how receivers of persuasive messages activate a cognitive knowledge structure that helps them cope with persuasive intentions usually found in brand messages or promotions. The current study investigated the activation of persuasion knowledge by explicitly making message receivers aware of a brand’s persuasive intent on a social network site such as Facebook. Moreover, the effects of Marketer Generated Content (MGC) and User Generated Content (UGC) on perceived information quality and brand perception were explored. The main question of the current study was therefore “To what extent does the activation of persuasion knowledge through MGC and UGC on social media influence brand perception?”

Persuasion knowledge activation was assumed to negatively affect brand perception through the evaluation of UGC and MGC excerpts of a Facebook brand page. Furthermore, UGC and MGC excerpts were tested for their information quality based on the informational determinants of recommendation framing or the extent to which respondents perceive the message to be negatively or positively framed, and recommendation sidedness, which is the extent to which respondents perceive the message to contain both negative and positive framing. UGC was predicted to score higher on information quality compared to MGC due to its consumer-oriented messages. A 2x2 experimental survey was conducted. Ten UGC and ten MGC excerpts were randomly selected from a Facebook brand page of an unfamiliar brand named BOOTS UK, a pharmacy-led health and beauty retailer based in England. Respondents were to evaluate either MGC or UGC excerpts according to recommendation framing and recommendation sidedness items. Following the evaluation of UGC and MGC excerpts, respondents had evaluated BOOTS UK based on their first impressions of the brand.

Results showed that brand perception did not score lower when persuasion knowledge was activated, but brand perception did score higher in UGC compared to MGC. UGC had also led to a higher score of information quality compared to MGC. The activation of persuasion knowledge might therefore be dependent on the type of medium used, but UGC was proven to be a better determinant of likeable brands compared to MGC. Marketing practitioners could therefore benefit more from UGC than MGC on a Facebook brand page to create measurable brand value and for brand users and potential brand users to associate the brand with positive consumer experiences.
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1. INTRODUCTION
Imagine yourself scrolling through a specific brand page that you have liked on Facebook. What captures your attention? A nice picture and a catchy line about all the cool things that the brand is doing or the comments that other social media users are posting on the left side of the brand page? Admittedly, when you visit a random brand page on Facebook, you will notice that the majority of space is given to the marketers to promote their brands with nice pictures and catchy lines, but what if your attention is caught right at the smallest section of the brand page where people such as yourself are allowed to post whatever they want? This section of the Facebook brand page is known as “posts to page” and is governed by User Generated Content (UGC).

According to previous marketing research (Goh, Heng & Lin, 2012), UGC has a more positive impact on purchase intention when posted on a brand page compared to Marketing Generated Content (MGC). UGC is thought to provide more relevant information that leads followers of a Facebook brand page to product preferences through associations with similar people. Due to the inclusion of user experiences on UGC, it is also thought to be more consumer-oriented than MGC and contain more information richness than MGC (Goh et al., 2012). The lack of positive valence for MGC can be explained by the persuasion intent that is more readily perceived on MGC than UGC. With past marketing messages in mind, the valence of MGC is regarded more negative to consumers than UGC, because the brand’s intention to persuade is recognized on MGC as opposed to genuine experience (Goh et al., 2012).

The notion of UGC and MGC sheds light on persuasion knowledge and how it affects brand perception when consumers are exposed to persuasion attempts through social media. According to the Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM) by Friestad and Wright (1994), persuasion knowledge refers to the general knowledge about persuasion attempts. Persuasion knowledge is a knowledge structure that a target or message receiver is most likely to make use of when coping with persuasive messages sent by an influence agent or marketing practitioner (Friestad & Wright, 1999). For example, when message receivers view a marketing campaign, they will most likely recognize the intention of the message sender to persuade them into purchasing products or other types of actions depending on the topic of the marketing campaign (Friestad & Wright, 1999). When the message sender’s intention to persuade is recognized by the message receivers, persuasion knowledge will be activated and message receivers will most likely become skeptical towards the message content (Friestad & Wright, 1994). The PKM illustrates persuasion
knowledge as a part of two other knowledge structures namely, agent knowledge and topic knowledge (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Agent knowledge refers to the target’s knowledge about the sender of the message, while topic knowledge refers to the target’s knowledge of the topic being addressed in the message. The activation of persuasion knowledge might affect the message sender to evaluate both the topic and the sender of the message negatively as persuasion intent is recognized instead of genuine intentions to for example, inform the audience of a certain subject matter (Friestad & Wright, 1999).

Previous studies have shown that the message receivers’ awareness of persuasion intent in marketing messages negatively affects overall brand evaluation (Campbell & Kirmani, 2000; Wei, Fischer & Main, 2008). When consumers are explicitly made aware of a brand’s intentions to promote or increase purchases, they will become more skeptical towards the message and its authenticity (Wei et al., 2008), because consumers are then more likely to apply their persuasion knowledge structure to process information of persuasive marketing messages (Friestad & Wright, 1994). The question is whether the negative effect of persuasion knowledge activation applies on social media, especially on brand pages, because followers of a brand page ‘like’ a brand on Facebook to actively find more information about the brand (Lake, 2011). In other words, a Facebook brand page does not intrude message receivers with branded content the way commercials on traditional media do and followers of a brand page can interact with the brand within a brand community provided by social network sites as active followers instead of passive message receivers (Adjei, Noble & Noble, 2010; Lake, 2011). Moreover, how does the evaluation of MGC and UGC on a social media brand page influence brand perception?

In a previous study, brand perception has mainly been investigated through the types of emotions and behaviors that it elicits as experienced by the consumers or message receivers (Kervyn, Fiske & Malone, 2012). It has been argued that the higher the degree of positive emotions felt as caused by the brand, the more likely the consumer will become a brand loyal and the more likely the consumer will purchase the brands’ products (Kervyn et al., 2012; Berger, Draganska & Simonson, 2007). The question then arises whether positive emotions and behaviors will be elicited in brand perceptions when persuasion knowledge is activated. As mentioned before, when consumers are explicitly made aware of persuasion intent, they will most likely activate their persuasion knowledge structure to process the persuasive message (Friestad & Wright, 1994), which will lead to negative brand perceptions (Wei et al., 2008). However, these effects have not
yet been studied on social media, where users are able to choose for themselves which brands to follow and receive information from. It becomes interesting to see whether the negative effects of persuasion knowledge activation on brand perception will equally occur when the brand messages are processed on social media sites, such as Facebook.

When consumers like a brand page on Facebook, they are actively seeking information about a brand and are therefore not persuaded, but convinced about the value that a brand community might generate through for example, opportunities of eWOM (Goh et al., 2012; Stephen & Galak, 2012). With the possibility of acquiring UGC on social media, consumers mainly seek to reduce their uncertainty prior to the purchase of products (Adjei et al., 2010). The positive effects of UGC on brand perception can therefore be studied through its similarities with eWOM, wherein social media users attempt to recommend or warn each other about brands based on their personal experiences with the brands (Cheung, Luo, Sia & Chen, 2009). The user recommendations provided via eWOM platforms have been proven to assist in uncertainty reduction prior to purchase decisions (Adjei, et al., 2010; Cheung et al., 2009). In order to discover whether the same functionality occurs in a social medium, the current study will investigate consumers’ attitude towards the message medium and its effects on brand perception.

According to a study about the adoption of eWOM recommendations, perceived information quality plays an important part as to discover why consumers are willing to accept the advice given to them by complete strangers to either purchase or not to purchase a product (Cheung et al., 2009; Constant, Sproull & Kiesler, 1996). The current study aims to discover whether perceived information quality might explain the preference of UGC over MGC on a Facebook brand page. Moreover, this investigation will seek to explain whether a high score on perceived information quality will result into a more positive brand perception through the evaluation of UGC excerpts on a Facebook brand page. The current research paper will therefore be aimed at exploring how UGC and MGC of a Facebook brand page influence brand perception, particularly when persuasion knowledge is activated. The main question that will be addressed in the current research paper is formulated as the following, “To what extent does the activation of persuasion knowledge through MGC and UGC on social media influence brand perception?” The answer to this question will expectantly provide meaningful insights about how brands can implement MGC and channel their UGC towards positive brand perceptions.
2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Practitioners of marketing communication that employ social media for promotion purposes are considered infatuated with the number of likes and followers that a Facebook brand page might generate, while it may not even lead to meaningful outcomes or significant values for the brand itself (Lake, 2011; Naylor, Lamberton & West, 2012). There are three main objectives of the marketing strategists’ P for promotion, namely (1) to generate and increase awareness about a brand or product, (2) to persuade a target audience to adopt a certain behavior or to act on a certain call of action and finally, (3) to remind the target audience of the products’ or brands’ existence (Kotler & Keller, 2007; Thackeray, Neiger, Hanson & McKenzie, 2008). With the implementation of a brand community on social network sites (SNS) such as Facebook, marketers are enabled to cost-effectively aim for the three main objectives of promotion (Thackeray et al., 2008). However, it becomes evident to keep in mind that achieving promotion objectives via social media requires marketing practitioners to engage their online fan base in a continuous conversation that will eventually lead them to become potential customers within a process of liking, purchasing and experiencing the brand (Lake, 2011). One way to actively engage a fan base to create measurable brand value is by means of a social media user’s network of connections or through Word-Of-Mouth (Keller, 2009; Stephen & Galak, 2012).

