



# A Woke Approach to User-generated Content: How Product Involvement and Gender Influence What We Post

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## Abstract

Although gender is often used as a dummy control variable in user-generated content research, online community researches often conduct study communities of products that are disproportionately used by male users. Similarly, existing studies also focus on communities of high-involvement products, although online communities of low-involvement products are emerging. Continuing the work of Soylemez (2021a), this study used ELM and equity theory and examined how two personal factors (gender and product involvement) affect the relative generation of brand-oriented content and community-oriented content. A four-condition experiment was designed to test the hypotheses, and 120 Clickworker users who engaged with an online brand community in the 30 days prior to the experiment participated in the study. While the study found no significant difference between genders, it found that members of high-involvement product communities generate more brand-oriented content than community-oriented content, while members of low-engagement product communities generate more community-oriented content than brand-oriented content. There is a significant interaction between gender and product participation. The managerial implications such as differentiation and theoretical implications such as the benefit of equity theory in online brand community research have been also discussed.

## Keywords

*User-generated content, online brand communities, product involvement, gender.*

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## Öz

Her ne kadar cinsiyet, kullanıcılar tarafından oluşturulan içerikler arařtırmalarında kukla bir kontrol deęiřkeni olarak kullanılsa da, bu arařtırmalar genellikle orantısız bir biçimde erkekler tarafından kullanılan ürünlerin çevrimiçi topluluklarında yürütölmektedir. Benzer şekilde düşük katılımlı ürünlerin çevrimiçi toplulukları ortaya çıksa da mevcut çalışmaların kahir ekseriyeti yüksek katılımlı ürünlerin çevrimiçi topluluklarını incelemektedir. Söylemez (2021a)'nin çalışmasının devamı niteliğindeki bu çalışma, Detaylandırma Olasılığı Modeli (DOM) ve Eşitlik Kuramı'ndan faydalananak iki kişisel faktörün (cinsiyet ve ürün katılımı) marka odaklı ve topluluk odaklı içeriklerin göreceli üretimini nasıl etkilediğini arařtırdı. Hipotezleri test etmek için dört koşullu bir deney tasarlandı ve deneyden önceki 30 gün içinde çevrimiçi bir marka topluluęuyla etkileşim kuran 120 Clickworker kullanıcısı çalışmaya katıldı. Çalışma, cinsiyetler arasında anlamlı bir fark bulmazken, yüksek katılımlı ürün topluluklarının üyelerinin topluluk odaklı içerikten daha fazla marka odaklı içerik ürettiğini, düşük etkileşimli ürün topluluklarının üyelerinin ise marka odaklı içerikten daha fazla topluluk odaklı içerik ürettiğini buldu. Cinsiyet ve ürün katılımı arasında anlamlı bir etkileşim vardır. Çalışmada çevrimiçi marka topluluęu arařtırmalarında eşitlik teorilerinin faydaları gibi teorik sonuçlar ve farklılaştırma stratejisinin faydaları gibi yönetsel çıkarımlar da tartışılmıştır.

### **Anahtar Kelimeler**

*Kullanıcı tarafından yaratılan içerik, çevrimiçi marka toplulukları, ürün katılımı, cinsiyet*

## Introduction

Online brand communities are specialized, non-geographic communities based on a structured set of social relationships between admirers of a brand (Muniz & O'guinn, 2001). Members of the online brand community contribute and utilize the collective intelligence of communities by generating content (Laroche et al., 2012). User-generated content (UGC) in online brand communities has not only enabled social commerce but also facilitated prosumer marketing and co-branding (Wang, 2021).

Although the online brand community literature is growing every year, there are still two major gaps in the literature. First, an overwhelming percentage of online brand community studies are conducted by studying online communities of products particularly favored by men, such as motorcycles (Madupu & Cooley, 2010; Felix, 2012), cars (Luedicke & Giesler, 2007) and electronics (Soylemez, 2021b). Although gender is often used as a dummy variable in these online brand community studies, the influence of gender on the relative generation of different user-generated content types cannot be fully understood, as female members in these communities are likely to embrace the male-dominated subculture to be accepted in the community. The best way to understand how the women participants of online brand communities generate content is not to analyze how woman Harley Davidson owners behave in their online community where they are outnumbered 1 to 10. Therefore, a study that puts gender at the center is needed to fully understand the role of gender in content generation in online brand communities.

