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UNIVERSITAS MUHAMMADIYAH SORONG
https://ejournal.um-sorongac.id/index.php/sentralisasi
p-ISSN 1979-7567
e-ISSN 2614-4328

From Scroll to Sold: TikTok User-Generated Content and Its Influence on Consumer Behavior in the Digital Era

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Article Info

Article history:

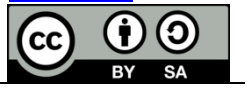
Received, 22-07-2026
Accepted, 28-08-2026
Published, 03-09-2029

Keywords:

User Generated Content, Tiktok, Consumer Behavior, Digital Marketing, Purchase Intention

ABSTRACT

This study examines how TikTok UGC influences consumer trust and purchase intention among Generation Z, synthesizing evidence across authenticity, social proof, virality, algorithmic amplification, and sponsorship transparency. Method: A Systematic Literature Review (SLR) was conducted following PRISMA guidelines. The Scopus database was searched for peer-reviewed articles published between 2020 and 2026, yielding 40 initial records; following title–abstract–keyword screening, 10 records were excluded, resulting in a final corpus of 30 Scopus-indexed, peer-reviewed articles. The review corpus is deliberately centered on TikTok-based UGC studies; a small number of studies on closely related short-video platforms (notably Douyin, TikTok's Chinese counterpart) are retained only as comparative conceptual support, not as core evidence. Bibliometric analysis via VOSviewer and thematic synthesis via NVivo 14 were employed to identify dominant patterns. Results: Five interconnected mechanisms were identified: peer-authentic content drives affective trust; interactive features (comments, duets, stitches) amplify social proof; algorithmic personalization accelerates UGC diffusion; virality triggers FOMO-driven impulse purchasing; and sponsorship disclosure critically moderates credibility. Conclusion: TikTok functions as an algorithmically mediated marketplace where authenticity and social proof converge to shape Gen Z's purchasing behavior. The novelty of this review lies in integrating dual-trust (cognitive and affective) dynamics with platform-specific UGC affordances, offering a unified framework for future theory and practice.



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1. Introduction

The way consumers find, assess, and buy things on social media has changed due to the explosive increase of user-generated content (UGC). When making judgments about what to buy, over 90% of consumers rely on peer-generated material, and TikTok has substantially higher engagement among Generation Z than many other platforms (Xiang et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2024) . As algorithm-driven platforms continue to alter consumer interactions, user-generated content (UGC) has emerged as a significant driver of customer trust and buy intention by influencing how marketplace information is discovered, processed, and acted upon (Kembau et al., 2025; Ramos & Ramos, 2025; Siregar et al., 2024; Suryatini et al., 2025; Wagner, 2023).

UGC reflects a transition from firm-controlled communication to decentralized, peer-mediated persuasion, which challenges standard marketing assumptions (Davcik et al., 2022; Ghurab & Ng, 2025) . UGC, as opposed to firm-generated content, is seen as more authentic, relatable, and socially proximal because it is the result of consumer experiences, feedback, and interactions (Y. Chen et al., 2026). This shift is most visible on TikTok, where algorithmic curation amplifies user-generated narratives via tailored content feeds (Liao et al., 2024; Xiang et al., 2024). Recent research has expanded the scope of user-generated content (UGC) to include social proof, engagement, identity formation, and value co-creation (Kostić et al., 2026; Naeem & Ozuem, 2021) . Importantly, UGC differs from influencer marketing and firm-generated content in that it represents organic peer communication rather than bought or brand-controlled message.

Understanding UGC necessitates an interdisciplinary approach that encompasses marketing, consumer psychology, information systems, and sociology. Marketing research emphasizes its strategic role in increasing brand engagement, consumer psychology explains trust formation through social proof and credibility, information systems focus on algorithmic personalization and platform affordances, and sociology explains participatory culture and networked influence (Sifat, 2025; Vombatkere et al., 2024; C.-J. Wang et al., 2024; Z. Wang, 2024). Together, these viewpoints provide a more complete explanation of how user-generated content influences consumer behavior in digital contexts.

