

AUTHENTICITY OR PROMOTIONAL CONTENT? THE INFLUENCE OF USER-GENERATED CONTENT AND CONTENT WRITING ON CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT IN MALANG COFFEE SHOP

Reni Rupianti¹, Hardian Dwi Utomo², Nur' Adilla³, Firda Meisaroh⁴

^{1,3,4}Institut Teknologi Nasional Malang, Indonesia

²Universitas PGRI Banyuwangi, Indonesia

Email: renir@lecturer.itn.ac.id

Abstract

This study aims to examine the influence of User-Generated Content (UGC) and Content Writing on Customer Engagement in coffee shops in Malang City. As the coffee industry in Malang continues to grow rapidly, businesses are increasingly utilizing social media to build relationships with consumers. This research employed a quantitative approach using a survey method involving 186 respondents selected through purposive sampling. Data analysis was conducted using Multiple Linear Regression. The results indicate that both UGC and content writing have a positive and significant influence on customer engagement. Furthermore, the findings reveal that UGC has a stronger influence than content writing in driving customer engagement. The study suggests that coffee shop owners should prioritize organic content from users to strengthen their brand presence. This research provides a practical model for coffee shop owners in Malang to optimize their digital marketing strategies by leveraging business dashboard analysis to monitor engagement metrics.

Keywords: *User-Generated Content, Content Writing, Customer Engagement, Coffee Shop, Malang.*

A. INTRODUCTION

The coffee shop industry in Indonesia has experienced rapid growth as coffee consumption has become an integral part of people's lifestyles, particularly among Generation Z and millennials. Malang, as an educational hub with a large student population, has become a potential market for coffee shops, leading to increasingly fierce competition among business operators. These conditions have prompted coffee shops to not only rely on product quality but also to implement digital marketing strategies capable of building long-term relationships with customers (Mailani et al., 2025). Instagram and TikTok have become the primary platforms used by to introduce products and engage with consumers. However, the high volume of digital promotions has made consumers increasingly selective in how they process information; consequently, marketing success is no longer determined solely by the quantity of content published but also by the level of trust in the information source (Asytuti et al., 2026).

In the context of digital marketing, two widely used strategies are *User-Generated Content* (UGC) and *content writing*. UGC refers to content such as photos, videos, reviews, or product usage experiences voluntarily created by customers, while

content writing refers to content created by companies to convey information or promotional messages (Naeem et al., 2025; Fashami, 2023). According to *Source Credibility Theory*, the effectiveness of communication is influenced by the credibility of the message source. UGC is viewed as having a higher level of *authenticity* because it stems from consumers' real-life experiences, making it more trustworthy than content created by companies (Correia et al., 2026). Conversely, although *content writing* is capable of conveying information systematically and persuasively, some consumers still view it as a form of promotion-oriented communication (Hu & Frank, 2026). These differing characteristics are believed to influence each strategy's ability to increase *customer engagement*, customer involvement reflected through activities such as *liking*, commenting, sharing content, and actively participating with a brand.

Various previous studies have shown that both UGC and content marketing have a positive impact on consumer behavior. Customer-generated communication has a greater influence on brand perception than corporate communication (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016). Hollebeek (2014) also explains that customer interactions on social media are a key factor in building *customer engagement*. More recent research further indicates that authentic content can increase consumer trust, interaction, and intent to participate on social media (Andonopoulos et al., 2023). However, most studies still examine "UGC", or content marketing separately, while research directly comparing the effectiveness of UGC and *content writing* on *customer engagement* particularly in the coffee shop industry in Malang. Furthermore, the characteristics of Gen Z and millennial consumers, who actively use Instagram and TikTok, suggest that there may be differences in the effectiveness of these two forms of communication, necessitating empirical validation.

