Mobilizing social media users to become advertisers: Corporate hashtag campaigns as a public health concern

Linnea I Laestadius and Megan M Wahl

Abstract

Objective: With the growing popularity of social media, corporate marketers are increasingly launching hashtag campaigns to encourage consumers to create branded user-generated content on their behalves. If successful, these campaigns may expand the reach of harmful marketing messages and capitalize on peer-effects among adolescents. To shed light on these novel corporate campaigns, we performed a case study of the user-generated Instagram content created in response to a hashtag campaign promoting the quick-service restaurant Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC).

Methods: We performed a content analysis of one week's worth of user-generated Instagram posts created with the hashtag #HowDoYouKFC between 24 April 2015–1 May 2015. Posts were coded to discern: (a) relevance to KFC as a brand and/or food; (b) themes in the post, (c) the content of images/videos, and (d) overall sentiment toward KFC. Posts that were deleted or made private during the study period were removed. Descriptive statistics were calculated to discern trends in post content.

Results: Instagram users created 196 posts with #HowDoYouKFC during the study period. After removing irrelevant and deleted/private posts, analysis of the 128 remaining user-generated posts revealed that 45% of posts were explicitly positive toward KFC and 39% lacked a specific stance or emotion related to KFC. Of the posts, 55% depicted KFC chicken and 65% included depictions of the brand hashtag on food packaging.

Conclusions: Findings indicate that corporations are successfully converting individual social media users into positive advertisers for harmful products. Novel efforts are needed to counter corporate user-generated content campaigns.

Introduction

While much has been written about the potential democratizing and empowering potential of social media,[1–3] it is now increasingly clear that social media is also being used to further corporate profits at the expense of the public's health.[4–6] Perhaps of little surprise, given that online practices can be rapidly "reterritorialized by capitalism,"[7] corporations selling harmful commodities have developed ways of making use of social media's ability to rapidly spread information and mobilize users. As noted by Serazio,[5] marketers "seek not civic engagement but rather consumer activation" (p. 613).

Accordingly, corporate marketers not only promote their own products directly on social media, but also seek to mobilize individuals to promote their products for them via personal user-generated content (UGC). Given growing understanding of the persuasive effects

Joseph J. Zilber School of Public Health, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, USA

Corresponding author:
Linnea I Laestadius, Joseph J Zilber School of Public Health, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 1240 North 10th Street, Milwaukee WI 53205, USA.
Email: LLaestad@uwm.edu
Twitter: @LinneaLaestad

of peers and advertising,[8–10] an increase in branded UGC for harmful products represents an important area of inquiry for public health.

Most commonly, this content appears to be solicited through hashtag campaigns that encourage social media users to create and post branded content on social media. The public health literature, while offering extensive coverage of corporate advertising on social media,[11–14] and increasingly considering the public health relevance of UGC,[15,16] has yet to fully explore the intersections of corporate campaigns and UGC on social media. For example, a recent study of food advertising on Facebook by Freeman et al.[11] notes the existence of contests to solicit UGC and the presence of UGC on almost all of the corporate pages examined, but focuses primarily on brand-created content. Given that 90% of young US adults and 76% of teenagers report using social media,[17,18] it is critical to develop a full understanding of this new marketing approach and the types of content that consumers share with peers and corporations in response to hashtag campaigns.

To begin to discern the extent to which the public health community should be concerned about consumers being converted into advertisers, we first draw on the communication and sociology literature to offer context on the phenomenon. We then present a case study and content analysis of a corporate hashtag campaign designed to promote the creation of brand-related UGC. More specifically, we focus on UGC created in response to Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC)'s #HowDoYouKFC campaign on the social media platform Instagram. Instagram is image-based, allowing for photographs and short videos of food to be shared, and is used by almost 52% of online teenagers.[18] KFC represents an important case study since quick-service restaurants are at the forefront of using online communications to target youth, with the sector's spending on new media promoting quick-service foods to adolescents growing by over 800% between 2006–2009.[19]

Hashtag campaigns, prosumption, and marketing

As per the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development,[20] UGC is characterized as "(i) content made publicly available over the Internet, (ii) which reflects a certain amount of creative effort [thus excluding the simple re-sharing of corporate-created content], and (iii) which is created outside of professional routines and practices" (p. 10). More simply, UGC is the content created by individual social media users and posted on social media platforms without formal remuneration. Social media users have come

to use hashtags (the # symbol) to identify the theme, context, or topic of their UGC on social media platforms such as Instagram and Twitter.[3,21] While many hashtags arise out of a "folksonomy" process, in which hashtags are developed by social media users themselves,[22] corporate marketers also create their own hashtags and use them in print and online advertising, as well as packaging, in order to mobilize people to post about their brand and products.

Examples of recent hashtag campaigns include KFC's #HowDoYouKFC,[23] Bud Light's #UpForWhatever,[24] and Snickers' #EatASnickers.[25] All of these hashtags were heavily promoted on branded social media pages, with the goal that social media users would use the hashtags to make their own brand-related posts on the corporation's behalf. While some hashtag campaigns use a contest format to encourage posting (#EatASnickers, for example, offered the chance to win cash and personalized Snickers bars if you posted a selfie with the hashtag), others offer no financial incentive for posting. Past research suggests that a lack of formal incentive may not be a barrier to campaign engagement since consumers partially generate UGC for the enjoyment that they receive from contributing to a creative process and engaging in self-expression, sharing opinions and information, interacting with their peers, or gaining some form of temporary celebrity status or prestige.[20,26–28]

Regardless of motivations, social media enables the shifting of advertising from producers to consumers of harmful commodities in ways that were not possible with early Internet sites.[29] In effect, consumers who create brand-related UGC are transformed "from mere viewers of commercials into ad producers and distributors themselves" (p. 226).[30] This autonomy from corporations is seen a source of authenticity among consumers which, in turn, makes the content valuable to advertisers.[31] In the process, corporations must cede some control over their marketing content (and undesirable branded UGC is not unheard of), but corporations make up for this with increased marketing power.[31] Consumers then become prosumers, who both produce and consume brand-related content.[26,29] Described by Chia[32] as an "implosion of consumption and production" (p. 424), prosumption is a well-established phenomenon in the communication and sociology literature, but relatively unknown in public health.

