

AN EXAMINATION OF USER GENERATED CONTENT VALUE ON CULTURALLY  
BASED CONSUMER GROUPS

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## **Abstract**

The consumer value of user-generated content was investigated between culture groups. Two groups of survey participants and three groups of interview respondents were utilized to identify the culture value's influence on people's reliance and preference in consumption-related UGC information. The behavior pattern of Chinese students and American students on UGC were identified and connected with dimensions of culture value. Some difference in preference and attitude between Chinese users and American users were found in this research. Power distance, individualism, and uncertainty avoidance are considered important cultural factors that influence the consumer-value of UGC in each culture group. Several potential areas for future quantitative and qualitative study as well as suggestions for UGC platform providers were also identified.

**Keywords:**

Culture, values, user generated content, social media, Americans, Chinese.

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## **Chapter 1 - Introduction**

Advances in Information and Communications Technology (ICT), particularly the so-called Web 2.0, are affecting all aspects of our lives: How we communicate, how we shop, how we socialize, how we learn (Tambouris et al., 2011). Among all the features of Web 2.0, User Generated Content (UGC) have been one that greatly affects people. Since its appearance in 2005, UGC has grown explosively. This vast new trend has allowed users to play an active role in the publication of content and has created many new communication opportunities (Valcke & Lenaerts, 2010). UGC marked a shift among media organizations from creating online content to providing facilities for amateurs to publish their own content. UGC has also been characterized as “Conversational Media” as opposed to the “packaged goods media” of the past century (Battelle, 2006).

UGC has created a “many-to-many” way for people to get information. In contrast of the traditional “one-to-many” way to information flow, where people solely rely on information on traditional media generated by a small proportion of professionals, now people can get information from fellow Internet users, and act as an information tunnel themselves. Jenkins (2006) said, “The role of the passive audience therefore has shifted, and an ever-growing number of participatory users are taking advantage of the interactive opportunities... The active, participatory and creative audience is prevailing today with relatively accessible media, tools, and applications, and its culture is in turn affecting mass media corporations and global audiences.”

One important function of UGC is that it provides an alternative way for people to gain the information they need for their purchase related decisions. Of the search results for the

world's top 20 largest brands, 25% are linked to user generated contents. UGC appears to have the edge on trust levels when competing with advertising. A survey conducted at Elon University (Mackinon, 2006) found that more than half of their survey participants trusted word of mouth on the Internet more than content produced by advertisers. A study in 2008 on consumer reliance on UGC revealed that participants voiced more trust in product information created by other consumers than in information generated by manufacturers (Cheong). Another survey conducted by Nielson suggested 90% of consumers online trust recommendations from people they know; 70% trust opinions of unknown users, only 14% trust advertisements (Global Advertising, 2009). Social media is starting to take a strong hold on advertising, as it is a new medium in which consumers can express their experiences with certain products or services (Introcaso, 2011). Dorsey & Nelson's (2012) study shows the percentage on important items the Millennial Generation (Gen Y) will not make without information from UGC. Many important purchases Gen Y makes are highly based on information from user generated content, such as major Electronics (44%), cars (40%), and hotels (39%), travel accommodations (32%), credit cards (29%) and insurances (29%).

The decline in traditional media also indicates audiences are gradually seeking elsewhere for information instead of relying on these traditional advertising platforms. Newspaper and magazine readership has shown a steady decline in the past several decades. Though the television market continues to grow in terms of overall viewership, it suffers a proliferation of program offerings, leading to fragmented audiences and decreasing program ratings (Anderson, 2006).

With the explosion of Web 2.0 technologies, people's reliance on UGC creates a plethora of niche markets within a media landscape that attracts more than 69 million users and generates

more than \$450 million in advertising revenue (Verna 2007). As a result, the online information market continues to shift toward a user-centric model and away from the conventional media model (characterized as publisher-centric). Consumers today are active and in charge of their media experiences, making it more important than ever to understand motivational factors that drive media consumption (McQuail 2000).

### **Crossing Cultural Barriers**

However, when people turn their attention from advertising to UGC, how often UGC crosses cultural barriers is unknown. According to one feature of Wunsch-Vincent and Vikery's (2006) definition of UGC, its contents are made publicly available over the Internet. Therefore, theoretically, UGC information can be accessed by anybody with Internet access around the globe. In a study on cross-culture Internet advertising, Khare (2009) argued that simply because Internet access is available in almost all parts of the world, it doesn't follow that an organization's web site will reach all potential international customers. Just like any market or community, each country needs to be targeted strategically. Effective communication depends, to a large extent, on the understanding of the dynamics of culture (Lee, 1993). Advertisers tailor messages when targeting a specific culture. On the other hand, UGC is commonly created by amateurs with motivations surrounding their own gratification. Thus, the consumer value of UGC information is highly dependant on the individual's own preference. People decide how whether they prefer UGC information over advertising, including which source and what types of UGC are useful to them.

There has been a great amount of research on many aspects of cultural differences on the Internet and social media. Some conclusions suggest that even in a simple case of using letters and punctuation marks to make facial expressions in text—which is a common phenomenon in

people's communication on social network sites—there is a difference between east and west. In eastern cultures, people's facial expression focuses on the differences between the eyes. In western countries, facial expressions focus on the mouth. How people use social networking sites (SNS) is also significantly different between cultures. For example, a comparative study shows American students' online social networks were found to be almost five times larger on average than Korean counterparts, but American and Korean students spent almost the same amount of time on average (1.5 for American students vs. 1 hour and 40 minutes for Korean students) on their respective SNSs (Kim et al. 2011).

Culture is also an important barrier that restrains the expansion of social networking sites (SNSs) and other large UGC platforms. In recent years, the market for FaceBook has step into a fast growing trend. However, in the years before 2010, FaceBook had only a minimum impact on Japanese SNS users. In 2010, Japan's population was a little over 128 million people, according to census data, but only 4.68 million people in the country were on FaceBook (Wolford, 2012). Japanese people prefer their own SNS such as Mixi, which has a high level of anonymity. Mixi suggests Japanese people generally prefer to stay totally anonymous online (Toto, 2008).

The above evidence in South Korea and Japan indicated a trend in how East Asian people interact online which differs from people in North America: to make their presence stay vague to strangers. They would maintain their social network online in a circle of people they've already known offline, and cautious in using their real identity and information to interact with strangers.

In China, large SNS and UGC platforms have either retreated from the market, or occupying only a small percentage. A Chinese social network site CEO explained that other than the regulation factors, the barriers for foreign SNSs' market development includes cultural differences, the level of SNS development, and user preference.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to exam the influence of cultural differences on the consumer value of UGC. These differences within culture include language, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and according to Webster's definition of culture, shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution or organization. UGC has different tunnels or channels to interact with audience depending on types of sites (Forums, Blogs, Social, etc...), and types of contents (videos, photos, reviews...). This research studies people's behavior—from various cultural backgrounds — and their reliance on UGC and its different tunnels. It hopes to find whether culture is to be considered a factor that influences people's attitudes and behavior when they utilize UGC in consumption-related decision making.

Previous studies have indicated that people value UGC information on Internet when they make purchasing decisions. Few studies have looked into different outcomes of UGC consumer value within different groups of audience. The results of this study could benefit various parties. First, it provides a primary work for mass communication experts to further study culture's influence on people communicating in this new information tunnel that is UGC. Second, it provides reference for UGC platform providers when they expand to multi-cultures to create or modify the platform to achieve better user satisfaction. Third, it provides marketers a further understanding on a culture's influence on consumer's preference of information. This could serve as a reference when making culture-sensitive marketing strategies.

## **Chapter 2 - Literature Review**

### **Background on User Generated Content**

The term “user-generated content” appeared for the first time around 2005. User-generated content (UGC), also referred as consumer generated media (CGM) or user-created content (UCC), covers a range of media content (problem processing, news, gossip and research, etc...) available in a range of modern communications technologies (question-answer databases, digital video, blogging, podcasting forums, review-sites, social networking, social media, mobile phone photography and wikis). Generally, UGC is understood very broadly to include all content put online by users, whether it was created by them or not (Valcke & Lenaerts, 2010).

It is difficult to define UGC as it is still evolving. Wunsch-Vincent and Vikery (2007) attempted to define it on three major characteristics, which can be concluded as:

- i) Content made publicly available over the Internet,
- ii) Content which reflects a “certain amount of creative effort”,
- iii) Content which is “created outside of professional routines and practices”

Ostman (2012) also identified UGC on two features: First, it involves amateur or petty production of original content, or the alteration and editing of existing content. Second, it involves sharing this with others, commonly by posting it on a website or a personal blog.

The characteristics of UGC have lead to a new way of communication. No longer are few media organizations pushing information to the silent masses. The recipients are shifting into participants. Jenkins (2006) puts it: “Audiences, empowered by these new technologies, occupying a space at the intersection between old and new media, are demanding the right to participated within the culture.”

Before the age of Web 2.0 and UGC, scholars studied word of mouth communication (WOM) and its online equivalent, eWOM. Arndt (1967) describes WOM as the “oral, person to person communication between a receiver and a communicator whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial, concerning a brand, a product or a service. (Buttle, 1998) ” Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) examine the relationships between opinion leaders and their followers and found that interpersonal relationships are much more influential than mass media in the evaluation of political candidates. The influence of WOM is particularly strong when consumers consider purchases of new types of products or services with which they have no prior personal experience. (Engel, Blackwell, & Kegerreis 1969).