The convenience of social media above traditional media, such as televised advertising and radio, is the total amount of reach and maximum spread of persuasive messages that marketing practitioners are enabled to cost-effectively acquire (Carlson & Zmud, 1999; Lake, 2011). Not only do social media allow users to actively and purposefully share their own content or brand content to members of their social network, it also allow users to see the brand pages that members of their own social network like and follow, thus allowing persuasion to indirectly envelop through social ties (Van Noort, Antheunis & Van Reijmersdal, 2012). In their study, Van Noort et al. (2012) argue that social ties can increase the likelihood for a social media campaign to be shared among members of a social network when the social media campaign is shared by a known member of someone’s social network instead of shared by the company or brand that created the campaign. When a company or brand directly shares social media campaigns or persuasive messages to their online fan base, it can easily be perceived as disruptive or irrelevant (Albuquerque, Pavlidis, Chatow, Chen, Jamal & Koh, 2012), while social ties can attenuate the effects of misperception.
about a brand being intrusive instead of informative.

A brand on social media might be perceived as intrusive or irrelevant due to the types of content that can be found on the brand page and the quality of information that is shared on the brand page (Adjei et al., 2010; De Vries, Gensler & Leeflang, 2012). Followers of a brand on SNS such as Facebook can no longer be interested in information that they can easily retrieve on traditional media, as they mainly seek to reduce their uncertainties about using a certain brand or product through exclusive information that they expect to find in online brand communities (Ajdei et al., 2010). The opportunity to reduce uncertainty prior to purchase decisions through consumer-to-consumer interactions in online brand communities is an essential component of social media that builds on perceived information quality and brand content (Adjei et al., 2010). Moreover, social media allows for global reach and supports the ability to communicate with different stimuli such as audio/visual presentations, synchronous communication and viral messages as provided by communication technology (Asur, Huberman, Szabo & Wang, 2011; Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Therefore, organizations that want to successfully incorporate social media to the promotion mix need to realize that they no longer can influence their target audience in a one-way communication direction.

For marketing practitioners to be able to effectively engage their online fan base in a continuous conversation and therefore, create measurable brand value, it becomes essential to examine possible factors that influence the way in which frequent users of social media perceive a brand that is endorsed through an online brand community (Adjei et al., 2010; Lin & Lee, 2006; Low & Lamb Jr, 2000; Murdough, 2009; Schau, Muñiz Jr & Arnould, 2009). The following section will examine a factor that possibly influences brand perception through (social media) marketing initiatives, namely, persuasion knowledge.

2.1. *Persuasion Knowledge*

According to a study by Friestad and Wright (1994), people who frequently receive marketing messages make use of a persuasion knowledge structure to process the message that is exposed to them by persuasive agents. In their Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM), a distinction has been made between the receiver of the message, here referred to as the target, and the sender of the message, also known as the agent. This of course is not a novel feature of persuasion theories, yet in their model, Friestad and Wright (1994) extends the role of the target audience in processing persuasive attempts by means of knowledge structures. These different types of knowledge
structures are labelled as topic knowledge, agent or target knowledge and persuasion knowledge. Topic knowledge focuses on the knowledge that the target has of the topic being addressed in the persuasive attempt. In this case, the persuasive attempt could be seen as anything that is part of a marketing strategy ranging from television commercials to social media campaigns. Agent knowledge refers to what traits the target attributes to the sender of the message and what is retained in the target’s mind of previous information about the agent. Finally, persuasion knowledge specifies the continuum of knowledge that the target has of general persuasive tactics (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Friestad & Wright, 1995). Persuasion knowledge enables the target to see through tactics that agents make use of in their attempt to persuade the target. The target basically learns from experiences with several persuasive attempts that cause the persuasion knowledge structure to be adjusted with new entries about how agents generally attempt to influence the target’s behaviour (Friestad & Wright, 1994).

The knowledge structures of the target are mirrored in the agent’s perspective of developing a persuasive attempt for the target. Friestad and Wright (1994) argue that the roles of target and agent swiftly frequently and rapidly in everyday life as caused by communication goals (sending a persuasive attempt or coping with a persuasive attempt). In other words, the roles of the target and agent are not definite, because different communication goals and contexts require different kinds of knowledge structures and communication strategies to be used. Furthermore, the PKM consists of persuasion episode and persuasion coping behaviours. According to Friestad and Wright (1994), persuasion episode refers to the agent’s persuasive intent that can readily be observed by the target, and persuasion coping behaviour elaborates on the physical and cognitive actions that the target contemplates on as a response to the persuasive attempt. Persuasion coping behaviour does not merely describe acceptance or rejection towards a persuasive attempt, but also a deep hunch of what the agent might do in a following persuasive attempt and how the target should best react to that (Russo & Chaxel, 2010). In a sense, the Persuasion Knowledge Model then acknowledges the intricate cognitive efforts and strategic awareness that are present during interactions where persuasion is involved. Compared to basic persuasion theories that do not include the target audience’s perspective, the PKM is therefore more suited to studies where the communication media enable their users to contemplate on their responses to persuasive attempts and actually provide their direct responses to the agent (Campbell & Kirmani, 2000), such as social media.
2.2. Perceived Persuasion intent in User Generated Content versus Marketer Generated Content

In a study about the measurable impacts of an online brand community on consumer behaviour, the importance to distinguish between UGC and MGC as two distinct types of online content on social media have been emphasized upon (Goh et al., 2012). Both types of online content namely serve different purposes. Consumers seek to reduce uncertainty prior to purchase decisions by means of consumer-to-consumer interactions and online UGC on social media, therefore UGC mostly contains consumers’ personal experiences with a certain brand or product (Adjei et al., 2010; Goh et al., 2012). Online UGC can be found in the forms of online product reviews (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre, 2011), comments of fans that like or follow a brand page on SNS such as Facebook (Goh et al., 2012) and personal blogs (Thackeray et al., 2008), while online MGC can be found in the forms of company owned websites (Adjei et al., 2010) or corporate blogs (Albuquerque et al., 2012) and status updates on social network sites (Goh et al., 2012). Even though UGC is found to be more effective in uncertainty reduction prior to purchase decisions and considered to have a greater credibility of information than MGC (Adjei et al., 2010; Martin & Clark, 1996; Xue & Phelps, 2004; Agichtein, Castillo, Donato, Gionis & Mishne, 2008), MGC remains favourable to a brand’s existing consumers who are already fans of the brand and actively seek to be further informed about a brand’s offers (Lake, 2011; Malmivaara, 2011).

The social media platform that has been chosen to be the setting of the current study about the effects of persuasion knowledge activation on brand perception through the evaluation of online UGC and MGC is Facebook. With a growing number of 15 million brands that manage a Facebook page to reach their target audiences (Koetsier, 2013), Facebook remains the widely used social media platform for marketing purposes. In the current study, both the UGC and MGC that is found on a specific Facebook brand page will be the subject of investigation. UGC will be operationalized as comments of fans that like a particular brand page on Facebook, while MGC will be operationalized as brand posts that marketers place on their company owned Facebook brand page to inform their fan base of developments and offers concerning the brand.

It has been previously assumed that the activation of the persuasion knowledge structure in processing persuasive messages starts with the recognition of persuasive intent within the message (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Kirmani & Zhu, 2007; Van Reijmersdal, Neijens & Smit, 2010; Wei et al., 2008). In a previous study about commercialized magazines, perceived persuasion intent has been measured through readers’ perceptions of commerciality (Van Reijmersdal et al.,
Perceived persuasion intent has been measured according to survey items asking the readers whether they think the magazine content was created to persuade and whether they think the magazines were created to sell products. Readers of a commercialized magazine tend to score high on perceived persuasion intent, meaning that the readers are aware of the magazine’s persuasion intent and that persuasion knowledge has been activated to process the magazine content (Van Reijmersdal et al., 2010). The effect of perceived persuasion intent has only been found for the magazine content and not for the source of the message, meaning that readers evaluate persuasion intent through content rather than message source (Van Reijmersdal et al., 2010). For this reason, the current study will measure perceived persuasion intent to see if the persuasion knowledge structure is indeed activated when one processes persuasive message content in the form of UGC and MGC. The current study will make use of the same items as the ones used in the study by Van Reijmersdal et al. (2010) to measure perceived persuasion intent according to evaluations of UGC and MGC excerpts of a Facebook brand page. Therefore, the following hypotheses based on perceived persuasion intent can be formulated.

**H1a:** The activation of persuasion knowledge will elicit a greater perceived persuasion intent compared to non-activation of persuasion knowledge.