In a broad sense, any UGC is a form of prosumption since it creates value for the corporations who own social media platforms. However, here we focus more narrowly on consumers taking on advertising functions. Past discussions of brand ambassadors begin to explain the phenomenon,[10,19] but fail to capture its breadth and scope. Making one branded UGC post in response to a corporate hashtag falls well within

the domain of prosumption, even if that specific social media user never uses the hashtag again. When taken collectively, thousands of individual social media users engaging in a single instance of prosumption to promote harmful commodities pose a clear public health concern. By contrast, the term "brand ambassador" speaks more narrowly to ongoing compensated relationships with individual consumers who take on advertising activities. Brand ambassadors may fall within prosumption if they are not formal employees, but the phenomenon itself is far more expansive.

As with other corporate practices that promote harmful commodities,[33,34] hashtag campaigns encouraging social media prosumption may pose a number of public health harms. First, while social media prosumption activities are similar to traditional word-of-mouth advertising, UGC is in some ways more problematic for public health because of its "instant availability, low cost, ease of use, wide subscription, wide access, and wide reach" (p. 198).[35] As a result, successful hashtag campaigns create a novel source of exposure to branded messages, often with minimal cost to corporations. UGC's creative component also pushes it beyond simple viral marketing, in which pre-created brand-related content is shared through networks.[36] Corporate advertising messages are instead transformed and translated into content created by consumers themselves and, as a result, may become even more persuasive. Passing messages through consumers allows them to take on the "native vernacular" (p. 136) of a platform and thus gain more authenticity.[31] Nielsen, a global market research firm, reports that both word-of-mouth advertising from friends and family and online consumer opinions are seen as more influential and trustworthy than paid advertisements on social media networks.[37] Adolescents are particularly vulnerable to both online marketing and peer-effects, making Instagram and its young user base an important venue for social media prosumption.[8–10] Food marketers have been known to intentionally play on this adolescent sensitivity to social pressure by mobilizing peers to help convey brands as "important and normative" (p. 956).[10,38]

Second, there is a risk that the act of creating branded UGC will encourage social media user identification with brands or corporations, particularly among adolescents. As noted by boyd and Sunden, youth "write themselves into being" (p. 129) on social media platforms as a part of the construction of their social identities.[39,40] Adolescents are also known to use brands "to project a positive image to others and to bolster feelings of self-worth" (p. 209).[9] As follows, branded content may become internalized during online identity construction. Serazio[5] suggests that corporate solicitation of UGC is "fundamentally an effort

at intertwining an emergent sense of self (and, for youth, this is still at an embryonic, unstable stage) with a branded identity" that can then be "lucratively exploited" (p. 608). The marketing literature lends further support to this concern, with evidence that brands can "help consumers fulfill their self-definitional needs" (p. 649) and that identification with brands can foster much-sought-after brand loyalty.[41] There is also evidence that participation in a "brand community" on social media can increase brand loyalty.[42,43]

Finally, corporations can more easily monitor social media posts than traditional word-of mouth and frequently work with marketing firms to track UGC related to their brands.[12,35,44] Hashtags allow viewers to examine all the posts on which the hashtag has been used, enabling a corporation or marketing firm to easily gather posts referencing their brand or a specific campaign. This, in turn, allows corporations, in the words of social media analytics firm Iconosquare (2015) to "Exploit users' behaviour to better promote your brand."[45] Again, the notion of authenticity in social media posting comes to the fore, as posts take on the role of a "digital Rorschach test... for collective brand perceptions" (p. 141).[31] More effective marketing of harmful commodities such as energy-dense, nutrient poor foods, alcohol, and tobacco would benefit corporations at the expense of the public's health.

