

## Chapter 32

# From Consumers to Producers: Engagement through User- Generated Advertising Contests

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### ABSTRACT

*If reality television is any indication, people have an interest in being known. For some, creating and possibly starring in some form of user-generated content can be a route to being a reality star. The Internet provides a way for consumers to share their documentaries, antics, music videos, and even commercials with other users. Several marketers have capitalized on this trend by combining the desire of users to create their own content with the time-honored concept of a sweepstakes. The purpose of this chapter is to present a model of consumer engagement that encompasses user-generated advertising content. The model will then be placed into context by discussing specific examples from 15 user-generated advertising contests and making theoretical connections for each of the key contest elements.*

### INTRODUCTION

The declining effectiveness of television advertising has been attributed to viewers who use their DVRs to zip through commercials, shrinking television audiences, and the increase of advertising messages, trends that are expected to continue, according to a 2006 McKinsey & Co. report (Klaassen, 2006). Viewers are also turning to the Internet to watch their favorite programs, in some cases, free of commercial interruptions (Hansell,

2005). Faced with these challenges, advertisers are employing new strategies and looking to the Web for a way to engage consumers in a brand conversation. While consumers have always had some degree of control over the brand, they now have more methods to communicate about their brand experience. Web users have already demonstrated they are eager to share their documentaries, antics, music videos, and even commercials with other users through sites such as YouTube. In response to these challenges and opportunities, advertisers are learning how to harness the energy of consumers willing to create brand content, potentially

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-60566-792-8.ch032

creating a higher level of engagement between consumers and brands.

This chapter examines user-generated advertising contests, which are used as a way to motivate consumers to produce advertising content, often a 30-second commercial. Precursors to user-generated advertising include jingle contests and customer testimonials (Klein, 2008). Although much has been written about user-generated advertising contests in trade journals and the mainstream media, no previous study has aggregated these contests to deepen understanding of this trend and its theoretical implications.

The use of the term user-generated advertising can encompass 30-second spots, but also images or films. Advertisers have also solicited other types of user-generated content from consumers such as stories, videos, and photos that are personal expressions of an individual's relationship with a brand. Some user-generated advertising is inspired solely by the producer and is generally created for a product either loved or despised. The foremost example of this type of content is George Masters' homemade iPod commercial, which was posted to his Web site in 2004 and then circulated to 37,000 viewers through blogs and e-mail (Kahney, 2004). This ad is widely regarded as the first consumer-generated commercial that was a "pure ad" and not parody or political commentary (Kahney, 2004).

User-generated content is not a panacea for the advertiser. The risks involve the creation and distribution of subversive messages and the inability of the producer to truly understand the brand and product positioning as well as the audience (Mills, 2006). Consumers can also be critical of this marketing tactic. Heinz's "Top This TV" contest generated online comments that Heinz is lazy and looking for cheap labor (Story, 2007). In addition, although creative costs are lower because the advertiser often relies on the creator to produce the actual spot, the advertiser still has costs associated with promoting and administering the contest as well as promoting the final spot

and paying for media space (Story, 2007). User-generated advertising, however, is a novel concept that has created another way for advertisers to engage with consumers and tap their creativity.

Agency executives have speculated whether user-generated advertising will replace agency-generated advertising (Morrissey, 2006). This trend may create a new role for agencies as they are needed to promote contests that solicit user-generated advertising, drive consumers to the contest Web site, and promote the winning spot, as Frito-Lay's agency Goodby, Silverstein & Partners in San Francisco did for the Doritos contest. Another perspective is that the proliferation of low quality user-generated content may actually create a backlash against its use and be a vindication for advertisers (Snoddy, 2007).

This chapter examines user-generated advertising contests and places them into the context of an engagement model of advertising. This research will examine the various elements of this model—the advertisers, producers, and consumers—in addition to content and media by describing how the contests addressed each element, discussing the theoretical considerations, and offering suggestions for future research. The analysis of user-generated contests also provides insight for practitioners into the variety of ways these contests are administered.

## **ADVERTISING ENGAGEMENT MODEL**

The traditional model of communication is a model of information transmission whereby the source sends a message to a receiver. Lasswell (1948) characterized this process as "who says what to whom in what channel with what effect." Even prior to widespread use of the Internet, Stern (1994) described the shortcomings of the model:

*Despite the postulation of noise and feedback, the traditional model fails to capture the interactivity*

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*of communicative intercourse between advertisers and consumers in several ways: it presumes that the source and recipient are singular constructs; it does not account for message content that can be activated in a variety of forms; and it assumes a passive message recipient as the object of information transmitted by the source (p. 5).*

Other scholars have noted that the rise of digital media requires a rethinking of traditional models of communication (Perry, 2002).

Rappaport (2007) presented three new advertising models, with the one called the engagement model being the most applicable to user-generated advertising. This model applies when brands are both highly relevant and emotionally connected to consumers and changes the notion of advertising effectiveness measures. As Rappaport (2007) stated:

*Standard learning and persuasion measures...are ceding ground to interest in understanding what we can think of as brands' social aspects—they are the ability to involve, inform, and entertain, and longer term, to co-evolve with consumers through the creation and ongoing development of brand meaning (p. 138).*

These new outcomes will present a challenge to the advertising industry as it moves to create and adopt new measures of effectiveness.

