



The Impact of User-Generated Content on Audience Engagement: Evidence from TikTok

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Abstract. This study investigates the influence of user-generated content (UGC) on consumer engagement within TikTok, one of the fastest-growing social media platforms. While brand-generated campaigns remain a dominant marketing strategy, UGC has emerged as a credible and authentic alternative that shapes online purchasing decisions. The research examines key factors affecting audience interaction, including content authenticity, credibility, perceived value, satisfaction, and content type, with a comparative perspective on UGC and brand-generated content. An empirical survey of 1,090 TikTok users, primarily women aged 18–24, was conducted, and the data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). Eight hypotheses were tested, addressing the relationships between authenticity, credibility, value, satisfaction, and engagement. Results indicate that seven out of eight hypotheses were supported, highlighting authenticity and perceived value as central drivers of audience interaction. While source credibility strongly influenced content credibility, it did not directly affect audience engagement, suggesting that on TikTok, the content itself outweighs the creator's status. The findings provide theoretical insights into consumer behavior on short-form video platforms and practical implications for marketers. Brands that leverage UGC strategies can foster authenticity, strengthen trust, and increase user engagement, ultimately improving loyalty and purchase intentions.

Keywords: User-generated content (UGC) · TikTok · Audience engagement · Social media marketing · Content authenticity · PLS-SEM

1 Introduction

Innovations on the Internet have completely transformed everyday life, introducing changes that have become an integral part of it. Activities that once required physical presence—such as shopping—now take place in virtual space, simplifying and accelerating many daily tasks. Year after year, online shopping is becoming increasingly popular among consumers, primarily due to advances in modern technology. Today, it can be carried out at any time and from any location, as long as users have Internet access. The development of intuitive gadgets and smartphones has made online transactions fast and convenient [1]. Shopping through social media is also gaining popularity among consumers worldwide.

The presence of brands on social media has become a necessity. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok have become integral to e-commerce, streamlining the purchasing process and influencing consumer decisions. One of the key aspects is the integration of shopping, which allows users to buy products directly from posts and advertisements without leaving the application. Shortening this path makes transactions much faster and more intuitive. Reviews and customer opinions also play a significant role. Consumers increasingly rely on the experiences of others, so brands that actively promote authentic recommendations gain greater trust and loyalty. Interactive advertisements further enhance sales effectiveness. Quizzes and surveys engage users, turning ads from passive messages into part of their overall experience. Personalization is equally important, as advanced algorithms and data analysis enable brands to tailor their offers to individual user preferences. This improves the effectiveness of marketing campaigns and fosters a more personalized and engaging relationship with customers [2]. All these elements mean that social media not only promotes products but also actively shapes the way consumers shop online. Companies that skillfully leverage the potential of social media not only gain a competitive advantage but also strengthen relationships with their customers, ultimately leading to long-term sales growth and increased consumer loyalty, as customers are more likely to return to trusted brands.

1.1 User-Generated Content

User-Generated Content (UGC) refers to content created by users. It includes all types of materials published online by internet users and consumers, such as photos, videos, reviews, and comments. These materials are not produced directly by the brand. UGC is characterized by three key features: Personal contribution (1)—user-generated content must contain a creative element or reflect the author's individual perspective.; Online availability (2)—to be considered UGC, the content must be published on the Internet, for example on social media platforms, and Non-commercial nature (3)—UGC is created outside of professional duties and is not produced as part of one's everyday work tasks.

Thanks to UGC, potential customers can explore content shared by other users, which allows them to obtain more authentic and comprehensive information about a product. At the same time, they have the opportunity to share their own experiences, which others can relate to [3].

In today's world, UGC has become one of the most important marketing tools. People tend to trust recommendations from other users far more than official advertising messages. Online consumers believe that users will talk not only about the positive aspects of a product but also about its shortcomings [1]. It is therefore not surprising that companies eagerly use content generated by their customers, as it carries greater persuasive power and enhances brand authenticity.