The #HowDoYouKFC campaign

KFC partnered with marketing firm Foote, Cone & Belding (FCB) to launch its #HowDoYouKFC campaign in January 2014.[46] At the time of data collection in spring 2015, the campaign was still featured on the KFC website and in television commercials. As described in a KFC press release, the campaign is a "movement that celebrates the real, authentic connections KFC's biggest fans have with the brand."[46] The campaign promoted its hashtag message via prominent displays on the KFC website and social networking sites, television advertisements, YouTube videos, food packaging, and restaurant displays. The associated television advertisements were created using improvisational actors and shot on iPhones in order to, as per the press release, "mirror user-generated content" and "inspire consumers to create their own videos."[46] KFC also made posts on its social media accounts that appeared to be faux-UGC in composition and style (Figure 1). As a rule, content did not explicitly ask consumers how they "KFC," but rather let the hashtag speak for itself by placing it on marketing and packaging materials (Figures 1 and 2). Even without any further description, consumers aware of social media were meant to interpret the hashtag as a call to share how they "KFC" with their online social networks. The
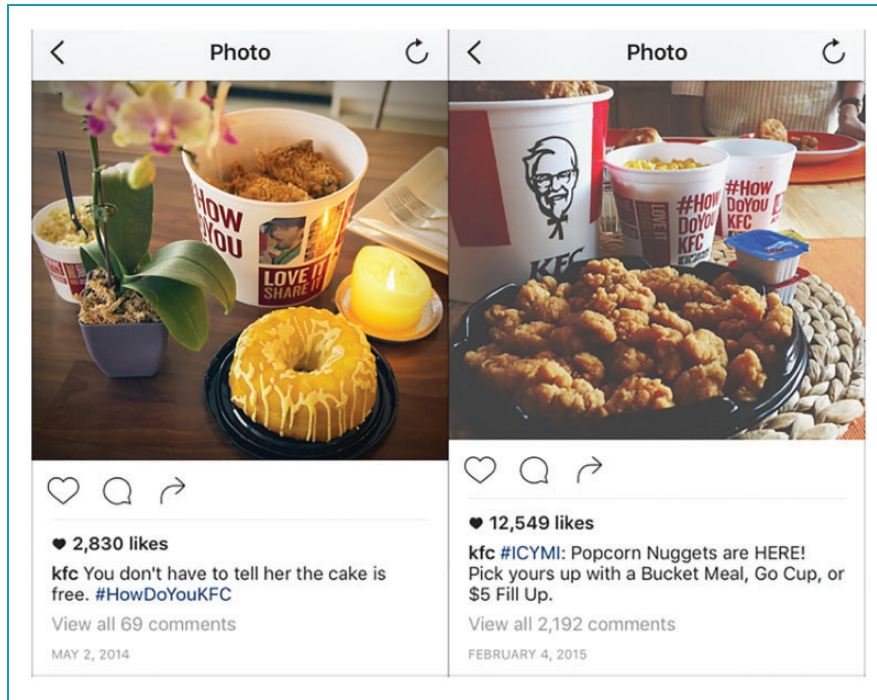
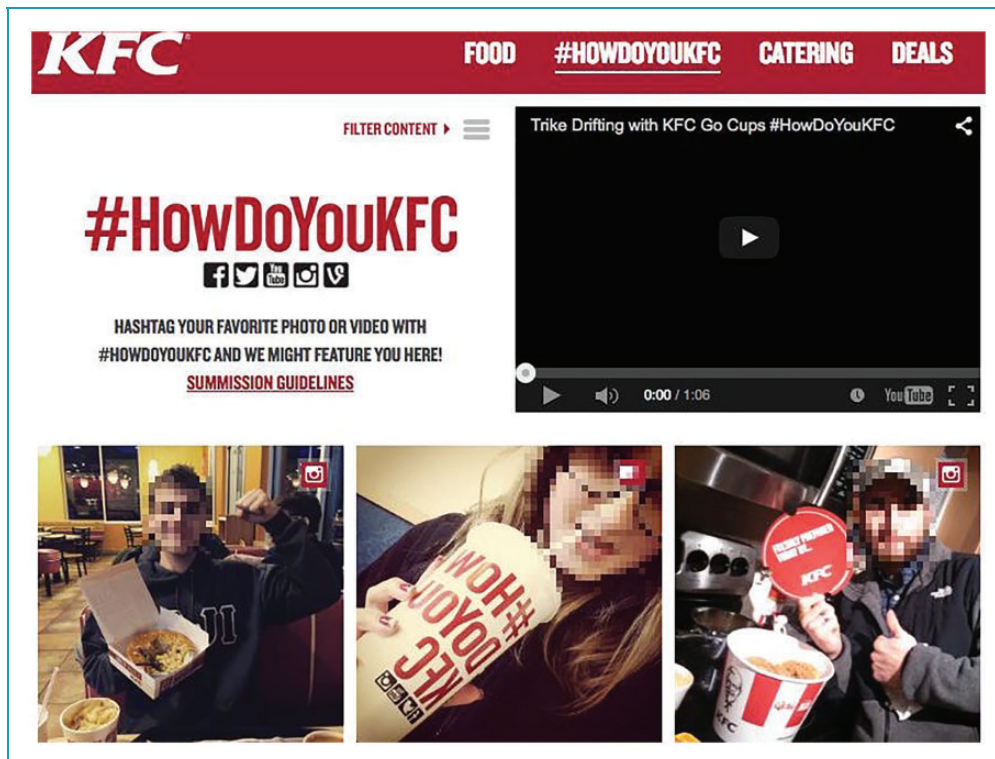**Figure 1.** Posts from Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC)'s Instagram account made during #HowDoYouKFC campaign.

Figure 2. Portion of #HowDoYouKFC Website, April 2015. Faces in user-generated content blurred to protect privacy. Source: http://www.kfc.com/howdoyoukfc. KFC: Kentucky Fried Chicken.

focus on how you KFC is also very much in line with the growing volume of advertising that appeals to consumers' desire for identity formation through the creation and sharing of branded self-expression.[31]

KFC also had a dedicated website for the campaign (http://www.kfc.com/howdoyoukfc/), which has since been taken offline with the conclusion of the campaign (Figure 2). Previously, the website stated "Hashtag your favorite photo or video with #HowDoYouKFC and we might feature you here!" KFC initially ran the campaign as a contest in which individuals could win US$100 Visa gift cards by posting their content with #HowDoYouKFC and #Contest.[47] During the study period there was no monetary reward or formal contest in place for creating #HowDoYouKFC content, however, users had the chance of being featured on the KFC website, as mentioned above.

The campaign was cast by industry as a success, with industry blogs highlighting key aspects of the campaign as a model for others to follow.[47,48] A post on the blog of well-known social media analytics firm Klout, for example, noted that the campaign "allowed people the opportunity to showcase how they 'KFC'. More than eating chicken, it allowed people, particularly millennials, to showcase something that defines them on a platform that could amplify their own megaphones."[49] This echoes comments from KFC's US Chief Marketing Officer that the campaign aimed to "inspire every KFC fan to share what they love about us and how KFC fits into their lives in a relevant, meaningful and personal way."[46]

Methods

To understand how Instagram users responded to the #HowDoYouKFC campaign, we used a case study approach relying on qualitative content analysis methods.[50] The Instagram platform was chosen for analysis in part because each post must include a photo or short video, resulting in a particularly rich source of data, as well as the potential for users to essentially recreate the composition of KFC advertising in their UGC. As with Carah and Shaul's[51] qualitative analysis of branded hashtags on Instagram, our aim was not to collect a representative sample of all Instagram users, but rather to develop an understanding of how a segment of consumers responded to the #HowDoYouKFC campaign on Instagram. Accordingly, a one-week sample of posts during the campaign was chosen provide an appropriate volume of data for analysis while still being small enough to engage in the critical but labor intensive qualitative approach that considers each Instagram post as a holistic unit of captions, hashtags, emojis, and image/video.[21,52]

Sampling of user-generated content

A search for #HowDoYouKFC posts was performed in May 2015 using Iconosquare, an authorized third-party service that draws directly from the Instagram Application Programming Interface (API). At the time, it allowed public Instagram posts to be searched at no cost and viewed without logging in to the actual Instagram service. After searching for a hashtag, Iconosquare pulled up all the public posts that were most recently tagged with that hashtag. The links to all public posts with #HowDoYouKFC applied during the week of 24 April 2015–1 May 2015 were collected on 1 May 2015 ($n = 196$). To assist with code development, 20 additional posts were gathered on 1 May 2015 to allow for initial coding. All sample links were revisited two weeks later and screen captures were taken of each post in order to keep a static record for analysis. In order to protect the privacy of Instagram users,[52] we removed all posts that had been deleted or made private at this stage ($n = 15$). This manual method of capture allowed for the holistic analysis mentioned above and created greater researcher familiarity with the data.

