

How Firms Can Steer Social Media Conversations



Harald van Heerde

University of New South Wales, Sydney

with

Mike Saljoughian

University of Missouri, Columbia

Kelly Hewett

University of Tennessee, Knoxville → Colorado State University, Fort Collins

Bill Rand

NC State University



Business
School



Poole College of
Management

Study Motivation

1) Tremendous growth in online customer-firm conversations

- 80% of customers expect firms to interact with them on social media
- 78% of customers are more willing to purchase from a brand with which they had a positive social media interaction
- 50+% of consumers expect a response from companies within one hour

3) The role of effective social media conversations for firm performance

- Responding to customers on social media can boost satisfaction by 20%
- Answering a complaint on social media can increase customer advocacy by 25%

2) Rising investments of firms in social media

- 89% of companies are moving towards a digital first strategy
- U.S. firms' expenditures on social media marketing increased to \$76.4b in 2024

4) Relative lack of studies on the *interaction* between firms and customers at the conversation level

- interactions between Firm Generated Content (FGC) and User Generated Content (UGC) on social media

Conversations on X (formerly Twitter)

 **Michelle** @

Dear @WellsFargo why oh why would you try to solicit me with a credit card offer while I'm in the drive through?

 **Drew Allen**
Replying to @
@WellsFargo
ask why you didn't upsell like
but true.

 **Ask Wells Fargo** @Ask_W
Replying to @
@ We'll be sur
appropriately. Which specific
more about this. ^JD

Challenge: how can a firm try to steer multiple, simultaneous, & very diverse social media conversations in favorable directions?



 **Michelle** @ · Apr 23, 2015
Replying to @Ask_WellsFargo
@Ask_WellsFargo the drivethrough was made 4 convenience +
to try to convince me to do something when Im ready to run my
next errand is lame.

 **Michelle** @ · Apr 23, 2015
Replying to @Ask_WellsFargo
@Ask_WellsFargo just let me enjoy my @WellsFargo without
being sold something.

 **Ask Wells Fargo** @Ask_WellsFargo · Apr 23, 2015
@ We understand your frustration. We will be
sure to share your feedback with the store manager. Thank
you. ^LW

 **Michelle** @ · Apr 24, 2015
@Ask_WellsFargo thank you!!!! :)

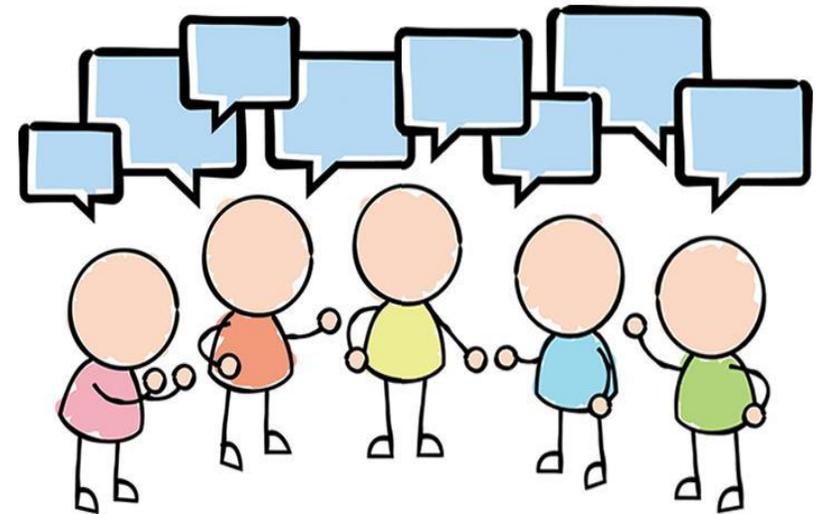


Study Focus

Social Media Conversation = written online interactions between a firm agent and social media user(s), in the context of a social media thread referencing a focal brand or firm

Overarching Research Question:

- *What factors can affect the conversation in terms of the tone of subsequent responses in that conversation?*
- *How should a firm adapt its response strategy in different conversations to alleviate negative UGC but intensify positive UGC?*



Theoretical Perspective & Key Variables

Dialogic Listening

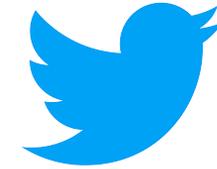
- Interactions that contribute to a supportive psychological climate can steer conversations in a positive direction (Floyd 1985; Johannesen 1971; Kent and Taylor 1998).
 - *Empathetic understanding: FGC (=Firm-generated content) Empathy*
 - *Unconditional positive regard: FGC Sentiment*
 - *Spirit of mutual understanding: FGC Topic Matching; Linguistic Style Matching (LSM)*
 - *Presentness: Firm Response Time*
 - *Genuineness: FGC Authenticity*