UGC brings numerous benefits. Above all, it is more credible than traditional advertising—when someone publishes a product test video or writes an honest review, other recipients are more confident that the message is not controlled by the company. It also engages the community—when users see their content appreciated by a brand, they are more willing to share it. Moreover, UGC expands reach organically, without the need to invest in paid campaigns.

Another important advantage of UGC is its impact on the purchasing decision-making process. Consumers often seek opinions from people who have already used a product before deciding to buy it. By seeing authentic reviews, photos, or videos created by other users, they can more easily assess whether the product will meet their expectations. This is particularly important in industries where the real appearance and functionality often differ from what is shown in advertising materials.

Over the past two decades, user-generated content has gained enormous popularity, becoming one of the most groundbreaking phenomena in the world of media and information systems [4]. Social media platforms have seamlessly combined the creation and sharing of content, allowing internet users to spontaneously share opinions, feelings, experiences, and knowledge. UGC serves as a tool for self-expression, with the entire process driven by users' internal motivations—ranging from enjoyment of interaction, through the desire to help others, to the need for self-fulfillment. Users are eager to create content when they see that their activity is valued. For this reason, social media platforms and brands increasingly employ strategies that encourage communities to share their own experiences, opinions, and creative ideas. When users see that others' content is rewarded with likes, shares, or comments, they are more motivated to take their own initiatives and publish content related to a brand or its products.

User influence on brands also plays a significant role. Consumers who see that their opinions are taken into account feel more connected to a company. This is why brands increasingly involve communities in the process of creating new products or services. Reward systems and contests that motivate users to create content are equally important. Recognition of activity can take both material forms (such as discounts or free products) and non-material ones (such as being featured on social media or included in rankings of top creators).

1.2 Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing in social media is now more popular than ever. According to Forbes' forecasts, companies were expected to allocate as much as 15 billion dollars to this segment in 2022 [5]. Even during the pandemic, the influencer industry maintained its effectiveness as a customer acquisition channel, and collaborations between brands and online creators became even stronger.

Social media influencers play a key role in spreading information and building engagement, thanks to the trust they receive from their audiences. It is precisely their authenticity and close relationships with followers that drive more and more companies to collaborate with influencers to promote their products [6]. Influencer marketing can therefore be defined as a strategy in which creators are compensated for publishing brand-related content. These collaborations are based not only on advertising but also on building narratives around products, which makes this form of marketing a particularly powerful sales tool.

Influencers are individuals who have built loyal communities around themselves on social media platforms. They develop their personal brand by focusing on specific topics such as cooking, beauty, gaming, lifestyle, or other niches. Their followers track their daily lives, subscribe to their content, and engage with their posts, which makes influencers not only content creators but also opinion leaders. Companies increasingly

invest in them because they are perceived as more authentic and credible than traditional celebrities [7]. As ordinary people, they appear closer to their audiences, making their recommendations more persuasive. Influencers do not simply sell products—they sell lifestyles, values, and ideas that their followers adopt as part of their own identity. Following them provides a sense of belonging to a larger community, creating space for the exchange of thoughts, inspiration, and aspirations. Millennials and Generation Z have grown up in a world where influencers play a key role—they are seen as authentic, trustworthy, and, above all, entertaining. Although technology has brought people closer together than ever before, influencers are a prime example of how the internet powerfully shapes daily choices and perceptions of reality.

Although influencer marketing has become a widely used strategy, it is not without risks. In the past, there have been cases where influencers were involved in scandals or where brands suffered consequences from controversial collaborations. In response to these challenges, companies have begun turning to virtual influencers as a complement or alternative to traditional creators in marketing campaigns.

Virtual influencers are digital characters that exist exclusively in the virtual world [8, 9]. They have carefully crafted personalities and share their stories from a first-person perspective, engaging users on social media platforms. Thanks to computer-generated imagery (CGI) and artificial intelligence (AI), virtual influencers—also known as CGI or AI influencers—have gained large audiences and achieve engagement rates up to 3.5 times higher than their real-life counterparts [10]. One of the best-known examples is Lil Miquela, whose Instagram account is followed by around 3 million users. She has collaborated with global brands such as Prada and Samsung Galaxy Z Flip [10], demonstrating that virtual influencers have the potential to become the future of social media marketing.

