

Uncertainty Reduction with Online Credibility & Persuasion: Research Proposal

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Communication literature spans many different disciplines within the field. Historically, uncertainty reduction theory (URT) has been researched in settings where persons communicate face-to-face. Since studying (URT) within communication, it is important to review selected articles to gain a better knowledge on how this topic is being researched within technology, and specifically, computer mediated communication. Another important concept is credibility as it relates to advertising, social media and basic communication between persons. When examining the prospect that social media advertising, social media influencers, celebrities, and product placements. These aspects create available research points to the importance of identifying a credible source.

Review of Literature

Origins of Uncertainty Reduction Theory

Beginning in 1975, Charles Berger and Richard Calabrese observed that when people interact with strangers, they do not know what to expect. Henceforth, URT was developed and evolved to include interactions within established interpersonal relationships. Berger and Calabrese's original theory employed seven variables. The amount of verbal communication is the number of words that are exchanged during an interaction. Non-verbal affiliative expressiveness is when a person displays positive feelings towards another non-verbally like hand and arm gestures. Information-seeking behavior is the number of questions an individual asks another person. Intimacy level of communication content is when information exchanged is a low risk like a person's demographics, attitudes, or opinions. Reciprocity has equal amounts of information being shared between two people. The similarity is two people sharing similar attitudes that represent agreement towards each other. Finally, there is liking that creates positive feelings or regards toward another person (Redmond, 2015).

Online Consumerism and Uncertainty Reduction

Word of mouth communication is essential to a brand's success. Online consumer reviews are a great source for people interested in buying a certain product. Nothing is worse than buying a product and ending up disliking it or not using it. Uncertainty can be reduced when shoppers are trying to gather more information on the product. Liu et al., (2008) conducted a study on how consumer reviews affect overall product sales and written review quality. Prior research only focused on review score scales and not the quality reputation of a reviewer and exposure to online communities. By using URT, the authors can understand how online reviews infer product quality, reduce product uncertainty, and make a final purchase decision. Reviews of media products like books, DVDs, and Video were used to measure how well reviews sold these products. Liu et al. (2008) variables were focused on abnormal sale changes between favorable and unfavorable review portfolios. The study's results showed consumers seek reviewer credibility prior to reading reviews and purchasing. Also, consumers react more to reviews on products that receive less coverage online. This means that these reviews can be more informative due to having fewer people writing opinions on a product. Comparatively, online sales are impacted by product reviews as the product ages (Liu et al., 2008).

URT was first utilized as an in-person means of communication. But since the rise of the internet, there is not much of a need to be physically available to communicate with one another. Measuring how fan pages utilize audiences who visit these sites and remain consistent followers using URT. Lee et al. (2016) looked at follower counts on certain fan pages on social media networks and gauging if low follower amounts are attributed to these pages posting low-quality content for interaction. Research questions included the roles of page follower's uncertainty reduction strategies, what were the impacts of the amount of uncertainty on fan pages that came

from posts and behaviors to fan pages. As well as does satisfaction and loyalty from page moderators affect continuous visiting behaviors. Social media platform, Facebook was used due to a higher user population. Variables measured user demographics, frequency of logging into Facebook, surveyed uncertainty constructs like loyalty, and satisfaction. Based on the research conducted, the uncertainty is reduced due to the numerous interactions and visitations on a fan page. From users, and moderators being able to comment by explaining the message to those who do not understand. Low amounts of uncertainty are present which increases product awareness on these fan pages. This means these visitors turn into paying customers (Lee et al.,2016).