**H1b:** MGC will elicit a greater perceived persuasion intent than UGC.

### 2.3. Brand ability and intention

Previous studies have argued that people perceive brands the same way they perceive their social contacts (Fournier, 2008; Albert & Vallette-Florence 2010). This line of thinking is based on the Stereotype Content model for social perception (Cuddy, Fiske & Glick, 2008). In this model, social perception is argued to consist of two dimensions in which people perceive and judge others based on their impressions. The dimensions of social perception as determined by the Stereotype Content model are warmth and competence (Cuddy et al., 2008; Kervyn et al., 2012). Warmth refers to perceived intentions and traits such as friendliness, helpfulness and sincerity, whereas competence refer to the perceived ability of others to act upon their intentions, such as intelligence, skills and consciousness (Kervyn et al., 2012).

In their study, Kervyn et al. (2012) have aimed to adjust the Stereotype Content model to measure the emotional and behavioral aspects of brand perceptions. Through their adaptation of the Stereotype Content model to measure brand perceptions, Kervyn et al. (2012) have developed
the Brands as Intentional Agents Framework (BIAF), wherein brand perceptions are measured according to perceived brand intention, which is a replacement for warmth in the Stereotype Content model and perceived brand ability to perform those intentions, which is a replacement for competence. Furthermore, the BIAF consists of four quadrants, namely (1) the brand is perceived to have ill-intentions, but able to perform them, (2) the brand is perceived to have good intentions, but unable to perform them, (3) the brand is perceived to have ill-intentions and unable to perform them and finally, (4) the brand is perceived to have good intentions and able to perform them (Kervyn et al., 2012). The measurement of brand perception through emotional and behavioral aspects have resulted brands to be assigned to emotions such as admiration, envy, pity and contempt (Kervyn et al., 2012). Brands that are perceived to have good intentions, but unable to perform them have been proved to elicit a higher degree of admiration than brands that are perceived to have ill-intentions, but able to perform them (Kervyn et al., 2012). Moreover, brands that score higher on positive emotions will most likely lead to positive behavior such as brand loyalty and willingness to purchase (Kervyn et al., 2012). With perceived brand intention and ability, the current study aims to measure the beliefs of consumers about a brand that they encounter on Facebook. Based on consumers’ knowledge and familiarity with Facebook brand pages in general and not on actual experiences with the brand, the following hypothesis can therefore be formulated for brand intention and ability.

**H2:** The activation of persuasion knowledge will lead to negative perceptions of brand intention and brand ability.

### 2.4. Brand Perception

In the current study, brand perception will mainly be focused on the emotional experiences of a brand based on impressions that one might generate through the evaluation of UGC and MGC on a Facebook brand page. According to a study by Naylor et al. (2012), perceptions of an unfamiliar brand on SNS can be influenced by mere virtual presence (MVP). When marketers aim to target a new audience for their brands, they must consider their existing fan base and how they should present their brands on SNS to increase purchase intentions and positive brand perceptions (Madrigal & Boush, 2008; Naylor et al., 2012; Wang, Yu & Wei, 2012). In their study, Naylor et al. (2012) have proven that purchase intentions, brand liking and consumers’ willingness to interact with the brand and their willingness to know more about the brand are determinants for brand
perceptions of unfamiliar brands. Furthermore, marketers are advised to reveal the MVP of their existing fan base to the new targeted audience when the new targeted audience is similar to the existing fan base, because positive brand perceptions may develop due to positive associations of potential new consumers with the existing fan base (Naylor et al., 2012). The current study will however not focus on the relationship between MVP and positive brand perceptions of unfamiliar brands, rather on the relationship between evaluations of UGC and MGC Facebook posts and the development of positive brand perceptions of an unfamiliar brand. Similar to the study by Kervyn et al. (2012), brand perception will be measured according to an emotional aspect, namely liking and similar to the study by Naylor et al. (2012), brand perception will also be measured according to two behavioral aspects, namely willingness to know and willingness to purchase. The current study will make use of an unknown brand, which is why the emotional aspect of brand liking and the behavioral aspects of willingness to know and willingness to purchase will suffice in determining brand perception, because these aspects are based on first impressions and not on past experiences (Naylor et al., 2012). Willingness to interact with the brand has been excluded from the determinants of brand perception in the current study, due to the study design. In the study by Naylor et al. (2012), the study design has allowed participants to view the entire SNS and profiles of users behind the content, which gave them the opportunity to reply to UGC, whereas the current study will make use of UGC and MGC excerpts to solely focus on the content of user-generated and marketer-generated Facebook posts, which is why willingness to interact and MVP are irrelevant at determining brand perception in the current study. The following hypotheses about brand perception in the conditions of persuasion knowledge activation and persuasion knowledge non-activation can therefore be formulated.

H3: The activation of persuasion knowledge will lead to a lower score on brand liking and willingness to purchase.

H4: The activation of persuasion knowledge will lead MGC to score lower on brand perception than UGC.

2.5. Perceived Information Quality: Recommendation Framing and Recommendation Sidedness
Online MGC has been shown in previous studies to produce a negative effect on brand perception, whereas UGC is evaluated more positively due to the focus of the content on user experiences rather than marketer generated information about product benefits (Adjei et al., 2010; Goh et al.,
The users’ favor towards UGC can be explained by the perceived Information Quality (IQ) of the accessible content (Bovee, Srivastava & Mak, 2003; Herrera-Viedma, Pasi, Lopez-Herrera & Porcel, 2006; Zheng, Zhao & Stylianou, 2013). Information quality has been argued to consist of belief-based determinants such as accessibility, interpretability, relevance and integrity of information (Bovee et al., 2003). Nonetheless, perceived information quality is stated to mainly depend on the users’ personal judgments about what they consider to be the requirements of high quality information (Bovee et al., 2003), meaning that users can for example, prefer relevance and integrity of information as the best determinants of information quality.

According to the Dual Process Theory developed by Deutsch and Gerard (1955), personal judgments about information quality are affected by informational as well as normative influences. Informational influences refer to determinants of the credibility of information, whereas normative influences concern the beliefs of other people’s judgments about information credibility. Thus, informational influences address one’s own knowledge, whereas normative influences address one’s beliefs about other people’s knowledge. For this study, informational determinants to information quality will be the focus of attention, because normative determinants to information quality has been mentioned to mainly occur in settings where other members’ information preferences are available (Kaplan & Miller, 1987; Cheung et al., 2009). The setting that has been chosen for the current study will not expose other members’ information preferences, which is why only the informational determinants to information quality based on the Dual Process Theory will be further explored.

In their study, Cheung et al. (2009) mainly sought to investigate the receivers’ perspective of eWOM adoption and the determinants that will arguably convince the receiver of the message to process eWOM content as generated by unknown brand users. Much like eWOM, UGC is generated by many brand and social media users that are mostly unknown to the message receiver (Cheung et al., 2009; Naylor, Lamberton & Norton, 2011; Weiss, Lurie & MacInnis, 2008). The current study makes use of UGC on a Facebook brand page “posts to page” section. The excerpts of UGC found on a Facebook brand page can be classified as a form of eWOM, because similar to eWOM, UGC on social media sites contain comments and recommendations based on user experiences of a brand or product (Cheung et al., 2009; Trusov, Bucklin & Pauwels, 2009). The only difference between eWOM through online product reviews and UGC on Facebook brand
pages is that UGC is directed at the brand, whereas online product reviews are directed at potential or existing consumers. Nevertheless, negative UGC directed at the brand has been found to influence consumers’ perceptions of the brand (Goh & Heng, 2012), which is why it becomes essential to investigate UGC on social media based on its similarities with eWOM recommendations and its effects on perceived information quality.

Five affective determinants of information quality have been described in the study about the adoption of consumer generated product reviews through eWOM platforms (Cheung et al., 2009). The determinants of information quality that have been assumed to affect eWOM adoption are argument strength, recommendation framing, recommendation sidedness, source credibility and confirmation with prior belief (Cheung et al., 2009). Argument strength refers to the extent to which the arguments posted in a persuasive message are considered valid and convincing. Recommendation framing considers the valence of the message, thus the notion of whether the message contains praise or complaint. It has been argued that negative eWOM messages are more effective determinants of consumer behavior due to its inconsistency with MGC (Cheung et al., 2009). In line with the valence of eWOM messages measured through recommendation framing, recommendation sidedness poses the extent to which both positive and negative content are included in the message. According to a comparative study by Kamins and Marks (1988), the inclusion of both negative as well as positive content (two-sided information) in persuasive messages has been found to increase information believability and is therefore experienced as more positive than when the information is either negative or positive (one-sided information). Furthermore, source credibility and confirmation with prior belief refer to the extent to which receivers find the sources of the message credible and the extent to which the message confirms the receivers’ prior-held beliefs (Cheung et al., 2009).