One stream of the study on UGC focused on how people engage UGC. Cheong and Morrison (2008) suggest that UGC communication follows a two-step flow model. The two-step flow model of communication includes a transfer of information from the mass media to opinion leaders, and then spreads from opinion leaders to their followers (Rogers, 1983). The mass majority users who participate in UGC are consumers and followers of opinion leaders, or ‘active creators’. This idea is consistent with the finding of Arthur (2006) when he pointed out an emerging pattern of behavior: “if you get a group of 100 people online then one will create content, 10 will “interact” with it (commenting or offering improvements) and the other 89 will just view it.”

The Forrester report (Li & Bernoff, 2007) did a survey among 10,000 American users that further categorized user’s behavior according to six levels on a participation ladder. Amongst the online users of UGC sites, only 13 percent are ‘active creators’- people actually producing contents, following by 19 percent users who provide ratings and comments and 15 percent who save and share those contents, and the rest act as passive spectators. Therefore,

‘participation’ does not equal ‘active contribution’ to UGC sites; participation is thus a relative term when over 80 percent of all users are in fact passive recipients of contents (Dijck, 2009).

When examining the motivation behind consumers creating UGC, some scholars have applied functional theory, which states that attitudes serve various motivations, depending on the purpose. Thus one’s behavior becomes a function of one’s attitude toward that behavior (O’Keefe, 2002). According to this theory, to influence behavior, one must understand the motivational source. Katz (1960) points out that any given attitude serves one or more of four distinct personality functions: utilitarian, knowledge, ego-defensive, and value-expressive. Daugherty, Eastin, and Bright (2008) further explained how these four functions apply in creating UGC: (1) consumer creating UGC for personal incentives; (2) to understand their environment, the topic at hand, and/or ultimately themselves, because they feel a sense of intrinsic wisdom; (3) gratification, with a sense of self-esteem; and (4) to minimize self doubts, feel a sense of belonging.

Some previous studies on online interpersonal influence and eWOM can be borrowed to address UGC’s influence on consumers. Goldsmith and Horowitz (2006) identified eight different motivations for online opinion seeking before purchase: (1) reduce risk; (2) because others do it; (3) to secure lower prices; (4) access easy information; (5) accidental/unplanned; (6) because it is cool; (7) stimulation by offline input; and (8) to get pre-purchase information. The first two motivations have a strong tie to cultural value. The first factor is related to a culture’s uncertainty avoidance, whereas the second one is connected to an individual’s perception of the social norm. Smith, Menon, and Sivakumar’s (2003) study on peer-to-peer recommendations on decision making found that recommendation from both experts and regular people with “tie strength” have relatively the same influential power. Consumers who receive positive

recommendations about products are twice as likely to purchase the recommended products as others (Senecal & Nantel, 2004). Cheong and Morrison's (2008) study on consumer's reliance on UGC found that positive or negative information from UGC has similar trustworthiness. Another consumer's personal experience is important to consumers who view such UGC as more credible than producer generated contents. Cheong's findings correspond with Goldsmith and Horowitz's work, which is echoing that consumers rely on UGC to reduce risk.

### **Cross-culture Studies and Cultural Studies in Social Media**

A cross-cultural research methodology can test hypotheses over different populations and cultures, which is suitable for this study. In particular for online communities, this methodology can provide information on understanding different national communication practices, identify the impact of national culture on online communities, help design better information sharing systems, or shape online community polices (Gallagher & Savage, 2012). Comparative research identifies both similarities and differences between cultures. It can be used to improve international understanding, questioning the uniqueness of findings based on nation-specific data, revealing gaps in knowledge, or point to new variables influencing the phenomenon under analysis (Hasebrink, Olafsson, & Stetka, 2010).

Although no previous study directly focuses on culture's influence on UGC's consumer value, many scholars have investigated the influence of culture barriers on Internet and social media. In most previous cross-cultural research, cultural differences often follow national boundaries (McDaniels and Gregory, 1991). These studies include interesting findings of cultural differences in a broader sense. For example, research in the past decade suggests that FaceBook has a considerably smaller market in Japan because the Japanese people prefer their local, anonymous social network sites. Yet, the limitation of these studies is, as Lee and Wohn (2012)

suggested that many of such studies are not strictly culture oriented in that it is uncertain whether these differences are caused by culture or other variables such as market structure. McCoy et al. (2005) suggested that a cultural dimension based on nationality should not be directly applied to technology adoption at the individual level. Today it is increasingly hard to conduct cultural differences study solely base on ethnicity or nationality since many countries, such as United States, have become more heterogeneous in terms of ethnic cultures.

Therefore, it is important that cross-cultural studies do not only focus in ethnicity or nationality to detect changes in behavior patterns. Hofstede (1991) identified four underlying dimensions of cultural values: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism/collectivism, and masculinity/femininity. Later on he added a fifth dimension: long-term orientation. Among the five major dimensions of cultural values, uncertainty avoidance was considered the most important cross-cultural perspective of perceived risk because this dimension mirrors a culture's tolerance or intolerance of risk (Khare, 2009).

Uncertainty avoidance is an important moderator of the relationships between subjective norms and the integrity and ability dimensions of online trust to consumer behavior (Kwang & Lee, 2012). Only uncertainty avoidance consistently modeled the relationship between subjective norms and intention to adopt (Srite & Karahanna, 2005). People within a high uncertainty avoidance culture would frown on conflict and value compromise (Kwang & Lee, 2012). According to Hofstede (1984), uncertain, ambiguous, risky or undefined situations are seen as threatening and to be avoided at all costs in a high uncertainty avoidance culture. Meanwhile risk is considered a natural component of life that can often produce opportunity in a low uncertainty avoidance culture.

According to Hofstede (2001), China and United States have a significant contrast on three dimensions. These are: Power distance, individualism, and long term orientation. Chinese people show high power distance, high collectivism, and high long term orientation cultural values. American people show low power distance, high individualism, and short term orientation cultural values. These differences could result in different consumer-values for the Chinese comparing to Americans. Both countries have low uncertainty avoidance, which means people are happy with ambiguity, according to Hofstede.

The Netpop report (2011) compared how American and Chinese users use social media. Some of the findings include: video sharing sites are the most popular social websites in China; social networking sites are the most popular social websites in the U.S.; Chinese social media users generate almost twice the content as American users; on average, Chinese users on average access 11 social websites, American users only use 3.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Cultural theory of risk sets the ground for this research. Cultural theory, as defined Douglas (1966, 1978) and Douglas and Wildavsky (1982), asserts that structures of social organization endow individuals with perceptions that reinforce those structures in competition against alternative ones. Cultural theory was originally used in a general account of the social function of individual perceptions of societal dangers. Individuals tend to associate societal harms—from sickness to famine to natural catastrophes—with conduct that transgresses societal norms (Douglas, 1966). This tendency, Douglas argued, plays an indispensable role in promoting certain social strictures, both by imbuing a society's members with aversions to subversive behavior and by focusing resentment and blame on those who defy such institutions (Douglas, 1992).

According to this theory, the cultural values in this study can be seen as the societal norms. People's reliance on UGC and their preference are influenced by their cultural values. Since cultural values differ from one cultural group to another, correspondingly, their reliance and preference on UGC differs, which ultimately lead to different outcome of consumer value for each cultural group. Therefore, even though UGC information is accessible throughout the world, people in each cultural group would respond differently according to their cultural norms. In other words, based on cultural theory, the structure of this research can be framed as:

Cultural values determine attitude and preference; attitude and preference determine the consumer value of UGC.

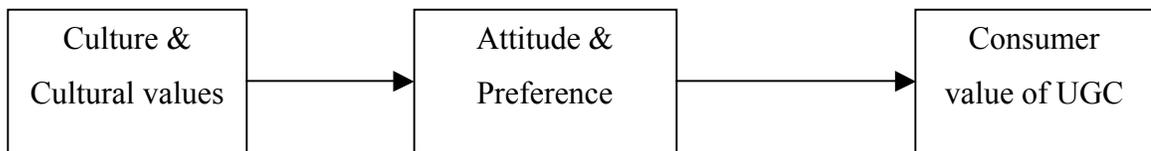


Table 2.1 Model of cultural influence on UGC

Table 2.1 illustrated a hypothesis model on why cultural differences on accessing UGC exist. People's attitude and preference of UGC is formed by their cultural values, and their culture's social norms on accessing UGC. These attitudes and preferences determine what types of UGC has value to them. In addition, people retain their attitude and preference formed in their own culture when they are accessing different cultures' UGC platforms.

### **Summary**

UGC has been studied as a new way of communication. Previous studies addressed on how people engage in UGC, their motivations, and UGC's relation with advertising and consumers. Though some studies pointed out UGC has a high influence in directing consumption, these studies were highly nation specific, whereas UGC platforms extend throughout the world. Questions regarding whether UGC's consumer value varies between

cultures has yet to be answered. Cross-cultural study is suitable to address this question, yet appears to be limited in finding patterns within national or ethnic boundaries, which could lead to confusing results. Hofstede (1991) offers four underlying dimensions of cultural values which serve as a guide to further study on cultural factors' influence. Among these dimensions, uncertainty avoidance is the leading aspect that this researcher will focus on, since studies on eWOM and UGC comparing to advertising has centered on the issue of trust. In addition, Cheong and Morrison (2008) have pointed out that consumer's reliance on UGC has a strong connection to the motivation of reducing risk. Based on cultural theory, the researcher made the assumption that people's preference and reliance on UGC is based on the cultural norms, therefore, cultural factors ultimately has the influence over how people access UGC and UGC's consumer value.