Coding of user-generated content

Posts were coded manually on three primary elements: (a) themes in the post, (b) the content of images/videos, and (c) overall sentiment toward KFC. Anticipating that UGC may echo themes found in advertising, we based the thematic coding on common themes found in food advertising.[53] The codebook included codes for taste/flavor/smell, health/wellness, convenience, mood alterations of positive or negative feelings, action/ adventure/outdoors, price/value, and KFC as a special treat or reward. With regard to image content, we coded for whether chicken (including images of chicken on packaging), vegetable side dishes, other side dishes, or soda were pictured, as well as for whether there was a person depicted. Mashed potatoes were coded as an "other side" rather than a vegetable due to their high calorie content. Overall portrayal was coded as irrelevant to KFC, pro-KFC, anti-KFC, complex, or neutral. Posts that did not depict or address KFC food or the KFC brand in any fashion outside of the application of the hashtag were deemed irrelevant to KFC and were reviewed for content in a holistic fashion but not coded on any further measures. Additionally, we recorded if the post was a video or image. Each post and profile were also examined to determine if the post had been made by KFC or a KFC employee.

First, the smaller sample of 20 posts was coded independently by the lead researcher and a trained doctoral student to ensure familiarity with the codebook. Each post was coded in Microsoft Excel based on image/

video content, descriptive caption text, and any hashtags or emojis used. All posts were discussed and any coding discrepancies were resolved and amendments to the codebook were made as needed to improve consistency of coding. Following resolution and codebook improvement, the full primary sample of posts was split in half and coded by the lead author and trained doctoral student. Additionally, a random sample of 30% of posts ($n = 55$) was selected for double coding to assess coding agreement. During double coding, an additional 18 posts were discovered to have been removed or made private and were in turn removed from our sample. An intercoder reliability test was performed on the remaining 37 double coded posts using SPSS. The intercoder reliability coefficients (Cohen's Kappa) had an average of 0.72 (with a range of 0.34–1.0),[54] with coding discrepancies discussed and resolved.

Results

Post volume and posting behaviors

During the last week of April 2015, 196 public posts were made with #HowDoYouKFC. After removing posts that were deleted or made private during the study period ($n = 37$) and posts that were determined to be irrelevant to KFC or KFC food ($n = 31$), a total of 128 relevant posts by 122 unique usernames remained for analysis. Irrelevant posts were frequently political in nature and aimed to make broad critiques about food and nutrition. However, any posts focused more narrowly on fast food and processed foods, and by association KFC, were included for analysis.

Full descriptive statistics for included posts are presented in Table 1. The vast majority of relevant posts contained images rather than videos ($n = 123$) and less than a third of posts depicted people ($n = 35$). Depictions of food were more common, with chicken depicted in 55% of posts ($n = 70$), soda in 52% of posts ($n = 67$), non-vegetable side dishes in 40% of posts ($n = 51$), and vegetables in 11% of posts ($n = 14$). Food depictions occurred in people's homes, cars, and at KFC restaurants. Additionally, 65% of posts ($n = 83$) depicted the #HowDoYouKFC graphic on KFC's food packaging, often with the hashtag appearing on multiple pieces of packaging in the same post. Soda cups were a prominent source of visual depictions of the hashtag, with several individuals posting close-ups of the hashtag on the cups.

While some posts depicted the food in an unflattering manner (e.g. half eaten chicken, excess gravy on mashed potatoes, a jumble of KFC packages and bags) many others depicted smiling patrons or careful arrangements of food, utensils, and packaging (with the

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for a sample of 128 #HowDoYouKFC Instagram Posts.

Variable	% (n)
User type	
Personal	97% (124)
KFC-affiliated	3% (4)
Post type	
Personal	94% (120)
Meme/text post	5% (6)
Promotional	2% (2)
Media type	
Images	96% (123)
Video	4% (5)
Hashtags only, no caption text	32% (41)
KFC hashtag only, no other caption	16% (20)
Stance on KFC	
Pro	45% (57)
Anti	6% (7)
Complex	11% (14)
Neutral	39% (50)
Image content	
Image of person	27% (35)
Chicken	55% (70)
Vegetables	11% (14)
Other side dishes	40% (51)
Soda/soda cups	52% (67)
Hashtag on packaging	65% (83)
Themes	
Treat/reward/special occasion	15% (19)
Convenience	11% (14)
Romance/sexuality	6% (8)
Action/adventure/outdoors	6% (7)
Taste/flavor/smell (positive)	23% (30)
	(continued)

Table 1. Continued.

Variable	% (n)
Taste/flavor/smell (negative)	2% (2)
Price/value (positive)	3% (4)
Price/value (negative)	2% (2)
Health/wellness (positive)	1% (1)
Health/wellness (negative)	9% (12)
Mood alterations (positive)	39% (50)
Mood alterations (negative)	2% (2)

KFC: Kentucky Fried Chicken.

hashtag oriented to the camera). The latter category of posts had a composition and style similar to KFC-created commercials and social media content (Figures 1 and 3). Several of these posts also featured images with high color saturation and warm temperature, indicating that the Instagram users applied an Instagram filter to improve the appearance of their images. These posts appeared to be true UGC created by regular social media users rather than faux-content created by KFC itself, with only four posts determined to have been made by users with explicit ties to KFC.

Themes and sentiments toward KFC

Overall, 45% of relevant posts were explicitly pro-KFC (n = 57). Positive themes included good taste/flavor (n = 30), KFC as a special treat or reward (n = 19), and the creation of positive feelings and emotions from consuming or planning to consume KFC (n = 50). Many posts also expressed a general positive attitude toward KFC through descriptive text such as "I KFC with a smile." Posters often combined multiple hashtags, such as "#dinnertime #howdoyouKFC #dadsdinner #fridayfun #familyfun," to convey attitudes toward KFC. Of the posts, 32% contained only hashtags and no other descriptive information (n = 41). Several posts also made use of emojis in combination with text and hashtags, such as the heart eye emoji (😍) to express positive sentiments about taste and overall feeling toward the product.