The study by Cheung et al. (2009) has concluded that argument strength, source credibility and confirmation with prior belief significantly affect the adoption of e-WOM recommendations through perceived information quality by evaluating consumer reviews. A possible explanation that has been offered to answer why recommendation framing and recommendation sidedness have not been found as significant informational determinants is the insufficient amount of negatively framed and one-sided consumer reviews that were included in the survey (Cheung et al., 2009). The current study will therefore aim to fill the gap in the knowledge about recommendation framing and recommendation sidedness as determinants of information quality in the evaluation.
of UGC and MGC excerpts of a Facebook brand page. The following hypotheses about perceived information quality and the informational determinants of recommendation framing and recommendation sidedness can therefore be formulated.

\textit{H5:} UGC will be perceived higher in recommendation framing compared to MGC.

\textit{H6:} MGC will be perceived higher in recommendation sidedness compared to UGC.

\textit{H7:} UGC will be perceived higher in information quality compared to MGC.

\textbf{2.6. Consumers’ Attitude}

Consumers who actively seek information on social media brand pages or product reviews have been argued to do so for the purpose of uncertainty reduction prior to a purchase decision (Adjei et al., 2010). The question that is particularly of interest for the current study is whether consumers make use of Facebook brand pages as a functionality to reduce uncertainties prior to a purchase decision. In an attempt to investigate this notion, the current study will aim to measure consumers’ attitude towards the medium of the message, namely Facebook. In a previous study about consumers’ attitude towards advertising, less attention has been given specifically to the medium of the message, but more on the message content or advertisement in general (Tan & Chia, 2007; Ling, Piew & Chai, 2010). Similarities in consumers’ attitude towards advertising media and consumers’ attitude towards social media can be found, as Facebook is known to consist of promotional messages created by brands to connect with their audience (Koetsier, 2013).

In their study, Ling et al. (2012) have investigated the determinants of consumers’ attitude towards persuasive messages such as advertising and the determinants of consumers’ attitudes towards the message medium. The distinction between the two types of stimuli (persuasive messages and message medium) have been explored and found essential to be able to understand consumers’ attitude towards persuasive messages (Gardner, 1985; Ling et al., 2012). According to the study by Ling et al. (2012), the medium of the message is an important moderator for the likelihood of consumers to elaborate on persuasive messages and the likelihood of consumers to develop positive attitudes about the content of persuasive messages. Whether consumers’ attitude towards the message medium would generate positive perceptions of the object or brand in the persuasive messages is however unclear. Therefore, the current study aims to further explore consumers’ attitude towards the message medium and the likelihood for consumers to generate positive brand perceptions based on their attitudes towards the message medium. For the purpose
of the current study, the following hypothesis about consumers’ attitude towards the message medium can thus be formulated.

*H8:* When consumers’ attitude towards Facebook is favourable, brand perception will be positively affected.

### 2.7. Experimental Study Design

The following figure illustrates the conditions and variables of the current study.

![Experimental Study Design](image-url)

*Figure 1: Experimental Study Design*
3. METHODS

3.1. Sample and procedure
A total amount of 100 respondents between the age of 18 and 54 years old participated in the experiment. 39 of the respondents were male and 61 were female, with an average age of 24.86 years old ($SD = 5.81$). The respondents who indicated to own a personal Facebook account (N = 93) checked their Facebook account on an average of 7 days per week ($M = 3.58, SD = 1.01$).

The respondents were approached via online community groups of an organization’s internal social network site and on Facebook via messages and posts. A link of the online survey was placed on both social network sites that led respondents to the online survey. Respondents were first introduced to the experiment as part of a Tilburg University study about Facebook, after which the respondents were informed about different sections included in the online survey. They were further informed that the online survey would take about ten minutes to complete. After completing the online survey, respondents were ensured of their data being used only for the purpose of the current study and thanked for their participation.

The online survey consisted of three distinct sections. The first section consisted of general questions that gathered background information (gender, age, education and native language) about the respondents and their Facebook usage. The second section contained the different experimental conditions wherein respondents were instructed to read either ten MGC or ten UGC Facebook posts. On the next page are examples of the UGC and MGC posts that were used in the experiment. Both the UGC and MGC Facebook posts were randomly selected on the Facebook brand page of Boots UK, a pharmacy-led health and beauty retailer based in England. The researcher had purposefully chosen for a brand that is generally unknown in the country where the online survey was sent out, which was the Netherlands. This decision was mainly to ensure that all perceptions of the brand were based on the stimuli and not on prior experiences with the brand. Respondents that indicated to be familiar with the brand were therefore removed from the sample.
Image 1. MGC excerpt of a Facebook post on a brand page

Image 2. UGC excerpt of a Facebook post on a ‘posts to page’ section of a brand page
The UGC version of the online survey contained ten Facebook posts that informed readers of users’ positive experiences with the brand. The MGC version of the online survey contained ten Facebook posts mentioning the positive sides of the brand and product offers, which were designed by the marketers of the brand to promote products and to generate ‘likes’.

The instructions of the online survey to read either ten MGC or ten UGC posts were differentiated based on persuasion knowledge activation. When persuasion knowledge was activated, the instructions were to decide whether Boots UK is a successful brand on Facebook. Furthermore, the instructions included background information about Boots UK and the brand’s Facebook activities. In the non-activated persuasion knowledge condition, the instructions were to read the Facebook posts carefully and to answer each statement about the content of the Facebook post that followed after. There was no background information about the brand Boots UK in the instructions of the non-activated persuasion knowledge condition.

The third and final section of the online survey consisted of statements that formed impressions about the Facebook posts. Three questions about consumers’ attitude towards Facebook brands were asked prior to the statements that formed impressions about the Facebook posts in section two.

3.2. Design and stimuli
The experiment involved a 2 (UGC versus MGC) by 2 (persuasion knowledge activated versus persuasion knowledge not activated) between-subjects study design. Four different online surveys were developed for the experiment using the online survey software ‘Qualtrics’. The online surveys were developed according to the following experimental conditions: (1) UGC, persuasion knowledge activated, (2) UGC, persuasion knowledge not activated, (3) MGC, persuasion knowledge activated and (4) MGC, persuasion knowledge not activated. These experimental conditions were randomized via Qualtrics in order to automatically lead respondents to either one of the four experimental conditions using only one link to the online survey.

Pretest In order to test the manipulation of the experimental conditions, a pretest was conducted with 16 participants that were not included in the actual experiment. A one-way ANOVA test has shown that the manipulation of UGC ($M = 2.94$, $SD = 0.56$) versus MGC excerpts ($M = 1.31$, $SD = 0.53$) led participants to significantly evaluate MGC as higher in perceived persuasion intent than UGC ($F(1, 14) = 35.31$, $p<.001$). Furthermore, the manipulation of persuasion knowledge activation against perceived persuasion intent has been included in the
pretest. The manipulation of persuasion knowledge activation has however been tested and found not to significantly affect perceived persuasion intent \(F(1, 14) = .00, p = 1.000\) with persuasion knowledge activated \(M = 2.13, SD = 1.06\) and not activated \(M = 2.13, SD = 0.99\). The instructions of the online survey for the persuasion knowledge activated conditions were therefore adjusted for the actual experiment with number of Facebook likes on the brand page and explicit mention of the task: to see whether the brand is successful on Facebook, in order to emphasize the persuasion knowledge activation. A second pretest was not conducted after the adjustment of the online survey instructions.

3.3. Measurement

**Brand Perception.** The measures of brand perception were based on a combination of the variables willingness to know, willingness to purchase and brand liking that were demonstrated in a previous study by Kervyn et al. (2012). Three statements were designed to measure brand perception. To measure willingness to know, the statement “After reading the Facebook posts, I am willing to know more about Boots UK” was used, whereas willingness to purchase and brand liking were measured according to the following statements: “After reading the Facebook posts, I am willing to make a purchase at Boots UK” and “After reading the Facebook posts, I can say that I like Boots UK”. The answers to the items of brand perception were based on a five point Likert scale ranging from (1) “Strongly disagree” to (5) “Strongly agree”. All items loaded on a one-dimensional scale. The mean of these computed variables resulted to the values for brand perception of Boots UK in the experimental conditions, with component loadings >.30. A Cronbach’s Alpha of .79 was found for brand perception with the inclusion of the willingness to know, willingness to purchase and brand liking measurements. A mean score of \(M = 2.34 (SD = 0.86)\) was found for brand perception.

**Brand intention.** Two items were designed in order to measure the perceived intention of the brand according to the Brands as Intentional Agents Framework (BIAF) developed by Kervyn et al. (2012). Brand intention was measured according to the item “Boots UK has good intentions towards ordinary people” and the item “Boots UK consistently acts with the public’s best interest in mind”. Similar to the response categories of brand perception, the response categories of brand intention were based on a five-point Likert scale ranging from (1) “Strongly disagree” to (5) “Strongly agree”. The items of brand intention were tested with Pearson’s r correlations and a score of \(r = .271\) showed that there was a weak relationship between the two items of brand.
intention. Furthermore, a Cronbach’s Alpha of .43 was found for the two items measuring brand intention, which was considered insufficient. The items of brand intention could not be computed into one variable based on the low correlation score. The first item of brand intention, namely “Boots UK has good intentions towards ordinary people”, was therefore removed from the analysis. The first item of brand intention scored a mean of $M = 3.26$ ($SD = 0.72$) and the second item of brand intention scored a mean of $M = 3.10$ ($SD = 0.75$).