The difference between influencers and UGC creators lies in how they deliver value to a brand. Influencers leverage their communities and reach to promote products, build brand awareness, and engage audiences, whereas UGC creators focus on producing authentic content that companies can use on their own platforms—in social media, advertising campaigns, or websites. Unlike influencers, UGC creators do not need large followings, since their value comes not from community influence but from their ability to produce credible and aesthetically appealing promotional content.

Modern consumers are increasingly aware of marketing mechanisms and know that influencer recommendations often stem from paid partnerships. For this reason, influencers are sometimes perceived as “advertising billboards,” which can weaken their credibility. By contrast, user-generated content is considered more authentic because it is based on personal experiences and spontaneous reactions to a product or service. From a marketing strategy perspective, influencers and UGC creators play complementary roles. Influencers are effective in building brand awareness and reaching specific target groups, while UGC strengthens engagement and enhances credibility.

1.3 TikTok

TikTok remains one of the most frequently visited websites in the world. As of December 2024, the platform recorded around 2.6 billion monthly visits [11], with more than 65% coming from mobile devices. The number of unique users hovers around 1 billion per

month, highlighting the platform's global reach. On average, a user spends approximately 9 min and 14 s on the app. Such a high level of engagement reflects the effectiveness of TikTok's recommendation algorithm, which continuously delivers content precisely tailored to users' preferences.

What contributed to TikTok's tremendous success? Above all, the effectiveness of visual communication [12]. Today's younger generations prefer visual over textual content, making this form of communication the most attractive and desirable for them. Many people struggle to focus on longer texts and often only skim through them. Delivering content in a visual format captures attention more effectively, facilitates information processing, and improves recall [13].

TikTok has gained immense popularity among young users because it perfectly meets their needs in the digital world. A key factor in its success is the dynamic format of short videos, which are easy to consume. TikTok provides fast, engaging, and personalized content that aligns seamlessly with Generation Z's lifestyle. One of the platform's greatest strengths is its advanced recommendation algorithm, which rapidly analyzes user interests and adjusts content accordingly. As a result, each user receives videos that match their tastes, encouraging them to spend even more time on the app.

Personalization and content diversity are among the main reasons why TikTok so strongly engages users and effectively captures their attention. Young people especially value authenticity, and TikTok offers them a space for free self-expression. Unlike other social media platforms, where content is often carefully curated and filtered, TikTok promotes spontaneity and originality. As a result, it has become the voice of the younger generation—a place that connects people, inspires action, and enables genuine self-expression. Its success lies in a deep understanding of today's users' needs. For brands, the platform represents a major opportunity to reach younger audiences.

This raises the research question of how user-generated content influences the purchase intentions of consumers active on TikTok.

2 Method

As part of this study, research was conducted to identify the impact of UGC on TikTok audience engagement compared to traditional marketing campaigns. The aim was to determine which factors influence users' decisions and lead to their engagement with content published on the platform.

The study employed the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) method, which enables the analysis of relationships between variables based on predefined assumptions. This technique made it possible to verify whether the empirical data supported the proposed theoretical model derived from the research hypotheses. PLS-SEM allows for the simultaneous examination of relationships between constructs and their corresponding indicators. The method is particularly effective for analyzing complex models and provides clear insights into the strength and direction of influence of individual factors.

2.1 Hypotheses Development

The **authenticity** of UGC refers to the perception of such material as genuine, spontaneous, and unforced. On TikTok, users often share their experiences, product reviews, or advice in the form of short videos, which gives this content an authentic character. The lack of direct brand involvement in the creation of such materials makes them appear more trustworthy to audiences. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: The authenticity of UGC influences content credibility.

Content credibility refers to the extent to which audiences perceive the information contained in content as reliable, truthful, and trustworthy. Content perceived as credible is more valuable to users, as it provides them with useful and accurate information. Consequently, content credibility may increase the perceived value of content. Thus, the following hypothesis is assumed:

H2: Content credibility influences the perceived value of content.

