The Relative Impact of User- and Marketer-generated Content on Consumer Purchase Intentions: The Case of the Social Media Marketing Platform, 0.8L

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This paper investigates the relative impact of user- and marketer-generated content on consumer purchase intentions and the way of designing an effective social media marketing platform by conducting a case study of the global social media marketing platform, 0.8L. Based on literature reviews of social media marketing and consumer purchase intentions, the case study was undertaken by making use of qualitative and quantitative results from a content analysis and a participatory survey. Firstly, about 450 consumer reviews about ten sunscreen products posted on the 0.8L platform were compared with their marketer-generated information. Next, 55 subjects took part in a participatory survey about their purchase intentions of moisturizing creams on the 0.8L platform. Results indicated that user-generated content (i.e. texts and photos) provided more personal experiences of the product usage process, whereas marketers focused on distinctive product photos and features. Moreover, customer reviews (particularly, high volume and narrative format) had more impact on purchasing decisions than marketer information in the online cosmetics market. Honest reviews (both positive and negative) of real users were found to help companies assess their newly-released products promptly and easily. In addition to the importance of customer-driven marketing practices, this study identifies distinctive UX design features to develop a competitive social media marketing platform, which facilitates creating and sharing sincere customer reviews that resonate with potential buyers.

Keywords: social media marketing; user-generated content; marketer-generated content; consumer purchase intentions; UX design

1   Introduction

The proliferation of social media created a whole new era for companies and brands. Social media has been widely regarded as "an effective mechanism that contributes to the firm's marketing aims and strategy; especially in the aspects related to customers' involvement, customer relationship management and communication (Alalwan, Rana, Dwivedi, & Algharabat, 2017, p.1178)." The number of global social media users reached 3.196 billion in 2018, up 13 percent from the year before (Kemp, 2018). According to eMarketer's US Social Trends report, social ad spending is predicted to increase by 19% in 2019, an estimated total of $37B (eMarketer, 2019). For instance, Barnes, Lescault, and Holmes (2018) found that

nine in ten US Fortune 500 companies in 2018 have a public-facing Facebook page and that these companies also evaluate and adapt their usage of social media to increase engagement with consumers and resonate with younger users.

In the meanwhile, these social media channels allow consumers to play an increasingly active role in the marketing cycle by creating, distributing, and consuming digital content. Recently, consumers preferentially search for and trust organic, user-generated content (UGC) more than all other forms of advertising; therefore, companies have increasingly valued user-generated content in the marketing field. According to Stackla's Consumer Content Report, 87% of people said that UGC (including influencer-created content) highly impacts their purchase decisions, whereas only 13% of them mentioned the effects of brand-created content (Stackla, 2017). In addition, BrightLocal (2018) discovered that 85% of consumers trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations, and consumers read an average of 10 online reviews before feeling able to trust a local business. Consequently, customers can influence other potential buyers through online reviews, social media, and so forth during the pre- and post-purchase stages (Court, Elzinga, Mulder, & Vetvik, 2009)

In light of the aforementioned prevalence of social media marketing, a large volume of UGC has been created across diverse social platforms such as Facebook, KakaoTalk, Instagram, Youtube, and others in the South Korean digital marketing landscape; however, companies are still struggling to implement social media marketing practices strategically, and users must spend large amounts of time searching relevant and useful content. In particular, a number of well-written customer reviews have been generated and spread under the auspices of the company or brand. Accordingly, many doubts about the reliability of these consumer reviews have risen. In this context, the social media marketing platform 0.8L was established in 2015 with the aim of sharing honest consumer experiences. Currently, marketers from about 3,800 global brands utilize this platform as a strategic marketing tool. In this vein, the present paper conducts a case study of the global social media marketing platform, 0.8L in order to investigate the relative impact of user- and marketer-generated content on consumer purchase intentions and the way of designing an effective social media marketing platform.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Social Media in Marketing
Social media refers to websites and applications that are designed to allow for quickly creating and sharing of user-generated content among organizations and individuals (Filo, Lock, & Karg, 2015; Hudson, 2018). Over the past decade, social media applications have been utilized in a wide range of different contexts including education, social, politics, marketing, management, and others (Alalwan, Rana, Dwivedi, & Algharabat, 2017). In particular, the successful use of social in marketing is of considerable importance so that companies devote large budget toward social media marketing. Social media marketing activates "a dialogue often triggered by consumers/audiences, or a business/product/ services that circulated amongst the stated parties to set in motion a revealing communication on some promotional information so that it allows learning from one another's use and experiences, eventually benefitting all of the involved parties (Dwivedi, Kapoor, & Chen, 2015, p.29)." Indeed, social media provides marketers with remarkable opportunities to closely reach consumers and build more personal relationships with them,

as well as to completely change the way marketing content is created, distributed, and consumed (Godey et al., 2016).