**Brand ability.** Two items were designed to measure the perceived ability of the brand to achieve its intentions according to the Brand as Intentional Agents Framework as developed by Kervyn et al. (2012). Brand ability was measured according to the item “Boots UK has the ability to implement its intentions” and the item “Boots UK is skilled and effective at achieving its goals”. Similar to the response categories of brand intention, the response categories of brand ability were based on a five-point Likert scale ranging from (1) “Strongly disagree” to (5) “Strongly agree”. The items of brand ability were tested with Pearson’s r correlations and a score of $r = .470$ showed that there was a positive, but not strong correlation between the two items of brand ability. Furthermore, a Cronbach’s Alpha of .64 was found for brand ability. The two items of brand ability were therefore computed into one variable, based on the positive correlation score. A mean score of $M = 3.29$ ($SD = 0.56$) was found for brand ability.

**Perceived Persuasion Intent.** The online survey aimed to measure perceived persuasion intent to test the manipulation of persuasion knowledge activation. The measures of perceived persuasion intent were based on a prior study by Van Reijmersdal et al. (2010) and were translated to two items in the online surveys, namely “To what extent do you think the Facebook posts were created to persuade?” and “To what extent do you think the Facebook posts were created to sell products?”. The response categories to the items of perceived persuasion intent were (1) “To a great extent”, (2) “Somewhat”, (3) “Undecided”, (4) “Very little” and (5) “Not at all”. The items of perceived persuasion intent were tested with Pearson’s r correlations and a score of $r = .532$ indicated a positive correlation between the two items of perceived persuasion intent. A Cronbach’s Alpha of .69 was found for perceived persuasion intent. The two items of perceived persuasion intent were therefore computed into one variable, based on the positive correlation score. A mean score of $M = 2.16$ ($SD = 1.08$) was found for perceived persuasion intent.

**Information Quality.** Another variable included in the experiment was information quality. This variable was measured through ten items of recommendation framing in which respondents
were to indicate whether the Facebook posts contained positive content. Furthermore, information quality was measured based on recommendation sidedness in which respondents were to state whether or not the content of the Facebook posts were both positive and negative. These items were based on a previous study by Cheung et al. (2009).

**Recommendation Framing.** To measure recommendation framing, a statement was placed in the online survey after respondents read either one MGC or one UGC Facebook post. The statement for recommendation framing was posed as the following: “*Overall, this Facebook post contains positive content*”. The response categories for the measure of recommendation framing were based on a five-point Likert scale that ranged from (1) “Strongly disagree” to (5) “Strongly agree”. A mean score of $M = 3.77$ ($SD = 0.64$) was found for recommendation framing.

**Recommendation sidedness.** To measure recommendation sidedness, the statement “*The content of the Facebook posts were both positive and negative*” was placed on the online survey. Similar to the measure of recommendation framing, the measure for recommendation sidedness contained response categories that were based on a five-point Likert scale ranging from (1) “Strongly disagree” to (5) “Strongly agree”. A mean score of $M = 2.62$ ($SD = 1.06$) was found for recommendation sidedness. A Cronbach’s Alpha of .76 was found for recommendation framing and recommendation sidedness.

**Consumers’ Attitude.** Two items to measure consumers’ attitude towards the Facebook brand pages have been designed according to a previous study by Ling et al., (2010) in which they investigated different functionalities and measurements of consumers’ attitudes towards persuasive media. Consumers’ attitude was measured according to the item “*I consider brands on Facebook useful as they promote the latest products*” and “*I like brands on Facebook, because it plays an important part in my buying decision*”. The response categories for consumers’ attitude were based on a five-point Likert scale ranging from (1) “Strongly disagree” to (5) “Strongly agree”. The items of consumers’ attitude were tested with Pearson’s r correlations and a score of $r = .495$ indicated a positive correlation between the items of consumers’ attitude. A Cronbach’s Alpha of .66 was found for consumers’ attitude. The two items of consumers’ attitude were therefore computed into one variable based on the positive correlation score. A mean score of $M = 2.51$ ($SD = 0.89$) was found for consumers’ attitude.
4. RESULTS

The first hypothesis (H1a) stated that persuasion knowledge activation would affect the level of perceived persuasion intent, which measured the extent to which respondents felt the Facebook posts were created to persuade and were created to sell products. A one-way ANOVA test was conducted with perceived persuasion intent as the dependent variable and persuasion knowledge activation as the independent variable. The difference in perceived persuasion intent was not significant \( (F(1, 96) = 0.58, p = .447) \) between persuasion knowledge activated \( (M = 2.24, \ SD = 1.06) \) and persuasion knowledge not activated \( (M = 2.07, \ SD = 1.11) \), meaning that persuasion knowledge activation did not result into a higher degree of perceived persuasion intent. The first hypothesis was therefore not supported. Below is the means plot of perceived persuasion intent between persuasion knowledge activated and not activated.

![Means plot of perceived persuasion intent between persuasion knowledge activated and not activated.](image)

As for the hypothesis (H1b) following to persuasion knowledge activation, perceived persuasion intent was tested against content types (UGC vs. MGC). The hypothesis stated that MGC would elicit greater perceived persuasion intent than UGC. A one-way ANOVA test was conducted with perceived persuasion intent as the dependent variable and content types as the
independent variable. Content types were found to significantly affect perceived persuasion intent \((F(1, 96) = 7.98, p = .006)\), with MGC \((M = 1.85, SD = 1.11)\) perceived to elicit a greater level of persuasion intent compared to UGC \((M = 2.45, SD = 1.11)\). The hypothesis was therefore supported. Below is the means plot of perceived persuasion intent between content types.

![Figure 4.2. Means plot of perceived persuasion intent between content types.](image)

The items brand intention and brand ability were created to measure the perceived positive intentions and the perceived positive abilities of the brand based on evaluations of UGC versus MGC Facebook excerpts. The second hypothesis \((H2)\) stated that persuasion knowledge when activated would lead brand ability \((M = 3.30, SD = 0.55)\) and intention \((M = 3.18, SD = 0.69)\) to score lower compared to when persuasion knowledge was not activated for brand ability \((M = 3.28, SD = 0.58)\) and intention \((M = 3.02, SD = 0.80)\). A one-way ANOVA test was carried out with brand ability and brand intention as the dependent variables and persuasion knowledge activation as the independent variable. Both brand ability \((F(1, 97) = 0.20, p = .889)\) and intention \((F(1, 97) = 1.13, p = .292)\) were not significantly affected by persuasion knowledge activation. Hypothesis 2 was therefore not supported. However, when the independent variable in the one-way ANOVA test was replaced by content types, brand ability \((M = 3.45, SD = 0.54)\) and brand intention \((M = 3.33, SD = 0.75)\) in UGC scored higher compared to brand ability \((M = 3.13, SD = 0.54)\) and brand intention \((M = 3.28, SD = 0.58)\) in MGC. The means plot of perceived persuasion intent between content types is shown below.

![Figure 4.2. Means plot of perceived persuasion intent between content types.](image)
0.54) and intention ($M = 2.88, SD = 0.69$) in MGC. The effects were significant for brand ability ($F(1, 97) = 8.56, p = .004$) and intention ($F(1, 97) = 9.56, p = .003$) in UGC. Below is a frequency bar chart of brand ability and brand intention between content types.

**Figure 4.3. Frequency of brand ability between content types.**

**Figure 4.4. Frequency of brand intention between content types.**
Two items of brand perception, namely brand liking and willingness to purchase, were tested against persuasion knowledge activation. The hypothesis (H3) stated that when persuasion knowledge was activated, brand liking \((M = 2.54, SD = 0.99)\) and willingness to purchase \((M = 2.26, SD = 1.05)\) would be lower compared to brand liking \((M = 2.44, SD = 1.03)\) and willingness to purchase \((M = 2.28, SD = 1.09)\) in the persuasion knowledge non-activated condition. A one-way ANOVA test was carried out with brand liking and willingness to purchase as the dependent variables and persuasion knowledge activation as the independent variable. The activation of persuasion knowledge was found not to significantly affect willingness to purchase \((F(1, 98) = 0.01, p = .926)\), nor brand liking \((F(1, 98) = 0.24, p = .623)\). Hypothesis 3 was therefore not supported. However, when brand liking and willingness to purchase were tested against content types, a trend towards significance was identified for brand liking \((F(1, 98) = 5.81, p = 0.60)\) and willingness to purchase \((F(1, 98) = 3.63, p = 0.18)\). Brand liking \((M = 2.30, SD = 0.89)\) and willingness to purchase \((M = 2.02, SD = 1.02)\) scored lower in MGC than in UGC. A mean score of \(M = 2.52\) \((SD = 1.05)\) for willingness to purchase and a mean score \(M = 2.68\) \((SD = 1.10)\) for brand liking were found in UGC.