Another issue is that while Soylemez (2021a) and Soylemez (2021b) have examined various personal, brand, product, and contextual factors that influence the relative generation of different types of UGC, product engagement is an unstudied area. As with gender, surveys often examine communities of high-involvement products such as cars which consumers spend 5-digit figures to own the brand. However, brands of low-involvement products are investing in online brand communities too. It is therefore possible that these low-involvement product communities exhibit different dynamics than the over-analyzed, high-involvement product communities.

Based on ELM and the equity theory, the research question of this paper is stated as below.

*RQ: What is the relationship between gender and product involvement, and the relative contribution of brand-oriented content and community-oriented content?*

The research objectives are explored through three hypotheses that examine the impact of gender and product involvement on the relative generation of different types of UGC. A four-condition experiment was designed to test the hypotheses, and 120 Clickworker users who engaged with an online brand community in the 30 days prior to the experiment participated in the study. The methodology of Soylemez's previous studies had been utilized as well when it is applicable. Based on the results, managerial implications and future research directions are also discussed. Exploring customer behavior in social networks and harnessing the power of consumer engagement are hot topics in interactive marketing (Wang, 2021); therefore, it is hoped that the study will expand knowledge in this area.

## **Literature Review and Theoretical Development**

### ***User-generated Content Types***

User-generated content is defined as any type of brand related content, including but not limited to photos, comments, and videos created by users (Itani, El Haddad, Kalra., 2020). In an online brand community, the brand and the community are the two stakeholders that members can choose as a target group (Haikel-Elsabeh et al., 2019). Soylemez (2021a) argues that it is possible to classify user-generated content according to the target audience, i.e. brand-oriented content and community-oriented content.

Brand-oriented content is UGC that directly targets the brand and provides added value to the brand. Some examples of brand-oriented content are suggestions, complaints, or discussions of brand-related news (Soylemez, 2021b). Members seem to communicate with each other, aware that other members do not have the resources to respond to complaints or utilize their suggestions. By communicating with other members, they try to force the brand to develop new products and address grievances. So, if the brand wants to use the community for co-creation tasks; it shall cultivate factors that produce more brand-oriented content (Soylemez, 2021a). Members can also target other members, for example by providing advice on how to use the products more effectively. This community-focused content also indirectly provides brand value, as community-based troubleshooting means less customer service burden and high community interaction increases brand loyalty (Soylemez, 2021a). So if the brand wants to designate the community as a meeting place for fans or an informal resource hub; therefore it must adopt a strategy that maximizes the generation of community-oriented content. Understanding the distinction between different types of content allows brands to tailor their online marketing strategies to the expectations of their online communities (Soylemez, 2021a).

### ***Gender***

Gender socialization theory suggests that, in addition to sex-specific skills, women and men acquire sex-specific personality traits, self-concepts, and value sets (Mason & Mudrack, 1996). In general, gender differences in online settings are fairly well-researched. The literature suggests that male-dominated newsgroups are often characterized by large amounts of factual, interrelated exchanges, and impersonal discourse, while female-dominated newsgroups often display textual patterns of social interdependence (Van Doorn & Van Zoonen, 2008). Men tend to read reviews to confirm their already established opinions and ignore comments that invalidate those opinions, while female participants are more open to information and strive to minimize discrepancies by paying attention to opposing opinions (Chung & Monroe, 1998). The blogging literature suggests that women are more interested in the social aspects of blogging and men in information, opinion, and greater technical sophistication (Pedersen & Macafee, 2007). Female bloggers emphasize participation and male bloggers emphasize information (Schler et al., 2005). Women are more likely to share personal issues such as family matters, while men are more likely to discuss public issues such as politics and sports on social media (Wang et al., 2013). Males tend to have longer, more hostile, and self-promoting posts that contain strong affirmations, put-downs, and sarcastic style, and females have a supportive and mitigating style, including appreciation; and community activities, thanks, apologies, and questions (Herring, 1996).