The engagement model of advertising consists of three groups involved in creating brand meaning—advertisers, consumers, and producers (see Figure 1). The intersection of advertisers and producers captures the willingness of people to create and share brand messages with advertisers, whether initiated by the advertiser or the producer. These producers can also share brand content with consumers, and consumers can provide feedback, a process facilitated by the Internet. The intersection between advertisers and consumers occurs when consumers have an opportunity to engage with the brand, possibly on a Web site or a social networking

profile. Finally, the center of the diagram is where these three groups converge and advertisers solicit content from producers for the purpose of sharing it with consumers. The overlapping areas in this model also acknowledge that from the ranks of consumers come producers; these producers act as advertisers by communicating a brand message; and advertisers are active consumers of the information they receive from producers.

## **USER-GENERATED AD CONTESTS**

The engagement model of advertising will be discussed in this section by describing the role of advertisers, the motivations of producers, and the involvement of consumers, as well as the nature of the content created and the use of media.

To be considered user-generated advertising content, the producer must actually generate something original, whether text, images, or a commercial, that will be used as an advertisement or has a brand message. In addition, for the purpose of this study of advertising contests, the user-generated content needs to be judged in some manner resulting in the acknowledgement of a winner or winners. Fifteen contests running at any time between January 2006 and June 2007 are used to explore this model and are presented in Table 1.

### **Advertiser/Sponsor**

The advertiser is often the impetus for the creation of user-generated advertising content and exerts a great deal of control over the creative execution of the ad. Advertisers set the tone for the content by providing a creative assignment to insure that the commercial has the appropriate brand message. In the Doritos contest, entrants were told to demonstrate how Doritos are “big, bold and packed with more flavor-power than a seven-course meal” by showing “all-out, passion-soaked, Doritos-loving, competitive action.” Moe’s

Figure 1. Engagement model of advertising

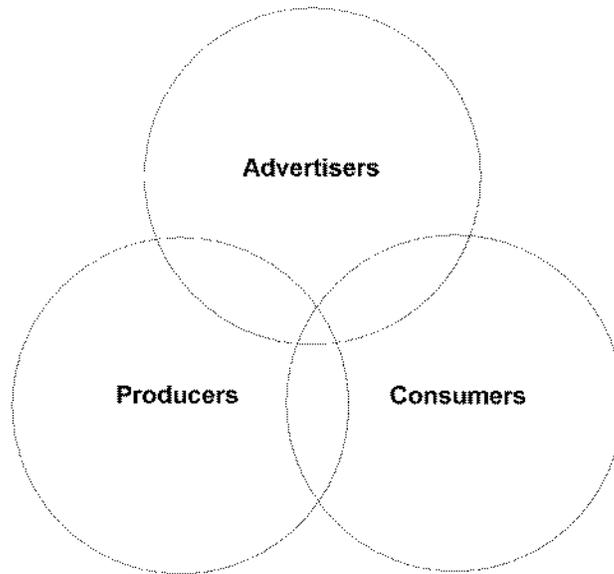


Table 1. User-generated advertising contest summary

Brand	Campaign	Web site	Dates
Chevrolet	Chevy Super Bowl College Ad Challenge	www.cbs.com/chevy intranet.edventurepartners.com/samprograms/Chevrolet_sb/default.asp	9/29/2006-2/4/2007
Chipotle	30 Seconds of Fame	www.chipotle.com/30secondsoffame (no longer maintained)	10/2006-11/2006
Converse	Chuck Taylor All Star Shoe	http://www.converse.com/index.asp?bhcp=1#(no longer maintained)	8/2004-2006
Doritos	Crash the Super Bowl	promotions.yahoo.com/doritos	10/10/2006-2/4/2007
Dove	Dove Cream Oil	www.dovecreamoil.com/	12/14/2006-2/25/2007
Heinz	Top this TV	www.topthistv.com	4/16/2007-9/10/2007
MasterCard	Priceless	www.priceless.com (no longer maintained)	3/2006
Moe's Southwest	Burrito in Every Hand	moes.sharkle.com	7/10/2006-2/2007
Mozilla	Firefox Flicks	www.firefoxflicks.com	12/21/2005-4/14/2006
NFL	Pitch Us Your Idea for the Best NFL Super Bowl Commercial Ever. Seriously.	www.nfl.com/superad	10/31/2006-2/1/2007
National Sunflower Association	Grab 'em by the Sack	www.grabembythesack.com	3/2007-6/17/2007
Sony	Sony HD (Current TV)	www.currenttv.com/make/vc2/sonyhd	Spring 2007
Southwest Airlines	Wanna Get Away	www.wannagetaway.com	12/12/2006-2/20/2007
Tahoe	Apprentice Challenge	www.chevyapprentice.com (no longer maintained)	3/13/2006-4/10/2006
Vegas.com	Direct the Next Vegas.Commercial	www.cinevegas.com/vegascom/	5/4/2007-6/14/2007

Southwest Grill sought ads that supported the mission of a burrito in every hand. Dove wanted ads that communicated the features and benefits of Dove Cream Oil, emphasized real beauty, were simple and uncluttered, and showed natural and self-assured women. Some creative assignments were less specific, such as Chipotle's that asked entrants to represent Chipotle and its personality, or National Sunflower Association's contest that wanted entrants to address why someone should grab a sack of sunflower seeds. In summary, most contests provided entrants with some sort of creative brief to guide the creation of the content.

Many of the advertisers in this study also had requirements for the use of the logo, product, tagline, and/or URL in the user-generated ad. While some contests did not express any requirements, Converse specifically made it optional and Southwest requested no brand mention. In these two cases, the sponsor added an end tag to each submission.