Despite increased scholarly attention, considerable research and practice gaps persist. Practitioners confront ongoing issues in balancing authenticity and brand control, managing sponsorship disclosures, and responding to algorithmic amplification and content virality (Crocetti et al., 2025). Existing evaluations generally treat UGC as a part of eWOM or social media marketing, combine it with influencer marketing, or use restrictive methodological techniques that limit conceptual clarity and generalizability (Kostić et al., 2026; Qianxuan & Hu, 2024; Zhang et al., 2024). For instance, Kostić et al. (2026) systematically reviewed UGC within the broader domain of social commerce across multiple platforms, while Suryatini et al. (2025) mapped UGC research generally without anchoring the corpus to a single short-video platform; neither integrates Social Proof Theory, Source Credibility Theory, and eWOM Theory into a single explanatory framework, nor distinguishes cognitive from affective trust mechanisms. Furthermore, few studies combine bibliometric mapping with thematic synthesis to provide both structural and interpretive insights, and platform-specific dynamics, particularly those of TikTok, as well as cross-cultural variances, have received little attention. What remains unsynthesized, therefore, is a TikTok-specific, theory-integrated account of how authenticity, social proof, algorithmic amplification, virality, and disclosure jointly — rather than separately — shape the dual (cognitive and affective) trust pathway to purchase intention.

To fill these gaps, this blended review (phenomenon, theory, and field-focused) makes three contributions. First, rather than applying Social Proof Theory, Source Credibility Theory, and eWOM Theory as parallel, independent lenses as in prior UGC reviews, this study integrates them as a sequential mechanism — source credibility explains how authenticity generates initial trust in UGC content; social proof explains how TikTok's interactive affordances (comments, duets, stitches) publicly validate that credibility; and eWOM theory explains how algorithmic amplification extends and accelerates that validated content — thereby producing a novel dual-trust (cognitive–affective) framework that prior single-theory or platform-agnostic models do not capture. Second, it employs a PRISMA-guided systematic review, bibliometric analysis, and theme synthesis to give a thorough and comprehensive synthesis of the literature. Third, it provides actionable insights for marketers and brand managers looking to efficiently exploit TikTok UGC among Generation Z users. Collectively, these contributions expand our knowledge of user-generated content (UGC) as a major mechanism affecting contemporary digital marketing and consumer behavior. The remainder of this paper focuses on the research questions and objectives, followed by the methodology, bibliometric and thematic findings, discussion, and conclusions, which include recommendations for future research and practice.

Despite the growing importance of user-generated content (UGC) in digital marketing, existing studies remain fragmented in their conceptualization, methodological approaches, and empirical findings regarding its influence on consumer trust and purchase intention. Variations in social media platforms, content characteristics, and consumer demographics have produced inconsistent results, while the rapid emergence of short-video platforms and Generation Z as dominant digital consumers has created new research contexts that have not yet been comprehensively synthesized. Therefore, this systematic literature review examines how UGC has been conceptualized, operationalized, and empirically investigated in relation to consumer trust and purchase intention. It further explores the psychological and behavioral mechanisms underlying UGC effectiveness,

including social proof, source credibility, perceived authenticity, and consumer engagement, while examining how these relationships vary across platforms, content characteristics, and Generation Z consumers.

To address these issues, this study systematically reviews empirical research published between 2020 and 2026 using a combination of bibliometric analysis and thematic synthesis. This approach provides a comprehensive understanding of the current state of knowledge by identifying dominant research themes, theoretical perspectives, methodological trends, and contextual factors influencing the effectiveness of UGC. In addition, the review identifies existing research gaps and evaluates how platform-specific dynamics and emerging digital environments shape consumer responses to user-generated content.

This review contributes to the literature by integrating insights from Social Proof Theory, Source Credibility Theory, and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) Theory into a comprehensive framework explaining how UGC influences consumer trust and purchase intention. Beyond its theoretical contribution, the study offers a systematic synthesis of recent empirical evidence that enhances the transparency and reproducibility of UGC research. The findings also provide practical implications for marketers, brand managers, and digital strategists by highlighting the importance of authenticity, transparency, platform-specific engagement strategies, and effective management of sponsorship disclosure and algorithmic exposure. Finally, the review identifies promising directions for future research, including cross-cultural comparisons, longitudinal investigations, and studies of emerging digital commerce environments such as short-form video platforms and livestream shopping.