2.2   Social Media Marketing Content and Consumer Purchase Intentions

In general, social media marketing content is classified into two main categories: user-generated content (UGC) and marketer-generated content (MGC). UGC literally refers to the content published on social media by internet users, whereas MGC presents the advantages and benefits of the products, mostly by endorsers and celebrities. UGC is perceived as more credible because it contains users' knowledge, experiences, as well as opinions/reviews about a product, a service, or an experience (Bahtar & Muda, 2016; Oum & Han, 2011). As one type of UGC, customer reviews can help consumers form an unbiased understanding of a product, construct a set of criteria for evaluating a product, make an accurate choice, and reduce the cognitive costs of making such as choice (Liu, Karahanna, & Watson, 2011). Gohm, Heng, and Lin (2013) statistically demonstrated that UGC has a stronger impact on consumers' purchase decision processes than MGC. Although UGC lacks official authority, "users may possess relevant expertise due to their firsthand knowledge or experience with a topic or situation, and thus may be accurately perceived by others as have a great deal of experiential credibility (Flanagin & Metzger, 2013, p.1626)."

Meanwhile, average ratings and descriptive comments are used as the main components of online consumer reviews (Fang, Ye, Kucukusta, & Law, 2016). Average ratings give an overview of the perceived quality of a product, whereas a single descriptive review (or comment) contains personal narratives of experiences with a specific product. Some studies indicated that customers are greatly influenced by average consumer ratings (BrightLocal, 2016). Conversely, Ziegele and Weber (2015) found that single vivid narratives could override their average ratings. Moreover, taking these two components together can determine the overall valence of each review, which is defined as the positive or negative orientation of information about an object or situation (Chan, Lam, Chow, Fong, & Law, 2017). Positive consumer reviews increase business results while enhancing the company's reputation, while negative reviews decrease consumer interest in the company's products/services (Anderson 2012; Pelsmacker, Tilburg, & Holthof, 2018). However, in some cases, negative reviews including a small amount of positivity result have stronger effects on their perceived usefulness by carrying more weight than positive reviews (Purnawirawan, Eisend, Pelsmacker, & Dens, 2015). According to Reevoo insight research, a few bad reviews gave consumers a reason to believe all other good reviews, and the reliability of the reviews increased by 68% when positive and negative reviews were exposed together (Reevoo, 2013).

Beside the valence of the review, the volume of reviews, one of the most critical review attributes, influences consumers' perception of user feedback (Duan, Gu, & Whinston, 2008). Several studies have noted that more online reviews lead to better business performance. For instance, Torres, Singh, and Robertson-Ring (2015) and Kim, Lim, and Brymer (2015) reported that the volume of reviews had a significant impact on online hotel booking and hotel revenues, respectively. Powell, Yu, DeWolf, and Holyoak (2017, p.1432) stated that "consumers preferred a product with more reviews to one with fewer reviews even though the statistical model indicated that the latter was likely to be of higher quality than the former."

3 Research Methodology

In order to investigate social media marketing practices within their real-world context, a case study was conducted with the global social media marketing platform, 0.8L. In order to increase research validity, the case study employed multiple sources of evidence from both qualitative and quantitative research methods, viz. a content analysis and a participatory survey, respectively.