Perceived content value refers to the subjective assessment of the benefits a viewer gains from consuming a given piece of content. Content considered valuable can lead to higher audience engagement, as it provides useful information or positive emotions. Therefore, perceived content value may positively affect audience engagement. Based on this, the next hypothesis is formulated as follows:

H3: The perceived value of content influences audience engagement.

Perceived value of content also relates to the subjective assessment of the benefits derived from consuming the content. Content considered valuable can encourage greater audience interaction, since it delivers useful information or enjoyable experiences. As a result, perceived value may positively influence the intention to interact. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: The perceived value of content influences the intention to interact.

Source credibility refers to the level of trust audiences place in the person publishing the content. In the context of social media platforms such as TikTok, creators who are perceived as authentic build stronger relationships with their audiences. This trust translates into the perception of their content as more credible. Thus, source credibility may positively influence content credibility. Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H5: Source credibility influences content credibility.

Source credibility also relates to the trust audiences place in the content creator. Creators considered credible may encourage users to engage more with their content. Thus, source credibility may influence audience engagement. Accordingly, the next hypothesis is presented as follows:

H6: Source credibility influences audience engagement.

Audience **satisfaction** refers to the positive reaction resulting from an experience with the content or an interaction with a brand. Satisfied audiences are more likely to continue

engaging and recommending content, which may further increase engagement. Audience satisfaction may therefore influence their level of engagement. This leads to the following hypothesis:

H7: Satisfaction influences audience engagement.

The **content type** published on social media platforms such as TikTok plays an important role in shaping audience engagement. UGC is often perceived as more authentic and credible because it comes from real people sharing their experiences. Brand-generated content, on the other hand, may be perceived as less authentic, potentially resulting in lower engagement levels. Therefore, the type of content published on the platform can significantly affect the degree of audience engagement. Based on this, the final hypothesis is proposed:

H8: The type of content influences audience engagement.

2.2 Model

To verify the proposed hypotheses, a theoretical model was developed as part of the study. Its graphical layout is presented in Fig. 1.

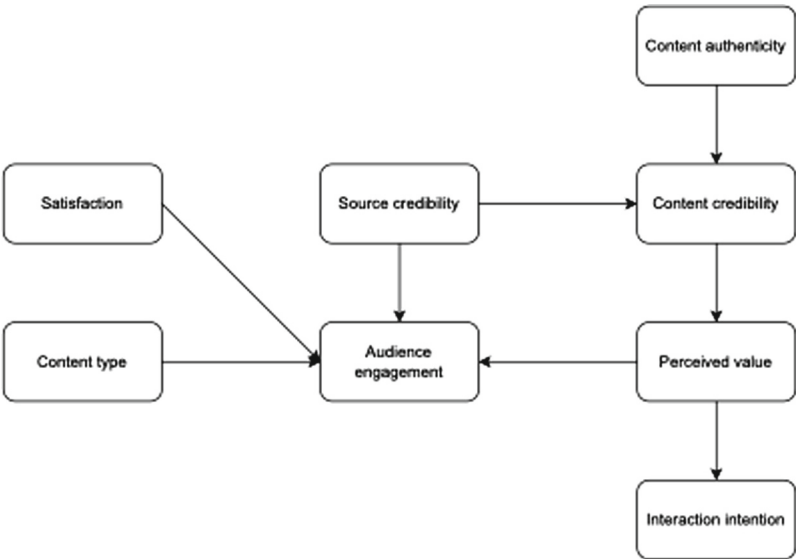


Fig. 1. Theoretical model of relationships influencing TikTok audience engagement

The theoretical model comprises eight constructs, each measured with appropriately selected indicators. The model structure incorporates eight research hypotheses illustrating the relationships between the individual variables. The aim of the study is to determine how UGC on TikTok influences audience engagement in comparison with brand-generated content. The constructs included in the model—such as UGC

Authenticity, Content Credibility, Perceived Content Value, Source Credibility, Satisfaction, Interaction Intention, Audience Engagement, and Content Type—are reflective in nature and serve as the basis for analysis. The study's results are intended to answer the question of whether the mode of creation and the source of content on TikTok affect the level of user engagement on the platform. Table 1 presents the variables representing the constructs in the model, that is, the observable indicators of latent variables used in the study.