The fourth hypothesis (H4) stated that the activation of persuasion knowledge would lead MGC to score lower on brand perception than UGC. A Univariate ANOVA was conducted to test for interaction effects between persuasion knowledge activation and content types for brand perception. No significant interaction effects were found for brand perception \((F(1, 96) = 0.052, p = .820)\). Hypothesis 4 was therefore not supported. However, when a one-way ANOVA test for brand perception against content types was carried out, a significant effect was found for brand perception \((F(1, 97) = 6.86, p = .010)\), with brand perception scoring higher in UGC \((M = 2.56, SD = 0.90)\) compared to MGC \((M = 2.13, SD = 0.76)\). The following page contains a means plot of brand perception between content types.
The fifth hypothesis (H5) stated that UGC would be perceived higher in recommendation framing compared to MGC. After each Facebook post in the assigned condition, the statement “Overall, this Facebook post contains positive content” appeared before the respondents to indicate the direction in which the content was framed (positive or negative). For both UGC and MGC the content was positive, meaning that only positive words were used to describe the subject of the content. A one-way ANOVA test was conducted for the ten items measuring recommendation framing according to content types. On all ten items of recommendation framing, UGC (M = 4.21, SD = 0.48) was significantly evaluated higher compared to MGC (M = 3.36, SD = 0.49), meaning that UGC was thought to be more positively framed in information quality than MGC ($F(1, 95) = 74.31, p<.001$). Hypothesis 5 was therefore supported. The following page contains a means plot of recommendation framing between content types.

Figure 4.5. Means plot of brand perception between content types.
The sixth hypothesis (H6) stated that MGC would be perceived higher in recommendation sidedness compared to UGC. A one-way ANOVA test was conducted with recommendation sidedness as the dependent variable and content types as the independent variable. The test scores indicated that MGC ($M = 3.12, SD = 0.92$) was significantly evaluated higher on recommendation sidedness than UGC ($M = 2.10, SD = 0.94$), meaning that participants thought MGC consisted of both positive and negative information, whereas UGC was only evaluated as positive ($F(1, 97) = 29.69, p < .001$). Hypothesis 6 was therefore supported. The following page contains a frequency bar chart of recommendation sidedness between content types.
The seventh hypothesis (H7) stated that UGC would be perceived higher in information quality compared to MGC. A linear regression analysis was conducted to see which of the determinants of information quality, recommendation framing or recommendation sidedness, would correlate with brand perception. The analysis had shown that recommendation framing ($r = .406$) correlated positively with brand perception and significantly predicted brand perception ($F(1, 94) = 17.91, p < .001$) compared to recommendation sidedness ($r = -.302$). Recommendation framing was a better determinant of information quality leading to brand perception. Hypothesis 7 was therefore supported.

The eighth hypothesis (H8) stated that when consumers’ attitude towards Facebook is favourable, brand perception would be positively affected. A linear regression analysis was carried out to test the effects of a favourable consumers’ attitude towards Facebook brand pages on brand perception. A significant trend in the linear regression was found for consumers’ attitude ($F(1, 59) = 5.68, p = .020$), which indicated that consumers’ attitude is a predictor of brand perception, when consumers’ attitude was higher than 2. A positive Pearson’s correlation of $r = .296$ was found for
consumers’ attitude. The hypothesis was therefore supported. The scatter plot in the following page shows a linear regression of consumers’ attitude to brand perception.

Figure 4.8. Relationship between brand perception and consumers’ attitude, when consumers’ attitude scored higher than 2.
5. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION
The purpose of the current study was to investigate the effects of persuasion knowledge activation on brand perception through the use of MGC and UGC Facebook posts. The question “To what extent does the activation of persuasion knowledge through MGC and UGC on social media influence brand perception?” served as a navigation throughout the study. Furthermore, the current study had managed to investigate the differences between UGC and MGC excerpts of a Facebook brand page and its effects on perceived persuasion intent and information quality, through the informational determinants of recommendation framing and recommendation sidedness. In this section, I will reflect on all hypotheses and results of the current study, including a review of limitations and proposals for future research, and both theoretical as well as practical implications.

The first hypothesis of the current study (H1a) stated that the activation of persuasion knowledge would elicit a greater perceived persuasion intent compared to non-activation of persuasion knowledge. This was not supported. The finding was contrary to conclusions based on previous studies wherein the activation of persuasion knowledge by making message receivers explicitly aware of persuasion intent has led to negative effects on brand perceptions (Campbell & Kirmani, 2000; Wei et al., 2008; Van Reijmersdal et al., 2010). However, the previous studies were conducted on traditional media such as radio (Wei et al., 2008) and magazines (Van Reijmersdal et al., 2010) and also on hypothetical real-life scenarios (Campbell & Kirmani, 2000), whereas the current study applied persuasion knowledge on Facebook posts. It might then be plausible to assume that the persuasion knowledge structure is already activated when people view branded content on social media platforms such as Facebook, because people actively seek exclusive brand-related information on Facebook brand pages that they cannot simply acquire through traditional media (Adjei et al., 2010; Lake, 2011). When the persuasion knowledge structure is already activated while viewing branded content on Facebook, then the explicit activation of persuasion knowledge by making message receivers aware of the brand’s persuasive intentions is no longer relevant, because message receivers are already aware of the brand’s intentions to persuade. This might explain why explicit persuasion knowledge activation did not generate significant differences in perceived persuasion intent.

As for the following hypothesis (H1b), perceived persuasion intent was tested against content types, wherein it was assumed that MGC would elicit greater perceived persuasion intent compared to UGC. This hypothesis was supported. Respondents felt that the extent to which MGC
was created to persuade and to sell products was higher than UGC. This was in line with the findings of a previous study by Van Reijmersdal et al. (2010), which concluded that commercialized messages in magazines were perceived to contain a greater level of persuasion intent than non-commercialized messages.

The second hypothesis (H2) stated that the activation of persuasion knowledge would lead to negative perceptions of brand ability and intention. This hypothesis was not supported. In a previous study by Kervyn et al. (2012), most brands that were tested according to brand intention and ability were familiar to the respondents, leading them to evaluate the brands based on their prior experiences with the brand instead of first impressions. Brand intention and ability thus yielded significant results, wherein brands that were highly familiar to respondents scored higher on brand intention and ability compared to brands that were less familiar (Kervyn et al. 2012). The current study aimed to investigate whether positive scores on perceived brand ability and intention would also hold for brands that were unfamiliar to respondents in order for them to judge the brand’s ability and intention based on first impressions. As a result, brand ability and intention of an unfamiliar brand did not score positively based on the evaluation of Facebook posts or first impressions. It might then be plausible to assume that brand ability and brand intention are not relevant determinants for the evaluation of unfamiliar brands. Furthermore, the activation of persuasion knowledge did not affect the scores of brand ability and intention. This might once again be explained by the activation of persuasion knowledge structure that is already existent when a message receiver views branded content on social media platforms such as Facebook.

The third hypothesis (H3) stated that the activation of persuasion knowledge would lead to a lower score on brand liking and willingness to purchase. This was not supported. The finding was contrary to the findings in the study by Wei et al. (2008), wherein brand perceptions were lower when listeners of a radio program were made explicitly aware of the brand’s persuasive intention, thereby activating the persuasion knowledge structure. The type of medium might therefore have an impact on how persuasion knowledge can be activated to generate differences in brand perceptions. Moreover, the respondents of the current study viewed the Facebook posts separate from the entire Facebook brand page in order for them to focus on the content generated by brand users and marketers. Even though the separation of Facebook posts as excerpts from the actual brand page was necessary to emphasize upon the difference between MGC and UGC, it might have had an impact on how respondents perceived the brand. Respondents might have
formed different perceptions of the brand when they viewed the Facebook posts in its context, which is tied to the brand page. Based on this notion, it can be questioned whether seeing an entire Facebook brand page while activating persuasion knowledge by means of explicit mention of the brand’s persuasive intentions might generate significant differences in brand perceptions with persuasion knowledge activated and non-activated. If the respondents for instance, had seen the entire Facebook brand page and were to evaluate the brand through UGC and MGC with persuasion knowledge activated and not activated, then the results might be more similar to the study by Wei et al. (2008), wherein respondents were enabled to listen to an entire radio program and not just excerpts of a radio program.