Based on these phenomena and gaps in the literature, this study aims to analyze the influence of *User-Generated Content* and *Content Writing* on *customer engagement* among coffee shop customers in Malang. This study is expected to provide a theoretical contribution by enriching the field of digital marketing research regarding the effectiveness of customer-based communication compared to company-generated communication. Practically, the results of this study are expected to serve as a reference for coffee shop business owners in designing more effective social media marketing strategies by optimizing UGC as an authentic source of communication without neglecting the role of *content writing* in supporting the delivery of information and brand identity.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. User-Generated Content (UGC)

User-Generated Content (UGC) is digital content voluntarily created by consumers in the form of photos, videos, reviews, comments, or testimonials regarding their experiences using a product or service (Al-Abdallah & Wright, 2025; Niu, 2025). Unlike content produced by companies, UGC stems from customers' real-life experiences and is therefore perceived as more authentic and credible. According to *Source Credibility Theory*, the effectiveness of a message is influenced by the level of trust in the information source (Correia et al., 2026). Therefore, information coming from fellow consumers tends to be trusted more than corporate marketing communications (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016). In the context of social media, UGC

is also part of electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), which can increase trust, strengthen brand image, and encourage customer interaction. Recent research shows that authentic content is more effective at increasing user participation than promotional content because it is perceived as more relevant and objective (Andonopoulos et al., 2023).

2. Content Writing

Content writing is the process of crafting communication messages aimed at conveying information, building brand image, and influencing consumer behavior through digital media (Wardani et al., 2024). In marketing practice, content writing takes the form of social media *captions*, articles, product descriptions, and *storytelling*. Content quality is influenced by the value of the information, its relevance, consistency, and its ability to provide benefits to the audience (Bazi et al., 2023). Good content writing can enhance consumers' understanding of a product and build relationships with customers. However, because it originates from a company, content writing is often perceived as promotional communication, which can result in lower credibility compared to UGC. Nevertheless, research shows that content that is informative, creative, and tailored to the audience's needs can still increase customer engagement and interaction on social media (Rini, 2022).

3. Customer Engagement

Customer engagement refers to the level of a customer's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral involvement with a brand through ongoing interactions (Ng et al., 2020). In the context of digital marketing, customer engagement is demonstrated not only through purchasing decisions but also through customer activities such as leaving comments, sharing content, writing reviews, and recommending a brand to others (Lestari et al., 2026; Rosado-Pinto & Loureiro, 2020). In the coffee shop industry, customer engagement is a key indicator because social media has become one of the primary channels through which consumers obtain information, share experiences, and interact with brands. The higher the level of customer engagement, the greater the likelihood of fostering brand loyalty and advocacy, which in turn impacts business sustainability (Agu et al., 2024).

4. Relationships Among Variables

UGC and content writing are two forms of digital communication that differ in how they influence customer engagement. UGC is based on customers' real-life experiences, giving it a higher level of *authenticity* and credibility. In contrast, content writing is company-controlled communication designed to convey information systematically and strengthen brand identity. Both strategies have the potential to boost customer engagement by increasing customer interaction on social media, though their effectiveness is believed to differ. Research by Schivinski and Dabrowski (2016) shows that customer-generated communication has a greater influence on consumer perceptions than corporate communication. Furthermore, interactions driven by trust and authentic experiences can boost customer engagement more effectively (Rini, 2022; Rosado-Pinto & Loureiro, 2020). Therefore, this study examines the effects of User-Generated Content and Content Writing on Customer Engagement.

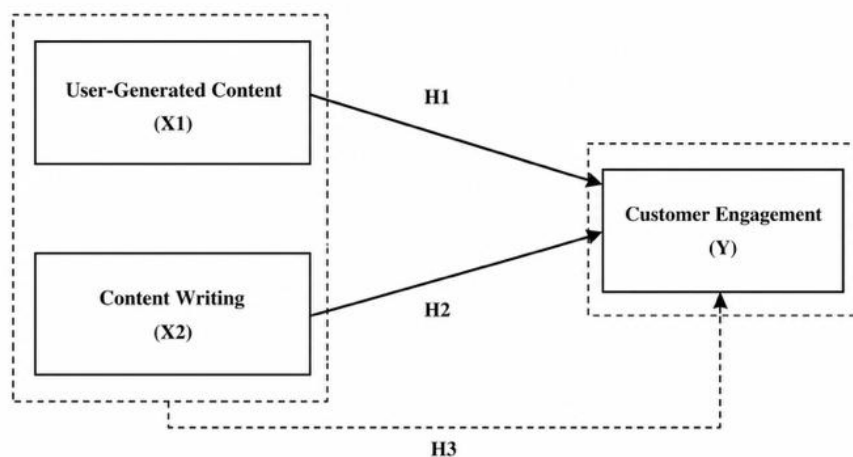


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Based on this conceptual framework, the research hypothesis is formulated as follows:

H₁: User-Generated Content has a positive and significant effect on customer engagement among coffee shop customers in Malang.