Another large segment of posts (39%, n = 50) was neutral toward KFC and did not explicitly express any particular sentiment about the KFC brand or foods. These posts were generally descriptive in nature, often using other hashtags to identify the specific foods in the image (e.g. #gocup #chickentenders) or simply depicting KFC food with no descriptors at all besides #HowDoYouKFC. Overall, 16% of posts contained

only the hashtag #HowDoYouKFC and no text or emojis (n = 20). Negative posts comprised just 6% of the sample (n = 7) and the majority of these posts were made by the same user. Posts with complex or unclear sentiments comprised 11% of sample (n = 14). The most common negative theme was that KFC was unhealthy (n = 12), however, these posts were partially coded as complex rather than purely negative due to comments indicating a humorous recognition of the unhealthy status of the food, such as "fattie feast" and "I'm such a fatty" paired with an image of KFC food.

Irrelevant posts

Notably, 84% (n = 26) of the irrelevant posts were all made by the same Instagram user who posted regularly with content opposed to the industrial food system and who also had five topical posts included in the analysis above. Eleven of the irrelevant posts addressed food in some context that was deemed too far removed from KFC to be relevant to the analysis. This included posts about labeling for genetically modified organisms, apricots and vitamins as a cure for cancer, the benefits of kombucha tea, and documentation of plant-based meals. The second largest category of posts on a unified theme (n = 7) related to political critiques of the government or police. No posts deemed irrelevant explicitly addressed or depicted KFC outside of the application of the hashtag.

Discussion

This content analysis of a week's worth of posts made with #HowDoYouKFC on Instagram indicates that KFC was successfully converting individual social media users into positive advertisers for its fast food products during its hashtag campaign. Indeed, the largest portion of posts was explicitly positive toward KFC. Taken together with neutral posts that also created exposure to KFC foods and branding, 84% of posts in our sample could be seen as meeting the aims of the campaign from the perspective of KFC. Similar to advertising's ability to shape consumption decisions, our work suggests that advertising can also shape social media posting decisions. Posts frequently resembled KFC ads in visual composition, with a heavy focus on the display of chicken, soda, and high calorie sides such as mashed potatoes.

These compositional similarities were the clear intention of the KFC campaign. As noted in its own press releases, KFC went out of its way to film its #HowDoYouKFC campaign ads on iPhones in order to create advertising content that resembled the UGC they hoped to inspire. By setting norms for content with its faux-UGC and then encouraging the spread of UGC
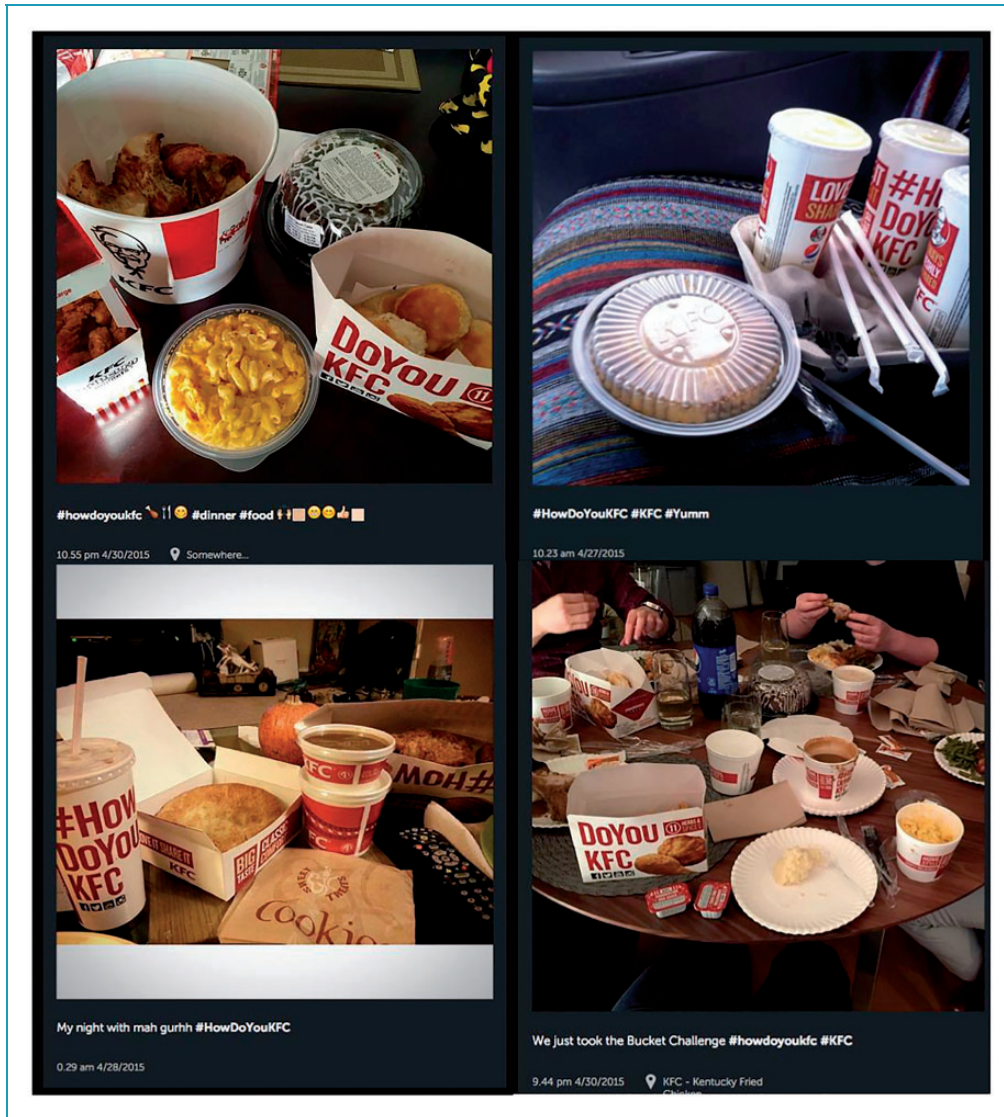
Figure 3. Sample of user-generated Instagram posts made with #HowDoYouKFC.

through the placement of the campaign hashtag on all of its packaging, KFC was able amplify the authenticity and spread of its desired advertising messages by passing it through consumers. While it is critical to note that the creation of this content is by no means a guarantee that consumers will respond by purchasing more KFC products, the content serves as a process objective on way to KFC meeting its ultimate objective of increasing sales and profits. However, the overall volume of posts during the week of analysis is modest for a national advertising campaign. Future studies would benefit from tracking branded hashtag content for the entire length of a campaign to assess the overall volume of consumers engaging in prosumer behaviors.