Consumers will use uncertainty reduction tactics before buying something. Online communities create routes for users to communicate with one another. Lee et al. (2017) looked at how independent online brands are able to influence customers to purchase products via URT and the brand's involvement. "Research that focuses on understanding relationship quality and information quality of independently owned online brand forums is crucial since the purpose of managing online communities is to facilitate members' communications and increase their adhesion to the community." (Lee et al. 2017, p. 1985). The authors surveyed users in a technology-sharing information forum. These forums have users discuss the latest electronic products. Lee et al. specifically targeted users buying Apple devices. The research included two questions pertaining to how information quality and relationship quality of a firm influence customer purchasing via uncertainty reduction. Next was how effective forums are in reducing uncertainty about the firm's offerings depends on involvement. Hypotheses included were, uncertainty reduction is positively related to purchase intentions, information quality is positively related to uncertainty reduction, relationship quality is positively related to uncertainty reduction,

and product involvement has a moderating effect such that a higher level of involvement will increase the influence of uncertainty reduction on purchase intention. Two hundred and forty-three participants answered using existing instruments such as Morgan and Hunt's (1994) uncertainty reduction scale. Users were assigned Likert scales between one, strongly disagree, to seven, strongly agree when assessing the questions. Five variables defined were information quality, relationship quality, uncertainty reduction, purchase intention, and involvement. The results indicated information quality and relationship quality of online brands reduced uncertainty of the firm and its products. Risk is reduced from buying a product due to community involvement disclosing their experiences with the product (Lee et al, 2017).

Uncertainty Reduction and Attraction

Often URT is used to gauge persons within relationships who interact in a face-to-face manner. Ellison et al. (2006) wanted to see how many people who use sites like match.com end up meeting face-to-face. Using URT to measure how much information users disclose to current love interests. Ellison et al.'s (2006) hypotheses were that there is a greater chance that users will meet face-to-face if they properly self-disclose information between one another. Variables were labeled based on relational goals, self-disclosure, online dating experience, online dating success, and using a controlled variable of how much time participants spent online dating. Judging from the results, researchers found that those who place more importance on face-to-face meetings felt like they were more honest in disclosing personal information. There were negative statistics regarding honesty, compared to previous research. Honesty can be tied to those who are controlling how they present themselves online compared to who they are in real life. People who work on presenting themselves online may not be one hundred percent honest about

themselves, based on fears of personal negatives may turn potential partners away (Ellison et al., 2006)

To measure URT, specific strategies were developed to measure uncertainty. Antheunis et al. (2009) wanted to see what certain strategies would reduce uncertainty amongst Hyve users. The study was created in regards to how social networking sites offer visual and auditory cues compared to Multi-User-Dungeons offering a text-based cue. By measuring the cue richness of social networking sites, Antheunis et al. (2009) can gauge how uncertainty can be reduced. For the purpose of this study, seven hundred and four users participated between the ages of ten to sixty-two. The first measurement within the study was a 14-item questionnaire that was used to measure three uncertainty reduction strategies (URS) of passive, active, and interactive. Participants answered via a Likert scale of 1= Never to 4 = more than three times. The second was the measurement of interpersonal attraction by McCroskey and McCain (1974). Variables measured were passive URS, active urs, interactive urs, low level of uncertainty, similarity, social attraction, valance of information such as age and gender. The core focus for variable comparison was with the affiliation of the valance of information variable. The results confirmed Berger and Calabrese (1975) URT in that lower levels of uncertainty are positively related to social attraction in initial interactions. However, on a social networking site, the quality of obtained information does not increase social attraction. But the valence of obtained information creates a better impact within a social networking site (Antheunis, 2009).

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) has been used to study URT with the absence of nonverbal cues with language-based strategies. Antheunis et al. (2010) conducted a study to see if uncertainty reduction strategies increased verbal states of affection in CMC, versus in-person. The reasoning for this study is to prove that there are increased amounts of

question-asking and self-disclosure in a CMC setting. The researchers used three methods of measurement, a face-to-face condition, a visual CMC condition, and a text-only CMC exchange. Hypotheses proposed greater amounts of self-disclosure, question asking, text-based verbal statements via CMC compared to face-to-face. Variables were coded based on a single utterance to several categories, self-disclosure, question, or other. The results showed that question/disclosure intimacy and proportion of question asking were greater in CMC than in face-to-face communication. CMC participants asked more intimate self-disclosing questions than those in a face-to-face setup (Antheunis et al., 2010).