3.1 Case Selection: 0.8L

As a social marketing service platform (PCs and mobile devices), 08.L connects product sellers and users with an emphasis on delivering pleasant experiences. On the platform, users try a variety of beauty and lifestyle products and share their post-experiences with others. The platform allows users to click a "Like" button on products that they want to try, to follow their favorite brands, and to post their real-world product usage reviews while sharing them through their own social channel accounts. For each product, the platform recruits influential users, who have over 10,000 followers of Facebook or Instagram, for 72 hours, and then delivers the product to them for free or at a lower price within 2-3 days. Then, the influencers generate and share their product reviews within 7 days. As shown in the left image of Figure 1, marketers present visually appealing photos and descriptions about their products to encourage users' participation. Below the product information, 0.8L depicts the number of customer recommendations and average review ratings together with customer narrative reviews using card-based UI modules (see the center and right images of Figure 1). Moreover, the platform suggests more suitable products to relevant users by analyzing big data derived from their profiles and prior activities; therefore, this recommendation algorithm enables sellers to more effectively deliver their products to potential customers and to obtain real-time user feedback.
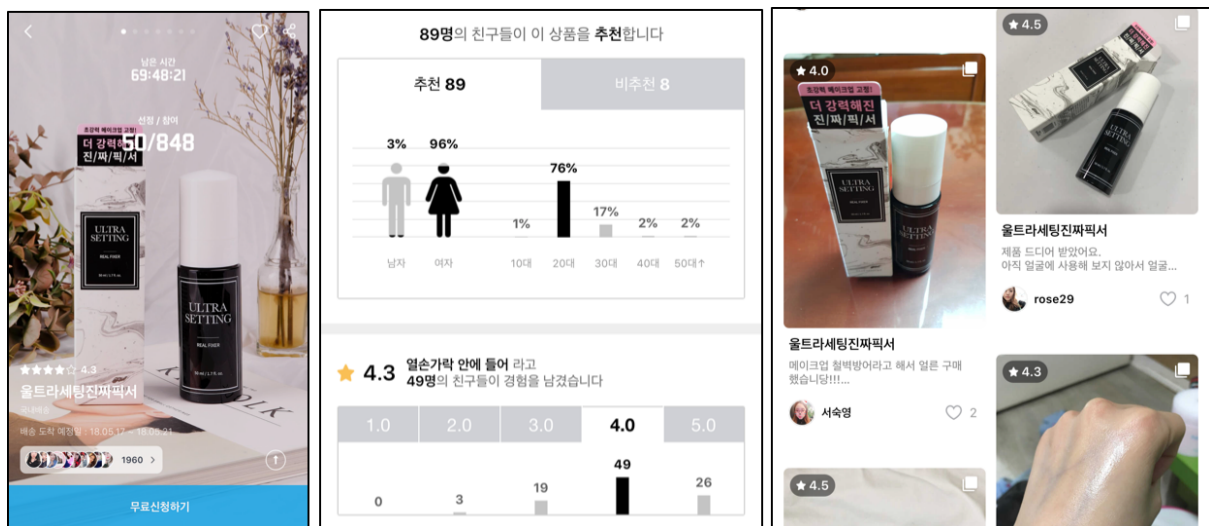

Figure 1. Screenshots of the 0.8L mobile app presenting (left) product information, (center) number of customer recommendation, average review rating, and (right) customer narrative reviews.

In order to deliver better UI/UX to users, in late 2017, the company launched its second version of the 0.8L mobile application, consisting of three main menus, as shown in Figure 2: "New Experience," "Today's Rank," and "Pleasant Discovery." In the "New Experience" menu, new products are updated every day so that users can examine, apply, and experience the latest products. The "Today's Rank" menu shows the rankings of highly-rated products and brands, as well as the rankings of active and influential users. The platform

selectively displays about 40,000 honest reviews in the "Pleasant Discovery" menu for frequent user visits. After these upgrades, the 0.8L application received the Special Prize in 2017 from the Smart App Award Korea, which has become the most prominent domestic app competition. In 2018, the 0.8L app was also awarded the Digital Marketing Grand Prize from the Korea Competency Association (KMA). Nowadays, the platform promotes diverse products of about 3,800 global brands with more than 1 million domestic and foreign memberships.
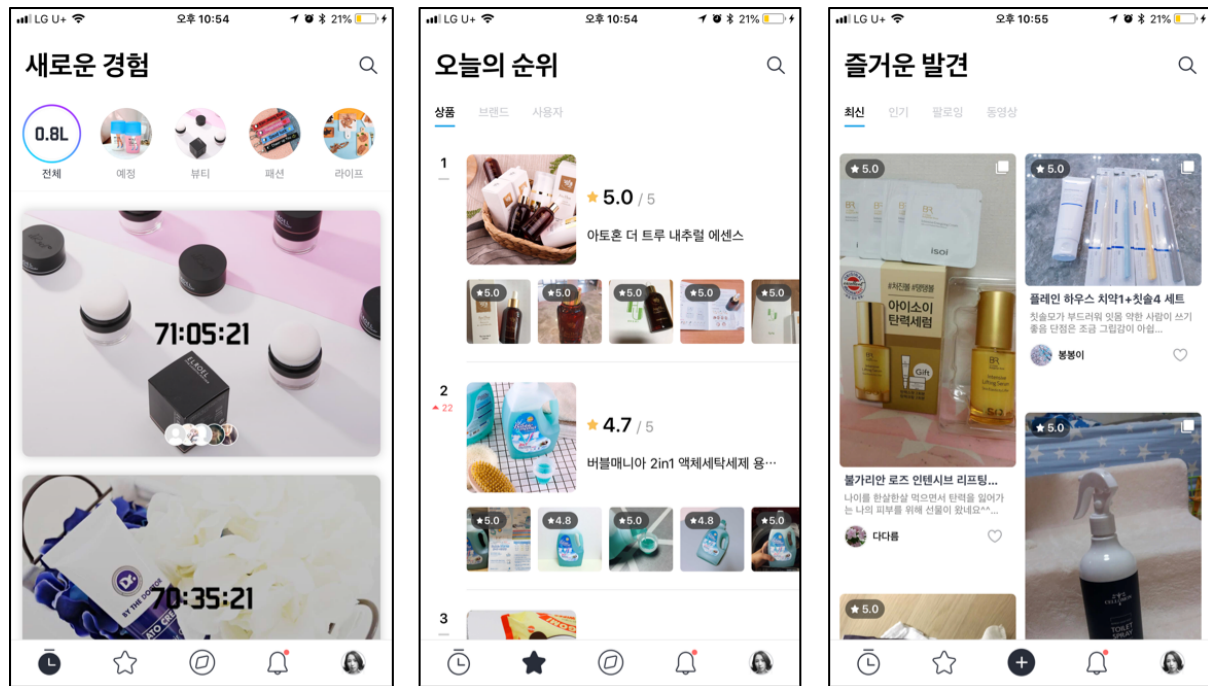