Empirics First

- Starting research from real-world marketing phenomena or problems and using data to generate relevant insights, without necessarily being bound by existing theoretical frameworks (Golder et al. 2023)
 - *Direct Messaging (DM)*
 - *Agent Signing*

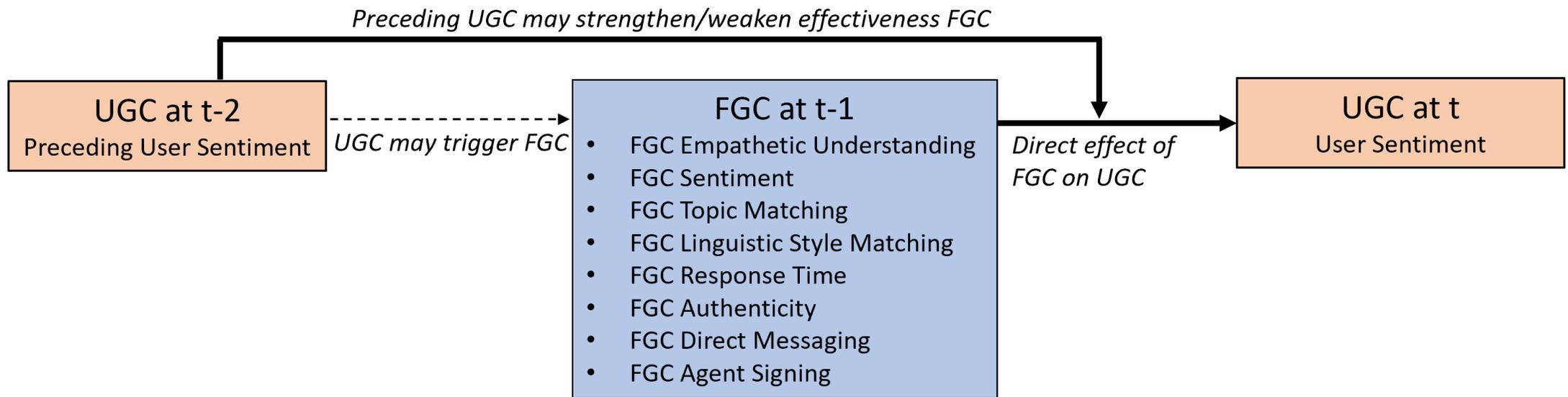
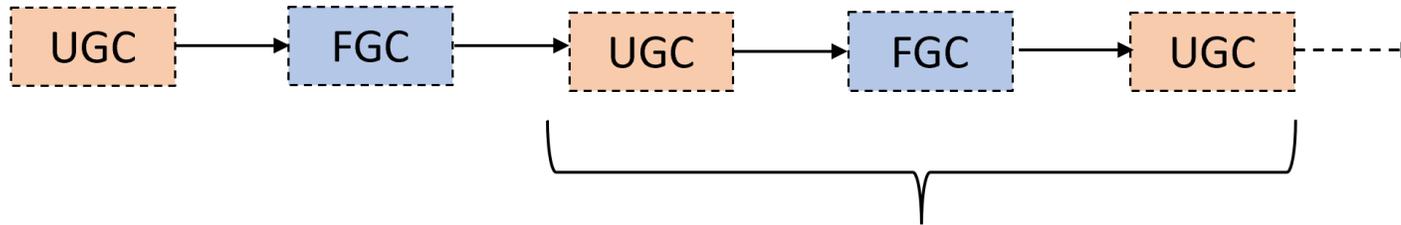
Data Description

- Tweets to and from the four largest U.S. banks:
Bank of America, Wells Fargo, Citibank, and JP Morgan Chase,



- ❖ 10-year period from 2011 to 2020
- ❖ Number of tweets after removing retweets: 969,477
- ❖ Number of conversations: 206,360

Schematic Model & Focal Variables



- UGC = User Generated Content
- FGC = Firm Generated Content

Examples of the FGC elements (Low, Medium, High)