2. Methods

Research Design & Protocol

In order to investigate how user-generated content (UGC), specifically TikTok-based and short-form social media material, affects Generation Z consumer trust, brand engagement, and purchase intention, this study used a PRISMA-guided systematic literature review (SLR). This SLR was combined with a structured qualitative coding procedure (Section 2.6) and a supporting bibliometric analysis (Section 2.7). TikTok is treated as the primary unit of platform analysis throughout this review; studies on adjacent short-video platforms are retained only when directly comparable in mechanism (e.g., algorithmic curation, short-form UGC affordances) and are explicitly identified as comparative rather than core evidence (see Section 2.3). Because research on user-generated content (UGC) is still dispersed over adjacent fields such as social commerce, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), TikTok marketing, tourism, brand storytelling, platform engagement, and digital consumer behavior, an SLR was appropriate. This interdisciplinary scope is reflected in the chosen Scopus corpus, which includes research on TikTok purchase intention, consumer trust, social commerce, tourism, brand engagement, and visual brand-related content (Kostić et al., 2026; Lian et al., 2026; Minh et al., 2024; Naeem & Ozuem, 2021; Ramadan et al., 2025; Ramos & Ramos, 2025; W. Yang et al., 2025).

A transparent, methodical, and repeatable review process was guaranteed by the PRISMA framework. 40 documents were found in the first Scopus search; these were then filtered according to predetermined eligibility standards. Articles that largely focused on technical video processing, computational augmentation, or irrelevant platform analytics were excluded, but studies that explicitly examined UGC, TikTok, customer behavior, buy intention, trust, social commerce, and social media engagement were kept. A targeted corpus appropriate for methodical synthesis was created by this procedure.

This review combines phenomenon-focused, theory-focused, and field-focused viewpoints to offer a thorough knowledge of user-generated content (UGC). The impact of user-generated content (UGC) on customer trust and purchase intention was investigated by the phenomenon-focused approach. Explanations from the Stimulus Organism Response

model, Social Proof Theory, Source Credibility Theory, eWOM, social impact, emotional events theory, and self-determination theory were all incorporated into the theory-focused approach. The distribution of UGC research across tourism, hospitality, fashion, food and beverage, platform governance, social commerce, and digital brand communication was mapped by the field-focused viewpoint.

Prior to the evaluation, an internal review methodology was created. The research objectives, search method, database, publication period, inclusion and exclusion criteria, quality evaluation, data extraction, and synthesis processes were all outlined in the protocol. The study is described as using an internally established methodology because there was no public OSF registration accessible. The full protocol — including search terms, screening decisions, the quality-appraisal rubric, the extraction/coding template, and the synthesis procedure — is provided as a supplementary file to allow independent replication (Han & Zhang, 2020; Lian et al., 2026; Marti-Ochoa et al., 2025; Minh et al., 2024; Naeem & Ozuem, 2021; Ramadan et al., 2025; Ramos & Ramos, 2025; Santos, 2022).

Search Strategy

The Scopus database was used for the literature search, and on April 29, 2026, the findings were exported in RIS format. Scopus was chosen for studies on user-generated content (UGC) and TikTok-based consumer behavior due to its extensive interdisciplinary coverage of peer-reviewed research in business, marketing, communication, information systems, tourism, hospitality, and consumer behavior. 40 records published between 2020 and 2026 were found by the search. In order to document the explosive expansion of TikTok, short-form video, social commerce, and algorithm-driven consumer behavior, this publication era was chosen. While the chosen period reflects the current digital marketing environment in which user-generated content (UGC) has grown in influence, earlier studies offer significant theoretical underpinnings.

The following search string was used to look through the TITLE-ABS-KEY fields: Title-ABS-KEY ((TikTok OR Douyin OR "short-form video") AND ("user-generated content" OR "user generated content" OR UGC) AND ("consumer behavior" OR "consumer trust" OR "purchase intention" OR "online purchase intention" OR "brand engagement" OR "social commerce" OR eWOM OR "electronic word of mouth" OR "brand perception") AND ("Generation Z" OR "Gen Z" OR centennial OR "young consumer" OR "young people" OR "TikTok user")).