Figure 2. Screenshots of the 0.8L's mobile app showing its three menus: (left) "New Experience," (middle) "Today's Ranks," and (right) "Pleasant Discovery."

3.2 Content Analysis

In order to investigate what kinds of consumer reviews are created on the 0.8L platform as compared with their marketer-generated information, a content analysis of its posted consumer reviews was performed in May, 2018. Consumer reviews on ten sunscreen products for sale were collected and analyzed. Between 45 and 50 recent reviews per product were gathered because the volume of consumer reviews varied according to the products. Therefore, 456 consumer reviews in total were coded by the following categories: reviewer (gender, number of followers, total number of reviews), average review ratings (product absorbability, persistence, and functionality), and narrative review content (text and photos). In particular, narrative customer reviews were sub-categorized into three types according to their dominant issues: (1) personal information (mostly, focused on their skin types and cosmetic preferences), (2) product usage experiences, and (3) product features (efficacy, package design, ingredients, aroma, texture, color, liquid type, etc.). Five coders including one author (two coders per product for increased data credibility) participated in the coding process. For increasing inter-coder reliability, one coder (the author) reviewed all the reviews in the sample at the end.

3.3 Participatory Survey

In order to identify influential factors that affected consumer purchase decisions on the 0.8L platform, in November, 2018, a participatory survey was undertaken about the purchasing

5

process of moisturizing cosmetic products. The survey data was collected from 55 university students (7 males and 48 females), ranging in age from 19 to 26 years old (*M* = 21.22, *SD*= 1.40). Before participating in the survey, the subjects were asked to download and install the 0.8L mobile application on their smartphones and then to create a user account along with learning how to use the app and how to participate in the survey.

The survey selected 54 moisturizing products of 20 domestic cosmetic brands sold in the 0.8L app during the survey period. The price range of the products was from 15 to 30 dollars. Firstly, the subjects could retrieve information on the 54 products by searching for moisturizers in the "Search" menu. Secondly, they looked at product information (i.e. text descriptions and photos) by swiping on the main images and clicking the related menus. For each product, the subjects also checked two numeric consumer review factors and several narrative consumer reviews: (1) consumer recommendation frequencies, which show how many reviewers recommended the product purchase by their gender and age groups; (2) consumer average review ratings, which represent how much reviewers liked the product on a 5-point Likert scale; and (3) consumer narrative reviews, which show reviewers' personal opinions and experiences along with their photos. The volume of consumer reviews for each product varied. Next, after searching and comparing the products, the subjects went through the pre-payment stage of purchasing a particular moisturizer. The purchase process took about 20-30 minutes.

After experiencing the real purchase process, the subjects answered the following questions: (1) What product did you choose and why did you choose it?; (2) What factors affected your purchase decision (prioritizing three among seven factors)?; (3) What was your favorite review?; (4) What was your least favorite review?; and (5) Do you have any other comments about the reviews and/or platform?

4   Research Results

4.1   Comparison of User- and Marketer-generated Content

For the total of 456 consumer reviews collected from the content analysis, only 3.51% (16 reviewers) was created by male reviewers. More female customers actively participated in creating the reviews about sunscreens. In general, reviewers with a large number of followers had generated more reviews since joining the platform; therefore, this research regarded them as more influential reviewers.