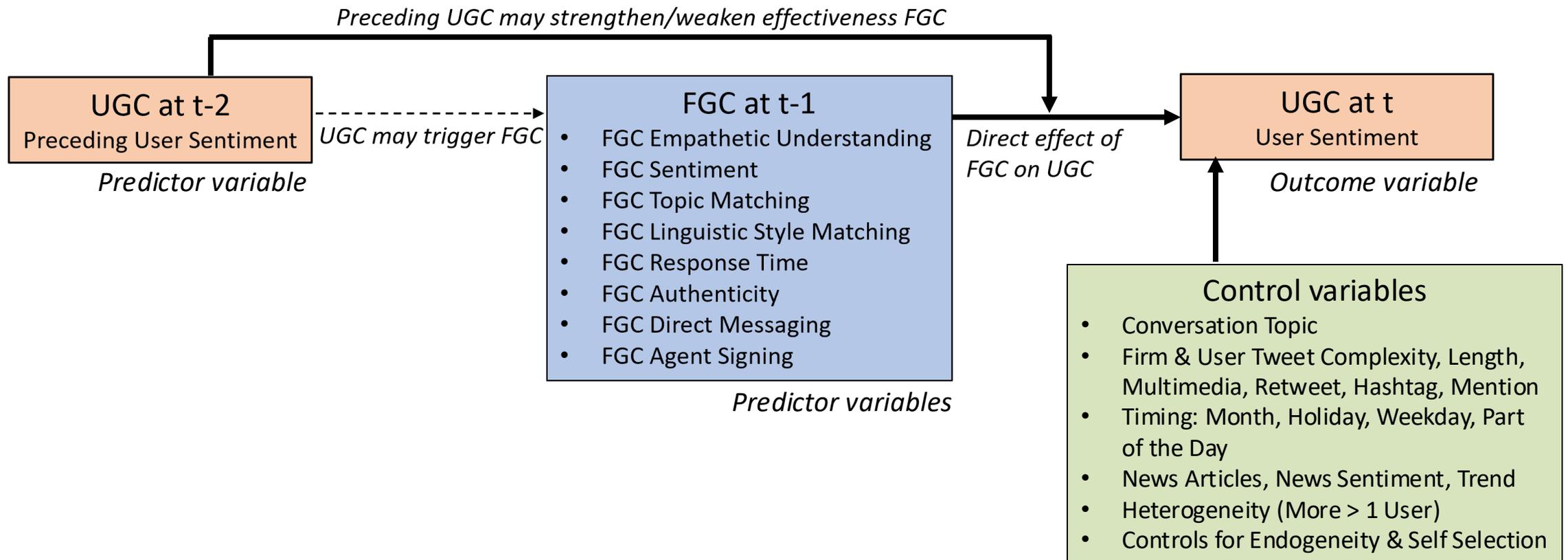
FGC variable	Low	Medium	High
Empathetic Understanding	Good morning. I've taken note of your concern. What is the country where your savings account was set up?	Good morning and thank you for contacting us. What is the country where your savings account was set up?	Good morning and thank you for contacting us. I understand your concern and want to help . Please let us know the country your savings account was set up in, so we can address this for you.
Sentiment	This tweet has grabbed our attention, Philip. We're always here to assist with your banking needs.	This tweet truly made us smile , Philip. We're always here if you need our help .	This tweet truly made us smile , Philip. We're always here if you need our help . Thanks for the love!
Topic Matching	Customer Tweet: "Makes me upset that you got rid of the coin counting machine. I literally want to give my bank money and can't. They have to be rolled." Company Tweet: Thank you for reaching out. We're here to assist you with your banking needs. Please let us know how we can help you further."	Customer Tweet: "Makes me upset that you got rid of the coin counting machine. I literally want to give my bank money and can't. They have to be rolled." Company Tweet: "Not rolling coins in advance can delay service . Please let us know how we can help you further."	Customer Tweet: "Makes me upset that you got rid of the coin counting machine. I literally want to give my bank money and can't. They have to be rolled." Company Tweet: "Not rolling coins in advance can delay service . We want to make it more convenient for everyone working with a bank teller ."