## **Chapter 3 - Research Questions and Methodology**

This study examines User Generated Content (UGC) in attempt to understand whether cultural boundaries vary consumer's reliance and preference of UGC, and to seek some patterns in such preference. Hopefully, such findings would, in addition to contributing to future research, assist UGC platform providers to improve their online presence for better user experience. Surveys and interviews will be used as primary tools of investigation for this study.

### **Methodology**

This study applied survey and interview method to collect data. Quantitative approach is generally used for measuring social data, especially attitudes and beliefs (Sukamolson, 2009). Surveys, as one of the quantitative research tactics, are used to collect data to exam features in social situations that could not be manipulated (Thomas, 2009). Given that the activity of people who participate in UGC platforms in daily life can not be manipulated, surveys would be a suitable tool to gather the related information. This survey will provide numerical data that directly address to the primary question in this research, which is the nature of cultural orientated preference on UGC platforms. It will also help in deeper examination of the patterns and connections between culture and UGC preference.

The survey was administered to two groups of students: the native-born students and the international students. The survey was distributed mainly online through e-mails. A total of 84 people participated in the survey. The majority of the participants are students that are classified as Generation Y by their age. 42 of the participants (50%) are Americans classified by nationality and region; 23 (27.4%) from China; 9 (10.7%) from Europe; 7 (8.3%) from Africa; and 3 (3.5%) from Latin and South America. Among all the participants, 48 (57.1%) are White;

7 (8.3%) are Black; 4 (4.7%) are Hispanic; 24 (28.6%) are Asian, and one unidentified. 52 (61.9%) from all participants speaks English as their native language. 36 (42.8%) of the participants are male; 48 (57.2%) are female.

The questions in this survey measures three types of variables. The first is a respondent's cultural feature. This includes nationality, ethnicity, and native language. The second part measures how respondents use Internet and UGC in general. This includes how much time people spend on Internet; what kinds of websites they visit; what format of information they prefer; and whether they are active UGC creators themselves. The third part measures their attitude and reliance on UGC.

The survey contains twelve questions in total. All of the questions are in the form of multiple choices. The survey questionnaire was posted online following the ethics approval by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) committee for research involving human subjects at Kansas State University. Data was collected and put into SPSS. The data were analyzed by nationality and race to compare the culturally based differences between participants.

Manhattan, Kansas is an acceptable location for this research for least two reasons: First, Manhattan is demographically representative of the United States and Kansas State University is home to about 1,900 international students from more than 100 countries. Second, college students fit in the demographic feature of generation Y, which is the major category that engages in UGC.

Qualitative measures were also applied in this research. Respondent interviews were used to achieve a deeper understanding of how culture affects people's preferences when they participate in UGC. To be more specific, these interviews helped the researcher to filter out other factors that might contribute in forming the differences of how people utilize the consumer value

of UGC, therefore getting a more accurate examination on the influence of different cultural values beyond ethnicity and nationality.

Lazarsfeld (1944) described the general goals of this type of interview: (1) to clarify the meanings of common concepts and opinions, (2) to distinguish the decisive elements of an expressed opinion, (3) to determine what influenced a person to form an opinion or to act in a certain way, (4) to classify complex attitude patterns, and (5) to understand the interpretations that people attribute to their motivations to act. Data related to any of these objectives are valuable in determine the cultural factors' influence.

Two types of respondents were selected for interview based on their ethnicity to gain a clearer result of culturally based differences: the first type Caucasian Americans; the second type Chinese students. Chinese students and Caucasian Americans were chosen because they represent distinct cultural differences and culture values. The Chinese participants are further categorized into Chinese students and Chinese international students, therefore letting the researcher to compare the students under multi-culture influence with students from a single culture. A total of twelve respondents participated in the interviews. Five of them are Caucasian American students, seven of them are Chinese students. Among the seven Chinese students, three were international students in their third year; two were in their first year; another two were students from China. Interviews were individually conducted in a confidential environment where respondents could share information. Ten of twelve interviews are face to face interviews, two were video interviews conducted online. Interviews helped to provide more truthful answers from respondents since others were not present to influence these individuals.

**Research question 1: What is the nature of the way people from different cultural groups access UGC for consumer value-related information?**

The survey is expected to get a general pattern on how people from different culture engage in UGC and how much reliance they have on UGC information when making their purchase decisions. Survey questionnaires were collected to analyze how much trust people from different cultural group have on UGC information, what forms of UGC information they prefer, and how do they value UGC information compare to other information tunnels such as traditional advertising.

**Research question 2: What are some cultural related factors that caused people to have different preference?**

Interviews are applied to find out the cultural related factors behind people's attitude and behavior on accessing UGC. Interviewees were given a brief description of the term UGC at the beginning of the interview. Respondents are encouraged to discuss their experiences and impressions of UGC, as well as their preferences and attitudes to some specific types of UGC platforms. Some questions were used by the interviewer as guidelines. However, rather than following the same pattern of questioning, the questions asked in these interviews vary depending on respondents' answers. Some of the frequently asked questions in the interviews include:

1. What's your general impression about product related information from other ordinary users from Internet?
2. In your own experience, how would you value information from other users in comparison with more formal sources, such as advertising?
3. Do you have any concerns when taking UGC information into decision making?
4. Why would you seeking opinion on UGC?
5. What is your preference on UGC?

6. Would you show more favor in UGC platforms or sources that is closer to your cultural background?
7. Are the reviews and ratings about UGC important to you?
8. Do you post anything about things you purchased?

## **Chapter 4 - Findings**

This chapter presents summarized results from surveys and interviews detailed in Chapter Three.

### **Description of Sample form survey**

A total of 84 people participated in the survey. The majority of the participants are students that are classified as Generation Y by their age. 42 of the participants (50%) are Americans classified by nationality and region; 23 (27.4%) from China; 9 (10.7%) from Europe; 7 (8.3%) from Africa; and 3 (3.5%) from Latin and South America. Among all the participants, 48 (57.1%) are White; 7 (8.3%) are Black; 4 (4.7%) are Hispanic; 24 (28.6%) are Asian, and one unmentioned. 52 (61.9%) from all participants speaks English as their native language. 36 (42.8%) of the participants are male; 48 (57.2%) are female.

### **American students and Chinese students**

The results of the survey show some different patterns on two large culture groups: the American and Chinese. These two culture groups vary in race, region, and native language. Both groups are heavy Internet users. However, Caucasian Americans would use Internet more often in terms of frequency, but generally spend less time on social media than Chinese students.

When asking which types of social media sites the participants visit regularly, the survey listed nine most common kinds of user generated content platform, including Social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Myspace); Micro blogging (e.g. Twitter); Video sharing (e.g. YouTube); Photo sharing (e.g. Flickr); Product based (e.g. Amazon, Ebay); Blog (e.g. Blogger); social Q&A (e.g. Yahoo! Answers); Professional Networks (e.g. LinkedIn); and reviews or recommendation (e.g. Yelp, Tripadvisor). The top five types of UGC platform people visit are: Social Networking

sites (80.95%); video sharing sites (72.62%); Micro blogging sites (46.43%); Product based sites (36.9%); and Professional Network sites (26.19%). Comparing the answers between American students and Chinese students, both groups picked these same five categories as top five, however the ranking of these five types of websites vary between the Chinese and the American as listed in table 4.1 and table 4.2.

<b>Top five categories of social sites American students visit regularly</b>		
<b>Rank</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>1.</b>	Social Network	83.3%
<b>2.</b>	Video sharing	69%
<b>3.</b>	Micro blogging	59.5%
<b>4.</b>	Product based	30.9%
<b>5.</b>	Professional Network	30.9%

**Table 4.1 Top 5 social sites American visits**

Table 4.1 shows the five most commonly visited categories of social sites American students visit. 83.3% respondents from survey use social networking sites;69% use video sharing sites; 59.5% use micro blogging sites; 30.9% use product based sites; and 30.9% use professional network.

<b>Top five categories of social sites Chinese students visit regularly</b>		
<b>Rank</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>1.</b>	Video sharing	78.2%
<b>2.</b>	Social Network	69.5%
<b>3.</b>	Product based	43.4%
<b>4.</b>	Professional Network	30.4%
<b>5.</b>	Micro blogging	17.3%

**Table 4.2 Top 5 social sites Chinese visits**

Table 4.2 shows the five most commonly visited categories of social sites Chinese students visit. 78.2% respondents from survey use video sharing sites; 69.5% use video social

networking sites; 43.4% use product based sites; 30.4% use professional networking sites; and 17.4% use micro blogging sites.

The results from American students show that Social Network sites such as Facebook ranked top for types of participative websites people regularly visit; whereas Chinese students ranked video sharing sites. Micro blogging sites are the third most regularly visited sites according to American students. Almost 60 percent of American students participate in micro blogging sites; however the percentage of Chinese student who responded visiting micro blogging sites is only 17.3%, which ranked bottom on the top-five list. Further more, the average Chinese participant reported visiting 3 types of social websites, while American participants checked 3.21 types on average.

The participants were also asked on their preference on format of the content, specifically in comparison between text, video and pictures. The answers gathered from all the participants were equally distributed. 35.71% answered videos, 32.14% answered pictures, and another 32.14% answered on text. When looking at the answers between American and Chinese, the data shows a significant difference on preference. 45.2% of American students answered they prefer text format content, 30.9% on video, 23.8% on pictures. Among Chinese students, 47.8% preferred video content; 43.4% preferred picture; only 8.7% answered they prefer text content

The next part of the survey addresses to the attitude and perception of participants regarding how they value information from UGC. When asking how they rate the credibility of information form contents created by other users online, most of the participants (53.57%) had a neutral attitude. Another large proportion of participants (36.9%) rated moderate reliable. Few (2.38%) Answered highly reliable, a few (7.14%) answered slightly unreliable. On a scale between one and five, in which the lower the score means the higher rate for credibility, Chinese

students on average (2.61) rated slightly higher than American students (2.74). The following question asking participants whether they agree UGC is more reliable than advertising. Again on a one to five scale, Chinese students on average (2.47) show slightly higher agreement than American students (2.50).