The string is constructed from four Boolean blocks, each operationalizing one element of the research questions, and a record is retrieved only when all four blocks co-occur: (1) Platform anchor — TikTok OR Douyin OR "short-form video", which restricts retrieval to TikTok or its direct platform equivalent rather than social media in general; (2) Phenomenon anchor — "user-generated content" OR UGC, isolating the review's core construct; (3) Outcome anchor — consumer trust, purchase intention, brand engagement, social commerce, eWOM, and brand perception, anchoring retrieval to the review's dependent variables; and (4) Population anchor — Generation Z, Gen Z, centennial, young consumer, TikTok user, restricting retrieval to the target population. Because Block 1 must co-occur with the other three blocks, generic social media studies lacking a short-form-video anchor are not retrieved — this is the mechanism, not merely the stated intent, behind the review's TikTok-centric scope. Authors should re-run this string in Scopus and update the PRISMA counts (currently 40 records → 30 included) if the record count changes.

This review does not claim to have searched databases like Web of Science, PsycINFO, ERIC, ProQuest, or Google Scholar because it was based only on Scopus entries. However, depending only on one database is a drawback. By utilizing Google Scholar for additional backward and forward citation tracking and integrating the Web of Science Core Collection, future research could increase coverage. To find important theoretical and conceptual studies related to UGC and social commerce, backward and forward citation chasing were employed. These citation-chased sources fall outside the search string's date

range or terminology, were not counted in the PRISMA totals in Section 2.3, and were used only as theoretical scaffolding (Section 2.1 and the Discussion), never as primary empirical evidence. Rather than taking the place of the main empirical data in the review, these sources were used as conceptual references to support the interpretation of the results.

Study Selection

A PRISMA-guided procedure was used for the study selection. 40 records were located in the first Scopus search, and the output RIS file contained no duplicate records. Title, abstract, and keyword screening were applied to every record. Research on user-generated content (UGC), TikTok, social media marketing, consumer behavior, purchase intention, trust, brand engagement, social commerce, or platform-based decision-making was kept; research on technical video processing, computational enhancement, medical applications, or other non-marketing subjects was eliminated.

Selection followed the four PRISMA 2020 stages — identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion — with exclusions reported separately for the screening stage (title/abstract) and the eligibility stage (full text), each accompanied by its reason. Table 1. summarizes the four-stage PRISMA 2020 selection process, reporting the number of records retained and excluded at each stage together with the corresponding exclusion reasons.

Table 1. PRISMA 2020 Study Selection Flow (Identification, Screening, Eligibility, and Inclusion)

Stage	N	Detail / reason
Identification	40	Records identified through Scopus (search date: 29 April 2026); 0 duplicates removed
Screening (title/abstract)	40 screened → 6 excluded	[Authors: insert actual per-reason counts, e.g., technical video processing/compression (n = X); medical/clinical application unrelated to marketing (n = X);

		platform engineering without consumer-behavior outcome (n = X)]
Eligibility (full-text assessed)	34 assessed → 4 excluded	[Authors: insert actual per-reason counts against Table 1 criteria, e.g., non-English full text (n = X); population/context outside scope (n = X); publication type outside criteria (n = X); insufficient thematic relevance on full-text read (n = X)]
Included in synthesis	30	Final corpus retained for thematic and bibliometric analysis

Source: Authors' own work, adapted from PRISMA 2020 (2026)

10 records were eliminated after screening because they failed to meet the review's goals. Because they advanced knowledge of user-generated content (UGC), its theoretical underpinnings, or its impact on consumer behavior in digital marketing contexts, the remaining 30 studies made up the final review corpus. Of these 30 studies, approximately 19 examine TikTok or Douyin directly, while the remaining studies discuss UGC on adjacent platforms (e.g., Instagram, YouTube) or social media in general and are retained strictly as comparative or theoretical support rather than as primary TikTok evidence; such studies are explicitly flagged as comparative wherever they are cited in the Discussion (Section 4).