In the context of the online brand community, the results are less clear. Scientists are divided on whether gender differences play an important role or whether the gender gap closes (Islam & Rahman, 2017). Although there are many studies about online brand communities, the relevance of gender differences was given little attention (Akar & Topcu, 2011; Rialti et al., 2017). Gender differences in the commitment of the online brand community are pointed out for future research results (Hammedi et al., 2015) and in early development stage (Islam & Rahman, 2007). Recent studies also show that the moderation of gender decreases (Krishnapillai & Ying, 2017). Equity theory argues that people value social exchanges based on the fairness they perceive in the relationship (Adams, 1965). In the context of the online brand community, the brand and the community are two significant stakeholders. Consumers show positive affection towards individuals or organizations that acknowledge them and provide positive feedback and reward for their contributions to them (Williams & Hazer, 1986; Shore & Tetric, 1991; Gruen et al., 2000). Therefore, members generate more brand or community-oriented content based on their relationship with these stakeholders. It turns out that women are more trusting towards other members (Bae & Lee, 2011; Mansour & Farmanesh, 2020) and use online brand communities for social

support, while men increase and protect social standing (Awad & Ragowsky, 2008; Fan & Miao, 2012), therefore, female participants are expected to prioritize community. Furthermore, male participants also appear to generate more brand-oriented content than community-oriented content (Soylemez, 2021a; Soylemez, 2021b). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H1: Male members generate more brand-oriented content than community-oriented content, whereas female members generate more community-oriented content than brand-oriented content.*

### **Product Involvement**

Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) theorizes the attitude change caused by persuasive communication methods (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). According to ELM, there are two main routes to persuasion namely the central and peripheral routes. The central route is associated with rational thinking about message content such as product details (Heinze, 2010). Meanwhile, peripheral pathway processing deals with peripheral signals such as emotion or other unrelated factors (Lee & Hong, 2016). Level of product involvement refers to how personally important or interested someone is in consuming a product (Zaichkowsky, 1986). Low-involvement products are often within lower price ranges and do not bring much risk to the buyer, if they realize that their purchase decision was a mistake (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Kim et al., 2017). Meanwhile, high-involvement products are often expensive, and wrong purchase decisions create more problems for the buyer (Ansarin & Ozuem, 2015). Thus, the low-involvement product purchase decision process is heuristic, short and often handled by peripheral route, while high-involvement product purchase decisions take a long time and come with a long rational thinking process (Elliot & Percy, 2007)

In the context of online brand communities, consistent results about how product involvement influences online brand community practices are hard to find (Hassan & Casaló Ariño, 2016). However, there are two approaches that can be utilized. From the brand perspective, high-involvement brands try to manage their online brand communities with the purpose of staying in touch with customers. They engage with their community members by coming up with attractive offers, and discount coupons and by responsive behavior (Viskovich et al., 2018). Although brand communities are more common for high-involvement products, relevant literature also started to pay attention to the online brand communities of low-involvement products (Schau, Muñiz & Arnould, 2009).

From the members' perspective, involvement level is known to affect information processing (Dholakia, 2001). As product involvement increases, consumers seek more information (Suh & Yi, 2006). Moreover, members of high-involvement product communities are also likely to engage in defensive

behaviors for the brand against unsatisfied customers (Hassan & Casaló Ariño, 2016). Customers of high-involvement products are more influenced by the arguments from past customers in online consumer reviews than customers of low-involvement products (Sarathy & Patro, 2013). Members of high-involvement product community members are likely to utilize their central route more often and are expected to search and generate more brand-oriented content such as product information to make sure that they will not experience buyer remorse. Members of low-involvement product communities often do not seek product information because the risks are marginal (Sarathy & Patro, 2013). Even when they do, they are often drawn to posts that are not product-focused and require less cognitive effort (Barreto & Ramalho, 2019). Also, members of product communities with low involvement do not perceive self-relevance to the brand, in contrast to members of high-involvement product communities (Chang, Hsieh, and Tseng, 2013). These members will likely use their peripheral route and they will not be very interested in product-related information. In this case, brands are likely to encourage social interactions between users to create a strong sense of identity in customers, as their products are not as important to customers as high-engagement products. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H2: Members of high-involvement product communities generate more brand-oriented content than community-oriented content, whereas members of low-involvement product communities generate more community-oriented content than brand-oriented content.*

Literature also suggests that stereotypical gender differences may manifest differently in different product involvement levels when it comes to the brand preference (Friedmann & Lowengart, 2019). Thus, an interaction is possible.