Content is also controlled by the way advertisers construct the judging process. In every contest examined except National Sunflower Association and Sony, representatives from the agency or sponsor had some level of involvement in choosing either the finalists or the grand prize winner. The outcome of some contests, including Chevrolet and Vegas.com, was completely controlled by the advertiser or sponsor. Another popular method is to have a panel choose finalists and then allow viewers to choose the winner. For example, five finalists were selected by a panel of judges in the Doritos "Crash the Super Bowl" contest and viewers voted on the winner. A panel chose 15 semi-finalists in the Heinz "Top This TV" contest, from which consumers chose the winners. The reverse method where the panel selects the winners from the top vote-getters was used by Moe's Southwest Grill. Two of the contests awarded separate prizes for the judges' selection and the popular vote. Southwest used a panel for the grand prize winner and awarded first, second, and third places based on consumer votes. Chipotle had a

creative winner judged by a panel and a most-viewed winner. In a novel approach, NFL used a panel to narrow the pool to 12 semi-finalists, then the viewers, the director, and a panel of agency and sponsor executives voted, with each of their votes counting one-third toward the entry's final score. Finally, as mentioned above, Sony and National Sunflower Association winners were selected by the viewers.

The advertiser also often outlines the criteria for the selection of finalists or winners and assigns a point value for each. For Doritos and Dove, finalists were chosen based on originality and creativity; adherence to assignment and regulations; and overall appeal. Of the 10 contests specifically stating their selection criteria, creativity and originality were the most popular criteria, followed by overall/audience appeal or marketability, appropriateness to theme, adherence to assignment or regulations, connection to brand, quality of production, quality of acting or writing, and concept or content. Other criteria mentioned included likelihood to motivate the audience to use the product; proper format for entry; use of logo, name, and tagline; and creativity of jingle or soundtrack.

Another important role of the advertiser is to publicize the contest. Web sites, Internet advertising, and television advertising are three commonly used methods. Advertisers who sponsored contests directed toward a student population, such as Chevrolet, created profiles in MySpace and Facebook. Mozilla used a grassroots campaign to publicize its contest. Heinz advertised its "Top This TV" contest on ketchup bottles and on television.

## **Producer**

At the very heart of user-generated contests are the creators or producers of the content, which sponsors will control by determining who can enter the contest. While some contests are promoted to the general public, sponsors may also solicit entries from professionals. Some contests are closed to all

but a specified group, with Chevrolet and Moe's targeting college students and Dove targeting women. Many contests, however, were open to the general public, including Doritos, Mozilla, Southwest, Converse, Vegas.com, NFL, and the National Sunflower Association. Of this group, Converse and Doritos also pitched the contest to film students, Mozilla pitched to film/ad/TV/multimedia students and aspiring professionals, and Vegas.com pitched to film students and professionals. Opening the contest to the general public and pitching it to people in the field practically insures that the contest will generate a large pool of entries and that at least some of the entries will be of professional quality.

While many people are acquiring the basic skills necessary to shoot, edit, and upload a video to the Web, several winners of user-generated advertising contests have had professional experience. The grand-prize winner of the Doritos "Crash the Super Bowl" contest was a five-person team from Five Point Productions, a North Carolina firm that specializes in creative video production. In fact, the five Doritos finalists were either aspiring or experienced filmmakers (Tanaka, 2007). Gino Bona, winner of the NFL contest, is the director of business development for a Portland, Maine, marketing firm (Anfuso, 2007). Mozilla's winner was Pete Macomber, who creates video, commercials, and screenplays, and a runner-up was Jeff Gill, a junior studying animation at Savannah College of Art and Design (Walker, 2006). Brian Lazzaro, who won the Vegas.com commercial, is a graduate of NYU film school and a professional videographer (Jaffee, 2007). Heinz's winner, Andrew Dobson of Wheelersburg, Ohio, runs a one-man production shop (O'Malley, 2007). Lindsay Miller, Dove's grand prize winner, was a station manager for VTV, the student-run television station of Vanderbilt University. Miller currently works as an assistant production coordinator at a television production company in Santa Monica, Calif. (Malinee, 2007). Brian Cates, one of the producers of the winning Southwest ad, works

in video production at Newchurch in Oklahoma City. In fact, in every contest where a single winner could be identified except National Sunflower Association, the winner was somehow affiliated with a creative industry.

The number of entries for each contest ranged 38 to 100,000 (see Table 2). The Converse Gallery, for example, elicited over 2,000 entries (Rose, 2006), while Doritos received more than 1,000 submissions (Mills, 2007). The Heinz competition generated about 8,000 entries, but only 4,000 were approved for posting (Heinz Company Release, 2007). Mozilla's contest received 280 entries (Walker, 2006). The contests with the highest number of entries were also the easiest to enter and required very little technical expertise. In MasterCard's contest, producers added the classic "Priceless" text to a video. In Tahoe's contest, producers were supplied video and developed a mash-up commercial using their own text.