Through analyzing the other coded data about the reviews, this research found the following insights about the consumer reviews. Firstly, three average review ratings about product absorbability, persistence, and functionality showed mostly high scores. Figure 3 shows the average score of these three review ratings for each product in a range of 3.99 and 4.52 on the 5-point Likert scale. These results indicate that the average review ratings were not dominant factors in consumer's purchase decisions in this context. This finding contrasts with the great influence of average consumer ratings on the consumer decision journey (BrightLocal, 2016). Moreover, for the product (Product #9 in Figure 3) that received the lowest score (3.99), the overall valence of its reviews was further scrutinized; however, most of its reviews were unexpectedly positive overall. Coincidently, this product was assessed by more inexperienced reviewers compared to the other products, and these novices tended to evaluate more rigorously while some of the influential reviewers evaluated the products more generously.
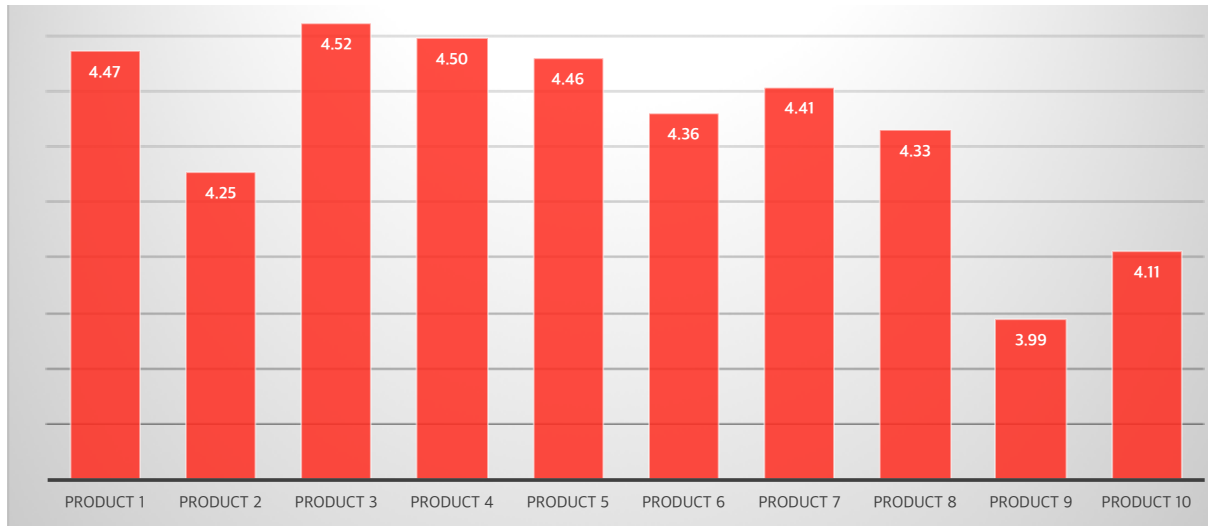
Figure 3. The average scores of the three review ratings for ten sunscreen products.

Next, for each product, 20 well-generated reviews were selected for exclusion of reviews that were poorly written in terms of their detail and quality. Then, the selected narrative customer reviews (N = 200) for the ten sunscreen products were classified into three groups including personal information, product usage experiences, and product features, as shown in Figure 4.
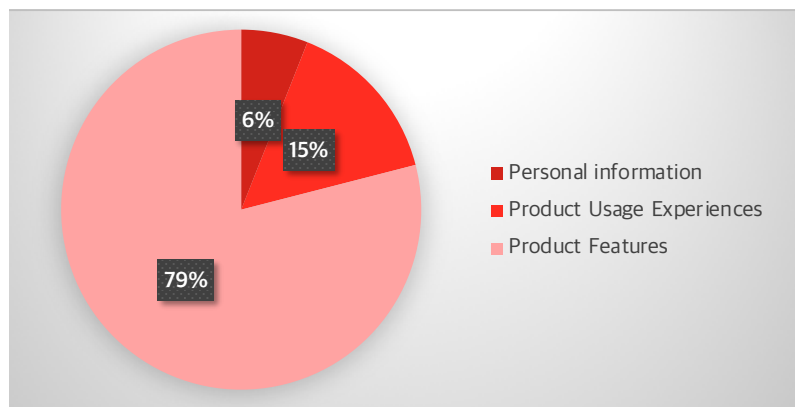

Figure 4. The distribution of the reviews according to three issue groups.

As many of the reviews were related with more than one group, the coders matched the dominant issue of each review to one of the three groups. Although about 80% of the reviewers wrote their posts mainly about diverse features of the products they used, the rest of them generated more personal-driven reviews. Although the reviews related with the product features mentioned the similar product information to that provided by marketers on the platform, these reviews also emphasized personal judgements and opinions about the product features. On the other hand, 21% of the reviewers shared information about their skin types, cosmetic preferences, and other more usage experiences. These reviewers also uploaded personal and realistic photos specifically showing how they used the sunscreens on their faces or other body parts, whereas most marketers provided a couple of high-quality photos highlighting the attractive product appearances (shown in the left and right images of Figure 1). From these pictures, potential buyers can experience the products indirectly and realistically. These results indicated that user-generated content (i.e. text and photos) provided more personal experiences of the product usage process (Bahtar & Muda, 2016;

7

Oum & Han, 2011). On the other hand, marketers focused on distinctive product features and appearance photos.