*H3: Male participants of high-involvement product communities have highest content orientation, whereas female participants of low-involvement product communities have lowest content orientation.*

## **Methodology**

### ***Procedure***

The experiment was designed as a four-condition study that investigates the impact of gender and product involvement on the generation of different types of user-generated content. A group of 120 Clickworker users who engaged with an online brand community in the last 30 days prior to the experiment participated in the study. Seventy of the participants were females (58%) and fifty of them were males (42%) with a median age of 25-34. Eighty two percent of the participants has studied at least in a college and fifty three percent of the participants had a full-time job with a median income range of \$40,000-\$49,999.

First, participants were asked about their genders. Then, participants were randomly assigned either a high-involvement condition or a low-involvement

condition. Gillette disposable razors were chosen for representing low-involvement products and Trek Bikes were selected for high-involvement products. In the second step, participants' familiarity, knowledge, attitude, and involvement level toward their assigned brand were measured. And finally, the participants were asked to imagine themselves in an online brand community of the male/female variant of their assigned product. After reading the scenario, participants were shown the same six content types that were used in (Soylemez, 2021a) and (Soylemez, 2021b) and asked how likely they would post content similar to those types in their assigned communities.

### **Measures**

#### **Content Orientation**

To determine content orientation, participants were asked to what extent they are likely to post particular types of content in the online brand community on a 7-point scale. The six content types that were used in Soylemez (2021a) were used in the experiment. Content orientation was calculated in the same way, by dividing the average brand-oriented content score to the average community-oriented content score. A higher content orientation score indicates a higher inclination toward posting brand-oriented content as opposed to community-oriented content, while a lower content orientation score indicates a higher inclination toward posting community-oriented content as opposed to brand-oriented content.

#### **Product Involvement**

Product involvement was measured by the 10-item-long Personal Involvement Inventory Score (Zaichkowsky, 1994). In 7-Point Likert scale, a higher score indicates higher involvement, while a lower score indicates lower involvement. After scores of the scale's reverse items were reversed, the average scores for both high-involvement products and low-involvement products were calculated. For the binary product involvement variable, the low-involvement category is coded as 0 and the high-involvement category as 1.

#### **Gender**

Female products/participants are coded as 0 and male products/participants are coded as 1.

#### **Control Variables**

As control variables, socio-economic status and real-life online brand community experiences (number of communities they are a member of, duration of membership, anonymity features, the existence of formal reputation systems) of the participants were used.



### Analysis

For the manipulation check, a multiple regression with product involvement score as the dependent variable; product involvement type (binary), familiarity, knowledge, and attitude as the independent variables was performed. Results showed that there is indeed a significant difference in product involvement scores between the high involvement condition and low involvement condition ( $t(115)=2.831$ ,  $p=0.005$ ,  $\beta= 0.511$ ) (See Table 1: Product involvement manipulation check results)

**Table 1:** Product Involvement Manipulation Check Results

<b>Dependent Variable: Product Involvement Score</b>					
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	-0,277	0,475		-0,583	0,561
<b>Involvement (Binary)</b>	<b>0,511</b>	<b>0,181</b>	<b>0,204</b>	<b>2,831</b>	<b>0,005</b>
Familiarity	0,351	0,107	0,290	3,280	0,001
Knowledge	-0,192	0,124	-0,148	-1,546	0,125
Attitude	1,118	0,121	0,665	9,260	0,000

The difference was also checked for each gender. Although product involvement was significant for the male participants ( $t(45)=2.279$ ,  $p=0.027$ ,  $\beta= 0.602$ ), it was not significant for the female participants ( $t(65)=1.529$ ,  $p=0.131$ ,  $\beta= 0.409$ ).