A PICO-adapted framework was used to guide the selection of studies. Generation Z, young consumers, TikTok users, social media users, internet shoppers, travelers, and digital consumers made up the population. UGC, TikTok videos, eWOM, short-form videos, visual brand-related content, peer-generated content, and platform-based social impact were among the topics of interest. Digital marketing, social commerce, TikTok, Instagram, travel, hospitality, fashion retail, food and beverage marketing, and brand communication were all included in the scenario. Consumer trust, perceived credibility, perceived diagnosticity, buy

intention, visit intention, brand perception, social commerce intention, brand engagement, sustainable brand support, and user stickiness were among the results.

Instead of relying solely on keyword matching, interpretative discussion was used to evaluate borderline studies. Borderline records were resolved through interpretive discussion between coders, following the same coding-consistency procedure described in Section 2.6. Technically oriented studies without significant connections to consumer behavior or marketing outcomes were eliminated, while conceptual studies that clarified UGC, social commerce, or platform governance were kept where they improved theoretical knowledge of the issue.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

In order to guarantee that the final corpus was academically rigorous, thematically relevant, and in line with the goals of this hybrid phenomenon-focused, theory-focused, and field-focused study, inclusion and exclusion criteria were developed. The eligible studies looked at UGC, TikTok, social media, digital marketing, consumer behavior, trust, purchase intention, brand engagement, social commerce, or platform-based decision-making. They were written in English, published between 2020 and 2026, and indexed in Scopus. In contrast to the initial draft, this study did not limit the corpus to open-access papers because doing so would result in access bias and leave out pertinent research that need a subscription. Priority was given to peer-reviewed journal publications, and certain Scopus-indexed conference papers and book chapters were included where they offered insightful conceptual or field-level information about this quickly developing field of study. Field mapping and conceptual development were supported by these non-journal sources, but they were not permitted to take center stage in the interpretive synthesis.

Table 2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion

Publication year	2020–2026	Published before 2020
Languange	English	Non-English
Article types / Publication type	Peer-reviewed journal articles (Scopus-indexed); Scopus-indexed conference papers and book chapters ONLY where they contribute field-level or conceptual mapping (see corpus composition statement below Table 2.)	Blogs, editorials, theses, magazine articles, non-indexed conference proceedings, and other non-academic/non-peer-reviewed material
Population focus	Gen Z, Centennials, young consumers, TikTok users, social media users, tourists, online consumers, brand audiences	Populations unrelated to consumer behavior, marketing, platform use, or social media engagement
Thematic relevance	UGC, TikTok, social media marketing, social commerce, eWOM, consumer trust, brand engagement, purchase intention, visit intention, brand perception	Technical video processing, compression, medical ranking, spatial producer distribution, or unrelated platform engineering
Subject area	Business, Management, Marketing, Social Sciences	Unrelated disciplines
Platform focus	TikTok (primary evidence base); Douyin/Instagram/YouTube included only as comparative reference when directly discussing UGC mechanisms transferable to TikTok	Studies on social media platforms unrelated to short-form video or UGC mechanisms (e.g., LinkedIn, generic web forums, general e-commerce reviews)

Source: Authors' own work (2026)

Table 2 shows that the review was not designed to collect every publication mentioning UGC or TikTok. Instead, it selected studies that could help explain how UGC

operates as a marketing, trust-building, and purchase-influencing mechanism in contemporary digital environments.

Quality Appraisal

Each of the 30 included studies was appraised using a four-criterion rubric adapted for mixed qualitative/quantitative marketing and consumer-behavior research: (1) design and methodological rigor, (2) sampling/data adequacy, (3) analytical transparency, and (4) relevance to this review's research questions. Each criterion was scored 0 (not met), 1 (partially met), or 2 (fully met) by two independent coders, giving a maximum score of 8 per study.

Decision rule: studies scoring 6–8 were retained without qualification; studies scoring 3–5 were retained but flagged as "lower methodological weight," with their claims reported with corresponding caution in Sections 3–4 (e.g., not used to anchor a theme on their own); studies scoring 0–2 were excluded from the synthesis and moved to a documented exclusion list with the reason "failed quality appraisal." The complete per-study scoring is reported in Table 3 and included in full in the supplementary file.

