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“SHORT-FORM VIDEO CONTENT EFFECTIVENESS ON SMALL BUSINESS PERFORMANCE
AND CONSUMER RELATIONS”

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INTRODUCTION

The way consumers utilize and consume media is constantly evolving, creating gaps for businesses and advertisers alike when it comes to effectively reaching these users where they spend the most time. In social media, this shift can be seen with users spending more of their time on video-based platforms that integrate short-form media such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube (Xiao, Xiaofeng, & Zhang, 2023). Because consumers' attention and focus has been shifted towards social media, it's important to position businesses to target consumers on these platforms in order to increase overall engagement and consideration for their brand. Xiao, Xiaofeng, and Zhang (2023) found that performance expectancy related to purchase intention, word of mouth online, and consumer satisfaction had a positive influence on users through short-form video content. Short-form video content only lasts a few minutes to a few seconds, and platforms that allow users to create content, such as TikTok and Instagram, enable users to capture memorable and creative moments (Xiao, Xiaofeng, & Zhang, 2023). The power of short-form video was seen even before the pandemic, as Marvis (2017) details how media consumption was changing years prior, as users would rather watch entertaining bursts of exciting clips than watch a lengthy 30-minute television show.

Statement of the Problem

Social media has provided businesses and marketers alike with remarkable opportunities to reach consumers within their communities as well as build more personal connections with them (Godey et al., 2016). Brands typically utilize five key dimensions that include entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization and word of mouth within their marketing efforts on social media (Kim & Ko, 2012). These dimensions inevitably tie into the overall perception of the brand online, which in turn affects brand equity (Godey et al., 2016). Keller's (1993) model of brand equity helps to explain the outcome of these dimensions, as it highlights that brand awareness and image are the key dimensions for which brand equity is built. Brands who market online enhance this consumer-based brand equity, even stronger than that of traditional marketing efforts (Bruhn et al., 2012). Social media has greatly elevated how brands and consumers connect with one another, developing a new kind of relationship that wasn't seen with

brands through traditional marketing efforts (Fournier & Alvarez, 2011). It was found that people actually relate to brands in several ways, similar to the ways they relate to other people (Fournier & Alvarez, 2011). Brands can develop a social perception online where consumers not only care about the features and benefits of a brand, but also see the brand in a relationship aspect (Kevryn, Fiske, & Malone, 2012). Through nurturing and fostering personal connections and relationships with consumers, brands can actively affect what customers think and feel about the brand itself (Schaefer et al., 2017).

Marketing efforts through social media have proven to be influential to potential consumers, as the majority of purchase decisions are made through trend and group information (Godey et al., 2016). User and influencer-generated content are some of the most popular routes that brands and marketers alike have taken in order to reach a particular consumer base where they are more likely to take in the information and influence purchase intention (Ren et al., 2023). Influence marketing allows brands to leverage the resources from said influencer and really tap into the bond that is shared between both the influencer and their followers (Leung et al., 2022). The trust and authenticity are essential elements found within these types of generated content, as Ren et al. (2023) notes that users are more likely to be persuaded by users they find to be either influential or relatable and authentic.

Purpose of the Study

This paper sets out to address how short-form video content on social media can enhance the relationship between both a small business and its consumer base as well as increase engagement and awareness for the brand itself through the key dimensions of content and message curation online. This paper will revisit literature that revolves around topics of short-form video content as well as the influence this content has on brand perception and engagement, the impact of user and influencer generated content on brand relations and perceptions, and brand/consumer relationships online. Brand equity theory will be utilized to better understand and conceptualize this phenomenon. Brand equity theory helps explain how the more a user sees likable and relevant content from a brand repeatedly, the more likely they are to develop positive attitudes toward the brand, leading to purchase intention, engagement, and an elevated perception (Keller, 1993). In utilizing social media as the main marketing tactic for small businesses,

these brands have the opportunity to shape how their consumers think and feel about their product or business which, in turn, can have great effects in relation to purchase intention (Keller, 1993). Currently, there is little research on consumer and brand relationships built off of short-form video content. The purpose of this study will be to see if utilizing short-form video content can be successful for small business marketing as well as identify key aspects, if any, that identify if consumers create a brand relationship that includes a stronger perception and equity toward the brand itself through short-form video content.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Brand Equity Theory

To deepen the understanding of consumer and brand relationships online, a theoretical approach will be aligned to this study to help define how brands create these relationships within a digital environment. Keller's (1993) Brand Equity Model, also known as the Customer-Based Brand Equity Model, illustrates that in order to have a strong brand, one must be able to develop the right brand image through constructing ideal brand experiences or encounters. The theory notes that through each experience a consumer has with a brand, it needs to leave them with positive emotions and thoughts (Hawker, 2019). When a brand is able to prove its value to the consumer, a brand has then been able to build brand equity and the consumer's positive opinions and perception of the brand will then be spread to others (Hawker, 2019). There are four key levels within Keller's (1993) Brand Equity Model: Relationships, Response, Meaning, and Identity. In order for brands to be successful, they need to be able to build consumer relationships from the ground up (Hawker, 2019). This process through which Keller proposes brand equity is formed will help inform how and why consumer and brand relationships are developed through short-form video content on social media and how that, in turn, can impact small businesses and their growth.