The next question asks the participants what is the most influential source of information regarding to purchase related fields. Only 4.76% of all the participants choose advertising. 13.1% choose official online information (official product websites, online advertising). 39.29% chooses form other users on Internet. The largest proportion of participants chooses word of mouth information from acquaintance.

<b>Most influential purchase related source of information</b>		
Source of information	American	Chinese
Advertising on traditional media	00.0%	4.3%
Official product websites or advertising on Internet	14.2%	13.0%
Related information, reviews from other users on Internet	30.9%	47.8%
Word of mouth information from acquaintance, family	54.7%	30.4%
Other	00.0%	4.3%

**Table 4.3 Most influential source of information between American and Chinese**

Table 4.3 shows what source of information American and Chinese people consider most influential regarding their purchase. 54.7% American respondents consider word of mouth information to be most influential; 30.9% choose UGC; 14.2% choose official sources online, none of the American respondents choose advertising on traditional media. 47.8% Chinese respondents consider UGC to be most influential, 30.4% choose word of mouth; 13% choose

official sources online; 4.3% choose advertising through traditional media; another 4.3% choose “other”.

As table 4.3 shows, more than half of American students consider word of mouth information from acquaintance to be the most influential source of information according to table 4.3. Another large proportion (30.9%) chooses from other users on Internet. The largest proportion of Chinese students (47.8) chooses from online information.

Half of all the participants (50%) responded they seldom post anything online about a purchase they made. 23.81% answered never; 22.62% answered occasionally; only 3.57% answered often. 2.4% American students answered often; 19% American students answered occasionally; 45.2% answered seldom; 33.3% answered never. 39.1% Chinese students answered occasionally; 52.1% answered seldom; 8.6% answered never.

### **Description from Interviews**

A total of 12 people were interviewed to further understand people’s attitude and behavior on UGC platforms. Five of them are American students; seven are Chinese students. Among the Chinese students, three are international students in their third year studying in United States; two in their first year; and two of them study in China.

The primary question being evaluated in this study is that cultural factors cause people to have different attitude and preference when they engage in UGC.

Both groups of students responded that they consider UGC to be a useful source of information. Most of the respondents see themselves as heavy Internet users. All of them responded they have made purchase decisions based on, or at least under the influence of what other people posted online. When asking what their general impression of UGC is, all of the respondents concurred that UGC is a positive information channel. At the same time, many

respondents from both groups mentioned they are skeptical. One Chinese respondent described it as “I trusted UGC on a 60% level.” He further explained it is because in average people are biased when they share their opinions online. However, the fact that their opinion comes from consumers’ true experience, it still more accountable than advertising. Combining the two aspects, the respondent felt more likely to trust UGC information.

The American respondents explained they are being skeptical because they generally will not take one person’s word online too seriously, but they trust people to be honest in general, as was the case with this respondent:

I am sometimes skeptical, sometimes not. If I’m buying stuff and I go see ratings, and there is a lot of people said “yes, they are good.” I’ll take their opinion on that because usually it’s pretty honest.

American students consider people on the UGC platform to be mostly honest, though might be inaccurate sometimes. When asking about what do they have in concern when they access UGC information, data shows that their biggest concern is that the content is biased. One described his concern of biased opinion:

One thing I keep in mind is when looking at reviews you probably see extremes. You probably only see either really unsatisfied consumer bash the product or really satisfied consumer praise the product, the mellow ones usually you won’t see them post anything. Another respondent further argued this issue with an example:

One thing is really tough though and it’s affecting how I view this source of information is that you don’t know where someone is coming from, like their biases, their tastes, their preference. I have a friend who is very knowledgeable about tech-stuff, but has a strong bias about Apple product. So if he posts something, I will just take it with a grain of

salt.....So it is hard whether you should take the advice since on one hand, people may actually know what they are talking about, but still they may also over stress the issue a bit because they have this kind of bias.....

Only one American student mentioned “viral advertising”, which is the act of people who were paid to pose as regular consumer and post things for the benefit of a company. In general, American students hold the opinion that one person’s words might be inaccurate; therefore decisions can not be based on one person’s post. However, most American respondents view the UGC generators to be mostly honest. One respondent addressed it:

I would think that they (the UGC creators) don’t have a point to lie. Even if a few of them do, you can get info from multiple people, and just get the consensus on it.

The Chinese respondents, on the other hand, stress on the concern that many of the sources online are people getting paid to post advertising-related information for sellers. Six out of seven Chinese respondents that took part in this interview mentioned this concern at some point during their interview session. They argued that sometimes companies will hire people to post information to their advantage, other times they will pay some UGC creators to take their negative comments off. Many of the respondents mentioned they have negative experience with this kind of problems on Chinese UGC platforms. A few respondents mentioned they also noticed such problems when they access American UGC platforms. Chinese respondents also pointed out the issue with biased opinions. They mentioned the UGC information is very often fragmented and magnified on one aspect of the product; they are also aware that many people post things with strong personal affections attached. All those factors lead them to be cautious around UGC information.

When comparing UGC and more official sources such as advertising and official product websites, all of the participants show favor in UGC. Both group value other consumer's experience and review more than advertising. They take advertising with a grain of salt and seek UGC information to settle their doubts. However, many of them from both groups acknowledged the fact that advertising sometimes serve as a medium that leads them to UGC. An American student stated that advertising is better in raising awareness. Respondents mentioned if they search for UGC it is probably because they have seen advertising on the product first.

I still value advertising because any company will highlight their most outstanding features of their product in advertising. If that got my attention, I would go online and further look at what other people think.....

According to data, three types of UGC platforms are commonly mentioned when respondents were describing how they access UGC information: product-based sites; review sites; and question-answer databases. Respondents voiced heavy reliance on information coming from these platforms.

Many respondents also mentioned social networking sites and micro blogging sites such as Facebook and Twitter. These two types of UGC platforms provide more information its users. People tend to have a closer relationship with other users on these sites. Data shows although Facebook and Twitter alike sites are not the most used UGC information source for either group, they both do have a lower level of concern when the information is coming from these sites, since it is both UGC and online information through word of mouth (eWOM). Both groups feel more comfortable when knowing where the information is coming from. However, the reliance level varies between the two groups. American students appeal to be more skeptical on Facebook and Twitter. One respondent pointed out some friends can be very naive. Another respondent's

answer is: Unless I can identify the person is an expert of that field or knows what he is talking about.

Chinese respondent showed a stronger reliance level on SNS. They voice more trust on the message if it is from a person they know. One respondent answered that he would use social networking sites as a primary approach to seek information. The respondent value eWOM information from acquaintances:

I would go on social networking sites and ask the people I know for opinion before I search that information from strangers.

Another respondent mentioned he would follow the experts on their Facebook or Twitter to get information on products he is interested in. One can identify the experts based on the personal information they have on their pages, which reduces the respondents' concern.

Chinese respondents also reported that when they seek opinions from strangers online they would prefer the websites have some rating system on UGC. Many respondents have a strong desire in knowing more about a stranger's opinion before trusting it. Most of them agreed that they will feel more comfortable taking online strangers' opinions if a UGC platform provide user profile, ratings, or comments around the content. American respondents also acknowledge this extra information to be helpful, yet appeal to be less interested. One respondent mentioned this information do not matter much if people are just looking for general opinions, unless it is about an actual seller on eBay or Amazon. In general, American respondents hold the opinion that if it is there, it helps. However, they will not specifically looking for this reassurance.

Cultural background is another aspect Chinese respondents pay more attention to than American respondents. Although half of the Chinese students in this interview do not think seeking opinion leaders that shares the same cultural background with them matters much, there

are still some mentioned that same culture and same race means people probably share same concerns and same preference on things which could have made their source more helpful. Some of the female respondents mentioned cosmetics as an example. They explained in the case of a lot of products, they are either designed for a specific race, or people simply have different aesthetics according to their culture. American respondents generally do not feel information coming from people with the same cultural background makes more difference than the ones that don't.

Respondents showed a major difference on what format of information do they prefer. Nearly all the American respondents choose text format information; nearly all the Chinese respondents choose visual format information. American students explained text is easier to access, takes less time to get the information, and it is quicker to look through a lot of sources. Chinese respondents pointed out pictures and videos are more direct than text. What can be seen is more creditable than what is described by words. Although none of the participants mentioned YouTube or other video uploading sites first when describing how they access UGC information, many Chinese respondents consider video to be the most creditable and effective UGC information from online strangers while comparing the information format.

Both groups answered they are not very active type of UGC participant in terms of sharing their own consumption related content. The majority of respondents reported they will most likely post things on UGC platform when they are extremely satisfied with their consumer experience, or extremely unsatisfied. Two respondents mentioned they would post on things they are passionate about. Most respondents stated it is the gratification of express themselves that motivated them to generate content. A couple of respondents mentioned they post their opinions to provide useful information for others.

In summary, respondents from both culture groups share a high reliance on UGC information when they make important purchase decisions. UGC has more influence on their decision making than advertising. People from the two cultures have approximately the same participation level on UGC. They both identify product based websites, question-answer database, review sites and social networking sites as primary tunnels to get information. The difference between the two cultures, as listed in table 4.4, is that American students tend to make more independent decisions based on their understanding of a general opinion, they are more comfortable with uncertainty and potential risks in UGC, they prefer text format information, and they have less concerns in cultural factors. Chinese students have a bigger tendency in taking the opinion of people they considered highly creditable. Therefore, they've shown more concerns on the uncertainty of UGC, more pessimistic on potential risks, looking for more information to establish trust on UGC sources. Chinese students have a certain level of cultural concern when they access UGC, and they prefer visual format information.