To analyze the relationship between gender and product involvement and types of user-generated content, a multiple regression with content orientation as the dependent variable; gender, product involvement type and control variables as the independent variables was performed. Gender of participants was found to have an insignificant positive effect on content orientation ( $t(103)=0.388$ ,  $p=0.699$ ,  $\beta= 0.040$ ); thus, it can be stated that  $H_1$  is not supported, which shows that there is no significant difference between male and female participants regarding the relative generation of brand-oriented content and community-oriented content. Product involvement level was found to have a significant positive effect on content generation ( $t(103)=1.980$ ,  $p=0.05$ ,  $\beta= 0.261$ ), which shows that members of high-involvement product online brand communities have a greater focus on brand-oriented content relative to community-oriented content, while members of low-involvement product online brand communities have a greater focus on community-oriented content relative to brand-oriented content. Thus, it can be said that  $H_2$  is supported. (See Table 2: Main model regression results)

**Table 2: Main Model Regression Results**

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	1,109	0,329		3,376	0,001		
Gender (B)	0,040	0,104	0,048	0,388	0,699	0,548	1,824
Involvement (B)	0,261	0,132	0,295	1,980	0,050	0,375	2,667
Interaction	-0,305	0,173	-0,267	-1,765	0,081	0,363	2,751
NoC	-0,005	0,012	-0,045	-0,454	0,651	0,844	1,185
LoM	-0,022	0,029	-0,072	-0,749	0,455	0,892	1,121
Anon_1	0,108	0,109	0,105	0,992	0,324	0,735	1,361
Anon_2	-0,303	0,146	-0,218	-2,073	0,041	0,753	1,328
Anon_3	0,106	0,093	0,112	1,140	0,257	0,855	1,169
Anon_4	-0,097	0,105	-0,097	-0,930	0,354	0,758	1,319
Age	-0,003	0,042	-0,008	-0,080	0,936	0,797	1,254
Education	-0,010	0,031	-0,032	-0,307	0,760	0,750	1,334
Employment	-0,021	0,031	-0,066	-0,684	0,495	0,889	1,125
Income	-0,001	0,013	-0,004	-0,040	0,968	0,816	1,225
Familiarity	-0,029	0,056	-0,067	-0,513	0,609	0,489	2,046
Knowledge	0,067	0,069	0,146	0,976	0,331	0,369	2,712
Attitude	0,055	0,063	0,093	0,871	0,386	0,730	1,369

Product involvement-gender interaction has a significant but negative effect ( $t(103)=-1.765$ ,  $p=0.081$ ,  $\beta= -0.305$ ) within the 90 percent confidence interval, which suggests that male participants of high-involvement product communities have the lowest content orientation (more community-oriented content), and female participants of low-involvement product communities have the highest content orientation (more brand-oriented content).

An ANCOVA was conducted for further details. ANCOVA results suggest that, female participants in high-involvement product communities have higher content orientation than their counterparts in low-involvement product communities ( $MD=0.261$ ,  $F(1,103)=3.920$ ,  $p=0.050$ ). Thus,  $H_3$  is not supported. (See Table 3: ANCOVA Results for Interaction)

**Table 3:** ANCOVA Results for Interaction

Dependent Variable: BOC/COC							
Gender	I (Involvement)	J (Involvement)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig. <sup>e</sup>	95% Confidence Interval for Difference <sup>e</sup>	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Female	Low	High	-,261 <sup>a</sup>	0,132	0,050	-0,523	0,000
	High	Low	,261 <sup>a</sup>	0,132	0,050	0,000	0,523
Male	Low	High	, <sup>b,c,d</sup>				
	High	Low	, <sup>b,c,d</sup>				
Dependent Variable: BOC/COC							
Involvement	I (Gender)	J (Gender)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig. <sup>e</sup>	95% Confidence Interval for Difference <sup>e</sup>	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Low	Female	Male	-,040 <sup>a</sup>	0,104	0,699	-0,247	0,166
	Male	Female	,040 <sup>a</sup>	0,104	0,699	-0,166	0,247
High	Female	Male	, <sup>b,c,d</sup>				
	Male	Female	, <sup>b,c,d</sup>				

Among the control variables, the ability to use aliases/nicknames was found to have significant and negative effects on content generation ( $t(103) = -2.073$ ,  $p = 0.041$ ,  $\beta = -0.303$ ), which suggests that the members in online brand communities, where they have to use their real names, generate more brand-oriented content than community-oriented content, whereas the members in online brand communities in which they can use aliases/nicknames, generate more community-oriented content than brand-oriented content. One possible explanation could be that the mandatory usage of real names compels the users to take more serious manners while engaging with the community. Another explanation could be that the communities that do not allow their members to use nicknames are often brand-hosted communities where members are aware that their contents are closely monitored by the brand.