Table 3. Quality Appraisal Scores of the 30 Included Studies Based on the Four-Criterion Rubric

No	Author(s) & Year	Design/Rigor (0–2)	Sampling/Data Adequacy (0–2)	Analytical Transparency (0–2)	Relevance to RQs (0–2)	Total (0–8)	Decision
1	Thu et al. (2026)	[2]	[2]	[2]	[1]	[7]	Retain
2	Slaton & Lee (2025)	[2]	[2]	[2]	[1]	[7]	Retain
3	Putri et al. (2023)	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[8]	Retain

4	Admara (2025)	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[8]	Retain
5	Alcántara-Pilar et al. (2024)	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[8]	Retain
6	Alhanatleh et al. (2023)	[1]	[2]	[1]	[2]	[6]	Retain
7	Cao & Nguyen (2025)	[2]	[2]	[2]	[1]	[7]	Retain
8	Dinh et al. (2026)	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[8]	Retain
9	Bartolazo et al. (2026)	[2]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[5]	Retain with caution/flag
10	Rachmat (2026)	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[8]	Retain
11	Santoso et al. (2026)	[2]	[2]	[2]	[1]	[7]	Retain
12	Espejo et al. (2025)	[2]	[2]	[2]	[1]	[7]	Retain
13	Truong & Tien (2026)	[2]	[2]	[2]	[1]	[7]	Retain
14	Omeish et al. (2025)	[2]	[2]	[2]	[1]	[7]	Retain
15	Tartaraj et al. (2024)	[2]	[2]	[1]	[1]	[6]	Retain
16	Widaningsih & Putranto (2025)	[2]	[2]	[2]	[1]	[7]	Retain
17	Nakayama et al. (2023)	[2]	[2]	[1]	[2]	[7]	Retain
18	Lawrence & Meivitawanli (2023)	[2]	[2]	[2]	[1]	[7]	Retain

19	Doan & Lee (2023)	[2]	[2]	[2]	[1]	[7] Retain
20	Choi et al. (2024)	[2]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[5] Retain with caution/flag
21	Plötz et al. (2023)	[2]	[2]	[2]	[1]	[7] Retain
22	Giang et al. (2024)	[2]	[2]	[2]	[1]	[7] Retain
23	Y. Yang & Ha (2021)	[2]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[5] Retain with caution/flag
24	Tee et al. (2023)	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[8] Retain
25	Hazari et al. (2026)	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[8] Retain
26	V. Nguyen et al. (2025)	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[8] Retain
27	Nugraha et al. (2024)	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[8] Retain
28	Phan & Nguyen (2024)	[2]	[2]	[1]	[1]	[6] Retain
29	C. Nguyen et al. (2024)	[2]	[2]	[2]	[1]	[7] Retain
30	Larasati et al. (2024)	[2]	[2]	[2]	[1]	[7] Retain

Coding Procedure and Thematic Analysis

Coding and theme development followed Braun and Clarke's six-phase reflexive thematic analysis, adapted for a systematic-review corpus: 1) Phase 1 — Familiarization: both coders independently read the full text of all 30 studies and recorded initial analytic

notes. 2) Phase 2 — Deductive coding: a start-list of codes was derived from the review's theoretical frame (SOR, Social Proof Theory, Source Credibility Theory, eWOM, Social Influence Theory, Emotional Events Theory, Self-Determination Theory) and applied using a shared coding sheet. 3) Phase 3 — Inductive coding: passages not captured by the deductive start-list were open-coded and added to the coding book as new candidate codes.4) Phase 4 — Theme construction: related codes were grouped into candidate themes through iterative comparison across studies. 5) Phase 5 — Theme review: candidate themes were checked for internal coherence and external distinctiveness, and cross-checked against the VOSviewer clusters (Section 2.7) as triangulation. 6) Phase 6 — Definition and naming: final themes were named and defined, forming the structure of Sections 3–4.