KFC's faux-UGC also helped to further blur the lines between KFC and its customers. Serazio[5] likens intentional efforts to make advertising indistinguishable from UGC to the use of product placements in broadcast media and suggests that this practice may impair consumer decision making. As most individuals engage with social media via their friends feed or stream pages, KFC advertising posts that closely resemble UGC would be likely to mesh seamlessly into their followers' overall stream of content. This may be particularly problematic for children, who already have a diminished capacity to recognize advertising content.[55] Further, KFC can mine this UGC for new ideas for advertising and promotions.

Our findings also lend support to the idea that the #HowDoYouKFC campaign is co-created by the KFC brand and the individual consumers of KFC products, thus converting consumers into what has been termed prosumers who take on aspects of both producers and consumers. The hashtag itself appears to be a primary

driver of prosumption behaviors given the large number of posts that prominently featured it emblazoned on packaging. This conversion should concern public health professionals since it represents a new pathway for exposure to promotions for harmful commodities and because it may help foster branded identities among youth. While the marketing literature has explored these developments, there is a need for public health researchers to begin to document the effects of creating and being exposed to branded UGC, particularly in the context of organized corporate hashtag campaigns. These campaigns are neither limited to #HowDoYouKFC nor to Instagram. For example, the American Marketing Association's March 2015 e-newsletter lauded Coca-Cola's #ShareACoke campaign and highlighted precisely why this issue is critical for public health. To the benefit of corporations, and frequently the to the detriment of health, these campaigns can work to increase sales:

> As the number of people tweeting about the campaign climbed, so did Coke sales. By geo-tagging #ShareACoke tweets with their specific location of origin, a correlation between social sharing and sales uplift could be explored by precise geographic market. And, as it turns out, that correlation was significant.[56]

It may be possible for public health campaigns to learn from these efforts to mobilize social media users for more positive and health promoting endeavors. It is interesting to note that FCB, the marketing firm that created the #HowDoYouKFC campaign, also created the recent Food and Drug Administration tobacco control campaign "The Real Cost."[57] This campaign did not, however, utilize UGC. By contrast, the Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids made use of UGC in its 2014 #StandWithCVS campaign, which encouraged social media users to offer support for the drug store CVS's decision to no longer sell cigarettes.[58] Future work should compare the dynamics of corporate versus non-profit and government campaigns that solicit UGC.

While regulatory strategies for hashtag campaigns should be considered, it appears to be extremely difficult to regulate UGC given US First Amendment rights, particularly when created without any financial incentive from corporations.[59] However, the US Federal Trade Commission has articulated guidelines relevant to hashtag campaigns run as contests. The words sweepstakes or contest should be made a part of the campaign hashtag since readers may not understand that a branded hashtag alone signifies "that those posts were made as part of a contest or that the people doing the posting had received something of value."[60] Similarly, social media users who receive any form of compensation, including contest entries, for posting are expected to disclose that information.[60]

Given the limited opportunities for action in the realm of policy, it is important to also consider educational campaigns that discourage the posting of branded content related to harmful commodities. While consumers display a range of motivations for creating UGC on social media,[20,27,28] they may not be fully aware that their prosumption activities generate revenue for corporations.[26] This may suggest a role for counter-marketing campaigns that raise critical corporate and social media literacy. Recent findings suggesting that adolescents are receptive to behavior change framed as resistance to manipulative corporate practices sheds light on one potential approach for interventions.[61]

It is also possible that hashtag campaigns could be subverted with a more public-health-oriented context. For example, Bud Light's 2015 #UpForWhatever campaign received a backlash due to its perceived endorsement of sexual assault, with some social media users beginning to use #UpForConsent to voice their critiques.[62] The freedom of consumers to create subversive UGC is a risk that corporations knowingly take on when they embrace social media and prosumer campaigns.[31] It is also a clear opportunity for those seeking to push back against harmful products and bad actors in the corporate sector. As the case study and additional campaign examples highlight, it is essential that public health practitioners become aware of both the threats and opportunities created by the mobilization of social media users.

Finally, it is interesting to note that posts appear to be somewhat transient in nature with almost 20% of collected posts having been deleted or made private during the screen capturing and initial analysis period. Prior work suggests that adolescents are more likely than adults to delete posts,[63] but further research is needed to discern the motivations for deleting branded content. The 16% of collected posts that were irrelevant also raise questions about the application of hashtags. While KFC managed to avoid very many explicitly negative posts, it seems unlikely that KFC would want their hashtag applied to posts critical of the police or supporting alternative medicine. It is not entirely clear if these users associated KFC with the current status quo around food and politics and used the hashtag as a form of subversion or if they simply hijacked the hashtag as a means of driving more traffic to their posts. The motivations for applying hashtags is also an area for further research.

Limitations

This study had several limitations. Data was only collected from public accounts and does not reflect data

posted by individuals with their privacy settings turned on. Instagram does not provide user demographics, making it difficult to assess the type of Instagram user who responded to the campaign. It is also difficult to discern if the users who deleted or made their posts private are different from those who kept their posts public during the study period. Additionally, we considered only one week's worth of public posts during the campaign in order to allow for qualitative analysis of posts that made sense of images, text, hashtags, and emoji in a holistic fashion. As a result, posts may not be reflective of the entirety of responses to the campaign. Finally, the study focused on post content and did not attempt to estimate the number of individuals exposed to #HowDoYouKFC UGC via follower or like counts. Given the unreliability of these measures and the rise of fake followers and likes,[64] future studies seeking to assess exposure to campaigns may wish to rely on survey research.