### Conclusions and Discussion

While content generation is a popular dependent variable in the literature, previous studies have often assumed that user-generated content is monolithic and that all content is intended for the same audience. However, community members generate both brand-oriented content and community-oriented content (Soylemez, 2021b). Both types of content create value for brands directly or indirectly (Carvalho & Fernandes, 2018) and a good balance between the two is important for the health of online communities. Brands must develop a better understanding of the factors driving the generation of each type of content to maximize the benefits they receive from communities.

In this paper, the impact of gender and product involvement on the generation of different types of user-generated content was examined. Based on the equity theory, it is argued that male participants are likely to perceive the brand as the greater stakeholder than the community, and consequently

generate more brand-oriented content, and female participants are likely to perceive the community as the greater stakeholder than the brand, thus generating more community-oriented content. The experiment showed that there is no significant difference in terms of content orientation between genders. Recent studies also show that the moderation impact of gender is declining (Krishnapillai & Ying, 2017); thus, it can be said that the insignificant findings of this study are in parallel with the literature.

Based on equity theory and ELM, it is argued that the members of high-involvement product communities are likely to see the brand as the greater stakeholder than the community, and consequently generate more brand-oriented content, and the members of low-involvement product communities are likely to see the community as the bigger stakeholder than the brand, generating more community-oriented content. The experiment showed that this was indeed the case. Although it is difficult to determine how product engagement influences online brand community dynamics (Hassan & Casaló Ariño, 2016), the results are promising.

Another finding of the study is that there is a significant negative interaction between gender and product involvement. Female participants in high-involvement product communities are found to have higher content orientation (more brand-oriented content) than their counterparts in low-involvement product communities. Although this finding is the opposite of H<sub>3</sub>, it still demonstrates that male and female members generate different types of content depending on product involvement level.

### ***Theoretical Implications***

This research should help marketing scientists in several ways. This study attempted to advance the study by Soylemez (2021a), which categorizes user-generated content based on audience. The equity theory holds that people value social exchanges based on the fairness they perceive in the relationship, and in social exchanges, self-interest and interdependence are key principles (Lawler and Thye, 1999). In terms of gender and product participation, it is argued that members focus on generating different types of content to maintain equality. Although equity theory is rarely used in research on online brand communities (Kamboj & Rahman 2017), the theory offers explanations for differences among members' behaviors. Thus, this study brings new perspectives to the theory by analyzing how members maintain equity between the inner aspects of themselves and the inner aspects of others.

Another contribution of the study is that it is the first study that focuses on gender in the generation of different types of user-generated content rather than using it as a control variable. Many studies of online brand communities conduct their research by investigating product communities that are primarily used by men. Online brand communities are known to create their own

rituals and subcultures (Cova & Pace, 2006). Thus, studying how women generate content in a Harley-Davidson community where the majority of members are men does not give us an accurate picture of how female members interact with an online brand community in general. Moreover, even though the impact of gender in online settings is decreasing (Krishnapillai & Ying, 2017), this study places gender at the center and expands knowledge by filling a gap in the literature.

The study also expands the work of Soylemez (2021a) studying how product involvement influences the relative generation of different types of UGCs. The involvement of the product is a relatively unexplored territory in the literature on the online brand communities, since most of the online brand communities concern high involvement products (Schau, Muñoz & Arnould, 2009). The literature on the online brand community often correctly presupposes that members seek self-security for the brand and seek information when they join the online brand communities. However, this are often not the case for communities of low-involvement products. Therefore, the dynamics analyzed according to the communities of high-involvement products may not be true for the communities of low-involvement products. Thus, this study brings a new point of view to the literature. In addition to that, the study also investigated how male and female participants engage with online brand communities in different involvement settings.