Examples of the FGC elements (Low, Medium, High)

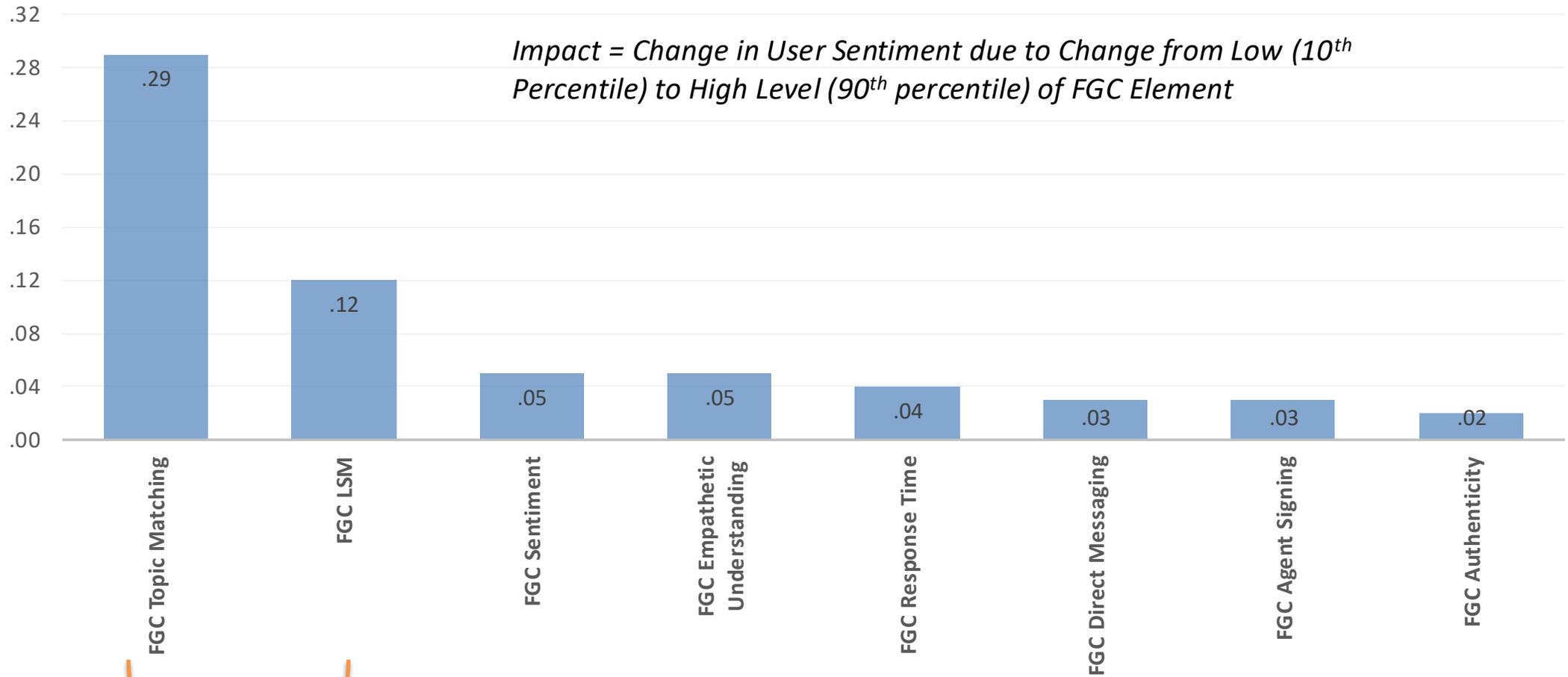
FGC variable	Low	Medium	High
Linguistic Style Matching <small>(firms using similar types of words as users)</small>	<p>Customer Tweet: “Not bad. I lose my card then find out the phone number on your app calls Bank of America. real helpful.”</p> <p>Company Tweet: “Hi Jacob. It's the Bank here. Thanks so much for this feedback. Any support is greatly appreciated.”</p>	<p>Customer Tweet: “Not bad. I lose my card then find out the phone number on your app calls Bank of America. real helpful.”</p> <p>Company Tweet: “Hi Jacob, I work for the Bank. Thanks a lot for your feedback. Your support is appreciated.”</p>	<p>Customer Tweet: “Not bad. I lose my card then find out the phone number on your app calls Bank of America. real helpful.”</p> <p>Company Tweet: “Hi Jacob, I work for the Bank. Not bad indeed. We really appreciate your support.”</p>
Response Time	Respond slowly, e.g., after 40 hours (=90 th percentile)	Take your time, e.g. respond between 20 minutes (=25 th percentile) and 10 hours (=75 th percentile)	Respond quickly, e.g., below 10 minutes (=10 th percentile)
Authenticity	Nothing is reported about any services being down at this time. Thanks a lot for the tweet.	I haven't heard that any services are down at this time. Thanks a lot for the tweet.	I haven't heard that any services are down at this time. Thank you for reaching out .
Direct Messaging	Please tell us what happened.	N/A	Can you DM us to talk about what happened?
Agent Signing	I haven't heard that anything is down at this time.	N/A	I haven't heard that anything is down at this time. ^Jack