When acquaintances meet each other, one might be inclined to look up the person's Facebook Profile. Since people want to know more about people they meet and seek information from their Facebook profiles, uncertainty can develop. A Facebook profile may present different perceptions compared to the initial face-to-face interaction. Wagner (2016) wrote that when modality switching occurs between two variables, face-to-face, and face-to-face then profile viewing, authenticity is at stake. Prior research mentions two primary vocabulary definitions, attributional confidence (AC), the level of confidence one feels towards knowing another person, social attraction (SA), the level of desire to develop a friendship with another person. AC and SA are questioned when the variables are measured. URT has eight axioms and specifically for this research axioms one, and seven were studied. The first axiom of Berger and Calabere (1975) proposed a negative linear relationship between verbal communication and uncertainty during initial interactions. The seventh axiom proposed a negative linear relationship between uncertainty and liking. Two-hundred and forty-eight undergraduate students were recruited and were given two surveys. The timed survey instruments were a quasi-replication of the Douglas and Clatterbuck (1979) attributional confidence scale and the McCroskey and McCain (1974)

interpersonal attraction scale. By using time as an additional variable, results showed SA may be more time-sensitive than AC in face-to-face modality. People may not know one another better when substituting Facebook over an initial face-to-face meeting. Variable SA was higher in the face-to-face the only strategy. The final result showed that combining face-to-face and profile viewing had higher ratings of AC (Wagner, 2016).

Social Commerce

Despite e-commerce channels serving as a primary means of obtaining merchandise electronically. Since the rise of social networking, a new term s-commerce has blossomed. “In recent years, and this has led to the development of new shopping trends whereby businesses and customers utilize social media to facilitate more effective purchases, a process referred to as s-commerce.” (Salma, 2018, p. 147). Salma (2018) wanted to see the value between s-commerce and its acceptance by customers via Instagram. S-commerce is somewhat new terminology with very limited empirical research. The study used the unified theory of acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT) as its framework. Hypotheses included where social influence has a positive and significant effect on behavior intention to s-commerce. Survey participants included four hundred-and forty one participants using instagram. The variables measured are individual theories that stem from UTAUT such as, performance expectancy (PE), effort expectancy (EE), social influence (SI), facilitating conditions (FC), behavioral intention (BI), and trust (T). A seven point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree was using a 20 question survey. The results from the study revealed SI and T were the significant factors affecting BI. While FC did not affect BI which did not cause any significance (Salma, 2018).

Success of Facebook Likes

The credibility of Facebook posts can be ascertained to people liking posts which in turn creates success. Carr et al. (2018) studied paralinguistic digital affordances (PDA) such as likes/reactions attributes to post success. Previous research concludes that a person will measure the success of self-presentation based on how people use feedback cues like PDA. But what is missing from previous studies is the exact quantity of PDA with Facebook likes & reactions (LRs) metrically measures self-presentation success. Respondents were recruited by having one participant identify two Facebook friends that are relationally close both offline and online. Variables measured LRs and correlating if the post was successful. Predictor Variables were based on an average number of Likes/Reactions between friends, and Likes/Reactions provided by a participant over a three-day period. Control variables measured the total number of Facebook friends, the intensity of Facebook use, the length of time in Facebook posts, and the need to find people similar to themselves. In order for a post to be considered successful, the results showed that it depends on how each friend group mutually reacts to each other and their posts. Those who provided more LRs to others' posts expected LRs in return for their own posts (Carr, et al. 2018).

Product Placement

Many brands opt to find product placements in movies or TV shows. Morton and Friedman (2002) identified a research gap surrounding what variables affect and contribute to audience beliefs and behaviors as they relate to product placement. The researchers surveyed college students about product placement versus usage of the product. Although no independent variable was used, a five-point Likert scale was used to measure reported behavior after viewing the placement. The study found that the way a product is depicted within the placement, and even who engages with the product in the movie, can predict consumer behavior after viewing

(Morton and Friedman, 2002). For instance, if an actor with high credibility among the target audience uses the product in a favorable way during the movie or show, consumers will generally be more likely to purchase or use the product. Brands should continue to seek product placement opportunities with positive mentions by credible celebrities.