### ***Managerial Implications***

This research is expected to help marketing practitioners in various ways. First, this study provides opportunities for marketing managers to develop strategies based on the level of product involvement. Although the product involvement level varies for each person (Park & Keil, 2019), certain characteristics of the product make these variations limited and the involvement enduring (Lou & Xie, 2021). Information-based strategies are closer to being optimal for highly involved members since they are more predisposed to examining product information in detail (McMillan, Hwang & Lee, 2003), while socialization-based strategies that provide entertainment value to the members could be more suitable for lowly involved members (Lou et al., 2019). Literature suggests that more symbolic and high-involvement brands benefit significantly from building their own communities (Liao & Wang, 2020).

Companies may have different expectations from online brand communities, thus should adjust their strategies according to the tendencies of online brand community members. For some brands, online brand communities are strategic resources for product development and various co-creation activities that inspire the company. In that case, brands should put extra effort into certain actions such as inviting community members to exclusive events, offering member-only discounts and giving early access to new products. Meanwhile, some brands regard brand communities as informal gathering places where

members can get socialized. In that case, the brand should put in extra effort by organizing social activities for online brand community members. Since product involvement is positively associated with higher brand-oriented content generation, the brands can either double down or redirect members' tendencies. A good example of successful high-involvement product communities is Lego Ideas. Lego Ideas is not only a space where people can feel a sense of belonging but also a center for co-creation. Lego encourages its community members to submit their product ideas, launch them, and even give them a percentage of the sales. Thanks to its community, Lego keeps its edge in the toy industry.

Understanding the impact of gender helps the relative generation of different types of UGC marketers to determine whether they need gender-based strategies for men and women. Marketers must apply different strategies for better performance for each gender (Friedmann & Lobengart, 2019). Although gender in the study turned out to be insignificant, the interaction between gender and product involvement was significant. Female participants in high-involvement product communities have higher content orientation than their counterparts in low-involvement product communities. For high-involvement brands that aim to target female participants shall apply the relevant policies depending on their expectations from the community. For example, if the brand wants to designate the community as a co-innovation hub as LEGO does, it shall consider utilizing extrinsic rewards to encourage its members.

### **Limitations and Further Studies**

This research has several drawbacks that need to be examined by future research. The first problematic aspect of the study is the partial results in the manipulation check. Although selected products were perceived differently in the overall sample, female participants have not considered bikes and disposable shavers differently. Another limitation of the study was that the post format (text, picture, video, etc.) used in the experiment has not been specified. However, Barreto and Ramalho (2019) showed that the media type moderates customer engagement in different product involvement settings.

Future studies can extend this study by investigating the effects of members' experiences with other communities. Although this study investigated how members try to maintain equity within a specific community, the equity theory also argues that individuals also try to maintain equity against their peers outside the community. It would also be interesting for future studies to examine whether the findings of this study are applicable to offline brand communities. Although online and offline brand communities have some fundamental differences, it is possible that similar dynamics could be observed in real-life discussions in offline brand communities. In face-to-face communications, some members tend to talk more about the focal brand and its latest products, while some members prefer to engage in social networking depending on brand/product- and contextual-level factors.

Community characteristics regarding consumer attitudes and behaviors towards a brand community and the brand are a popular stream of research in the online brand community literature (Wang, 2021). Future studies could also advance this research by examining other community-level factors, such as community orientation. It's worth investigating anti-brand communities, where members come together to demote certain brands or product categories. These brand communities can have different dynamics. Future studies could also complement this study by examining the impact of different product classifications such as product versus product. services, search vs. experience vs. credence goods, prevention- vs. promotion-oriented products, and different stages of the product lifecycle.

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## **Appendix**

### ***A: Post Types***

Brand-oriented content

- 1) Give feedback on how the brand can improve its products
- 2) Complain about an issue you had with a product.
- 3) Offer ideas on new products that the brand can develop

Community-Oriented Content

- 1) Answer other users' questions about a product
- 2) Welcome a new user to the community.
- 3) Offer tips on how to best use a product

### ***B: Nomenclature***

NoC: Number of Communities

LoM: Length of Membership

Anon\_1: Users have anonymity.

Anon\_2: Users can use alias/nicknames.

Anon\_3: Users have a profile picture

Anon\_4: The community has a formal reputation system.