The chance to win a prize and possibly receive national exposure may motivate some producers. A popular prize for the winning commercial is an airing of the spot before a national television audience. More publicity can be garnered for the winner if the airing occurs during a highly-rated program such as the Super Bowl XLI, as in the case of Doritos, NFL, and Chevrolet, or the 79<sup>th</sup> Annual Academy Awards,<sup>®</sup> as in the case of Dove. Southwest's winning ad ran during the NBA playoffs on TNT. In a majority of contests, the winning ad was aired on television. The remaining contests all used a variety of approaches for making the winning ad accessible to consumers. In the Chipotle contest, the winning ad was featured on the Web site with the possibility, but no guarantee, that the ad would be shown on television. The ads for National Sunflower Association and Moe's are only available on the Web site. Mozilla's winning ad was one of 11 that viewers then voted on to determine which four ads would be shown on television. While the winning ad was not guaranteed a television spot, the voting resulted in it earning a spot. Finally, the prize for

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*Table 2. Total entries per contest*

Brand	Contest	No. of Entries
Chevrolet	Chevy Super Bowl College Ad Challenge	820
Chipotle	30 Seconds of Fame	70
Converse	Chuck Taylor All Star Shoe	2,000 (76 for current topic)
Doritos	Crash the Super Bowl	Over 1,000
Dove	Dove Cream Oil	1,200
Heinz	Top this TV	8,000 (4,000 approved)
MasterCard	Priceless	100,000
Moe's Southwest	Burrito in Every Hand	38 (on Web site)
Mozilla	Firefox Flicks	280
NFL	Pitch Us Your Idea for the Best NFL Super Bowl Commercial Ever. Seriously.	1,700
National Sunflower Association	Grab 'em by the Sack	55
Sony	Sony HD (Current TV)	81
Southwest Airlines	Wanna Get Away	149
Tahoe	Apprentice Challenge	30,000
Vegas.com	Direct the Next Vegas.Commercial	Unknown

Vegas.com was to direct an ad for Vegas.com, but the rules did not indicate that this ad would follow the same concept as the winning ad.

In a majority of contests, the winner received a cash prize (or gift certificate) ranging from \$1,000 to \$57,000. Six contests did not involve a financial reward. In some contests, including Converse, Dove, Doritos, and Heinz, finalists also received a cash prize ranging from \$1,000 to \$10,000. A trip is another common element of the prize either at the finalist stage or as a grand prize. In some cases, finalists traveled to a location where the winner would be announced. Dove finalists traveled to Los Angeles, Doritos finalists to Miami, Chevrolet finalists to Michigan, and Vegas.com finalists to Las Vegas. The NFL winner won a trip to the Super Bowl as well as a trip to Los Angeles to watch the production of the commercial. Some contests involve product prizes for grand prize winners or finalists, such as vacations or airline tickets for Southwest's grand prize winner and the first three places determined by popular voting, T-shirts for weekly National Sunflower Association winners/

finalists, hardware for Mozilla's second and third place winners, and an NFL gift pack worth \$500 for the NFL contest finalists. Moe's grand prize winner received burritos for life.

Some contests allow the producer's personality or background to be exposed. Visitors to the Converse site can read the director's commentary and biography and get contact information for the filmmaker. The Chevrolet site hosts an episodic documentary that followed the student teams throughout the selection process. The Sony ads hosted on Current TV's Web site offer the producer a MySpace-like profile page with links to Web sites or e-mails. Through Jumpcut, Doritos entrants also had a profile page.

Advertisers should question whether entrants are motivated at all by their relationship with the brand. Some entrants might be trying to break into the advertising or film industries and view entering contests as a way to do this. Walker (2006) described contest entries not as examples of "co-creation," but as "co-promotion," as winners attempt to use the contest to promote themselves.

Mozilla contest runner-up Jeff Gill described himself as “a huge contest guy” (Walker, 2006). Craig Kuehne, who also entered Mozilla’s contest, features his Doritos entry on his blog (homepage. mac.com/craigkuehne/index.html). Dan Cunliffe II, who won the National Sunflower Association contest, also won \$500 from a toy company for a 30-second video and \$5,000 for an American Idol video contest (Tice, 2007). Tyson Ibele, who submitted a Sony ad he created while an animator at MAKE, was also entering the Mozilla contest (Petrecca, 2006). Heinz contest winner Andrew Dobson includes a bottle of ketchup in new business proposals as a way to remind people of his winning work (O’Malley, 2007). For contests that solicit entries from film or advertising students, are the advertisers looking for talent? For contests that solicit entries from the general public, are the advertisers seeking to further engage the consumer in a brand conversation?

Contest entries may gain additional exposure through the process of viral advertising. When a company creates a viral message, the intent is for it to be distributed by consumers among their networks of friends and family (Porter & Golan, 2006). Contest entrants have employed viral advertising tactics to further promote themselves and the contest through blogs, Web sites, or social media profiles. The winner of the Doritos contest, Five Point Productions, hosted a blog at [www.5pointproductions.com/doritos.html](http://www.5pointproductions.com/doritos.html) that included a link to the Doritos contest voting page. Dan Cunliff II, the winner of the National Sunflower Association contest, used the URL [voteforminot.com](http://voteforminot.com) to promote his entry, driving traffic to the site through fliers sent home with schoolchildren and through the encouragement of community leaders (Tice, 2007). A search of Facebook and MySpace reveals student-created sites on both asking friends to vote for Chipotle entries. Doritos’ contest entrants also used MySpace pages (Tanaka, 2007).

## **Consumers**

The Internet offers the ability to measure exposure to user-generated content. In the case of the Doritos contest, winning commercial “Live the Flavor” was viewed by 667,711 people and finalist “Check-Out Girl” was viewed by 638,032. The other three finalists were all watched more than 200,000 times. The gallery of entries had 600 million views during Super Bowl week (Mills, 2007). Chipotle’s most-viewed ad was seen over 8 million times with the second most-viewed ad seen almost 7.8 million times. Heinz’s entries had 2.3 million views, representing 80,000 hours of viewing (Heinz Company Release, 2007). Mozilla’s second place ad had 29,000 votes and an additional 23,000 views on YouTube (Walker, 2006). Over 200,000 people voted for the NFL pitches (Anfuso, 2007). Even the National Sunflower Association had 115,000 views during grand prize voting and 257,000 views during the contest. The winning Chevrolet ad has been viewed 63,445 times on YouTube and Dove’s winning ad had over 40,000 views on AOL Video. The winning Southwest ad had over 20,000 views and Moe’s most-watched ad was seen almost 14,000 times on Sharkle. Top rated ads Sony ads on Current TV had thousands of views.