Celebrity Endorsements

Another compelling advertising tactic is the use of celebrity endorsements. Dekker and van Reijmersdal (2013) completed a study examining the effects of disclosure types and celebrity credibility. Although similar in a few aspects to findings from Stubb et al. (2019), this study placed more emphasis on the celebrity persona. As seen in previous research, disclosures may be mandated and the general effect of the types of disclosures was not known. Dekker and van Reijmersdal (2013) focused on a particular episode of Oprah's talk show where she gives away a Samsung camcorder to each of her audience members. Participants watched the episode with different levels of disclosures and the researchers measured their responses. Variables included celebrity credibility, brand attitude, acceptance of product claims and several controls (Dekker & van Reijmersdal, 2013). The study found that the more credible participants viewed Oprah, the more positive their brand attitude was towards Samsung. Disclosures only played a role in undermining the acceptance of the brand claims when participants did not view Oprah as a credible source. Understanding that disclosures must be utilized in different placements, brands should take a careful look at who their target audience would find most credible before selecting a celebrity endorser.

In a similar study concerning celebrity endorsement, Russel and Rasolofoarison (2017) researched how consumers respond to celebrities using products in real life situations as compared to more traditional celebrity endorsement advertisements. Previous studies had not

focused on this particular type of affiliation. The researchers chose an energy drink brand that was unknown within the U.S. and paired the drink with Sarah Jessica Parker, a popular U.S. actress. A marketing department at a large, southwestern U.S. university was chosen with a pool of 143 students, mostly female. The students were randomly selected for one of four groups, each with a separate variable. One group was shown a photo of Sarah Jessica Parker in a commercial for this energy drink and another group saw a photo of product placement in a movie starring the actress. The third photo was a paparazzi-like image of Sarah Jessica Parker with the energy drink in real life and the final photo was an advertisement for the drink without including the actress. The researchers measured the brand attitude, purchase intent, self-brand connection and celebrity credibility through surveys administered to the students after viewing the photos. Ultimately, the researchers found that all of their hypotheses were supported. Consumers are more likely to purchase a product when the celebrity endorsement appears to be a natural occurrence of the celebrity using the product in real life.

Social Media Brand Attachment

As discussed, social media continues to play a large role in the lives of consumers and advertisers alike. A recent study by Klassen et al. (2018) sought to understand why health organizations struggle to see the engagement that lifestyle brands and food industries see on Facebook and Instagram. Public health campaigns are very important and the researchers aimed to uncover how these campaigns might deliver better results. The researchers took a multidimensional variable approach and used linear regression models to categorize the strategies and engagement data uncovered. The ten most popular food industries and ten most popular lifestyle brands were compared to six health organizations. Posts from Facebook and Instagram were analyzed by organizational type, strategies used, content of the posts and format

of the posts. Ultimately, the researchers found that links to buy items, body image messages with food content, and content that produced positive emotions had the highest engagement scores on Facebook. Relatable content had the highest engagement score on Instagram. This study offers insight into what types of posts consumers engage with the most and how brands can leverage this knowledge to improve reach.

Dwivedi et al. (2019) took a different approach when studying social media. Instead of focusing on the effects of different types of social media advertising or content on users, this study concentrated on understanding the effect of emotional brand attachment on consumer-based brand equity (CBBE) and perceived brand credibility and consumer satisfaction. The researchers worked with 340 web users based in Australia and asked them questions about their favorite social media brand. Most of the respondents were female and 74% reported Facebook as their brand of choice. The study found that when social media brands are able to create positive emotional connections with their users, the users' trust in the brand increases. These emotional brand attachments directly impact credibility. From an advertising perspective, brands should pay close attention to the attachment of the users to the social media platforms as decisions are made regarding which platforms to advertise with.

Before the rise of social media, judgements about credibility and information was a personalized and individualized process. In today's world, people are bombarded with news, opinions and various forms of content across multiple platforms every day. Sohn and Choi (2019) conducted a study to focus on how people make these judgements in light of the changes brought on by social media. The researchers looked specifically at how people perceive one's own centrality to a network (cognitive network centrality) and how similar one's views are to this network (cognitive network homogeneity). These two concepts were related to a person's

credibility assessments and the intent to share this information on social media. The study focused on 256 online respondents across several large universities in Seoul, Korea. The majority of participants were female. The researchers concluded that people are more likely to find social media content credible if presented by an expert instead of a novice. Those with a higher level of cognitive network centrality are more likely to share information that is deemed credible and are more concerned with credibility. Ultimately, it was found that people judge information based on the amount of uncertainty in their immediate world (Sohn & Choi, 2019). This conclusion leads directly into the world of social media influencers.