H₂: Content writing has a positive and significant effect on customer engagement among coffee shop customers in Malang.

H₃: User-Generated Content and Content Writing simultaneously have a positive and significant effect on customer engagement among coffee shop customers in Malang.

C. METHOD

This study employs a quantitative approach with an explanatory research design to analyze the influence of User-Generated Content (UGC) and Content Writing on customer engagement among coffee shop customers in Malang. The sampling technique used purposive sampling with the following criteria: respondents aged 17–35 years (Generation Z and millennials), active users of Instagram or TikTok, and those who had made at least two purchases at a coffee shop in the past three months specifically, the period from January to March 2026 resulting in a sample of 186 respondents.

Primary data was collected through a questionnaire using a 5-point Likert scale, while variable measurements were based on indicators adapted from Schivinski & Dabrowski (2016) for UGC, Pulizzi (2012) for content writing, and Hollebeek (2014) for customer engagement. Data analysis was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics 26 through validity tests, reliability tests, classical assumption tests, multiple linear regression analysis, t-tests, F-tests, and the coefficient of determination (R^2).

D. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Respondent Characteristics

This section presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents involved in the study. The distribution of respondents based on their demographic profiles is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographics of Respondents

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	82	44.1
	Female	104	55.9
Total		186	100.0
Age	17-20 years	63	33.9
	21-25 years	91	48.9
	26-30 years	22	11.8
	31-35 years	10	5.4
Total		186	100.0
Occupation	College Student	112	60.2
	Employee	39	21.0
	Entrepreneur	18	9.7
	Other	17	9.1
Total		186	100.0

The majority of respondents were female (55.9%) and aged 21-25 (48.9%). Most respondents were college students (60.2%), indicating that the study sample was dominated by Generation Z as active social media users and the primary consumers of coffee shops in Malang.

2. Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to provide an initial overview of the characteristics and distribution patterns of the research data. This analysis aims to describe the tendency of respondents' responses for each variable by examining several statistical indicators, including the minimum value, maximum value, mean, and standard deviation. The mean value indicates the general tendency of respondents' perceptions toward each measured construct, while the standard deviation represents the level of data dispersion or variation among responses. The results of the descriptive statistical analysis provide a preliminary understanding of the observed variables before proceeding to further statistical testing. The complete results of the descriptive statistics are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
User-Generated Content	4.093	0.433
Content Writing	3,844	0.488
Customer Engagement	4,125	0.362

Source: SPSS, 2026

The results of the descriptive statistics show that all variables have mean values above 3.80, and can therefore be categorized as high. Customer Engagement received the highest mean score (4.125), followed by User-Generated Content (4.093), while Content Writing had a mean of 3.844.

3. Classical Assumption Test

The classical assumption test was conducted to ensure that the regression model met the required statistical assumptions before further analysis. This test aims

to evaluate the feasibility and reliability of the model through several assessments, including normality, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity tests. The results of the classical assumption test are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Results of the Classical Assumptions Test

Testing	Result	Notes
Normality	Sig. = 0.200	Normal
Multicollinearity	Tolerance = 1.000; VIF = 1.000	No multicollinearity
Heteroscedasticity	Sig. X_1 = 0.763; Sig. X_2 = 0.458	No heteroscedasticity

Source: SPSS, 2026

Based on the results of the classical assumption tests, the regression model meets all the requirements for analysis. The data are normally distributed, there is no multicollinearity, and no evidence of heteroscedasticity was found, so the model is suitable for hypothesis testing.

4. Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

Multiple linear regression analysis was performed to examine the influence of independent variables on the dependent variable. This analysis identifies the direction, strength, and significance of relationships among the variables in the research model. The results of the multiple linear regression analysis are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Results of Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

Variables	B	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	0.355	-	2.097	0.037
UGC (X_1)	0.648	0.773	20.617	0.000
Content Writing (X_2)	0.291	0.392	10.453	0.000

Source: SPSS, 2026

The regression equation obtained is: $Y = 0,355 + 0,648X_1 + 0,291X_2$. The regression coefficients indicate that both independent variables have a positive effect on Customer Engagement. The higher coefficient value for UGC compared to Content Writing suggests that UGC is a more dominant factor in increasing Customer Engagement.

5. Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing was conducted to determine the significance of the relationships between variables proposed in the research model. The analysis evaluates whether each hypothesis is supported based on the statistical results. The results of hypothesis testing are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Hypothesis Test Results

	Hypothesis	t/F	Sig.	Decision
H_1	UGC \rightarrow CE	20.617	0.000	Accepted
H_2	CW \rightarrow CE	10,453	0.000	Accepted
H_3	UGC & CW \rightarrow CE	F = 264,139	0.000	Accepted

Source: SPSS, 2026

The test results show that all hypotheses were accepted. UGC and content writing have a positive and significant effect on customer engagement, both partially and simultaneously.

6. Coefficient of Determination

The coefficient of determination test was conducted to measure the extent to which the independent variables explain variations in the dependent variable. This analysis indicates the explanatory power of the regression model. The results of the coefficient of determination test are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Coefficient of Determination

R	R-Square	Adjusted R-Square
0.862	0.743	0.740

Source: SPSS output.

An Adjusted R-Square value of 0.740 indicates that approximately 74.0% of the variation in Customer Engagement can be explained by User-Generated Content and Content Writing. The remaining 26.0% is influenced by other factors outside the research model.

The research findings show that User-Generated Content (UGC) has a positive and significant effect on customer engagement and is the variable with the most dominant influence. This finding supports *Source Credibility Theory*, which explains that the effectiveness of communication is influenced by the credibility of the information source. UGC derived from customers' real-life experiences has a higher level of *authenticity* and is therefore more trusted than content produced by the company. This encourages customers to *like*, comment on, and share content, as well as recommend the coffee shop to other users. These research results align with Schivinski and Dabrowski (2016), who state that customer-generated communication is more effective at influencing brand perception than corporate communication. Furthermore, this study demonstrates that UGC can increase consumer trust and strengthen customer engagement through more authentic interactions (Al-Abdallah & Wright, 2025; Naeem et al., 2025).

This study also demonstrates that content writing has a positive and significant impact on customer engagement, indicating that the quality of information conveyed through *captions*, *storytelling*, and product descriptions continues to play a role in fostering customer interaction. These findings align with the concepts outlined in *the literature review*, which suggest that informative, relevant, and consistent content writing can enhance consumers' understanding of a brand. However, because it originates from a company, content writing tends to be perceived as promotional communication, resulting in a lower level of credibility compared to UGC. The results of this study support the assertion that the quality of digital content influences increased customer engagement, although its effectiveness depends heavily on the quality of the message conveyed (Bazi et al., 2023; Rini, 2022).

Simultaneously, User-Generated Content and Content Writing have been shown to have a significant impact on Customer Engagement, indicating that these two digital communication strategies complement each other in building relationships with customers. However, UGC has a greater impact than Content Writing because it is able to provide a more authentic experience and increase customer trust. These findings consistently indicate that the level of *authenticity* is the key differentiator in the effectiveness of these two communication strategies, and they support the conclusion that customer engagement grows through meaningful and

sustained interactions between customers and brands (Ng et al., 2020; Rosado-Pinto & Loureiro, 2020).

Based on these findings, coffee shop owners in Malang are advised not only to optimize content writing as a medium for conveying information but also to encourage customers to create User-Generated Content through reviews, photos, videos, and shared experiences on social media. This strategy will enhance the credibility of communication, strengthen emotional bonds with customers, and generate higher customer engagement. Thus, a combination of informative content writing and authentic UGC can serve as an effective digital marketing strategy to boost the competitiveness of coffee shops in Malang.

E. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that User-Generated Content (UGC) and Content Writing have a positive and significant impact on customer engagement among coffee shop customers in Malang. The analysis results show that User-Generated Content is the variable with the most dominant influence compared to Content Writing, indicating that content generated by customers is more effective at increasing customer engagement because it is perceived as more authentic, credible, and relevant than promotional content created by the company. These findings reinforce the concept of *Source Credibility Theory*, which emphasizes the importance of the credibility of information sources in influencing consumer responses. In practical terms, the results of this study imply that coffee shop managers need to optimize their digital marketing strategies by encouraging customers to generate organic content through reviews, photos, videos, and consumption experiences on social media, supported by content writing that is informative, engaging, and aligned with the characteristics of the target market. Future research is recommended to develop a research model by adding other variables, such as brand trust, electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), or brand experience, as well as expanding the scope of the study to different industries and regions to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing customer engagement.

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