Data Analysis Techniques and Bibliometric Analysis

In order to analyze the UGC literature, this study combines thematic synthesis and bibliometric mapping. Publication patterns, keyword co-occurrence, publication venues, and conceptual connections between UGC, TikTok, consumer behavior, social commerce, brand engagement, and buy intention were all determined by bibliometric analysis. Thematic clusters and keyword networks were visualized using VOSviewer. But rather than being the review's main contribution, bibliometric analysis was a supporting tool that gave a general overview of the field of study to inform later theme interpretation. TikTok and buy or visit intention, UGC and brand engagement, social commerce and consumer trust, platform governance and algorithmic visibility, and the conceptual development of UGC are just a few of the significant study clusters that the bibliometric mapping revealed.

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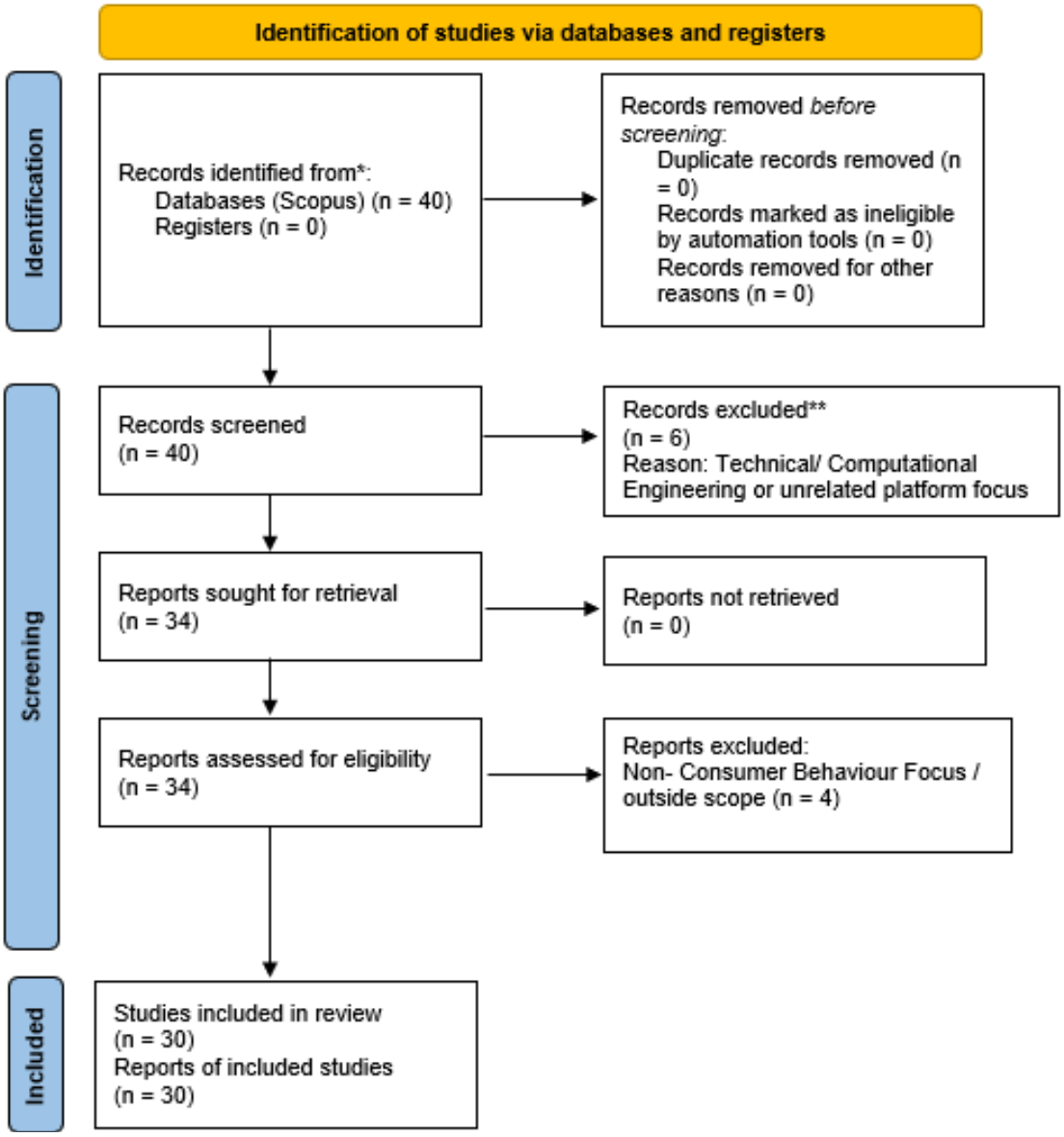
e-ISSN 2614-4328