Social Media Influencers

A recent study by Stubb et al. (2019) examines the effect of social media influencers using different types of sponsorship justification disclosures and how social media users react. Social media influencers may have millions of followers on a singular platform. Influencers are especially sought after by brands looking to reach new consumers. Current laws and regulations specify how and when an influencer must disclose when compensation is received. Prior research had not examined which types of sponsorship justification disclosures were most effective for brands, influencers and consumers alike (Stubb et al., 2019). The study completed by Stubb et al. (2019) asked participants questions about a YouTube influencer giving a product review for Patagonia. The study used a seven-point Likert scale to measure the effect of no sponsorship disclosure, a simple disclosure, an influencer disclosure or a brand disclosure. Ultimately, the researchers found that using an influencer disclosure could result in an increase in both source and message credibility. Consumers generally had a more positive attitude towards the influencer receiving payment from a brand, as compared to a simple disclosure. Researchers also found that when the brand posed its own disclosure for the influencer, the brand does so by endorsing the

influencer, which led to positive outcomes for both parties. Lastly, the study found that any type of disclosure did not affect the overall brand attitude. Ultimately, brands can learn that partnering with credible influencers can be successful when sponsorship justification disclosures are posted for both parties.

Since social media influencers are often paid to showcase a brand's products. Occasionally an influencer may post a recommendation that is not sponsored. Influencers are meant to convey their opinion regarding products and brands. By not posting sponsored content, impartiality disclosures (ID) occur. Impartiality is based on content that is non-sponsored, while partial content is sponsored. Stubb et al. (2019) wanted to research mechanisms behind influencers impartial and partial brand communication in social media. By using the power of persuasion, the authors hypothesized that impartial persuasion will be lower vs partial persuasion. In the meantime, the product review credibility will be higher for influencers impartially vs. partially reviewing products. Participants answered multiple Likert scale questionnaires measuring, persuasion knowledge activation, product-review credibility, source credibility, brand attitude, and purchase intention. The study revealed that audiences are less likely to perceive influencer reviews of non sponsored products as advertising. It also found that credibility is increased when the audience is informed that the product is not sponsored, or that sponsorship is not disclosed (Stubb et al. 2019).

Brand marketers are recruiting influencers due to its strong effects on selling products. However there is not much research available on how influencers attempt to sell products within specific target audiences. Ki (2019) created a study on how audiences mimic influencers based on how they sell products. The study also looked at how brands measure influencers prior to establishing partnerships Several research questions included was, how does desire to mimic

influencers have a positive effect on behavioral outcomes (Ki, 2019). Hypotheses measured variables like attractiveness, prestigious, expert, informative, and interactive Instagram contents. By using Amazon's Mechanical Turk via a web survey, Ki used a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1, strongly disagree, to 7, strongly agree. The questionnaire was distributed to participants in the United States between the ages of 18-49. Regardless of follower count, the study found brands primarily look at visual appeal, prestige, expertise as informative, and promote interaction. Influencers who have millions of followers may not be ideal to market products, as they avoid previously mentioned content creation. One final thought is that the study identified specific qualities of influencer posts that affected target individuals' evaluations. It might be beneficial for brands to employ multiple influencers especially when initiating corporate initiatives.

As influencers rise in popularity, further research is completed to study the effects influencers have on brands and consumers. Jin and Muqaddam (2019) conducted a study to determine if Instagram influencers have a positive effect on brand outcomes as compared to native brand posts. The study also examined how influencers affect credibility of the post and what outcomes the influencer receives from brand association in terms of source credibility. The researchers surveyed 304 female consumers through a web questionnaire and were randomly assigned to one of four manipulation stimuli. The study looked at photoshopped Instagram posts by the luxury brand, Chanel, and the influencer Julie Sarinana. Jin and Muqaddam (2019) found that the brand's credibility plays a large role in determining the perceived credibility of the influencer. The study also found that consumers prefer to see influencers in the post with the promoted product. Generally, consumers respond more positively towards influencer content as

it pertains to positive brand attitude and brand credibility. This study is another positive contribution to the effectiveness of influencers.