4.2 Customer Purchase Intensions on the Social Marketing Platform

In the participatory survey, 30 of the 54 products were selected by at least one subject. Half of them (17 products) were chosen by only one person while three products were chosen by 4, 5, and 6 people, respectively. These results show that most subjects were not just looking at the products retrieved on the top of the screen, but also scanning and comparing various products even within a short time. These three products that multiple people preferred at the same time had relatively larger volumes of customer reviews that were created with a composition of text and photos. Their larger volumes made the subjects consider them as more popular products. From a greater number of reviews, the subjects might get more diverse information about the products. In addition, the present research scrutinized the reasons why the subjects chose these 30 products in this survey; however, there were no common patterns because their reasons were diverse, including product features, product usage effects, personal skin types, higher customer recommendation frequencies, higher customer review ratings, larger customer review volumes, and others.

As for the question about what factors affected users' purchase decisions, seven factors were listed on the survey sheet. These factors can be categorized into the following two groups: (1) marketer-generated content, which includes brand, price, and product information; and (2) user-generated content, which includes the number of consumer recommendations, average consumer review ratings, narrative consumer review content, and consumer review volume. Respondents were asked to prioritize three factors that had the greatest impact on their purchasing decisions. Figure 5 shows how many people chose each factor as the first, second, and third most impactful. The first-ranked influential factors were sequentially consumer review volume (12 subjects, 21.80%), narrative consumer review (11), and product information (11). The narrative consumer review factor (17, 30.90%) was the most frequently selected as the second.
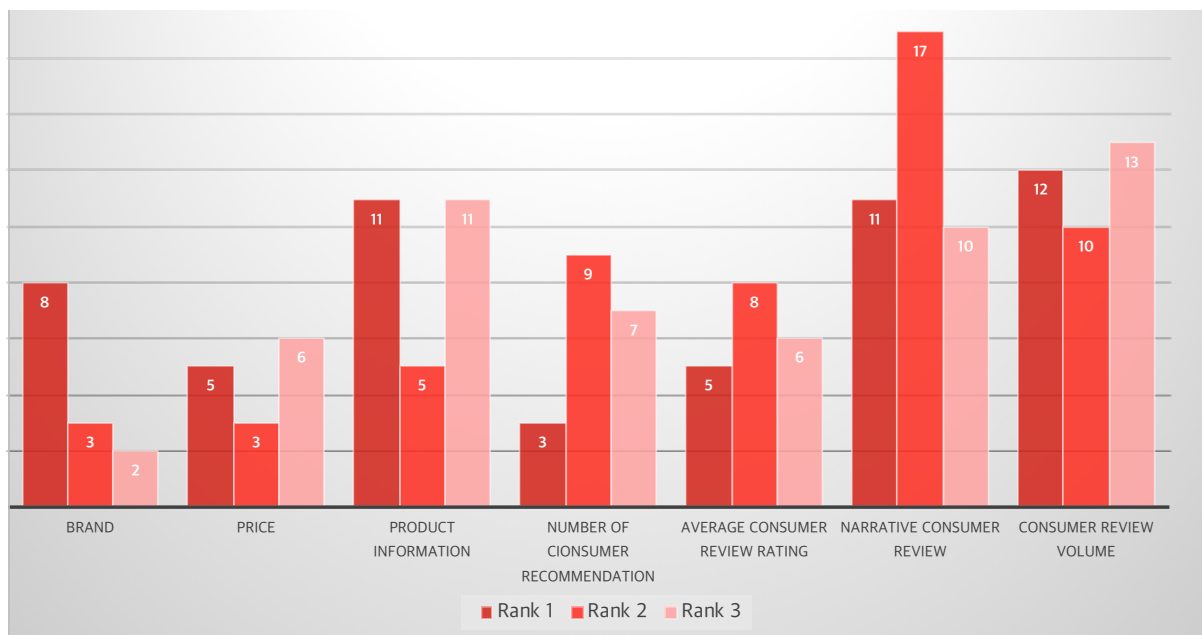

Figure 5. The first, the second, and the third rank sums for each factor.

Moreover, in order to compare each factor distinctively, the present study logically applied the rank ordered weights (3, 2, and 1) to the three factors because the importance and influence of the three factors was supposed to decrease from the first to the third factor. A weighted sum of each factor was then computed using Eq. (1):