The acronyms were assigned to the manifest variables, which correspond to the statements provided by the respondents. Based on the responses, an index was then calculated for each of these variables, which was subsequently used to analyze their impact on the latent variable.

3 Results

The required calculations for the study were performed using SmartPLS4 software [14]. The collected data were analyzed with the PLS method, applying the default initial settings. The survey questionnaire was prepared via the Google Forms platform and distributed in thematic forums and Facebook groups bringing together people interested in TikTok. In addition, the survey was shared directly on TikTok among its active users. These efforts resulted in a total of 1,090 respondents participating in the study.

A total of 1,090 people participated in the study, the vast majority of whom were women—accounting for 89.6% of all respondents. This distribution is not accidental but reflects the specific nature of the TikTok platform, where women, particularly in younger age groups, are more active and engaged in both creating and consuming content. They are more interested in the opinions of other users, consumer trends, and reviews, which aligns closely with the focus of the study. Women are also generally more willing to participate in online surveys, especially those related to everyday experiences with social media. Men accounted for 10.4% of the sample. In terms of age, the largest group of respondents was between 18 and 24 years old, totaling 685 individuals (62.8% of all participants). Other age groups included: 13–17 years (18.3%), 25–34 years (15.9%), 35–44 years (2.3%), and respondents over 45 years of age (0.6%).

The most common level of education reported was secondary education (56.4%). Primary education was declared by 11.5% of respondents, while 22% held a bachelor's or engineering degree. A master's degree was reported by 9% of respondents, whereas only 0.1% held a doctoral degree or higher. The "other" category was selected by 1%. Students represented the largest group among respondents (47.8%). Some of them combined studying with employment: 18.2% part-time and 10.1% full-time. Employment in a full-time capacity was reported by 18.3%, while 3.7% worked part-time. A total of 1.9% were unemployed. Regarding place of residence, the largest proportion came from residents of large cities with more than 200,000 inhabitants (29.5%). Almost as many (27.8%) were residents of rural areas. Respondents from towns with up to 50,000 inhabitants made up 19.5%, those from towns with up to 100,000 accounted for 11.8%, and those from towns with up to 200,000 represented 11.4%.

Table 1. Latent and manifest variables included in the model.

Latent variable	Manifest variable	Loading
Content authenticity	I feel that people posting videos on TikTok show life as it really is	0.690
	Videos created by TikTok users seem more authentic to me than promotional materials	0.863
	When I watch a video made by an ordinary TikTok user, I feel that their message is genuine	0.822
	I often feel that TikTok users speak to me “like a friend” rather than like a salesperson	0.798
Content credibility	Reviews and opinions presented in TikTok videos appear credible to me	0.850
	I sometimes decide to purchase a product based on a video created by another TikTok user	0.857
	I often trust content created by TikTok users more than advertisements	0.899
Perceived value	TikTok videos help me discover interesting products or solutions	0.890
	The opinions of other TikTok users help me avoid poor purchase decisions	0.860
	A video recorded by someone who has personally tested a product is more valuable to me than a standard advertisement	0.896
	Content created by TikTok users is often more inspiring to me than professional campaigns	0.855
	I feel that I can always take something useful from such videos, whether or not I plan to make a purchase	0.858
Source credibility	I believe that people sharing their experiences on TikTok are trustworthy	0.841
	I trust the opinions of TikTok users more than brand-produced materials	0.896
	If someone on TikTok shows a product they purchased and used, I am more likely to trust them	0.902
Satisfaction	I am often satisfied with products I discovered through TikTok videos	0.916
	I feel that TikTok helps me make better purchasing decisions through the opinions of ordinary users	0.907
	I would return to the TikTok account of a user whose recommendations did not disappoint me	0.838