Additionally, a recent study by Casalo et al. (2020) examined opinion leadership on Instagram in the fashion industry. The researchers wanted to understand what types of Instagram content leads to opinion leader status, and also how followers behave if they perceive someone as an opinion leader. The study focused on an opinion leader Instagram account with more than 76,000 followers. These followers were invited to participate in the study and 808 answered the questionnaire. The survey included several established measurement scales and examined perceptions of opinion leadership, originality, uniqueness of the account, online recommendations, interaction intentions, intentions to follow the account's advice, online interaction propensity, and the perceived fit of the account with their personality. Casalo et al. (2020) found that consumers believe originality and uniqueness are both essential to making an Instagram account into an opinion leader. Once the account is established as an opinion leader, consumers are more likely to interact with the account and recommend it, while also intending to follow the specific fashion advice posted. This study furthers the research examining Instagram, consumer behavior and brand attitude.

Social Media Advertising

Another recent study on social media as it relates to product placement was completed by Wai Lai and Liu (2020). As social media continues to rise in popularity and plays a large role in digital advertising strategies, the researchers wanted to understand how content likeability, content credibility and social media engagement impact a user's acceptance of product placement, specifically on mobile devices. The researchers focused on different age groups, knowing that young adults are more likely to use social media, but recognizing that use is

growing among middle aged adults and this group typically has more buying power. The study sourced 448 participants from WeChat, a social media chat application and just over 50% of the participants were considered middle aged, falling between the ages of 31-60. The rest of the respondents were between 18-30. Ultimately, the study concluded that if users like the content presented, it is more likely to result in acceptance of product placement, especially with engagement from friends. Users were also more likely to believe the content presented if it was likeable. In terms of the age groups, middle aged audiences found content credibility to be most important to acceptance of product placement. Overall, brands that use product placement in advertising, should concentrate on generating likeable, credible content that encourages engagement.

Social media advertising plays a large role in today's digital advertising strategies. Yeo et al. (2020) completed a study to research how social media advertising affects a consumer's purchase intent. The study examined users accepting mobile ads, different types of social media users and their subsequent purchase intentions. The researchers were especially interested in how ad interactivity positively affects purchase intent, information, trust, vividness (how the ad stimulates a user's senses), brand image and word of mouth. Participants were Malaysian consumers and ultimately, 219 people completed the study. The researchers included participants from a mall and a university campus to ensure a broader representation of viewpoints. The highest number of participants were male and within the 18-24 age group. Yeo et al. (2020) concluded that the original hypotheses were supported by the research. This work leads to the conclusion that social media advertising, social media advertising likes and brand credibility all lead to an increase in sales and brand loyalty.

URT has plenty room to create more discussion beyond a face-to-face environment. It can be utilized to analyze how we disclose ourselves in web spaces. It would be interesting to see how people disclose themselves perhaps visually on Instagram, or in a more personal matter via a text messaging thread. How does one present themselves within different relationship roles, like a coworker, teacher, friend, or significant other? Facets of uncertainty could arise from mistakes, like typos, capitalizing wrong words, or certain emoticons could confuse the receiver. Additionally, the research shows the importance of credibility in all interactions, both from a consumer and brand perspective. These studies provide valuable information for today's brands looking for engaging advertising opportunities. Brands are more likely to experience positive returns when partnering with a person their target audience views as credible. Whether a brand utilizes social media advertising, influencer messaging, celebrity endorsements or product placements, brands must focus on the credibility of the source and include the proper disclosures.

Rationale

The previous research explains how uncertainty and credibility interact, but it falls short of examining how these two concepts interact through Instagram advertisements and influencer posts. Moving ahead, this research will uncover how credibility and uncertainty affect consumers' acceptance of these advertising types on Instagram.