<b>American</b>	<b>Chinese</b>
Tend to seek the general opinion among multiple sources	Tend to seek creditable sources
Unlikely to trust one single source	Likely to trust sources they consider safe
Optimistic about information from online strangers	Cautious with source from online strangers
Less interested in seeking prove of credibility about UGC creators	More interested in seeking prove of credibility about UGC creators
Prefer text information	Prefer visual information
Very little cultural difference concern	Some culture difference concern

**Table 4.4 differences on preference and attitude**

Table 4.4 summarized the some characteristics of American and Chinese students that contradict each other summarized from the findings from surveys and interviews. American students in general showed more optimism on the honesty of UGC information, more concerned about accuracy. They are more likely to make a decision based on information from a series of different sources, less concerned about the credibility of one individual; they prefer text content, and have little concern about cultural differences. Chinese students in general shoed they are more likely to trust information from sources they identify as creditable; they are cautious about information from strangers; they are more interested in seeking prove of creditability about a

source; they prefer visual content; and they pay some attention to cultural differences as they access UGC.

### **Other findings**

One more discovery of this study is that when comparing the Chinese students who have been exposed to American culture for some years with the students who have none or less exposure, the previous type of students showed attitudes and preference that may suggest a cross-culture influence. Data from interviews showed those students are more optimistic about information from strangers, yet more aware of scams on UGC than American students. They are highly influenced by what they considered as creditable source, at the same time they like to make decisions base on a large quantity of information they gathered. They still prefer visual content better than text, but showing more reliance on text information than average Chinese students.

## **Chapter 5 - Discussion and Conclusion**

This study looked at what's common between American users and Chinese users on their way of accessing UGC for purchasing-related information. The findings from surveys and interviews in chapter four are discussed in this chapter. Patterns of preferences and attitudes were summarized and connected to cultural values. The researcher offered some suggestions on increasing the gratification of user experience for UGC platform providers.

### **Discussion**

The first research question of this study is to understand the nature of the way people from different cultures access UGC. In the case between Chinese students and American students, both groups showed a strong reliance on UGC. Data from respondents showed people make important purchase decisions highly based on UGC. UGC proves to be an effective source of information among different cultures. Respondents in both groups value the information they get from other users online more than the information from official sources. This high reliance on UGC in general is based on two perceptions from the respondents concluded in this study. First, people have more trust in consumers than sellers when it comes to consumption-related information. This finding is consistent with the findings of Cheong and Morrison (2008). The second perception is idealistically UGC is based on real experiences, and the creators are real consumers.

The Netpop report (2011) on social media trends between the U.S. and China stated Facebook is most commonly visited website for Americans. According to this report, 73% American social media users use Facebook. In China video sharing sites are the most commonly visited social websites. 65% Chinese social media users use Chinese video sharing sites such as

Youku or Tudou. The findings in this study are consistent with the Netpop report. Video sharing sites are the most commonly visited social media websites for Chinese social media users, and video is the most preferred format of content for Chinese users.

This study found that both Chinese and American users participate in approximately three types of UGC based websites. In comparison, American students use more types of social media websites. However, Chinese students access more social media sites in total. Chinese users access 11 websites on average, while American users only use three (Netpop, 2011). Chinese students who participated in this study mentioned they use U.S. based social websites as well as social websites in China. Another reason that contribute to this result is that Chinese social media has more of an oligopoly market than the monopoly market in U.S. For instance, Twitter is the only micro-blogging website in United States, whereas there are five micro-blogging websites in China, not including Twitter.

Contradicts with Hofstede's UAI scores between the two countries, a large part of the findings from interviews appear to suggest a difference in the level of uncertainty avoidance between two cultures on how they access UGC. Uncertainty avoidance (UAI) is defined by Hofstede (2001) as "the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations." One psychological characteristics of UAI is that people with lower level of UAI are optimistic about other people's motives, while people with a high level of UAI are pessimistic about other people's motives. Even though both the American students and the Chinese students participated in this study showed concern about UGC's accuracy, American students are more concerned with biased opinions while remain optimistic on people's motive to be honest. Chinese students also acknowledge biased opinions exist, yet they are more concerned on the motives behind UGC creators. They are very careful with information gathered from

strangers, and have a stronger tendency to look for proves of credibility on UGC. This finding concur with two other characteristics of high level of UAI summarized by Hofstede: first, only known risks are taken; second, need for clarity and structure. American students, in contrast, are more comfortable with ambiguity and chaos, and willing to take unknown risk according to the characteristics of low UAI.

The characteristics of UAI may also explain why Chinese people prefer visual content while American people prefer text. American respondents described text content is easier to access and faster to process. Chinese respondents considered videos more direct and thorough, and their responses contains a strong “seeing is believing” attitude. This finding is also consistent with the societal norms of UAI: low UAI appeal to novelty and convenience, high UAI appeal to purity.

In this study, American respondents also showed a higher level of individualism in their attitude and preference on UGC. They are more calculative when processing UGC information. They are not easily affected by one source of information, more likely to make their own judgment between multiple sources. According to Hofstede (2001), China is a collectivist culture and the United States is an individualist culture. One of the Characteristics of high individualism is people are self-orientated and consider individual decisions better than group decisions. American respondents’ behaviors fit the characteristics of high individual culture. Chinese students tend to look for the creditable source. Data suggests they pay more attention to determine whether a source is creditable based on if the source is a friend, an expert, or an online stranger with enough information to prove the source’s credibility. Once credibility is established, they are content to rely on the source to make their decisions.

The decision making style of Chinese students indicates they are more likely to follow opinion leaders online than American students. They pay more attention to information around a source that aids the credential of the source, whether is based on the profile of the source or other users' evaluation. This process creates certainty and gratification, which further lead to acceptance to a source. Hofstede's study suggested China has a much higher power distance level than United States. In this study, Chinese respondents value sources with more credentials more than information gathered from a series of random sources indicates an acceptance to unequal distribution of power.

Results of this study support the cultural theory of risk. People carry the social norms from their own culture when they encounter a different cultural environment. People's attitude and preference with UGC formed in one culture can apply to how they view UGC from other cultures. The findings in this research shows Chinese people maintained high alert to the credibility of UGC in American UGC platforms as they did in Chinese ones. Such was the case as some of the international students from China mentioned they are aware of the scams on American UGC platforms, whereas American students hardly mentioned this problem in the interview process. It was identified in this study that people act accordingly to their own cultural values and social norms when they access UGC in a similar cultural atmosphere and in a different cultural atmosphere. This research also finds that given enough exposure to multi-culture, people's preference and attitudes on UGC can shift from one culture's characteristics to another. For the Chinese students who had spend considerable amount of time in United Sites, results suggest their preference on UGC carry both the characteristics of Chinese and American culture value.

Previous studies have suggests Chinese users are more active than American users in generating content (Netpop, 2011). One specific set of data shows that Chinese users are twice as likely to post content on a product as Americans. However, such tendency was not shown in this study. Data from Chinese and American participants show they have the same active participation level on generating product related content. Data from interviews further showed both cultural groups share the same common motivation on why they post content, which is when they feel extremely satisfied or unsatisfied about a consumer-experience. Two Chinese respondents mentioned a second motivation, a passion for a product. Thus, the finding in this study may suggest that Chinese users are motivated by more complex reasons, yet they do not show a higher participation level.

### **Implications for practice**

The findings in this study suggest UGC has great consumer-value in both American and Chinese cultures. Generally, websites that provide more interaction between users can increase people's gratification on seeking information. These interactions include making UGC sites more social, creating rating and commenting space to offer opportunities for users to socialize and interact among themselves. To serve users in both cultures with good user experience, UGC platforms need to be designed flexible to support different kind of contents.

Websites that are text-based have more consumer-value in the United States. Video sharing websites and picture sharing sites are popular, yet they have a low level of influence for consumers. Websites that can make information faster to process and easier to access are more appealing to American consumers.

For the Chinese market, website designers need to make UGC platforms more visually applicable. Websites that can support visual UGC is very likely to offer better user experience

than those that are text-based. It is also important to create space for more information and more interaction attached to UGC. Web designers need to make it easier for users to evaluate credibility on other users' content.

### **Limitations**

This is a cross-culture study that searches the existence of culturally based difference in attitude and preference of UGC. The findings of this study are mainly explorative suggestions, not conclusive. Using nationality and race to divide culture groups is arguable. People can belong to one race or one nationality, yet not expose to its culture. What's more, in a culture convergence country such as United States, people are very likely under the influence of multi-cultures, which makes it hard to draw cultural images based on nationality. Other variables could also attribute to the results of people's preference and perception. These include gender, age, education level, economic development, urban versus rural, small city versus big city, and etc...

One limitation in using self-reported data is that the results might be confusing since respondents may have to guess or imagine what they were answering, due to that there were no examples given. This study was also limited by the source at hand. Only a small amount of students were studied as samples. Thus, this study is unable to provide large quantity of data to support solid conclusions. To understand the cultural characteristics of a group on a certain field, large amounts of quantitative data is usually needed to provide conclusive results.