Short-Form Video Content

Short-form video content, which are videos that last just a few seconds or minutes, have seen a rise in popularity among social media users within the last few years (Xiao, Li, & Zhang, 2023). These quick-to-the-point snippets of content have attracted user's attention online and because of this, advertisers have taken note when it comes to incorporating this content into their marketing plan (Xiao, Li, & Zhang, 2023). Xiao, Li, and Zhang (2023) note that there are four key features of a short-form video that are related to consumer engagement behavior: performance expectancy, tie strength, entertainment, and sales approach. Through utilizing these key features outlined by Xiao, Li, and Zhang (2023), businesses and advertisers can have a better opportunity at reaching individuals when they are most likely to engage in the content.

User and influencer-generated short-form video content has proved to be a successful tactic as well from an advertising perspective, as it relays information in a more authentic and conversational way (Zheng Xie et al., 2019). The essence of short-form video content is found within user-generated content, which is a form of content created by the consumer organically for a brand's product or service (Zheng Xie et al., 2019). Influencer generated content, on the other hand, gives brands the opportunity to leverage a successful influencer's resources, followers and fame, as well as tap into the bond they share with their followers (Leung et al., 2022). It was noted by Ren et al. (2023) that influencer endorsements that take on the role of an entertainer end up attracting more engagement than the endorsements by influencers who are labeled as more informers. Through utilizing user and influencer generated content, businesses can elevate their messaging and reach a greater amount of potential consumers through utilizing messaging that reaches consumers in a more personable way.

The Consumer and Brand Relationship Online

One of the most important reasons brands and businesses alike have shifted to more of an online presence is due to the fact that they are able to develop and nurture more personal connections with their consumers than ever before (Godey et al., 2016). Brands, in order to foster consumer relationships on

social media, need to be able to build brand equity with users through tactics pertaining to developing a strong brand identity and positioning messaging strategically (Godey et al., 2016). Brand identity is the perception of the brand that is based through areas such as personality, aesthetic, and the overall quality of the product or service (Bruhn, Schoenmueller, & Schäfer, 2012). In developing brand identity on social media, brands develop content that defines who they are through three aspects: brand, user, and influencer-generated content (Bazi, Filieri, & Gorton, 2023).

Content, as noted by Bazi, Filieri, and Gorton (2023), is just one of the main reasons consumers end up searching for information on social media. Brand generated content is the foundation, as it's crucial for stimulating engagement and starting to generate perception from consumers (Bazi, Filieri, & Gorton, 2023). Through generating brand content, brands are able to identify who they are as a brand aesthetically and personality wise, influencing consumer decisions and evaluations on the brand itself as well as potentially increasing purchase intentions and cross-buying behavior (Bazi, Filieri, & Gorton, 2023). User and influencer-generated content, as previously mentioned, helps to further establish a brand's identity online through developing messaging in a more personable and authentic way to potential consumers (Leung et al., 2022). Strategic messaging tactics, whether that be through brand, user, or influencer-generated content, is imperative in building brand equity with potential consumers online (Kaushik, Mishra, & Cyr, 2023). Messaging from a brand through both emotional and rational appeals helps to establish more of a relationship with consumers, especially when they come off as more authentic and personable than automatic and robotic (Kaushik, Mishra, & Cyr, 2023).

Small Businesses and Social Media

Social media is a tool frequently used by small businesses as a main avenue to where their advertising efforts are delivered. Platforms today have made it easier on small businesses, especially those just now venturing out into the digital environment, to effectively develop content, connect with consumers, and promote select posts to boost on social media (Xiao, Li, & Zhang, 2023). Social media allows these small businesses to connect with potential consumers outside of their local market and encourage growth in both awareness and engagement among consumers (Hassan, Nadzim, & Shiratuddin,

2015). In doing so, small businesses are able to bring greater awareness at a local, national, and even potentially a global scale (Hassan, Nadzim, & Shiratuddin, 2015). Post pandemic, small businesses have focused even more seriously on the potential opportunities having a strong presence on social media has on their overall consumer relations and business success (Kaushnik, Mishra, & Cyr, 2023).

Developing a brand identity and forming brand equity are essential in keeping these small businesses top of mind for social media users. In aligning with the Brand Equity Model proposed by Keller (1993), the following research questions were proposed.

RQ1: How does short-form video content from a small business develop strong consumer relations, if any, than that of regular, static content?

RQ2: How does short-form video content from a small business develop a stronger brand identity than that of regular, static content?

Small businesses need to be able to develop strong consumer relations and brand equity while on social media in order to facilitate growth and engagement. Based on the importance of developing brand identity, strategic messaging, and utilizing user and influencer-generated content, the following research questions were proposed.

RQ3: How does short-form video messaging for small businesses with an established identity online affect the brand?

RQ4: How is short-form video messaging for small businesses more effective when utilizing user-generated or influencer-generated content?

RQ5: How is the consumer relationship and brand perception of a small business stronger when short-form video content is utilized?

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