To our knowledge, this study represents the first public-health-focused examination of a corporate hashtag campaign. Our findings lend support to the notion that social media prosumption driven by corporations may pose a threat to the public's health. Hashtag campaigns diffuse the task of marketing across consumers, capitalizing on peer-effects, expanding the reach of messages, and creating a source of brand-related data for corporations to mine for user trends and novel ideas. Given the high proportion of adolescents on social media platforms, youth appear to be particularly at risk for both serving as creators and audiences of prosumer content. As these types of campaigns continue to proliferate on social media, research supporting critical corporate and social media literacy tools for adolescents should be a priority.

References

1. Househ M, Borycki E and Kushniruk A. Empowering patients through social media: The benefits and challenges. *Health Informatics J* 2014; 20: 50–58.
2. Obar JA, Zube P and Lampe C. Advocacy 2.0: An analysis of how advocacy groups in the United States perceive and use social media as tools for facilitating civic engagement and collective action. *Journal of Information Policy* 2012; 2: 1–25.
3. Bonilla Y and Rosa J. #Ferguson: Digital protest, hashtag ethnography, and the racial politics of social media in the United States. *Am Ethnol* 2015; 42: 4–16.
4. Freeman B. New media and tobacco control. *Tob Control* 2012; 21: 139–144.
5. Serazio M. Selling (digital) millennials the social construction and technological bias of a consumer generation. *Television & New Media* 2015; 16: 599–615.
6. Chu K-H, Unger JB, Allem J-P, et al. Diffusion of messages from an electronic cigarette brand to potential users through Twitter. *PLoS One* 2015; 10: e0145387.
7. Petersen SM. Loser generated content: From participation to exploitation. *First Monday* 2008; 13: 3.
8. Agaku IT and Ayo-Yusuf OA. The effect of exposure to pro-tobacco advertising on experimentation with emerging tobacco products among U.S. adolescents. *Health Educ Behav* 2014; 41: 275–280.
9. Pechmann C, Levine L and Loughlin S. Impulsive and self-conscious: Adolescents' vulnerability to advertising and promotion. *J Public Policy* 2005; 24: 202–221.
10. Freeman B, Kelly B, Vandevijvere S, et al. Young adults: Beloved by food and drink marketers and forgotten by public health? *Health Promot Int* 2016; 31: 954–961.
11. Freeman B, Kelly B, Baur L, et al. Digital junk: Food and beverage marketing on Facebook. *Am J Public Health* 2014; 104: e56–64.
12. Montgomery KC and Chester J. Interactive food and beverage marketing: Targeting adolescents in the digital age. *J Adolesc Health* 2009; 45: S18–S29.
13. Cheyne A, Mejia P, Nixon L, et al. Food and beverage marketing to youth. *Curr Obes Rep* 2014; 3: 440–450.
14. Lim M, Hare JD, Carrotte ER, et al. An investigation of strategies used in alcohol brand marketing and alcohol-related health promotion on Facebook. *Digit Health* 2016; 2: 1–7.
15. Primack BA, Carroll MV, Shensa A, et al. Sex differences in hookah-related images posted on Tumblr: A content analysis. *J Health Commun* 2016; 21: 366–375.
16. Laestadius LI, Wahl MM and Cho YI. #Vapelife: An exploratory study of electronic cigarette use and promotion on Instagram. *Subst Use Misuse* 2016; 51: 1669–1673.
17. Perrin A. Social media usage: 2005–2015. Pew Research Center, http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/10/08/2015/Social-Networking-Usage-2005-2015/ (2015, accessed 3 October 2016).
18. Lenhart A. *Teens, social media and technology overview 2015*. Pew Research Center, http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/04/09/teens-social-media-technology-2015/ (2015, accessed 3 October 2016).

19. Leibowitz J, Rosch JT, Ramirez E, et al. *A review of food marketing to children and adolescents: Follow-up report*. Washington (DC): US Federal Trade Commission, 2012.

20. Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). *Participative Web and user-created content Web 2.0, Wikis and social networking*, http://www.oecd.org/sti/ieconomy/participativewebanduser-createdcontentweb20wikisandsocialnetworking.htm (2007, accessed 3 October 2016).

21. Highfield T and Leaver T. A methodology for mapping Instagram hashtags. *First Monday* 2014; 20: 1–5.

22. Gruzd A, Wellman B and Takhteyev Y. Imagining Twitter as an imagined community. *Am Behav Sci* 2011; 55: 1294–1318.

23. KFC. #HowDoYouKFC? Show us!, http://www.kfc.com/howdoyoukfc/ (2015, accessed 14 January 2015).

24. Bud Light Beer. Up for whatever, http://www.budlight.com/up-for-whatever.html (2015, accessed 14 January 2015).

25. Snickers. Eat a Snickers. Who are you when you're hungry?, https://www.eatasnickers.com/ (2016, accessed 14 October 2016).

26. Humphreys A and Grayson K. The intersecting roles of consumer and producer: A critical perspective on co-production, co-creation and prosumption. *Sociol Compass* 2008; 2: 963–980.

27. Whiting A and Williams D. Why people use social media: A uses and gratifications approach. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal* 2013; 16: 362–369.

28. Shao G. Understanding the appeal of user-generated media: A uses and gratification perspective. *Internet Research* 2009; 19: 7–25.

29. Ritzer G and Jurgenson N. Production, consumption, prosumption: The nature of capitalism in the age of the digital 'prosumer'. *Journal of Consumer Culture* 2010; 10: 13–36.

30. Montgomery KC, Grier SA, Chester J, et al. The digital food marketing landscape: Challenges for researchers. In: Williams JD, Pasch KE and Collins CA (eds) *Advances in communication research to reduce childhood obesity*. Dordrecht: Springer, 2013, pp. 221–242.

31. Serazio M. *Your ad here. The cool sell of guerilla marketing*. New York: NYU Press, 2013.

32. Chia A. Welcome to Me-Mart: The politics of user-generated content in personal blogs. *Am Behav Sci* 2012; 56: 421–438.

33. Freudenberg N. The manufacture of lifestyle: The role of corporations in unhealthy living. *J Public Health Pol* 2012; 33: 244–256.