This research compared China and the United States. The two countries have distinct cultural difference in many aspects. Whether cultural orientated differences are significant on UGC worldwide is yet to be determined. China, like many countries, has its own set of UGC platforms that are not globally recognized, these UGC platforms have similarities as well as differences comparing to the UGC platforms we come to know in United States. It is arguable to

compare the culture differences in how people access UGC when one group is telling them based on one set of platforms and another group is partly telling them based on another set. Future studies can focus on how people in different cultures access information on one specific website to give more detailed implications on how to improve user experience and cultural awareness.

This study was not able to fully explain in what condition people exposed to multi-cultures change or shift their behavior and attitude from their own cultural background to a new one. Since every large UGC-based website attempts to open up markets in different cultures and encounter some level of cultural barriers, it is valuable to find out what are some factors that change people's preferences, especially culturally based characteristics in attitude and behavior patterns online.

## **Conclusion**

According to the findings and discussions from this study, user-generated content has high consumer-value attached for people in different cultures. In the case between Chinese and American, people from both cultures acknowledge UGC as a valuable information source to assist them on purchasing decision making. The major difference between those two culture groups lies in their preferences and attitudes toward UGC.

This study found that people in Chinese culture and the people in American culture have strong differences in the preference of text or video content. Video sharing websites are the most commonly visited social websites among Chinese users. Chinese users also prefer to see UGC in the form of video for purchasing related information. Although video sharing websites are the second most popular social websites for Americans, they are less attached to videos when it comes to information seeking. Text form information and text based social websites have a strong appeal to American users.

American users on the whole are more concerned about the biases that may exist in UGC. Chinese users question more on the motives behind. American users are generally skeptical to any particular source of information, uninterested in the details behind UGC, more likely to form opinion base on a large amount of sources gathered. Chinese users are cautious to UGC from unknown sources, likely to trust information from a secure channel such as friends or UGC creators with some credential, very selective on where to seek information. These differences in attitudes and behaviors are strongly tied to the characteristics of different cultural values. The characteristics of American users are consistent to American culture's low uncertainty avoidance and high individualism values. The characteristics of Chinese users showed high level of uncertainty avoidance and high collectivism values.

This research suggests in comparison, American users prefer the quantity of UGC information over quality when they use UGC to guide their decision making. Websites that are easy to access and have high density of direct text-based content are most likely welcomed by Americans. Chinese users prefer the quality of UGC information compared with Americans. Websites that allow users to see the information around a source such as user profile, ratings, and comments appeal to Chinese users more. Video sharing sites also appeal to Chinese users as creditable and comprehensive.

A person's attitude and preference on UGC formed in one culture tend to apply to other UGC-based websites he or she encounters later on. However, when exposed to another culture for a period of time (as the Chinese students who spent three years in U.S. in this study), the attitude and preference can shift to another set of social norms.

On the whole, this study suggests UGC platform providers should be aware of the subjective norms between different cultures. Although people of different cultures are exposed to

same UGC platforms, their cultural values often lead them to only feel comfortable with the information in certain conditions. Condition varies as marketers promote their UGC websites to different countries and different audiences. This study recommends UGC platforms maintain flexibility for making necessary changes to target different culture markets.

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# Appendix A - Survey Questionnaire

## Study on Social Media Reliance

### Page 1

#### Question 1

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

#### Question 2 **\*\* required \*\***

What is your nationality?

Characters Remaining:

#### Question 3

What is your ethnicity?

- White
- Black
- Hispanic
- Asian
- Other

#### Question 4

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Is your native language English?

- Yes
- No

#### Question 5

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How often do you access the Internet?

- 5 or more times a day
- 1 to 4 times a day
- A few times a week
- Less than once a week

#### Question 6

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How much time do you spend on Social media?

- More than two hours a day
- One to two hours a day
- Less than one hour a day
- Less than one hour a week

#### Question 7

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Which types of social media sites do you go regularly?

- Social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, MySpace)
- Microblogging (e.g. Twitter)

- Video sharing (e.g. YouTube)
- Photo sharing (e.g. Flickr)
- Product based (e.g. Amazon, Ebay)
- Blog (e.g. Blogger)
- Social Q&A (e.g. Yahoo! answers)
- Professional Networks (e.g. LinkedIn)
- Review and Recommendation (e.g. Yelp, Tripadvisor)
- Other

### Question 8

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Which form of information do you prefer?

- Videos
- Pictures
- Texts

### Question 9

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How do you rate the credibility of information from contents created by other users online?

- Highly reliable
- Moderate reliable
- So-so
- Slightly unreliable
- Highly unreliable

### Question 10

---

Would you agree that information from other consumers on Internet is more reliable than advertising?

- Strongly agree
- Moderate agree

- Neutral
- Moderately disagree
- Strongly disagree

**Question 11**

---

What is the most influential source of information when you are about to make a purchase?

- Traditional Media advertising (TV, Newspapers, Magazine, etc...)
- Official product websites or advertising on Internet
- Related information, reviews from other users on Internet
- Word of mouth information from acquaintance, family, or experts
- Other

**Question 12**

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How often do you post contents (rating, comments, picture, video....) on Internet about a purchase?

- Often
- Occasionally
- Seldom
- Never

## **Appendix B - Transcripts of Interviews**

### **Appendix B: Interview transcripts**

Key: Int = Interviewer, Res = respondent

#### **Interview 1: American student**

(Int) What's your general impression about product related information from other ordinary users on internet?

(Res) Depends on situations... (I am) sometimes skeptical, sometimes not. If I'm buying stuff, and I see ratings, if there is a lot of ratings that means many people said "yes, they are good." I'll take their opinion on that because usually it's pretty honest.

(Int) So you usually go for the ratings and reviews?

(Res) Yeah.

(Int) How would you value information from other users in comparison with more formal sources, such as advertising? Which one do you prefer?

(Res) People.

(Int) Sometimes information more other users could be inaccurate. When it comes to that, who do you think is responsible for it? Is it the ones who post the content, the platform (Social website) provider, or is it the user's own risk to take?

(Res) I don't know. It's kind of vague. If it's a cheap product I will just buy it and see for myself (if what people say is accurate). If the item I am searching is expensive, I would just do more research on it and be cautious.

(Int) Do you have any concerns when taking this kind of online information?

(Res) No, not really. I would think that they don't have a point to lie. Even if a few of them do, you can get info from multiple people, and just get the consensus on it.

(Int) So you are very positive about this information source?

(Res) Yes.

(Int) Would you feel more comfortable about the information you get if it's from a friend from Facebook, or someone you know online? (Instead of a stranger)

(Res) I don't know. Because some friends could be very naive, they will just post stuff out there and just like "Yeahhhhhh!"....

(Int) If you can identify the person who is the source has a similar cultural background like you (Same race, same region, same culture...), do you find it more comfortable about the information, comparing to someone who has a different cultural background?

(Res) No. I kind of go more with the overall consensus. I would take a look at a bunch of sources, instead of one person, just because he has (exactly the same cultural features like me).

(Int) In some websites, if you post something, other people can comment or rate it, and it perhaps gives you a little bit more about that content or that person's credibility. Do you find this important?

(Res) Yes. I think so. If it's there, I think it's helpful.

(Int) Do you ever post anything about stuff you purchased?

(Res) No.

(Int) Could you try to think why so many people share this kind of information?

(Res) For the most part, just show their satisfaction or dissatisfaction about it.

(Int) What about the format, videos, pictures, or text? Do you have a preference on this?

(Res) I guess video would be nice; you get more information from videos than text.

## **Interview 2: American student**

(Int) What's your general impression about product related information from other ordinary users on internet?

(Res) In general, I trust them. I view it as a positive thing.

(Int) How do you know a person knows what he is talking about, given that you won't know much about who is generating the information?

(Res) If it's on Twitter or Facebook, the people I follow, and if it's a field I'm not familiar with, I will just trust what they say.

(Int) You mentioned Twitter and Facebook, which gives you some information about who is posting the information. It seems to suggest you have to know a little bit about people before taking their word. Do you specifically look for contents that linked with some information about the creator?

(Res) I'm not sure that I'll take random people's word on Facebook. I do not weigh them very much. Unless it's someone I know, then I take their words seriously. Or if it is a famous person, like a person who wrote a book about what he is talking about, I take their words.

(Int) So you would not like the question-answer platforms, that kind of thing?

(Res) Like Yahoo? Yahoo is the worst. I would not go there unless it is a small problem, like "How to do this on my laptop?" Because in that case if it works then it works. If it doesn't, there is no harm done.

(Int) Some websites will provide other people's reviews and ratings on whether one person's post is helpful. That probably suits your preference more?

(Res) Yes. One thing is really tough though and it's affecting how I view this source of information is that you don't know where someone is coming from, like their biases, their tastes, their preference. I have a friend who is very knowledgeable about tech-stuff, but has a strong bias about Apple product. So if he posts something, I will just take it with a grain of salt. I know what he is talking about, and I also know that he dislike Apple products just because it is Apple product. So it is hard whether you should take the advice since on one hand, people may actually know what they are talking about, but still they may also over stress the issue a bit because they have this kind of bias. I do not like to accept things blindly. If I don't know who they are, what their background is, I don't know if I should believe what they say is true or not.

(Int) If you can identify a creator's cultural background is close to you, would that make you feel more comfortable to take them as a source of information?

(Res) It's hard to say. I think probably yes, just because I know more people in my own culture, and I'm surrounded by them.

(Int) Do you ever post something about stuff you purchased?

(Res) Yes. Like I got a car, and I posted something on Facebook. I think I did that just because it was exciting. And I post funny stuff like my magic wallet, so I posted a video to show it.

(Int) Comparing this source we talked about with some official sources like official websites, advertising, which one do you prefer?