The entries and the sponsor can get additional exposure if the technology allows the consumer to blog or send the video to a friend, both also being ways to enhance interactivity. For the Sony ads on Current TV, users can post comments, as well as post the video to a blog, e-mail it, “Digg” it, or tag it as a delicious link. Mozilla’s system allowed users to get a link to embed in a blog or Web site, e-mail the video, or download the video. Converse, Southwest, and Moe’s allowed the user to e-mail the video. The Doritos entries could be posted to a Web site or e-mailed; Dove offered the same capabilities as well as sending the video via instant messaging. Heinz used IM and e-mail as well.

Consumers also interact with user-generated ads by casting votes. In many of the contests examined, consumers have a vote that counts toward selecting a winner, most often the grand prize winner but sometimes an alternative winner. For example, Dove used a panel of judges to select ten semi-finalists and then used another panel to narrow the field to three finalists. Consumers then selected a winner from the top three. Similarly, after Doritos selected five finalists in its “Crash the Super Bowl” contest, Web site visitors voted for the winning commercial, which was shown during the Super Bowl XLI broadcast. As mentioned earlier, sometimes consumers have no involvement in voting for the grand prize winner. Southwest used a panel of judges to name a grand prize winner, although it did utilize consumers to select first, second, and third place winners who received prizes ranging from a three-day vacation for four to a Southwest destination to two Southwest tickets. Chipotle awarded \$20,000 to a creative winner judged solely by the panel and \$10,000 to a most-viewed winner. In the Chevrolet college student contest, viewers were able to vote for the team they thought would win, but the votes did not count toward the selection of a winner. Consumers like to be able to have some impact on the final outcome and have expressed frustration when their comments or votes do not count.

The anonymity of the Web has created situations whereby consumers are vindictive toward the advertising producers. In the case of Mozilla, comments turned cruel and insulting, rather than constructive, and several entrants asked for their videos to be removed from the site (Firefox Flicks Backstage, 2006). The contest administrators disabled the comment function until they could develop a solution.

## **Content**

The content of a user-generated ad is most influenced by the amount or type of content provided by the sponsor as a starting point. In some contests,

the advertiser provides the video and the producer then adds the text, as in the case of MasterCard’s “Priceless” campaign. In Tahoe’s contest, producers developed a mash-up video consisting solely of footage provided by the advertiser. In other cases, such as in the contests for Dove and Doritos, producers have a much higher degree of creative control and are asked to create an original video, pitch, script, or storyboard. In addition, some contests provided graphics or video of the logo and/or product lineup, music, or sound effects to assist in the creative process.

One way to analyze content is to classify its format. For the contests included in this study, the content requirements are specific. The content might look like a commercial for the brand, as in the case of Doritos, Heinz, and Dove. In another variation, producers were asked to make a vignette without a brand message that would be incorporated into a commercial. Southwest used this strategy for their “Wanna Get Away” contest by asking producers to show uncomfortable or embarrassing scenes from which a person might want to “get away.” Southwest then added its own logo to the producer’s 20-second video. Converse solicits 24-second films from consumers. Not intended as advertisements for the brand, the films are inspired by the values of Converse. Two contests, Chevrolet and NFL, sought ideas from entrants, with Chevrolet requiring a script and storyboard and NFL allowing entrants to make a 90-second pitch with no video or audio materials. In MasterCard’s Priceless contest, producers were provided with the video and asked to fill in the missing phrases. Only the Vegas.com contest allowed entrants to submit 60 seconds of either a pitch, an “acting-out” of the idea, or a rough-cut version of the commercial. Despite the range in the format, according to a press release from Vegas.com, the contest generated many professional-quality entries (Vegas.com, 2007).

Another way to classify the content is to examine whether the final version of the advertisement was created by the producer or whether the idea

was generated by the producer then professionally produced by the advertising agency. Most contests used the version submitted by the producer while some were shot or re-shot by the advertising agency. However, some ads did not run on television so it was not critical for these to be of professional quality. In the case of Doritos, Dove, Southwest, and others, the producer created the commercial that ran on television. In Chevrolet's contest for college students, agency Campwell-Ewald invited the top five teams to its office in Warren, Mich., chose the best concept, and then professionally shot the commercial based on the winning idea. The NFL also professionally produced a commercial based on the winning idea. Working in collaboration with the CineVegas Film Festival, Vegas.com awarded an opportunity for the winner to be able to direct the next Vegas.com commercial.

User-generated advertising contests have been known to produce subversive advertising messages, as in the case of Chevrolet's user-generated advertising contest launched in March 2006 to promote the Tahoe SUV. The company provided images and music for producers to develop their own 30-second spots. This campaign generated approximately 30,000 commercials (Rose, 2006), but backfired when subversive themes emerged, such as GM's contribution to global warming, social irresponsibility, or the poor quality of the cars, as well as profane and sexually explicit messages. While company officials stated that they expected some negative ads to be submitted, they were satisfied that more than 80% of the entries had positive themes (Sandoval, 2006). In MasterCard's "Priceless" campaign, 200 of the 10,000 entries were considered inappropriate (Petrecca, 2007). Interestingly, these two contests provided consumers with the highest degree of content. Although the content allowed these companies to control the creative execution of the commercials, it perhaps encouraged consumers to consider subversive messages.

