

# Chapter 7

## Expectancy–Value: Identifying Relationships Associated with Consuming User–Generated Content

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### ABSTRACT

*Consumers today have more control over media consumption than ever before, with interactive media helping to transform the industry away from a traditional publisher-centric focus towards a new dynamic user-centric model. Examples of prominent Web 2.0 media environments that support the creation, distribution and consumption of user-generated content (UGC) include YouTube, MySpace, Facebook, Wikipedia, StupidVideos, Flickr, Blogger, and personal Web pages, among others. In addition, recent media research involving Social Cognitive Theory has emerged to offer explanatory power for Internet use and could provide a better understanding of the UGC phenomenon. Therefore, a theoretical model grounded in Social Cognitive Theory was tested examining the relationships between media experience, desirability of control, attitude and the consumption of UGC. A survey was administered to an opt-in online panel (N=325) recruited for Web-based research with the findings confirming the hypothesized model.*

### INTRODUCTION

Over the last several decades, the media landscape has evolved into a complex and dynamic conglomeration of both traditional and interactive media

that seek to serve the needs of today's fast-paced lifestyles. While traditional media are struggling under the weight of increased segmentation, the interactive environment has shown the capacity to capitalize on this fragmented market by offering media alternatives that provide consumers a

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voice amidst the whirlwind of information and advertising. In the online world, these new media options are being driven increasingly less by publishers and more so by consumers empowered to consume, create, and distribute media, often referred to as user-generated content (UGC). User-generated content refers to media that is created or produced by the general public rather than by paid professionals and is primarily distributed via Web 2.0 technologies online. In fact, the Internet has come to serve as an outlet for an overwhelming majority of American adults (71%) with creators of UGC expected to climb to 95 million by 2011 (Verna, 2007). Given these numbers, it is evident that UGC must be strongly considered by marketing technology professionals as both a means to disseminate brand friendly information, through both the delivery and creation of media content, but also as a means of keeping a finger on the pulse of their consumers.

Although the creation and dissemination of media content has been a constant in our world for hundreds of years, the potential for an ordinary consumer to communicate with and influence a mass audience has just recently been achieved with the advent of Web 2.0 technologies. Examples of prominent Web 2.0 websites and web-based applications that support the creation, distribution and consumption of UGC include, but are not limited to, YouTube, MySpace, Facebook, Wikipedia, StupidVideos, Flickr, Blogger, and personal Web pages, among others. Amidst the plethora of both traditional and digital media choices today, the Internet has revealed itself to be an outlet where traditional forms of media entertainment can also converge and be offered to consumers in a time and place that is most convenient for them. While traditional media are nowhere near extinction, it is clear that trends are changing such that consumers are in more control of their media consumption than ever before in history and, because of new media technologies, have the freedom to create as well as disseminate content. This media content consumption sphere continues to shift towards a

‘user-centric model’ led by UGC and away from the past model that has been characterized as ‘publisher-centric’ (Daugherty, Eastin, & Bright, 2008). Beginning in 2004 with the explosion of the Web 2.0 market, UGC has formed a plethora of niche markets within the media landscape generating more than \$450 million in advertising revenues (Verna, 2007, p.2). As a result of this changing paradigm and expanding media channel, top television networks are integrating blogs, podcasts, and news feeds into their current media strategies, reflecting the importance of UGC in communicating with today’s consumers. Certainly the accelerated growth of this nascent area presents both significant problems and opportunities for media technology researchers to better understand consumer motivations for consumption and the effectiveness of UGC.

Recent online research involving Social Cognitive Theory (LaRose & Eastin, 2002, 2004; Eastin & LaRose, 2000) has emerged to offer explanatory power for consumer Internet use and could provide a better understanding of the UGC phenomenon. Specifically, social-cognitive theory is a framework that explains human actions along three combined areas: individuals, environments and behavior. Within SCT, behavior is an observable act and the performance of behavior is determined, in large part, by the expected outcomes of the behavior. These expectations are formed through our own direct experience or mediated by vicarious reinforcements observed through others. Ultimately, individuals act according to expected outcomes and learning experiences organized around six basic types of motivations for human behavior: novel sensory, social, status, monetary, enjoyable activity, and self-reactive incentives (Bandura, 1986).

User-generated content has empowered consumers and enabled them to connect with one another in the broad online information space. In this regard, it is imperative for media technology researchers to begin to gain a better understanding of the impact of UGC and underlying reasons

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