Regression Model

- UGC = User Generated Content
- FGC = Firm Generated Content

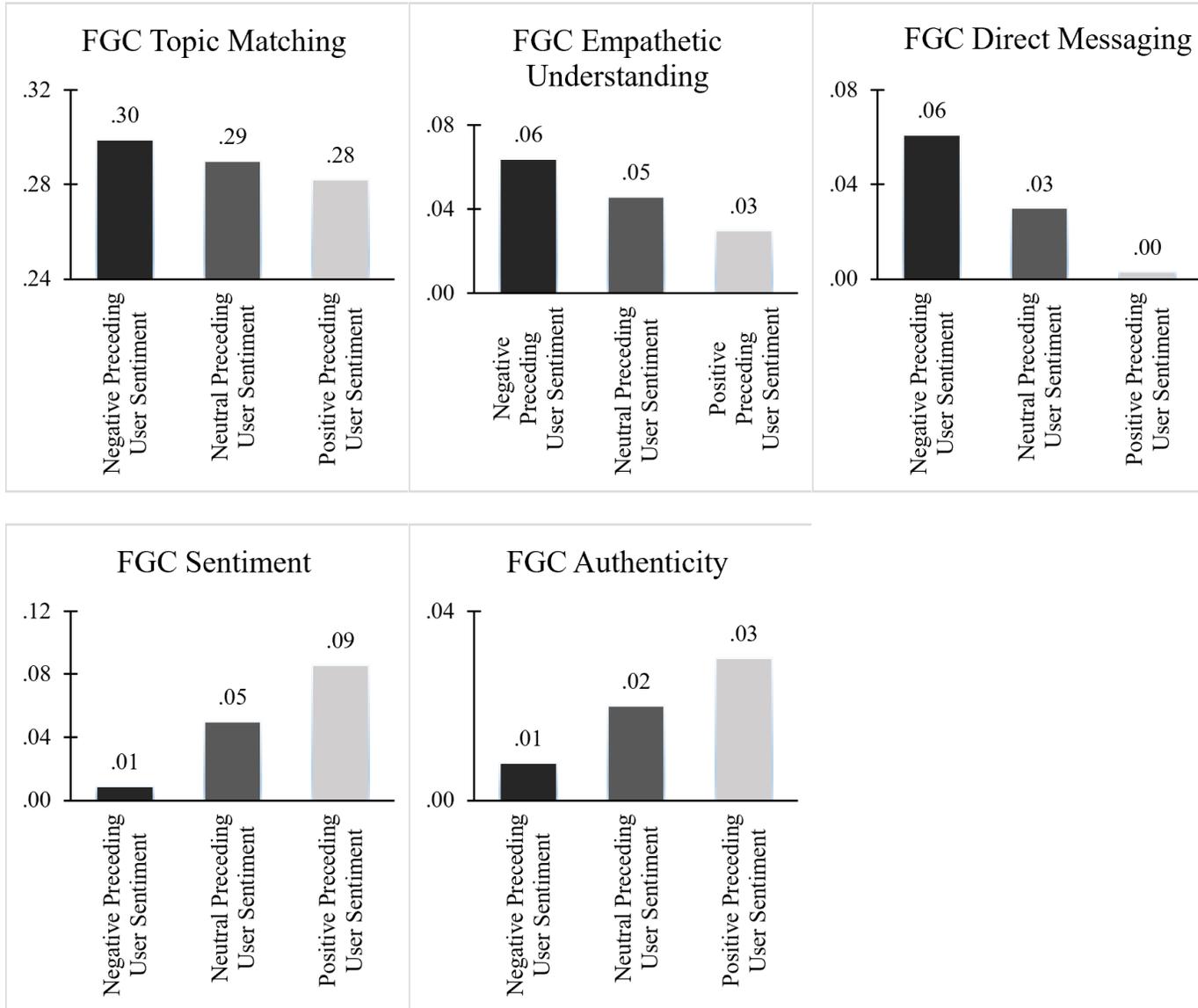


Comparing the Impact of FGC on User Sentiment (Direct Effect)



Spirit of mutual understanding

Comparing the Impact of FGC on User Sentiment (Interaction Effects)

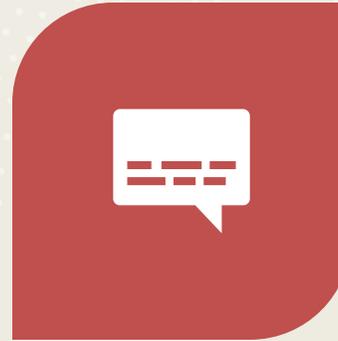


To counter negative preceding user sentiment, topic matching, empathic understanding and direct messaging become more effective