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Latent variable	Manifest variable	Loading
Interaction intention	When a TikTok review video interests me, I am likely to like or comment on it	0.886
	I sometimes save or share a TikTok video that I find helpful	0.890
	If someone on TikTok provides accurate recommendations, I am likely to follow them regularly	0.851
Audience engagement	I regularly watch videos in which TikTok users share their product experiences	0.832
	Before buying a product, I sometimes check whether someone has talked about it on TikTok	0.880
	I often follow TikTok users who share opinions about products or services	0.891
	When I am interested in a specific product, I may spend a lot of time watching TikTok reviews of it	0.876
Content type	I trust content created by ordinary TikTok users more than videos prepared by brands	0.910
	I feel that advertisements on TikTok are less convincing than reviews shared by users	0.854
	When I see a video labeled as an advertisement, I approach it more cautiously than spontaneous reviews	0.879

For a more detailed analysis, respondents were asked additional questions. Among all participants, the largest group—45.3%—declared that they spend more than two hours on TikTok daily. The next largest group (31.8%) reported using the app for one to two hours per day. Slightly fewer, 15%, spend 30 to 60 min daily, while 5% use the platform for 15 to 30 min. The smallest share, 2.8%, reported using TikTok for less than 15 min each day. When asked about creative activity on TikTok, most respondents (58.1%) stated that they use the platform only as viewers and do not publish their own content. A total of 26% reported posting videos occasionally, while 16% said they create and share content regularly. The majority of respondents (63.2%) declared that they follow TikTok users who post opinions about products or services. Meanwhile, 26.7% admitted that they either do not pay attention to this or are unaware of it, and 10.1% said they do not follow such creators at all. More than half of respondents (51.5%) admitted that they had made a purchase on several occasions as a result of watching a TikTok video. Additionally, 26.2% reported making such purchases multiple times, and 13.2% had done so at least once. Only 9.1% of respondents stated that they had never purchased anything based on content viewed on the platform.

The study began with an analysis of the validity of the indicators assigned to the reflective variables. As shown in Table 1, almost all outer loadings exceed the value of 0.70, indicating that the assigned indicators adequately represent the latent variables. The only exception is first “content authenticity” indicator, with a value of 0.690. Although

slightly below the recommended threshold, the difference is minor, and therefore it was decided not to remove it from the model. All remaining indicators meet the quality criteria and were included in the subsequent stages of analysis. Table 2 presents the measures of validity and convergent reliability coefficients for the reflective variables, which were necessary for their proper assessment.

Table 2. Reliability and validity measures for the latent variables

Latent variable	Cronbach's alpha	Reliability coefficient ρ_A	Composite reliability ρ_c	AVE
Content authenticity	0.806	0.826	0.873	0.633
Interaction intention	0.849	0.856	0.908	0.767
Perceived value	0.921	0.922	0.941	0.761
Satisfaction	0.865	0.871	0.917	0.788
Content type	0.857	0.880	0.912	0.777
Content credibility	0.838	0.843	0.903	0.755
Source credibility	0.855	0.862	0.912	0.775
Audience engagement	0.893	0.895	0.926	0.758

All latent variables in the model exhibit a satisfactory level of validity and reliability. The AVE values exceed the recommended threshold of 0.50, indicating that each variable adequately explains the variance of its assigned indicators. Construct reliability is also confirmed by the ρ_c and ρ_A coefficients, both of which are higher than the required minimum of 0.70 in all cases. Cronbach's alpha for each variable exceeds 0.80, which further demonstrates high internal consistency. These results confirm that all variables were measured reliably and can be used in the subsequent analysis of the model.

After verifying the validity of all variables included in the study, it was possible to proceed to the stage of estimating the structural model. Next, a path analysis was conducted, including the assessment of the coefficients assigned to these paths and the verification of the corresponding hypotheses presented in Table 3.

The Table 3 presents the values of path coefficients, sample means, standard deviations, as well as t-statistics and their corresponding significance levels (p). Based on the model estimation results, seven out of the eight proposed hypotheses were confirmed. The only relationship that did not reach statistical significance was the link between source credibility and audience engagement, whereas all other relationships proved to be statistically significant.