## **Medium**

Contest entries are made available for viewing through the contest Web site, on video sites such as YouTube or Yahoo! Video, on television, or in print. For most contests, the grand prize was an airing of the winning commercial (or a commercial directed by the winner) on television. Sony and Converse both ran the commercials of several contests winners. Chipotle and Mozilla noted that the airing of the winning commercial was a possibility, but not a guarantee. For the winners of the Tahoe, Moe's, and National Sunflower Association contests, their commercial was not intended for television. Several contests, such as Doritos, not only aired the winner, but another top entry. Heinz aired five finalists to generate publicity for voting. Mozilla aired the four most popular commercials in two markets. The winning MasterCard commercial ran as a television spot in 2006 (Tanaka, 2007).

Some contest sponsors partner with video sites to utilize their technological capabilities. For example, Doritos' entries were created in and uploaded to Jumpcut and powered by Yahoo! video, Dove's entries were hosted by AOL Video, and the entries for Southwest, Heinz, and Chipotle entries were hosted by YouTube. Moe's used Sharkle, Vegas.com used a service called VideoEgg, and Mozilla powered its videos with Revver. In addition, video sites, such as YouTube, offer a wealth of inventory of all kinds of user-generated content and many of the contest entries find their way here.

After the contests ended, some contest sites maintained all entries, while highlighting the winner and finalists. The contest Web sites for Doritos, Converse, and Southwest, for example, hosted all or almost all entries. Some contest sites hosted just the winning ad. Two sites, Dove and Vegas.com, maintained only the grand prize winner and the finalists.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

This section will explore each of the key elements of user-generated advertising contests from a theoretical perspective and suggest topics for future research.

### **Advertisers**

The use of user-generated advertising contests by advertisers raises the issue of whether this strategy affects consumer attitudes toward the advertiser. A report released by the AMA who partnered with Opinion Research Corp. for the study indicated that adults perceive user-generated content to be more customer-friendly, more creative, and more innovative than agency-generated advertising (Wood, 2006). Younger adults (between the ages of 18 and 24), however, are more skeptical of user-generated advertising than older adults (between the ages of 25-64). Younger consumers are more likely to say that advertisers who use user-generated advertising are less trustworthy, less socially responsible, and less customer-friendly (Wood, 2006). These findings should be somewhat troubling for advertisers who are using user-generated advertising contests to target a younger demographic.

Defined as “a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner to the sponsoring organization” (Lutz, 1985, p. 53), attitude toward the advertiser represents an affective response to an advertisement. In the attitude toward the ad model, perceptions of the advertiser, including advertiser credibility, are expected to influence attitude toward the advertiser (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989). Perceptions emanate from consumers’ past experiences and information about the company. Advertiser attitude was found to have a strong positive correlation with attitude toward the ad under ad pretest conditions (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989). The relationship between attitude toward the advertiser and attitude toward the ad should be explored in future studies

of user-generated content to determine under what circumstances the two concepts are correlated.

Research has demonstrated that credibility of the source is an important factor in the effectiveness of persuasive messages (Austin & Pinkleton, 2006). Consumers may perceive the *source* of the message to be the producer of the ad, the person appearing in the ad, the advertiser, or possibly all three. Credibility is defined as the extent to which the source is perceived to have relevant expertise, can be trusted as having an objective opinion, and exhibits attractiveness (Ohanian, 1990). The source considered in Ohanian’s (1990) research is the spokesperson appearing in the advertisement.

A distinct concept from spokesperson credibility is corporate credibility, which impacts the company’s image or reputation (Newell & Goldsmith, 2001). This construct can be measured using Newell and Goldsmith’s (2001) Corporate Credibility Scale which includes eight items, with four items measuring corporate trustworthiness and four measuring corporate expertise. Lafferty, Goldsmith, and Newell (2002) tested the Dual Credibility Model, which integrates corporate and spokesperson credibility, and found that consumers can differentiate between the presenter and the corporate sponsor of the ad. Furthermore, while endorser credibility was found to have a more profound direct effect on attitude toward the ad than corporate credibility, corporate credibility was directly related to all three advertising-related variables (i.e., attitude toward the ad, attitude toward the brand, and purchase intention) (Lafferty, Goldsmith, & Newell, 2002). User-generated ads may exhibit a higher level of source credibility because consumers are likely to trust the opinion of a peer who created the ad or a lower level because the message is not emanating directly from the advertiser. A better understanding of perceived source may help to advance knowledge of the appropriate application of user-generated advertising.

## **Producers**

The producer can be studied by examining the motivations for creating the content. Daugherty, Eastin, and Bright (2008) examined the functional sources of motivation to create user-generated content and the impact of motivations on attitude toward creating user-generated content. Based on the postulation that attitudes serve personality functions, Katz (1960) developed a typology of four personality functions—utilitarian, knowledge, ego-defensive, and value expressive. Adding the social function of Clary et al. (1998) to Katz's (1960) typology and applying the concepts to user-generated content, Daugherty, Eastin, and Bright (2008) found that the ego-defensive and social functions have a positive and significant relationship with attitudes toward creating user-generated content, while the value-expressive function had a negative relationship. Therefore, those producers who exhibit the ego-defensive motivation, which helps to minimize self-doubt and experience a sense of community, and the social motivation, which allows them to associate with others and participate in activities considered favorable to others, will have more favorable attitudes toward creating user-generated content (Daugherty, Eastin, & Bright, 2008). Exploring this social function as well as other motivations may provide additional insight as to how to mobilize contest entrants, which has both theoretical and practical applications for advertisers.