To amplify positive preceding user sentiment, positive firm sentiment and authenticity become more effective

FGC Element	Managerial Guidance on How to Increase FGC Element
Empathetic Understanding	When possible, use words that are empathetically loaded, such as admir*, affection*, appreciat*, assur*, better, care, careful*, caring, challenging, comfort*, commitment*, confiden*, considerate, contact*, contented*, courag*, determin*, devot*, difficult, discourag*, divin*, eager*, encourag*, engag*, entertain*, enthus*, excel*, excit*, experience, faith*, favor*, favour*, feedback, feel*, fix*, forgiv*, frustrat*, gentle*, gently, glad, gladly, gratef*, grati*, happen*, hear, hearing, heartwarm*, help*, honest, honest*, honor*, honour*, hope*, hoping, imagine, improve*, improving, keen*, kind*, know*, look, “make it better,” “makes me really sad,” “makes me sad,” “my mistake,” notify*, open*, openness, “our mistake,” patience, peace*, perfect*, personally, pleas*, precious*, promis*, relief, reliev*, resolv*, respect, safe*, same, satisf*, save, sense, share*, sharing, similar, sincer*, sound*, support*, sympath*, “tell me,” thank*, thoughtful*, touch, true*, truly, trust*, understand*, upset, useful*, valuabl*, value*, valuing, welcom*, wish, worthwhile, “you are right,” “you are totally right,” “you’re right,” “your position”
Sentiment	Use words that carry a positive sentiment, especially when the tone of the customer is positive, such as: assist*, awesome, benefit, bonus, celebrate, chance, cheer*, compliment, congrat*, enjoy*, ensure, free, full, fun*, gift, fantastic, forward, friend, gift, good, gracious, great*, happy, humor, inspir*, interest*, journey, leadership, like, love, luck, new, opportunity, party, praise, proud, quick, reach, reward*, shout-out, support, sweet, wonderful, wow
Topic Matching	In responding, make a conscious effort to use words and expressions that are frequently used in the topic the customer is discussing, or use synonyms. Make sure that the response truly addresses the issue the user raised. Do not offer generic boilerplate responses
Linguistic Style Matching	Match the linguistic style of the user by using similar types of words such as articles (e.g., a, an, the), auxiliary verbs (e.g., am, will), conjunctions (e.g., and, but), adverbs (e.g., really, very), impersonal pronouns (e.g., it, that), negations (e.g., no, not, never), personal pronouns (e.g., I, we), prepositions (e.g., at, in, into)
Response Time	Respond as fast as possible regardless of how positive or negative the sentiment of your customer in the conversation is
Direct Messaging	Taking conversations offline can lift the sentiment. If not feasible, take negative conversations offline
Authenticity	Write more spontaneously and self-regulate or filter less what you are saying. Use more self-references (e.g., I, me, my), insight words (e.g., aware), differentiation words (e.g., but), and relativity terms (e.g., above). Use fewer words that indicate discrepancies from reality (e.g., must) and third-person singular pronouns (she-he words)
Agent Signing	Agents’ signing off their responses can help lift user sentiment.

Key Takeaways



STAY ON TOPIC! TO IMPROVE SOCIAL MEDIA SENTIMENT, FIRMS SHOULD MIRROR USER TOPICS AND MATCH THEIR LINGUISTIC STYLE



AMPLIFY POSITIVITY! RESPOND TO POSITIVE POSTS WITH AUTHENTIC, PERSONAL, AND POSITIVE CONTENT TO DEEPEN USER GOODWILL



TURN IT AROUND! FOR NEGATIVE POSTS, EMPATHETIC, ON-TOPIC RESPONSES AND USING DIRECT MESSAGING WORK WONDERS



BE ALERT! MAKE SURE TO RESPOND QUICKLY, AS THIS SHOWS YOU ARE ACTIVELY PAYING ATTENTION TO WHAT CUSTOMERS ARE SAYING





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Mohammad "Mike" Saljoughian, Kelly Hewett, and William Rand View all authors and affiliations

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Thank You!

- h.vanheerde@unsw.edu.au
- m.saljoughian@missouri.edu
- kellyshewett@gmail.com
- wmrand@ncsu.edu

X (Twitter) handles:

Md.Saljoughian
Kelhewett
wrand