The fourth hypothesis (H4) stated that the activation of persuasion knowledge would lead MGC to score lower on brand perception compared to UGC. No such effects were found, therefore the hypothesis could not be supported. A possible explanation for the lack of significant effects with the activation of persuasion knowledge can be related to the study by Naylor et al. (2012), in which brand perceptions of unfamiliar brands have been measured in a social media setting wherein user profiles were revealed and made ambiguous for the effects of peer associations towards the likelihood of positive brand perceptions to occur. As it turns out, peer associations were a significant factor that led to an increased likelihood for positive brand perceptions to occur, whereas this study has shown that persuasion knowledge activation did not affect the likelihood for positive brand perceptions to decrease nor the likelihood for negative brand perceptions to increase. It might therefore be assumed that persuasion knowledge activation should be connected to peer associations or social ties for it to be explicitly activated in the message receivers’ minds in order to generate significant differences between brand perceptions (Naylor et al., 2012; Van Noort et al., 2012). Positive effects on brand perception were however found between content types with UGC scoring significantly higher on brand perception compared to MGC. Even though this was not a specific hypothesis of the current study, it is an intriguing result that sheds light on the influence of UGC on building positive brand perceptions. It adds to findings of previous studies wherein eWOM recommendations (Cheung et al., 2009) and user experiences (Goh et al., 2012) were more preferred over MGC, simply because respondents are better able at associating themselves to these consumer experiences.

The fifth hypothesis (H5) was designed to measure the first informational determinant of information quality, namely recommendation framing. It stated that UGC would be perceived
higher in recommendation framing than MGC. This hypothesis was supported. In the current study, ten UGC posts scored significantly higher on recommendation framing compared to MGC posts, meaning that UGC posts were perceived as more positive than MGC posts. This was in line with the findings of a study by Goh et al. (2012), wherein UGC posts were experienced as more consumer-oriented and positive in experience than MGC posts, due to the genuine experiences that can be perceived in UGC instead of persuasion intent that was found in MGC. As for the following hypothesis (H6) involving recommendation sidedness as the second informational determinant of information quality, it was assumed that MGC would be perceived as higher in recommendation sidedness compared to UGC. This too was supported. MGC scored significantly higher compared to UGC, which means that respondents thought MGC contained both positive as well as negative content, whereas UGC was only regarded as positive in content. This has however more to do with the respondents’ preferences of Facebook post content than the actual, linguistic content evaluation of MGC, because all MGC posts contained only positive words to generate Facebook likes. The respondents thought that their preferences of the object spoken about in the MGC posts mattered, which actually did not. Recommendation sidedness was meant to measure the actual content and not the respondents’ perceptions or preferences of what was spoken about in the MGC Facebook posts. Then again, it might be difficult to separate content preferences from actual, linguistic content evaluation to measure recommendation sidedness in MGC. Nevertheless, recommendation framing was proved to correlate higher as an informational determinant of information quality leading towards the likelihood of positive brand perceptions to occur rather than recommendation sidedness. It means that recommendation framing on Facebook brand pages or whether the message receiver perceives the message as positive or negative is more important for the likelihood of positive brand perceptions to occur rather than whether the message contains both positive and negative aspects. This is in accordance with the seventh hypothesis (H7), which stated that UGC will be perceived as higher in information quality compared to MGC. Due to the significant scores of UGC being perceived as more positive compared to MGC, the likelihood for positive brand perceptions to occur was increased. It may thus be concluded that the information quality of UGC versus MGC Facebook posts is more dependent on recommendation framing rather than recommendation sidedness.

The final hypothesis of the current study (H8) stated that brand perceptions would be positively affected, when consumers’ attitude towards Facebook is favourable. This hypothesis
was supported. When consumers’ attitude towards Facebook was positive, respondents were most likely to have a positive brand perception through the evaluation of MGC and UGC Facebook posts. This was similar to the findings of a study by Ling et al. (2012), wherein positive attitudes towards persuasive messages resulted after positive attitudes were found for the medium of the message. The current study has managed to extend the current knowledge about positive consumers’ attitude towards the message medium and its relationship to positive perceptions towards the object spoken about in the message, namely the brand Boots UK. However, based on the overall low mean score of consumers’ attitude that was found, it can be concluded that consumers generally do not find Facebook brand pages useful for promotions of latest products and they generally do not like Facebook brand pages as an important part of their purchase decisions. This finding is contrary to what was found in the study by Adjei et al. (2010) wherein social media platforms were perceived as useful for uncertainty reduction prior to purchase decisions. An answer to the question of whether consumers make use of Facebook as a functionality to reduce uncertainty prior to purchase decisions can therefore be given. The finding on consumers’ attitude towards Facebook in the current study had shown that consumers do not use Facebook brand pages as a functionality for uncertainty reduction prior to purchase decisions.

5.1. Limitations and Suggestions for future research.
Although the current study had managed to contribute to existing knowledge on brand perceptions through the evaluations of UGC versus MGC Facebook posts, it had not been completely safeguarded from certain limitations. First of all, the activation of persuasion knowledge might have been too weak for respondents to actually activate their persuasion knowledge structure. The adjustment that was made to the online survey instructions as a means of persuasion knowledge activation did not become subject to a second pre-test due to time limitations, which meant that making message receivers explicitly aware of the brand’s persuasive intent as a means of persuasion knowledge activation could not be guaranteed to significantly impact brand perceptions. Therefore, it might have been necessary to conduct several manipulation checks to activate persuasion knowledge on the UGC and MGC excerpts of the Facebook brand page. Furthermore, the design of the experiment that required respondents to read instructions and ten Facebook posts might have been too lengthy, which might have had an influence on how the respondents filled in their answers to the survey statements. If the instructions of the online survey was not read properly or if respondents did not thoroughly understand the instructions of the online
survey, then the persuasion knowledge could not have been activated. This also relates to some statement formulations that were used in the online survey. For instance, one possible limitation of recommendation sidedness that can be derived from the current study is that the statement formulation of recommendation sidedness might have been unclear to respondents for them to actually answer the statement according to message content instead of message preference. The same goes for the statement formulation of brand intention, wherein one statement was removed from the analysis due to insufficient answers.

In future research, different determinants could be selected to measure brand perceptions through the evaluation of UGC and MGC Facebook excerpts. It might be interesting to investigate whether fulfilling the information needs of message receivers would result to an increased likelihood for positive brand perceptions to occur. This tackles the issue of recommendation framing for MGC excerpts, wherein respondents indicated their preferences of the object spoken about in the content, rather than the linguistic properties of the content itself. Further investigations of information quality towards the likelihood for positive brand perceptions to occur, could therefore be directed at the fulfilment of information needs. Moreover, the activation of persuasion knowledge should be connected to social ties or peer associations for different brand perceptions to occur after the evaluation of UGC and MGC Facebook posts.

5.2. Theoretical implications
The results presented in the current study were not absolutely in accordance with existing theory, such as the Persuasion Knowledge model (Friestad & Wright, 1994), which makes the existing theory on persuasion knowledge subject to certain implications. In order for persuasion knowledge to be applied on social media platforms, the activation of persuasion knowledge must be far stronger than what has been used as manipulations in previous studies on traditional media (Van Reijmersdal et al., 2010; Wei et al., 2012). A distinction between traditional media and social media must be made with the investigation of persuasion knowledge. It is plausible to assume that the persuasion knowledge structure is always activated when consumers review brands on social media platforms, because the activation of persuasion knowledge did not generate significant results in the current study. Although, it is also plausible to assume that persuasion knowledge does not apply on social media platforms, because consumers are the ones taking initiatives towards finding more information about brands instead of the other way around (Adjei et al., 2010; Naylor et al., 2012). Moreover, the current study had shown that MGC was perceived higher in
persuasion intent compared to UGC, meaning that the likelihood for the persuasion knowledge structure to be activated when evaluating MGC is greater than when UGC is being evaluated. Thus, it could also be assumed that persuasion knowledge only applies to MGC and not to UGC. If persuasion knowledge is only activated when message receivers evaluate MGC, then the knowledge structure of “agent knowledge” in the persuasion knowledge model might be most relevant and influential to understand the mechanisms of persuasion knowledge on social media such as Facebook.

If however, persuasion knowledge is always activated when consumers review brands on social media platforms through MGC and UGC, then Friestad and Wright’s (1994) Persuasion Knowledge Model should be adjusted according to the medium of the message. An additional knowledge structure might be relevant to understand and apply the persuasion knowledge model on social media. This knowledge structure could be called medium knowledge, wherein knowledge and attitude towards the message medium and its functionalities might influence persuasion coping behaviour and perceived persuasion intent.

5.3. Practical implications
In an attempt to answer the main question of the current study, “To what extent does the activation of persuasion knowledge through MGC and UGC on social media influence brand perception?” it can be concluded that persuasion knowledge activation did not influence brand perception through social media such as Facebook. However, the significant differences found for perceived persuasion intent, brand ability and intention, information quality and brand perception between content types cannot be ignored. In order for marketing practitioners to successfully promote their brands and to effectively engage their online fan base in a continuous conversation to create measurable brand value through social media, they must keep in mind that UGC is more favorable for consumers to become associated with the brand and for marketing practitioners to achieve their promotion objectives. Much like the power of ongoing Word-of-Mouth and satisfied customer testimonials, UGC generates a greater likelihood for brands to be liked and for consumers to increase their purchase intentions.
REFERENCES


ONLINE SURVEY

Section 1. Instructions and general questions (for all conditions)
You are about to participate in a Tilburg University study about Facebook. This online survey consists of three sections and will take about 10 minutes to complete.