To assess how well the model explains the variance of the dependent variables, R^2 coefficients were calculated. The values of the determination coefficient (R^2) for all

Table 3. Values of path coefficients and hypothesis confirmation

Hypothesis	Path coefficient	Standard deviation	T-statistic	p < 0.05	Supported?
H1: Content authenticity influences content credibility	0.366	0.033	11.102	0.000	Yes
H2: Perceived content value influences interaction intention	0.736	0.017	43.376	0.000	Yes
H3: Perceived content value influences audience engagement	0.281	0.053	5.333	0.000	Yes
H4: Satisfaction influences audience engagement	0.313	0.042	7.364	0.000	Yes
H5: Content type influences audience engagement	0.189	0.040	4.716	0.000	Yes
H6: Content credibility influences perceived content value	0.776	0.013	57.663	0.000	Yes
H7: Source credibility influences content credibility	0.523	0.033	15.886	0.000	Yes
H8: Source credibility influences audience engagement	0.050	0.043	1.181	0.238	No

four constructs indicate a good model fit to the data. The highest R2 was obtained for the variable “Content credibility” (0.698), meaning that the model explains 69.8% of

its variance. For “Perceived value” and “Audience engagement”, the R^2 values were 0.602 and 0.586, respectively. The lowest result was recorded for “Interaction intention” (0.541), although it still falls within the range considered acceptable.

4 Discussion

The aim of this study was to conduct a detailed analysis of the impact of UGC on TikTok audience engagement compared with traditional marketing campaigns. The paper presented the current state of knowledge on UGC and the mechanisms shaping user interactions in social media. Based on a literature review and empirical research, eight hypotheses were formulated and tested regarding the factors influencing audience engagement. The primary goal was to analyze the influence of UGC on TikTok audience engagement in relation to brand campaigns. Seven of the eight hypotheses were confirmed, and the following discussion addresses each of them in light of relevant scientific findings.

The first hypothesis assumed that the authenticity of user-generated content influences its perceived credibility. The analysis confirmed this relationship: audiences perceive content as more credible when it appears authentic and natural. Similar findings were reported by Sukontipp et al. [15], who emphasized that authenticity plays a key role in building trust in social media content.

The second hypothesis proposed that content credibility affects the way audiences evaluate its value. The results showed that the more credible the content was perceived to be, the more value it was attributed. Cheung and Thadani [16] observed a similar pattern, highlighting that credible information in social media significantly enhances its usefulness and importance for users.

The third hypothesis concerned the relationship between perceived content value and audience engagement. The study confirmed that content perceived as valuable more strongly captures user attention and encourages interaction. Pramesti and Alversia [17] reached similar conclusions in their analysis of TikTok user behavior, noting that high informational or emotional value fosters greater engagement.

The fourth hypothesis addressed the impact of perceived content value on interaction intention. The findings revealed that the more users considered content useful and valuable, the greater their willingness to participate actively, for example by commenting, sharing, or reacting. Herrero Crespo et al. [18] reported similar evidence in the hospital-ity industry, demonstrating that UGC can significantly influence others’ decisions and that highly valuable content promotes its further dissemination and recommendation.

The fifth hypothesis related to the relationship between source credibility and perceived content credibility. The results showed that the more trust audiences place in the creator, the higher they evaluate the authenticity and reliability of the content. Silva et al. [19] described similar relationships, stressing that the perceived credibility of the sender has a significant impact on how digital content is received.

The sixth hypothesis tested the direct effect of source credibility on audience engagement. Unlike the other assumptions, this one was not confirmed. The results suggest that on TikTok, it is the content itself—its form, message, and appeal—that plays the key role in shaping user activity, whereas the recognizability or trustworthiness of the creator is less decisive. Marwick [20] similarly concluded that in the space of short, dynamic

video clips, authenticity and the strength of the message outweigh the identity of the publisher.

The seventh hypothesis examined the impact of satisfaction on audience engagement. The findings confirmed this relationship: users who feel satisfied with the content they consume are more likely to remain active. Kim and Ko [21] reported comparable results, pointing to a significant link between user satisfaction in social media and engagement.