(Res) I will get what's out there on advertising, but I get a general feel of the product from people. I will go online see what people say about this, or I will ask people on Facebook to see if anyone had experience on it. If more than one person says it's no good, and then I probably won't take it; maybe if more than one person says it's good then I will probably take it.

### **Interview 3: American student**

(Int) What's your general impression about product related information from other ordinary users from internet?

(Res) I use internet quite a bit if I'm researching on a product, like user reviews. For example I go on amazon.com and I look through at least first three user reviews. So I get a good view at some of the pros and cons at the product.

(Int) In your own experience, how would you value information from other users in comparison with more formal sources, such as advertising?

(Res) I take traditional advertising with a grain of salt, same thing with official sources online, because I know they are trying to sell me the product. So I probably lean towards online information (by other users) more than traditional advertising. When I search for UGC it's probably because I've seen advertising on the product first. Traditional advertising would catch my attention and lead me to search more on what other users say about the product online. So traditional advertising is better in raising awareness.

(Int) Do you have any concerns when taking UGC information into decision making? (UcA)

One thing I keep in mind is when looking at reviews you probably see extremes. You probably only see either really unsatisfied consumer bash the product or really satisfied consumer praise the product, the mellow ones usually you won't see them post anything. (Int) who is to blame if UGC information proves to be unreliable?

(Res) It's sticky, hard to say, but probably where that information is coming from.

(Int) What is your preference on UGC? (SOURCES, FORMAT)

(Res) I like those third party sites that have a strong tie with the product as source. I prefer text because you get a quick overview at things. I can go through a lot of people's opinion through text in a short time, but videos take too long to watch.

(Int) Are the reviews and ratings about UGC important to you?

(Res) It helps to know what or who to pay attention to. I went o some websites that has been operating for several years and some of the people who post there I can identify, that helps me on taking the information. Credibility makes a difference.

(Int) How often do you post something about a purchase? Why do you do (or other people) it?

(Res) Like I said, I would only feel the extremes (really satisfied or really not satisfied), then I would post something. I want to warn other customers that you might want to think twice. I think I was just motivated by trying to warn other people.

#### **Interview 4: American student**

(Int) What's your general impression about product related information from other ordinary users from internet?

(Res) I think it's great. Because before, the only source you get is from the ones who sells the product, which I don't think it's on neutral ground. I use this source for information a lot, not on the everyday stuff, but it's very useful.

(Int) So you find this source more helping than what we can call "Official sources"?

(Res) I use a little of both. I look at advertising to see what was out there. When I learned what was out there, and I got interested, then I look at third party websites for information to make sure it actually is what they (advertising) say it is, and how actual users' experience and what they think of it.

(Int) When you seek UGC for information, do you have any concerns about it?

(Res) I think sometimes there is a concern of what I think is called "viral advertising", where people actually works for a company go online and post stuff about their product acting as

regular consumer. That is why I think you need to take a large sample size to cautiously take the information. It is hard for them to simulate a large sample size.

(Int) Who is to blame if nothing is inaccurate? Is it the platform provider, the ones who post the inaccurate information, or the ones who are seeking UGC information?

(Res) I think as long as the third party sites make it clear to the users that they are not associated with any of the opinions people post up there, I think it is the users' risk to take.

(Int) Would it be more comfortable to you if you can identify the information is from someone who is more culturally close to you?

(Res) Honestly I do not think it makes a difference. I do not think I would trust anyone from Beijing to Kansas City differently. To me a stranger is still a stranger. I don't think I would value more on people's opinion based on whether they are from the same culture that I am.

(Int) Some websites let you know a little more about who is posting the message. People can give ratings or likes or comments under it, or they have a profile. Do you consider that information important to you?

(Res) Yes, it adds another layer of certainty of it. It is a lot harder to scam on a system when you have a measure of credibility.

(Int) How important does that mean to you, would you specifically look for this extra layer of certainty, or do you think it is better if it's there?

(Res) When it comes to actual sellers like the ones on eBay or Amazon, I think it matters; but in other places when you look for just general opinion, I don't think it matters that much.

(Int) have you ever post anything related to stuff you purchased?

(Res) I haven't. I appreciate those who do, and I probably should do too. I read a lot of stuff on it, I'm a lurker.

(Int) In your opinion, what do you think motivates people to post consumer-related information?

(Res) I think it depends on personality. One might do it to express himself online, I can't think of any other reasons why people do it right now.

### **Interview 5: American student**

(Int) What's your general impression about product related information from other ordinary users on internet?

(Res) I can't remember what I find useful. I think if I buy something, and if I do not know the product I would go for some reviews online.

(Int) In your own experience, how would you value information from other users in comparison with more formal sources, such as advertising?

(Res) I try to take them both with a grain of salt. I go to the actual (official) website first, they give a lot of detailed information about the product which I think is helpful.

(Int) Do you have any concerns when taking UGC information into decision making?

(Res) I do not have many concerns, like I said I do not use it much.

(Int) What is your preference on UGC? (SOURCES, FORMAT)

(Res) I would go for the text more.

(Int) Would you show more favor in UGC platforms or sources that is closer to your cultural background?

(Res) Not much, I do not think culture matter that much. It depends on what they say about the product.

(Int) Are the reviews and ratings about UGC important to you?

(Res) no.

(Int) How often do you post something about a purchase? Why do you do (or other people) it?

(Res) Never.

### **Interview 6: Chinese, international student, third year**

(Int) What's your general impression about product related information from other ordinary users on internet?

(Res) I feel like I trust UGC on a 60% level. When I come across a field that I don't know much, I would look for advertisement first, and then I probably go to some websites or discussion board, question-answer sites for some more information. I think people trust advertising less these days, but when you go online, you know users are biased, but the fact that it's the consumer's true feeling and their true experience gained their trust level. That's why I do not trust UGC completely, but I trust it about 60%. And it really influences my final decision, especially in a field I do not know much.

(Int) In your own experience, how would you value information from other users in comparison with more formal sources, such as advertising?

(Res) I still value advertising because any company will highlight their most special features on their product, if that attracts me, I would go online and further look at it, myself, but if that doesn't, there's no point look into it anymore. (So you think advertising is like a medium that lead you to UGC and a filter of some sort?) Yes, I think so.

(Int) Do you have any concerns when you access UGC information?

(Res) There are people hiring people to post fake reviews. People sometimes pay off users to take their negative comment off. So that is the biggest concern I carry in mind when I seek UGC.

(Int) Who is to blame for this, the platform provider, the ones who post the inaccurate information, or user's own risk to take?

(Res) I think you can not control social media, you can not control what people will do or say. So you have to have your own judgment, it's your own risk to take.

(Int) Would you show more favor in UGC platforms or sources that is closer to your cultural background?

(Res) If a friend I can identify post something, I would trust it. However culture is not that much of a problem. It won't make a difference whether the information I saw is from a guy with the same cultural background like me, or from a totally different background; same with the platform. The only thing that would make me trust it more is that if it's shared or created by a friend I know.

(Int) Are the reviews and ratings about UGC important to you?

(Res) If it's there, I think it would be very helpful. If many other people think the source is trustworthy, at least it won't be far away from the truth. Even though sometimes their opinion may be strong, at least you know it's because they are unsatisfied with the product, or very satisfied, but not because they have some personal issues with the seller (they are not paid to attack someone's reputation.) So I would like the ratings there.

(Int) What is your preference on UGC? (SOURCES, FORMAT)

(Res) I like Amazon, it's big and it has a reputation through years. And I would use other social sites to see what is new, what watch catch my attention.

(Res) I would certainly prefer video or pictures. It's simple and direct. Text description sometimes do not give you enough or do not give you what you what. But a picture always gives you a better picture on things. A picture says a lot more than text.

(Int) Do you ever post stuff about things you purchased?

(Res) Yes. It wasn't long ago I gave a comment on my experience about a pair of sneakers and gave it a rating. I found people went to the extremes on both end when they comment on it, so I think I want to express how I feel, how I evaluate it, and trying to give a balanced review on it.

(Int) are you very updated with SNS, UGC sources?

(Res) So-so. If I have enough friends on one site, I would join.

### **Interview 7: Chinese, international student. First year**

(Int) What's your general impression about product related information from other ordinary users from internet?

(Res) I think I would likely be influenced by my friends, if they post something.

(Int) In your own experience, how would you value information from other users in comparison with more formal sources, such as advertising?

(Res) I think if it is a major purchase, I would go to the actual stores to get some info, I do not have much chance to encounter advertising since I do not have a TV or anything. I would go online just to look at the estimated price on products. So I like more official sources.

(Int) Do you have any concerns when taking UGC information into decision making?

(Res) I think some experience I had in Chinese social media lead me to doubt the credibility this kind of information. I've also heard a lot about scams and untruthful information floating on review sites here. So I think you can look around those information, but cautious in trusting them.

(Int) What is your preference on UGC? (SOURCES, FORMAT)

(Res) I like pictures, and it need to look professional, in good quality, not someone took with their cell phone. I would like text reviews with pictures in them.

(Int) Would you show more favor in UGC platforms or sources that is closer to your cultural background?

(Res) Yes I would feel more comfortable if it's I can identify something in my culture.

(Int) Are the reviews and ratings about UGC important to you?

(Res) I think it would make a strong difference, but still you need to compare with other sources.

(Int) Are you very updated with social media platforms?

(Res) Not really. I stick to the most popular ones.

Interview 8: Chinese student, first year

Respondant 4 Chinese student, female

(Int) What's your general impression about product related information from other ordinary users from internet?