Hypotheses

The first hypothesis focuses on sponsored content on Instagram, which includes ad types that are clearly branded and marked as advertisements. These ads may be images with text or in a video format. For the purpose of this study, ads with images and no video will be analyzed.

H1a: Credibility increases with higher levels of engagement on Instagram ads.

H1b: Uncertainty decreases with higher levels of engagement on Instagram ads.

The second hypothesis concentrates on influencer marketing across Instagram. Many brands choose to pay celebrities or non-celebrities with a large number of followers to promote the brand through an influencer post. These posts may be labeled as an ad and may come across in different formats. For this study, influencer posts are analyzed that are clearly marked as an ad.

H2a: Credibility increases with higher levels of engagement on influencer ad posts.

H2b: Uncertainty decreases with higher levels of engagement on influencer ad posts.

Methods

Participants

For the purpose of this study, the researchers aim to survey 200 participants in total. Participants will be asked to voluntarily participate without incentive through social media posts, and through employees who are off the clock, and in an off-stage area (i.e. break room) at a local Target store in Cicero, NY. Participation will be anonymous, but researchers will ask simple demographic questions, including sex and age. All participants will abide by being the age of eighteen years and older for the survey.

Procedure

Participants will be shown a series of real-life Instagram posts. Two posts will be sponsored ad content by brands with high engagement visible (likes and comments). Two posts will be sponsored ad content by brands with low engagement visible. Two posts will feature

influencer posts with high engagement and a further two with low engagement. The brands and influencers will be chosen from the same industry for consistency's sake. Immediately after viewing the posts, participants will take a brief online survey.

Measurement

For the purpose of this study, the researchers will use two established scales within the survey. The first scale was developed by McCroskey and Teven (1999) and examines source credibility with a reliability score of .80-.94. The second scale studies the impact of user comments in social media and was created by Hazari et al. (2017) with a reliability score of .63-.83. Both scales have been found to be valid.

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Appendix A

Source Credibility Measures

Measurement of source credibility has been a concern of the Communication discipline for over 40 years. The first multidimensional measure appeared in the Communication literature in 1966 (McCroskey, J. C., Scales for the measurement of ethos, *Speech Monographs*, 33, 65-72) and provided scales measuring competence and trustworthiness. Many other studies were conducted over the next 30 years. The most complete measure (reported below) includes scales for three dimensions: competence, trustworthiness, and goodwill/caring. These are measures of constructs which are parallel to those theorized by Aristotle in *The Rhetoric*.

The development of these measures employed oblique factor analyses which generated correlated dimensions. That is, the three measures represent unique constructs, but those constructs are intercorrelated, as suggested by Aristotle and found in many research studies. Earlier work had used orthogonal factor analyses which forces uncorrelated factors. Thus, the new measures are more consistent with general rhetorical/social influence theories as well as previous findings. These measures provide three separate total scores, one for each dimension. THESE SCORES SHOULD NOT BE SUMMED TO CREATE A SINGLE SCORE. To do so would be adding the proverbial apples and oranges (and watermelons). They should not be employed in stepwise regression analyses because their colinearity will violate the assumptions of this statistical procedure. However, they can be used in regular multiple regression and in canonical correlational analyses, as well as for computing individual simple correlations.

The alpha reliabilities of these measures usually range between .80 and .94.

Instructions: On the scales below, indicate your feelings about your manager (or, if not currently employed, your most recent supervisor). Numbers 1 and 7 indicate a very strong feeling. Numbers 2 and 6 indicate a strong feeling. Numbers 3 and 5 indicate a fairly weak feeling. Number 4 indicates you are undecided.