The eighth and final hypothesis assumed that the type of content—comparing UGC with brand-generated content—affects audience engagement. The study confirmed this: UGC proved more effective in attracting the attention and activity of TikTok users. Prasanti and Rufaidah [22] reached similar conclusions, showing that user-generated content significantly and positively influences engagement behaviors, emphasizing the role of authenticity and spontaneity in fostering interaction and brand loyalty.

Overall, the results are largely consistent with previous findings, confirming the importance of authenticity, credibility, and perceived value of content in shaping audience engagement. At the same time, the lack of confirmation for the direct influence of source credibility on interaction suggests that TikTok operates with a different dynamic, where the content itself, rather than the creator, plays the central role in motivating user activity.

By reviewing the literature and conducting empirical research, the study identified key factors influencing TikTok audience engagement in the context of UGC and brand campaigns. A survey was conducted among 1,090 respondents—mainly women aged 18–24. This large and relatively homogeneous group allowed for a precise capture of TikTok user behaviors within one of the most active demographic segments. Future research should include multi-group comparisons, taking into account, for example, differences in age, gender, or level of engagement with the platform.

The conclusions of this study have important implications for marketing practice, especially in the context of activities conducted on TikTok. The analysis of UGC's impact on audience engagement provides companies with concrete guidelines on how to effectively engage communities and strengthen relationships with potential customers. Businesses that incorporate UGC into their strategies can expect higher user activity and more positive community responses. Promoting authentic, grassroots content can contribute to greater reach, improved brand image, and long-term loyalty. Presence on TikTok based on such content creates opportunities for more natural and effective communication with users. The findings also provide a solid foundation for further research on the use of TikTok in digital marketing. The developed model may be useful in examining additional factors affecting audience engagement, as well as in analyzing variations in user responses according to demographic characteristics. It can also be applied to other social media platforms, enabling comparisons of the effectiveness of different forms of online communication. Marketing efforts should therefore pay particular attention to authenticity, content value for users, and satisfaction—factors that prove crucial for building engagement and lasting relationships with customers in the digital environment.

5 Conclusions

Both the review of the scientific literature and the empirical study provided an in-depth understanding of the specific nature of social media, with particular emphasis on the role of user-generated content (UGC) on the TikTok platform. The findings confirm that TikTok is not only rapidly developing as a social medium but also serves as an effective marketing communication tool, enabling the building of audience engagement and strengthening brand positioning.

The literature review demonstrated that authenticity, credibility, and the value of user-generated content are the key factors influencing the activity of the TikTok community. Unlike traditional brand materials, UGC is more effective in capturing user attention and fostering stronger relationships with audiences. The survey conducted on a sample of 1,090 respondents made it possible to identify the mechanisms responsible for user engagement and confirmed that UGC has the greatest impact on interaction.

The developed research model enabled the verification of eight research hypotheses. The application of Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) allowed for the examination of complex relationships between content characteristics and audience behavior. Most of the research assumptions were confirmed, which attests to the validity of the adopted research concept and the value of the collected data.

The conclusions of the study can be practically applied in the design of marketing strategies on TikTok, as well as on other social media platforms where visual and video content play a key role. The results indicate that incorporating UGC into brand communication can significantly increase campaign effectiveness, improve engagement indicators, and support the creation of an authentic image. Companies may use these insights to optimize cooperation with influencers, develop campaigns based on grassroots content, and better adapt the tone and style of communication to the expectations of the TikTok community.

Furthermore, the study provides a foundation for comparative analyses between different types of content and across social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, or Facebook. This can help identify the most effective channels and formats depending on the goals of a marketing campaign. In addition, the collected data and research model can be used to study the impact of demographic variables—such as age, gender, or level of social media expertise—on the reception and interpretation of content.

In practical terms, this means that marketers, advertising agencies, and communication specialists can design more tailored and engaging campaigns based on these findings, thereby increasing the chances of viral reach, audience loyalty, and real influence on consumer behavior. TikTok thus offers extensive opportunities for brands and creators who seek to build authentic relationships with audiences and effectively engage communities in the dynamic environment of social media.

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