(Res) I think it is a source that both consumers and advertisers consider to be important. It is a fragment of information about the product. If you look at official sources you will see more complete information on a product, while when you look at what users post online, you see only an aspect of it, but leave other aspects blank.

I personally like this way because it involves user experience, though some of this kind information contains some nature in advertising.

(Int) In your own experience, how would you value information from other users in comparison with more formal sources, such as advertising?

(Res) To me, I like the feedback from consumers. Internet is convenient. I would like to go online to see how some consumers post about their experience before I make a major purchase, so I can see the pros and cons. If you look at advertising, you only see the good features. You won't know if there are some flaws in the product that makes the product unsuitable for you.

(Int) Have you had any concerns when you access UGC information?

(Res) I think one of my biggest concerns is that some sellers might pose as consumers to post some good information and reviews out there to lure customers. Another thing is I don't think UGC sources are very "comprehensive". People tend to magnify one good thing, or flaw, about the product, and disregard the rest.

(Int) If UGC is inaccurate, who is to blame?

(Res) I think you can not control what people said, it should be your own risk to take when you seek information in this direction.

(Int) Would you show more favor in UGC platforms or sources that is closer to your cultural background?

(Res) I don't think I would find it more credible just because of that.

(Int) Are the reviews and ratings about UGC important to you?

(Res) I think it is helpful, but I won't specifically look into that unless that is the only source of information I can find. I would more likely to just look through a lot of sources to see what everybody has to say. Usually that gives me a good picture on things. If the source is limited to only a few, then I want to see what other people think about these sources.

(Int) Have you ever posted anything about things you've purchased?

(Res) Never.

(Int) Why do you think so many people do it?

(Res) express oneself, bragging.

(Int) How do use UGC information online, do you have any preferences?

(Res) I would look at a few. I like question-answer databases, discussion boards. I would google and see what listed on top.

(Int) Do you prefer text, video, or pictures in terms of format?

(Res) Generally I like text, but it also depends on what kind of product I am looking at. For example, if it is clothing I am looking at, I would like to see actual photos took by consumers to see what it really looks like. If it is electronic products, I would look through text reviews and evaluations. Visual information did make it more direct and vivid, in a sense, better, but I prefer text because it is more accessible and convenient.

### **Interview 9: Chinese student, third year**

(Int) How do you use UGC information?

(Res) I follow a lot of people on Twitter and SNS sites, people that are experts or have a focus on one certain area. Depending on what I am buying, I would go to some different sites like Amazon, or specific areas of discussion boards.

(Int) How would you value UGC, comparing to more official sources like advertising?

(Res) I don't really rely on advertising. I much more prefer what consumers say from their experience which is what UGC provides. Sometimes perhaps I saw the advertisement first and it got my interest, but whether I would go ahead and make a purchase is ultimately based on what reviews say.

(Int) Do you have any concerns when using UGC?

(Res) One of my concerns is the quantity of information that is out there. If a product has very few reviews I begin to doubt on the quality of that product. Because if there is a considerable amount of information posted by users it means that many people use this product, so it gives a certain level of comfort. What's more, if there is not enough source of information, you begin to wonder if the information is biased or inaccurate without comparison.

(Int) Would you feel more comfortable with the information if you can identify a strong tie in culture?

(Res) I think it would because people have preferences. People with a similar background may provide more information on aspects of things you care about. For example, when you search on information on make-up and beauty product, and you are in United States, you need an Asian voice here to tell you whether the product that suits western people will look good on Asian people. In that aspect, it is very important to know if the person that provides the information has a similar cultural background like you.

(Int) Would it matter to you if some platforms provide more information about people's post, such as ratings, likes and comment?

(Res) I rarely pay attention to this. If I am buying from an online seller, I would probably pay attention to the ratings and credibility revolved information on the seller, but as far as opinions, reviews, I do not pay much attention on this.

(Int) Would you say you prefer text, video, or pictures when it comes to format?

(Res) I would go for visual stuff more for most of my purchase. There are a lot of products that are hard for text information to describe.

(Int) Have you ever post anything about things you purchased? What motivate you to do it?

(Res) I have, not very often though. I think I just want to share my experience with people. One hard thing for me to do this is a lot of the places I post things are real-name registered. I find it uncomfortable to let people know what I was doing. Yet I want to post more product reviews, I think what I will do at some point is to register another account with an avatar and post more things.

### **Interview 10: Chinese international student, third year**

(Int) What's your general impression about product related information from other ordinary users on internet?

(Res) I would usually go online to search for people's comments and opinions when I'm about to make a big purchase. At the same time, I keep a cautious mind, not to blindly follow what other people say. I try to hold a suspicious mind on what angles and what intentions are behind those posts. On the whole, I like this source of information. I think having that information at hand makes it more comfortable to decide on a purchase.

(Int) how do you value UGC information comparing with advertising?

(Res) I don't like advertising. What advertising does is to promote a product, make it look good, and hide the flaws. For example, the Apple product commercials brag about how their product is fancy and high-tech, but it leaves the part that its home key bottom breaks easily. I would read some information about a product on its official site, but it is not as helpful as consumer reviews. The online posts from consumers can point out what is good about a product, and what its flaw are. They give comparisons between products, and help you make a wise choose.

(Int) What do you think about those inaccurate messages from users online?

(Res) I think the people who post the content, they should not give highly interest driven, biased opinions. They should only provide subjective facts about their experience. I do not think it is necessarily the platform provider's fault, but I do think it is better if a little censorship is there to filter some of the outrageous posts. I think Facebook is doing something like that. If you report a post is not appropriate, they will contact the creator and work on the problem.

(Int) Would it be helpful if websites provide more information on the posts?

(Res) I think it is very helpful. If you know more about who is posting things, you would know that if he is posting from consumer experience or maybe that he is hired to post good or bad things for a seller's benefit.

(Int) Would you feel more comfortable learning the information from a platform or someone you can identify to have the same culture background like you?

(Res) I had a few bad experiences on trusting on the information posted by people within my culture. You can identify many people's culture simply by their names, and having some bad experience, I would rather trust people that are not within my culture more.

(Int) Have you ever post anything about things you purchased? What motivates people to post this kind of content?

(Res) I think I would reply to some of the user generated content I see, but I won't write a long article for a product myself like some people. I think people are motivated by one of three things: the first is the idealistic groups who consider posting information as a good cause to influence people and gain great gratification; the second is people hired on someone's benefit to pretend to be a satisfied consumer; the third is people who like to brag about what they get.

Interview 11: Chinese student

(Int) If you know the person who is posting the message, do you find it more trustworthy?

(Res) Yes, I think it is very creditable if I know the person posting the message, and I will probably do some more search online to google what other people have said based on that. If I know the person, I would value his opinion more, but if I don't, I probably will just ignore it.

(Int) What about review sites and question-answer based sites?

(Res) I like reviews from other consumers. I think that is a good way to get the information you need.

(Int) Do you have any concerns when you are looking for information from other users online?

(Res) I think I would go to my friends first when I want information about an important purchase. If I want to buy a phone, I would probably ask around my friends for their opinion before I go online. UGC is a second approach, because you never know who is an actual consumer and who is hired to pose as a consumer.

(Int) Some websites let you in on some information of the creator. Knowing a little more information on the people who posted the content, or having some ratings and comments from other user, do you think that's very helpful to you?

(Res) Yes I think it is helpful. I will attach credibility to how other people think on the information, if a lot of people give positive ratings or comments on a piece of information, I think it's more reliable.

(Int) If you can identify the information is from a culture background that is closer to you, would you feel more comfortable?

(Res) Yes. I think in a lot of things the same race and the same culture shares same preference and opinions. Thus, what people closer to my culture background might say maybe closer to what I am interested in.

(Int) what do you prefer in terms of format?

(Res) I like visual content. Pictures and videos give you more information, and it is more direct. Plus, it adds to the credibility if you can actually see something instead of just somebody describe it.

(Int) Comparing to some of the more official information such as advertising or official websites, how do you prefer?

(Res) I like the consumer side better. I personally think that Chinese people do not have much faith on official sources.

Interview 12: Chinese student

(Int) what is your general impression of information posted by other people online in terms of consumer value?

(Res) I think it is a very good thing. It offers more reference for you when you make your decision. You get to see other consumer's experience and evaluation before you make your purchase.

(Int) how do you value this source of information, comparing to some of the more official sources such as the product's official websites, or advertising?

(Res) I tend to be skeptical when viewing the information from official websites. I think the commercials in China tend to be highly exaggerated. I do not have much trust on advertising.

(Int) So how do you use UGC information?

(Res) I went to some search engines and type in the things I'm researching for, and see what pops out on the first page. I like the question answer databases. Or I went to some product based sites to see people's comments.

(Int) Do you have any concerns when seeking information in this source?

(Res) One thing I always doubt when I see other user's post is whether it is another marketing strategy, that is, people that are hired pose as consumers to post comments that serves the sellers' best interest. So I need to browse a lot of people to get a good understanding.

(Int) Some websites let you know a little more about who is posting the message. People can give ratings or likes or comments under it, or they have a profile. Do you consider that information important to you?

(Res) Some of the websites here do let people comment on other people's post. They will let you rate "yes" or "no" on whether you find that information useful. It helps raise the credibility a little. Still, what I would do is to browse a lot of source and make up my own mind.

(Int) Would you show more favor in UGC platforms or sources that is closer to your cultural background?

(Res) It still depends on the content.

(Int) what do you prefer in terms of format?

(Res) It depends on what I am looking for.

(Int) Would you ever post anything about something you purchased?

(Res) Sometimes I do. It usually happens when I am extremely satisfied with a product, or extremely unsatisfied.