- 1) **Intelligent 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Unintelligent**
- 2) Untrained 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Trained
- 3) **Cares about me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Doesn't care about me**
- 4) **Honest 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Dishonest**
- 5) **Has my interests at heart 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Doesn't have my interests at heart**
- 6) Untrustworthy 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Trustworthy
- 7) Inexpert 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Expert
- 8) Self-centered 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Not self-centered
- 9) **Concerned with me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Not concerned with me**
- 10) **Honorable 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Dishonorable**
- 11) **Informed 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Uninformed**
- 12) **Moral 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Immoral**
- 13) Incompetent 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Competent

- 14) Unethical 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Ethical
- 15) Insensitive 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Sensitive
- 16) Bright 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Stupid**
- 17) Phony 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Genuine
- 18) Not understanding 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Understanding

SCORING:To compute your scores, add your scores for each item as indicated below:

Recode BOLDED questions with the following format:

1=7

2=6

3=5

4=4

5=3

6=2

7=1

Competence Factor (1, 2, 7, 11, 13, and 16)_____

Caring/Goodwill Factor (3, 5, 8, 9, 15, and 18)_____

Trustworthiness Factor (4, 6, 10, 12, 14, and 17) _____

Source:

McCroskey, J. C., & Teven, J. J. (1999). Goodwill: A reexamination of the construct and its measurement. *Communication Monographs*, 66, 90-103.

Appendix B

Impact of User-Generated Comments Questionnaire

The Impact of User-Generated Comments Questionnaire (Hazari, Bergiel, & Sethna, 2017) was developed for a U.S.-based study examining two uses of user-generated content (UGC), i.e., hedonic and utilitarian. The sample comprised business students at a major university. An example of an Amazon.com user review showing an actual product was presented. Participants then answered questions related to UGC as a variable affecting purchase intention, hedonic, utilitarian, and trust in user reviews/comments. Content validity was established by Marketing faculty. Cronbach's alphas were as follows: hedonic = 0.82; utilitarian use = 0.77; intention to purchase = 0.83; trust = 0.63. The authors note that one limitation of the study was that it analyzed reported behavior rather than actual behavior. (PsycTESTS Database Record (c) 2019 APA, all rights reserved)

Directions: In this survey, there are no right or wrong answers. In this part of the survey, please respond to the statements given in the survey by checking the appropriate response related to the degree of agreement with the statement, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Some questions are used only for demographic analysis. For this survey, the terms 'user comments' and 'reviews' are used interchangeably.

Likert Scale: (1)-Strongly disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Neither Agree nor Disagree, (4) (Agree) Strongly Agree (5).

Questionnaire:

- 1. I enjoy reading user comments/reviews of a product**
- 2. I feel good purchasing a product that has positive user comments/reviews**
- 3. I love shopping online because of user comments/reviews of a product**
- 4. I usually go on the Internet to read user comments/reviews of a product**
- 5. I believe user reviews of a product are more beneficial than manufacturer provided information**
- 6. I usually shop online with intent to purchase during that session**
- 7. I believe user comments/reviews of products**
- 8. I would trust a product review posted by an average user more than a product review posted by an expert**
- 9. If the majority of user comments/reviews are negative, I would not purchase the product**
- 10. If the majority of user comments/reviews are positive, I would purchase the product**
- 11. Information searching on the internet is fun rather than tedious**
- 12. It is convenient to gather information from the internet**
- 13. It is important for me to make a purchase decision based on user comments/reviews of a product**
- 14. It is risky to rely on user comments/reviews of a product when making purchase decisions**
- 15. It saves time to gather information by using the internet**

- 16. Reading user comments/reviews is a worthwhile use of my time**
- 17. Reading user comments/reviews of a product would change my mind about purchasing a product**
- 18. Reviews found on company websites influence my purchase decision**
- 19. I trust reviews from celebrities I follow on social networking websites**
- 20. User Comments/reviews have in the past influenced my purchase decision**
- 21. I trust reviews from friends or people I follow on social networking websites**
- 22. I trust reviews from identified experts on social networking websites**
- 23. I trust user comments/reviews from people who have purchased the product**
- 24. Searching for information on the internet is a good way to spend time**
- 25. Searching for information on the internet is not obligatory but enjoyable**
- 26. The internet can be a useful tool to compare information about products from different websites**

What is your gender?

Male (1)

Female (2)

What is your approximate age? _____

Source:

Hazari, Sunil, Bergiel, Blaise J., & Sethna, Beheruz N. (2017). Hedonic and utilitarian use of user-generated content on online shopping websites. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, Vol

23(6), 572-591. doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13527266.2016.1143383>, © 2017 by Taylor & Francis. Reproduced by Permission of Taylor & Francis.