Advertising contests also have implications for brand-building. Branding has long been used to create social networks among consumers in an effort to generate enthusiasm for a brand and encourage consumers to remain loyal (Schultz, 2007). A recent study by Dou and Krishnamurthy (2007) examined how product and service providers are using the Web to build brands, focusing on the specific elements of a brand's Web site. Consumer involvement in advertising contests might even be considered a form of "branding Reformation," whereby "marketing professionals

used to be the high-priest gatekeepers, but now we can all have a direct relationship with the Almighty Brand" (Walker, 2006, p. 20 paraphrasing Grant McCracken). For this reason, sponsors should examine their objectives to ensure they are in line with the entrants to get the most out of their efforts. Future research in this area of user-generated content could focus on the relationship between the producer and the brand and consider the branding benefits of contest entrants and other content creation promotions.

The creation of user-generated advertising might evoke a high involvement situation for producers, whereby they persuade themselves of the benefits of a product through the intense process of creating an ad. Petty and Cacioppo (1986) incorporate the concept of involvement in their Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), which directs those who are motivated and able to process a message to a central route to persuasion involving elaborated arguments. In contrast, elaborated arguments are not effective for those unmotivated and unable to cognitively process a message, requiring communicators to rely on peripheral cues in the peripheral route to persuasion (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). The study of user-generated advertising provides for a unique application of ELM whereby the ad creator might be hastening the process of persuasion through intimate interactions with the brand.

## **Consumers**

While Web site statistics are available and useful for advertisers, the literature does not reveal an understanding of the motivations of consumers. Uses and gratifications theory helps explain why people use certain media by classifying how people make decisions about media use and the needs fulfilled by those choices (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973). Uses and gratifications makes three assumptions: the audience actively uses media to provide gratifications, audience members will identify a need prior to making a media choice,

and media outlets compete with other methods for satisfying needs (Katz et al., 1973). Future research in the area of user-generated advertising should examine the uses and gratifications of consumers who watch and comment on the entries.

In an application of uses and gratifications to Web site usage, Ko, Cho, and Roberts (2005) found high information, convenience, and social interaction to account for length of time spent on a Web site, and consumers with high information needs were more likely to engage in human-message interaction. Consumers with high convenience and social interaction needs will engage in human-human interaction, which was found to have more impact on attitude toward the site than human-message interaction (Ko, Cho, & Roberts, 2005). Those who engage more in human-message and human-human interactions evaluate Web sites more positively, leading to favorable attitudes toward brands and higher purchase intentions (Ko, Cho, & Roberts, 2005).

User-generated advertising often provides opportunities for consumers to interact with the producers of the ad or the ad itself. Cho and Leckenby (1997) classified existing definitions of interactivity in terms of user-machine interactions, user-user interactions, and user-message interactions. Applying these definitions to the Internet, user-machine interactivity allows the user to change the look of the Web site or navigate the site through links; user-user interactivity refers to communication between two people mediated by the Internet; and user-message interactivity allows for control of advertising messages on the Internet. Interactivity is important for its documented link to positive user attitudes (Cho & Leckenby, 1999).

Liu and Shrum (2002) used a definition of interactivity that combined Cho and Leckenby's (1997) perspective: "We define interactivity as follows: The degree to which two or more communication parties can act on each other, on the communication, and on the messages and the degree to which such influences are synchronized." Of Liu and Shrum's (2002) three dimensions

of interactivity—active control, two-way communication, and synchronicity—the dimension that most applies to user-generated advertising contests is two-way communication. Two-way communication is predicted to be positively related to cognitive involvement and user satisfaction (Liu & Shrum, 2002).

McQuail's (1987) typology of motivations of mass media use offers additional insight for user-generated content and its consumers. While the information, entertainment, and personal identity reasons may apply, it is the personal relationships and social interaction reason that is particularly useful for understanding consumption of user-generated advertising. When user-generated content is available on the Web, it often allows consumers to connect with others. Some of the advertising contests reviewed, for example, make it possible for consumers to comment on the entries. Furthermore, two-way communication is possible when consumers are able to comment on the entries and contest entrants respond.

The ELM (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) also applies to the study of user-generated advertising consumers. Research should explore whether consumers have higher levels of involvement when viewing consumer-generated advertisements as opposed to agency advertisements. The added features of comment functions, voting, and pass-along power may further enhance involvement levels.

Research could also explore how a consumer becomes a producer of user-generated content. Daugherty, Eastin, and Bright (2008) found that people are more likely to create blogs or Web sites and post in discussion forums than read blogs, Web sites, or other forum posts. In contrast, people are more likely to consume videos, photos, audio, and wiki sites than create them. These differences are surmised to be attributed to the desire of people to use more text-based online communication for self-expression and their limited skills to create and post video and audio (Daugherty, Eastin, & Bright, 2008).

## **Content**

Further research could examine whether user-generated advertising content confuses consumers. Producers have been known to make their entries available to others on sites such as YouTube. These entries may communicate a subversive brand message or at the very least, a message that is not consistent with that of the company. Research could also examine whether the availability of critical messages creates a distrust of ad messages in general.