- The first section consists of general questions about your personal information and Facebook usage.
- The second section contains ten Facebook posts. After reading each Facebook post, you will be asked to answer one statement.
- The third and final section contains statements about your impressions of the Facebook posts in section two.

You will now begin with the first section of this online survey. Please answer the following questions.

SECTION ONE: PERSONAL INFORMATION

1. What is your gender?
   () Male
   () Female

2. What is your age? Please type down in numbers.

3. What is your level of education?
   () Primary education (Elementary school)
   () Secondary education (High school)
   () Basic vocational education
   () Bachelor’s degree
   () Master’s degree
   () Doctoral degree

4. What is your native language?
   () Dutch
   () English
   () Other

5. Do you have a Facebook account?
   () Yes
   () No
6. How many days per week do you check your personal Facebook account?
   () 0 days per week
   () 1-2 days per week
   () 3-4 days per week
   () 5-6 days per week
   () 7 days per week

Section 2. Facebook posts on BOOTS UK (randomized according to conditions)

When persuasion knowledge was activated, the instructions of the online surveys for both UGC and MGC were formulated as the following:

You will now proceed with section two of this online survey.

This section will focus on one brand in particular, namely Boots UK, a pharmacy-led health and beauty retailer. With a brand page and over 700.000 likes on Facebook, Boots UK aims to reach their customers and provide them with information about the brand and product offers. Boots UK wishes to find out whether they are successful at impressing their customers on Facebook. Your task is simply to read these Facebook posts and decide whether Boots UK is a successful brand on Facebook.

Please read each Facebook post carefully and answer the statement after reading each Facebook post.

When persuasion knowledge was not activated, the instructions of the online surveys for both UGC and MGC were formulated as the following:

You will now proceed with section two of this online survey.
Please read each Facebook post carefully and answer the statement after reading each Facebook post.
UGC EXCERPTS

1. Overall, this Facebook post contains positive content.
   () Strongly Disagree
   () Disagree
   () Neither agree nor disagree
   () Agree
   () Strongly Agree

2. Overall, this Facebook post contains positive content.
   () Strongly Disagree
   () Disagree
   () Neither agree nor disagree
   () Agree
   () Strongly Agree
3. Overall, this Facebook post contains positive content
   () Strongly Disagree
   () Disagree
   () Neither agree nor disagree
   () Agree
   () Strongly Agree

4. Overall, this Facebook post contains positive content.
   () Strongly Disagree
   () Disagree
   () Neither agree nor disagree
   () Agree
   () Strongly Agree
5. Overall, this Facebook post contains positive content.
   () Strongly Disagree
   () Disagree
   () Neither agree nor disagree
   () Agree
   () Strongly Agree

6. Overall, this Facebook post contains positive content.
   () Strongly Disagree
   () Disagree
   () Neither agree nor disagree
   () Agree
   () Strongly Agree
7. Overall, this Facebook post contains positive content.
   ( ) Strongly Disagree
   ( ) Disagree
   ( ) Neither agree nor disagree
   ( ) Agree
   ( ) Strongly Agree

8. Overall, this Facebook post contains positive content.
   ( ) Strongly Disagree
   ( ) Disagree
   ( ) Neither agree nor disagree
   ( ) Agree
   ( ) Strongly Agree
9. Overall, this Facebook post contains positive content.
   () Strongly Disagree
   () Disagree
   () Neither agree nor disagree
   () Agree
   () Strongly Agree

10. Overall, this Facebook post contains positive content.
    () Strongly Disagree
    () Disagree
    () Neither agree nor disagree
    () Agree
    () Strongly Agree
1. Overall, this Facebook post contains positive content
   () Strongly Disagree
   () Disagree
   () Neither agree nor disagree
   () Agree
   () Strongly Agree
2. Overall, this Facebook post contains positive content
   () Strongly Disagree
   () Disagree
   () Neither agree nor disagree
   () Agree
   () Strongly Agree
3. Overall, this Facebook post contains positive content
   () Strongly Disagree
   () Disagree
   () Neither agree nor disagree
   () Agree
   () Strongly Agree
4. Overall, this Facebook post contains positive content
   () Strongly Disagree
   () Disagree
   () Neither agree nor disagree
   () Agree
   () Strongly Agree
5. Overall, this Facebook post contains positive content
   () Strongly Disagree
   () Disagree
   () Neither agree nor disagree
   () Agree
   () Strongly Agree
6. Overall, this Facebook post contains positive content
   ( ) Strongly Disagree
   ( ) Disagree
   ( ) Neither agree nor disagree
   ( ) Agree
   ( ) Strongly Agree
7. Overall, this Facebook post contains positive content
   () Strongly Disagree
   () Disagree
   () Neither agree nor disagree
   () Agree
   () Strongly Agree
8. Overall, this Facebook post contains positive content
   () Strongly Disagree
   () Disagree
   () Neither agree nor disagree
   () Agree
   () Strongly Agree
9. Overall, this Facebook post contains positive content
    () Strongly Disagree
    () Disagree
    () Neither agree nor disagree
    () Agree
    () Strongly Agree
10. Overall, this Facebook post contains positive content
   () Strongly Disagree
   () Disagree
   () Neither agree nor disagree
   () Agree
   () Strongly Agree
Consumers’ Attitude Items (for all conditions)
You are about to begin with the third and final section of this online survey.
Please answer the following statements about Facebook brand pages before you continue.

11. I consider brands on Facebook useful as it promotes the latest products.
   () Strongly Disagree
   () Disagree
   () Neither agree nor disagree
   () Agree
   () Strongly Agree

12. I like brands on Facebook, because it plays an important part in my buying decision.
   () Strongly Disagree
   () Disagree
   () Neither agree nor disagree
   () Agree
   () Strongly Agree

13. My general opinion of Facebook is favorable.
   () Strongly Disagree
   () Disagree
   () Neither agree nor disagree
   () Agree
   () Strongly Agree
Section 3. Impressions of Facebook posts on BOOTS UK (for all conditions)
You are about to begin with the third and final section of this online survey.
Please answer the following statements about Facebook brand pages before you continue.

1. I am familiar with the brand Boots UK.
   () Strongly Disagree
   () Disagree
   () Neither agree nor disagree
   () Agree
   () Strongly Agree

2. The Facebook posts about Boots UK were both positive and negative.
   () Strongly Disagree
   () Disagree
   () Neither agree nor disagree
   () Agree
   () Strongly Agree

3. The Facebook posts had informed me about Boots UK.
   () Strongly Disagree
   () Disagree
   () Neither agree nor disagree
   () Agree
   () Strongly Agree

4. The content of the Facebook posts were both positive and negative.
   () Strongly Disagree
   () Disagree
   () Neither agree nor disagree
   () Agree
   () Strongly Agree

5. To what extent do you think the Facebook posts were created to persuade?
   () To a great extent
   () Somewhat
   () Undecided
   () Very little
   () Not at all
6. To what extent do you think the Facebook posts were created to sell products?
   () To a great extent
   () Somewhat
   () Undecided
   () Very little
   () Not at all

7. Boots UK has good intentions towards ordinary people.
   () Strongly Disagree
   () Disagree
   () Neither agree nor disagree
   () Agree
   () Strongly Agree

8. Boots UK consistently acts with the public’s best interest in mind.
   () Strongly Disagree
   () Disagree
   () Neither agree nor disagree
   () Agree
   () Strongly Agree

9. Boots UK has the ability to implement its intentions.
   () Strongly Disagree
   () Disagree
   () Neither agree nor disagree
   () Agree
   () Strongly Agree

10. Boots UK is skilled and effective at achieving its goals.
    () Strongly Disagree
    () Disagree
    () Neither agree nor disagree
    () Agree
    () Strongly Agree

11. After reading the Facebook posts, I want to know more about Boots UK.
    () Strongly Disagree
    () Disagree
    () Neither agree nor disagree
    () Agree
    () Strongly Agree
12. After reading the Facebook posts, I am willing to purchase Boots UK products.
   () Strongly Disagree
   () Disagree
   () Neither agree nor disagree
   () Agree
   () Strongly Agree

13. After reading the Facebook posts, I can say that I like Boots UK.
   () Strongly Disagree
   () Disagree
   () Neither agree nor disagree
   () Agree
   () Strongly Agree

14. Do you have any comments about this study?
   () Yes
   () No

This was the end of the survey. Your data will be saved and used for the purpose of this research only and under no circumstances will it be exposed to third parties. Please click on the arrow below to have your data stored.

Thank you for your participation and for your time to complete this online survey. Have a pleasant day ahead.