$$W_x = 3F_x + 2S_x + T_x, (1)$$

where W_x, F_x, S_x, and T_x denote the total weighted sum of the xth factor (from $x = 1$ to $x = 7$ in this experiment), the first rank sum, the second rank sum, and the third rank sum of the xth factor, respectively. For each factor, the total weighted sums were computed, as shown in Figure 6.
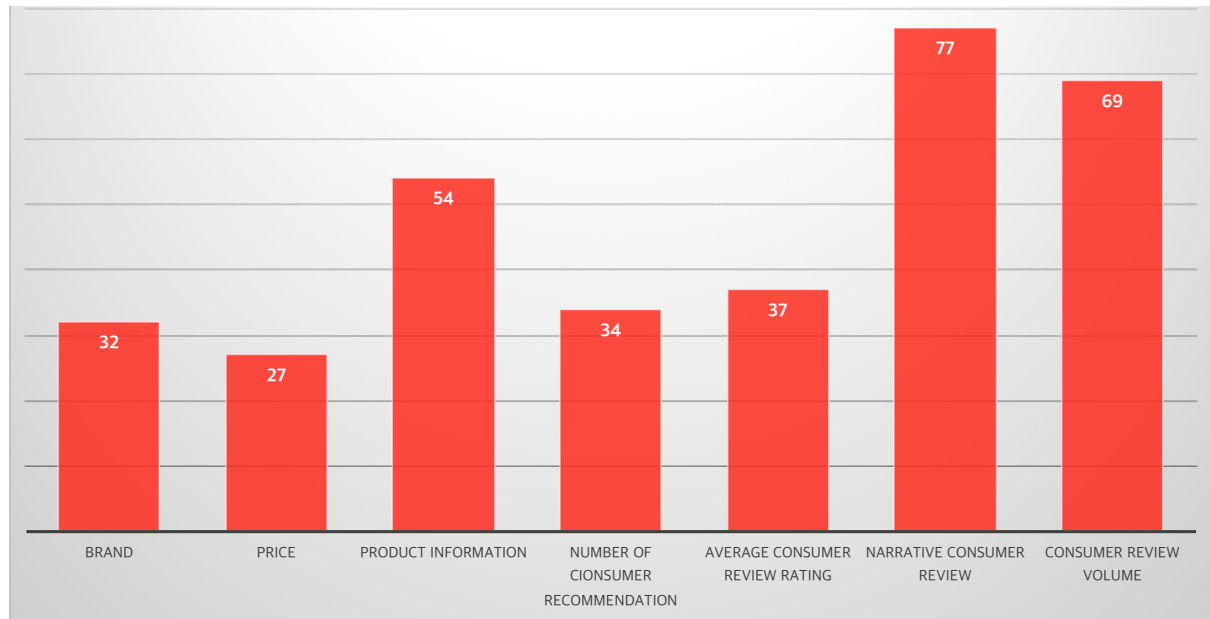

Figure 6. The total weighted sums for each factor (N=330).

As shown in Figure 6, the total weighted sums of four factors related to user-generated content (217, 65.76%) was twice those of three marketer-related factors (113, 34.24%). Remarkably, customer reviews (particularly, high volume and narrative content) had more impact on purchasing decisions than marketer-generated information in the online cosmetics market, as was found in a previous statistical study conducted by Gohm, Heng, and Lin (2013). Moreover, honest reviews (i.e. both positive and negative) of real users help companies assess their newly-released products promptly and easily. In particular, statistic information sources, like the number of consumer recommendations and average consumer review ratings, had less influence than narrative consumer review content, which provided a wealth of personal experience stories and realistic photos in the context of daily life (Ziegele & Weber, 2015). For example, one of the participants said, "My favorite review showed photos of the actual color on the back of hands." The other participant mentioned that it was good to know the actual post-experience of people who have similar skin types. On the other hand, several participants mentioned the following issues for the unfavorable reviews: solely text-driven reviews without images, unconditional compliments, product appearance evaluations, generic product features, and others. Furthermore, the price and brand factors might have little influence on the purchase decisions because most of the suggested moisturizers were medium- and low-priced products of unpopular brands. Instead of the

price and brand, the subjects relied on detailed product information when they compared the products.

5   Discussion and Conclusion

In the digital environment, customers can move through their decision journey in fundamentally new ways. "Customers can gather information from focused research at search engines and read other customers' reviews on retailers' sites or third-party forums not controlled by the seller, and the initial demand to purchase could be created just by seeing a post on social networks (Kannan & Li, 2016, p.26)." Moreover, the rapidly growing social media channels have put consumers in the driver's seat in the marketing field by allowing them to create and share their post-product experiences in a highly-efficient way. The influence of these user-generated content items on consumer's purchase intentions rapidly increased more than that of other marker-generated content.

In this vein, the present research conducted a case study of 0.8L qualitatively and quantitatively to identify the relative impact of user- and marketer-generated content on consumer purchase intentions and the way of designing an effective social media marketing platform. From the results of the content analysis and the participatory survey, it was discovered that people tend to trust sincere consumer reviews more than marketer-generated advertising content (Gohm, Heng, & Lin, 2013). As shown in Figure 7, in the online cosmetics market, user-generated content relatively had stronger impact on consumer purchase intentions by providing personal experiences with product usage than in the case of marketer-generated content. In particular, the volume and narrative content of consumer provided the greatest influence on the participants' purchase decisions (Duan, Gu, & Whinston, 2008; Powell, Yu, DeWolf, & Holyoak, 2017; Ziegele & Weber, 2015).