34. Freudenberg N and Galea S. The impact of corporate practices on health: Implications for health policy. *J Public Health Pol* 2008; 29: 86–104.

35. Tirunillai S and Tellis GJ. Does chatter really matter? dynamics of user-generated content and stock performance. *Marketing Science* 2012; 31: 198–215.

36. Freeman B and Chapman S. Gone viral? Heard the buzz? A guide for public health practitioners and researchers on how Web 2.0 can subvert advertising restrictions and spread health information. *J Epidemiol Community Health* 2008; 62: 778–782.

37. Nielsen Company. *Global trust in advertising. winning strategies for an evolving media landscape*. September 2015, https://www.nielsen.com/content/dam/nielsenglobal/apac/docs/reports/2015/nielsen-global-trust-in-advertising-report-september-2015.pdf (2015, accessed 3 October 2016).

38. Harris JL and Graff SK. Protecting young people from junk food advertising: Implications of psychological research for First Amendment law. *Am J Public Health* 2012; 102: 214–222.

39. boyd d. Why youth (heart) social network sites: The role of networked publics in teenage social life. In: Buckingham D (ed.) *MacArthur foundation series on digital learning – youth, identity, and digital media volume*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008, pp.119–142.

40. Sundén J. *Material virtualities*. New York: Peter Lang, 2003.

41. He H, Li Y and Harris L. Social identity perspective on brand loyalty. *J Bus Res* 2012; 64: 648–657.

42. Laroche M, Habibi MR and Richard MO. To be or not to be in social media: How brand loyalty is affected by social media? *Int J Inf Manage* 2014; 33: 76–82.

43. Dessart L and Veloutsou C. Consumer engagement in online brand communities: A social media perspective. *Journal of Product & Brand Management* 2015; 24: 28–42.

44. Alspach K. Ditto Labs raises $2.2 million for social media photo analytics. *The Boston Globe*, 14 May 2014, http://www.betaboston.com/news/2014/05/14/ditto-labs-raises-2-2-million-for-social-media-photo-analytics/ (2014, accessed 12 January 2015).

45. Clasen A. Instagram 2015 study – unleash the power of Instagram. Iconosquare blog, 12 January 2015, http://blog.iconosquare.com/instagram-2015-study-unleash-power-instagram (2015, accessed 20 January 2015).

46. Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC). KFC's boneless chicken just got a whole lot crunchier! Introduction of extra crispy boneless kicks off brand movement - #HowDoYouKFC, http://www.kfc.com/about/news/2014/1214.asp (2014, accessed 12 January 2015).

47. Boast. 5 Tips From KFC's #HowDoYouKFC video contest, 23 April 2014, http://boast.io/5-tips-kfcs-howdoyoukfc-video-contest/ (2014, accessed 14 October 2016).

48. Beta21. A one day 400,000+ increase in Facebook page likes explained. beta21.circussocial.com/facebook/a-one-day-400000-increase-in-facebook-page-likes-explained/ (2014, accessed 14 October 2016).

49. Welsh, T. Marketing to millennials: Past, present and future. *Klout for Business Blog*, 14 March 2014, http://business.blog.klout.com/2014/03/marketing-to-millennials/ (2014, accessed 12 January 2015).

50. Forman J and Damschroder L. Qualitative content analysis. In: Jacoby L and Siminoff LA (eds) *Empirical methods for bioethics a primer*. San Diego: Elsevier, 2008, pp. 39–62.

51. Carah N and Shaul M. Brands and Instagram: Point, tap, swipe, glance. *Mob Media Commun* 2015; 1–17.

52. Laestadius LI. Instagram. In: Sloan L and Quan-Haase A (eds) *SAGE handbook of social media research methods*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2017, pp. 573–592.

53. Warren R, Wicks RH, Wicks JL, et al. Food and beverage advertising on US television: A comparison of child-targeted versus general audience commercials. *J Broadcast Electron Media* 2008; 52: 231–246.

54. Viera AJ and Garrett JM. Understanding interobserver agreement: The kappa statistic. *Fam Med* 2005; 37: 360–363.

55. Kelly B, Vandevijvere S, Freeman B, et al. New media but same old tricks: Food marketing to children in the digital age. *Curr Obes Rep* 2015; 4: 37–45.

56. Deye J. #ShareACoke and the personalized brand experience, American Marketing Association, March 2015, https://www.ama.org/publications/eNewsletters/MarketingInsightsNewsletter/Pages/shareacoke-and-the-personalized-brand-experience.aspx (2015, accessed 14 October 2016).

57. Bachman K. New ad campaign shows teens the real cost of smoking, *Ad Week*, 4 February 2014, http://www.adweek.com/news/advertising-branding/new-ad-campaign-shows-teens-real-cost-smoking-155472 (2014, accessed 12 January 2015).

58. Olmstead E. Stand with CVS on Kick Butts Day. Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, 11 March 2014, http://www.kickbuttsday.org/updates/detail/2014_03_11_standwithcvs (2014, accessed 12 January 2015).

59. Ciolli A. Joe Camel meets YouTube: Cigarette advertising regulations and user-generated marketing. *U Tol L Rev* 2007; 39: 121.

60. Federal Trade Commission. The FTC's endorsement guides: What people are asking, https://www.ftc.gov/tips-advice/business-center/guidance/ftcs-endorsement-guides-what-people-are-asking (2015 accessed 14 October 2016).

61. Bryan CJ, Yeager DS, Hinojosa CP, et al. Harnessing adolescent values to motivate healthier eating. *Proc Natl Acad Sci* 2016; 113: 10830–10835.

62. Okyle C. Bud Light's lighthearted ''Up for whatever'' campaign takes a dark turn. *Entrepreneur*, 28 April 2015, https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/245608 (2015, accessed 14 October 2016).

63. Jang JY, Han K, Shih PC, et al. In: *Generation like*, 2015, pp. 4039–4042. New York: ACM Press.

64. Eördögh F. Inside an Instagram bot farm, *Vice*, 10 August 2015, http://motherboard.vice.com/read/inside-an-instagram-bot-farm (2015, accessed 10 October 2016).