Content can also be studied by classifying the creative strategy of the user-generated advertising content. Creative strategy has been described as a combination of message content and creative execution (Laskey, Day, & Crask, 1989; Ray, 1982; Shimp & DeLozier, 1986). Laskey, Day, and Crask (1989), for example, described creative strategy as “what is being said in an advertisement as well as how it is said.” While some scholars limit the definition of creative strategy to message content, creative strategy can encompass both message content and creative execution. Advertisers are encouraged to use the same strategy for all marketing communications (Kim, McMillan, & Hwang, 2005).

Message content often falls into one of two general categories with one focusing on product attributes and benefits and the other emphasizing brand image (Laskey, Fox, & Crask, 1995). Puto and Wells (1984) described this distinction as informational or transformational. Previous typologies of message strategies that are more detailed than the simple informational/transformational dichotomy include Laskey, Day, and Crask’s (1989) typology of nine message strategies divided into the informational and transformational approaches.

The five creative strategies of the informational approach include Comparative, Unique Selling Proposition (USP), Preemptive, Hyperbole, and Generic Information. The four creative strategies of the transformational approach include User

Image, Brand Image, Use Occasion, and Generic Transformation. Using Laskey, Day, and Crask’s (1989) typology, user-generated advertising content can be examined to see if it is consistent with other advertisements produced by the agency for the brand and to also examine the difference between winning ads and other entries.

Creative execution refers to the way a message is presented and the context of that presentation. The Marketing Science Institute’s typology (cited in Schmalensee, 1983) examines the format, product, presenter, visuals, music, and sexual content. Added to this typology by Koudelova and Whitelock (2001) is the category of humor as examined by Weinberger and Spotts (1989). The creative execution of user-generated advertising can be examined to determine if it is consistent with other agency-produced advertisements for the brand or if there is a difference between winning ads and other entries.

Other areas of research to explore would be attitudes toward user-generated ads and attitudes toward the brand. Attitude toward the ad has been found to be a mediator of brand attitude, brand choice, and purchase intentions (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989; MacKenzie, Lutz, & Belch, 1986; Mitchell & Olson, 1981). A meta-analysis by Brown and Stayman (1992) confirmed a significant relationship between attitude toward the ad and brand attitudes, brand-related cognitions, and purchase intention. The significance of brand attitude is its documented link to purchase intentions (Brown & Stayman, 1992). Additional research could explore whether attitude toward the ad is as strongly correlated with advertising-related variables for user-generated advertising as it is for agency-generated advertising or whether consumers disassociate user-generated advertising from the brand itself, reducing the impact of attitude toward the ad.

## **Media**

The concept of synergy has relevance in a user-generated campaign because consumer ads often air on television and are hosted on the Web. Synergy first requires that multiple communication tools or vehicles are applied within a campaign (Chang & Thorson, 2004). Achieving synergy then occurs in one of four ways: having a unified image, speaking in a consistent voice, being a good listener, or being a world-class citizen (Duncan, 1993). In testing the effectiveness of television-Web synergy compared to repetition of either television or Web, Chang and Thorson (2004) found that synergy led to higher attention, higher perceived message credibility, and more total and positive thoughts. Chang and Thorson (2004) concluded that multiple sources not only elicited more thoughts, but also led to more central processing than repetition, which relied more on peripheral cues.

Attitudes toward online advertising have been explored in number of studies, but many of these focus on Web formats, such as banner ads or pop-ups (Burns & Lutz, 2006, 2008; Cho, 2003; Wolin & Korgaonkar, 2003; Yang, 2003). Research could explore attitudes toward online video advertisements. Another area for future research would be the role of involvement in watching user-generated ads on the Web versus television commercials. It is assumed that involvement levels will be higher, thereby enhancing cognitive processing.

## **DISCUSSION**

The engagement model of advertising is more complex than traditional models and it is hoped that the complexity has been thoroughly explicated here in the context of user-generated advertising contests. The advertiser, once the sender of the message, invites participation from a targeted group, sets up the boundaries for the creation of the content, and serves as a gatekeeper for

appropriate content. The producer, once a passive receiver of the message, has an invitation to communicate about the brand, which may or may not have occurred without the inspiration of a contest. Consumers may engage in a dialogue with the producer of the ad, further defining the brand. Engaging with producers and consumers involves using new and social media, where more interactivity can occur. The engagement model presented serves as a method to analyze the various components of user-generated advertising contests and also define areas for future research. The model provides additional insight into the phenomenon of user-generated content and will hopefully motivate scholars to develop theory and address issues in this area.

That said, the trend of user-generated content raises additional concerns for the industry. Advertisers need to consider whether seeking and sharing user-generated advertising is the best way to engage consumers. An initial concern would be whether subversive messages are possible, as in the case of the Chevy Tahoe. Another question would be whether the brand engenders devotion, as in the case of the National Football League (Fine, 2007). As Fine (2007) described, “Many big advertisers sell commodities—soap powder, paper goods—that lack logos people tattoo on their torsos or paint on their faces” (p. 24). Thus, if people do not feel a brand connection, they may not be able to be motivated to create advertisements for it.

Another issue for the industry is whether user-generated advertising is more effective than traditional advertising and if so, locating the source or sources of this impact. Producers of the ad may experience increases in advertising effects through their intense involvement with the brand while creating the ad. Consumers may experience greater advertising effects watching ads created by their peers. The effects may occur as producers and consumers engage in dialogue. The use of the Web as a vehicle for showcasing these ads may have greater impact on viewers

than television commercials. Measuring all these components will help bridge understanding for this new advertising strategy.

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