In 2016, BrightLocal found that customers are greatly influenced by average consumer ratings; however, in this research, the dependence on the other numeric components of UGC like the number of consumer recommendations and average review ratings appeared relatively lower. For the marketer-generated content, only few participants significantly considered the brand and price factors of the products, referring more to product information describing distinctive product features along with visually appealing product photos.
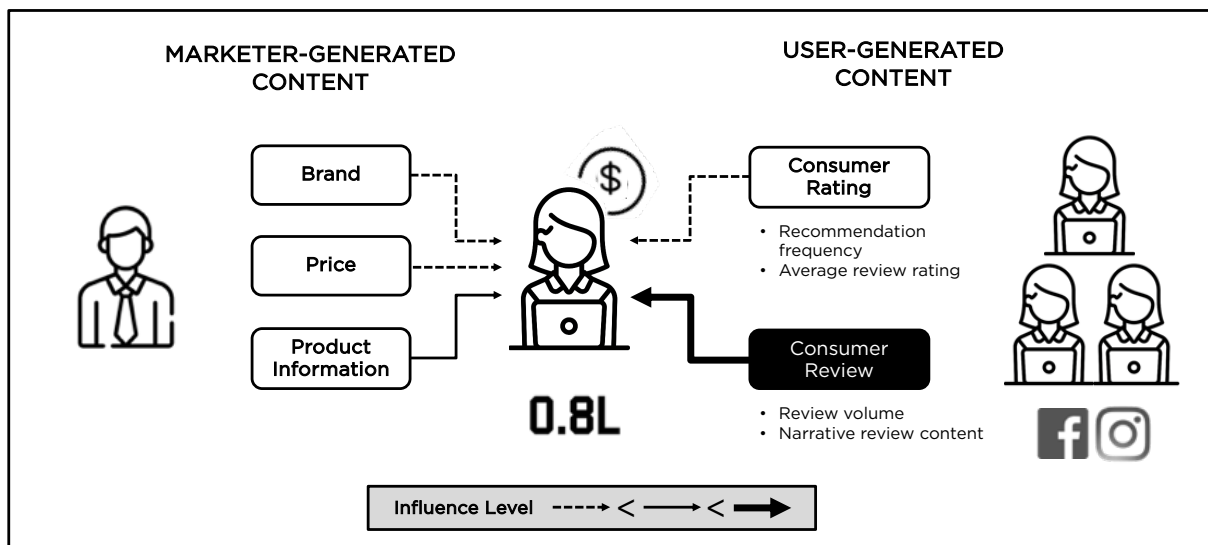

Figure 7. Influential factors on consumer purchase intentions.

Furthermore, honest review content (both positive and negative) of real users facilitated companies' assessment of their newly-released products (Reevoo, 2013). Especially, if companies effectively manage these negative reviews, they can provide the kind of highly detailed feedback that improves greater customer satisfaction and leads to product development.

Along with the importance of customer-driven marketing practices, the following UX design features were identified for developing a competitive social media marketing, which facilitates creating and sharing sincere customer reviews that resonate with potential buyers:

- Rapid consumer review process
  In order to generate a higher volume of customer reviews in a short time, the 0.8L platform encourages influencers to apply for and experience products within 72 hours; therefore, marketers can gather users' feedback in a prompt and highly efficient way. To facilitate this rapid consumer review process, the first landing page of each product highlights its high-quality images layered with bigger numeric typographies counting down the time (see Figure 1). This page emphasized a minimalistic look and feel.
- Customized product recommendation
  With its own algorithm that suggests products to consumers based on their profiles and prior marketing activities, the 0.8L platform can recommend more relevant products to the right consumers. At the same time, marketers can hear more prospective customer voices while testing the usability of their products with potential buyers.
- Playful shopping experiences with sharing honest reviews
  The latest renewal of the 0.8L platform focused on providing diverse fun experiences whenever users connect, as well as making them feel positive about the whole review process of searching, applying, and experiencing products: therefore, the platform launched three menus including the "New Experience," "Today's Rank," and "Pleasant Discovery." These services contribute to encouraging users to revisit to the platform and spend more time on the platform.

Finally, the present case study confirmed that users' sincere experiences and stories are effective marketing tools that contribute to improving the product purchase intention and conversion rate. Nevertheless, this research was conducted only on cosmetic products, so the scope of further research can be expanded into other product or service categories in the digital marketplace. In addition, although this research identified the aforementioned UX design features, marketing and design practitioners needs more hands-on design guidelines for launching more competitive marketing platforms. Thus, future research could focus on more practical design issues (i.e. design strategies and UX design guidelines) of social marketing platforms. It is hoped that this study will help marketers and sellers who want to create effective brand or marketing content through authentic user stories in the competitive social media market.

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