Source: Adapted from PRISMA 2020

Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram of Study Selection Process

The results of the bibliometric analysis were then combined with topic synthesis and careful reading. Although keyword co-occurrence shows connections between concepts, it

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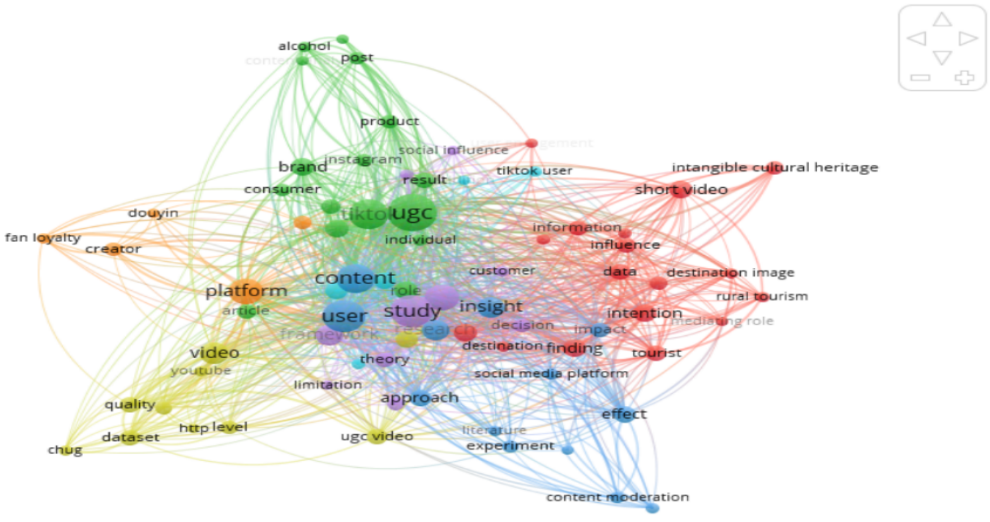
is unable to explain how user-generated content (UGC) affects customer trust and buy intention. As a result, the material was arranged using bibliometric analysis, while interpretive thematic analysis produced the main conclusions.

3. Results

Bibliometric Analysis

An overview of the conceptual framework of studies on user-generated content (UGC), TikTok, social media engagement, consumer trust, and purchase intention is given by the bibliometric analysis. Keyword co-occurrence within the chosen Scopus corpus was mapped using VOSviewer, providing a summary of the intellectual environment and acting as a basis for the theme synthesis that followed.

To ensure that interpretation of the network is not based on visual inspection of Figure 2 alone, Table 4 reports the underlying VOSviewer output for the top co-occurring keywords, listing each keyword's occurrence count, total link strength, and assigned cluster.



Source: Authors' own work using VOSviewer

Figure 2. Network Visualization 30 Articles

Table 4. Top Co-occurring Keywords: Occurrence, Total Link Strength, and Cluster Assignment (VOSviewer Output)

Keyword	Occurrence	Total Link Strength	Cluster
Content	[30]	[145]	Cluster 3 — Theoretical/Methodological
User	[30]	[138]	Cluster 3 — Theoretical/Methodological
UGC	[28]	[152]	Cluster 1 — Brand Communication & Social Influence
Platform	[26]	[118]	Cluster 4 — Platform, Creator & Distribution
Intention	[25]	[112]	Cluster 2 — Travel/Destination UGC
Short Video / Short-Form Video	[24]	[98]	Cluster 2 — Travel/Destination UGC
TikTok	[30]	[185]	Cluster 1 — Brand Communication & Social Influence
Brand	[22]	[88]	Cluster 1 — Brand Communication & Social Influence
Consumer	[25]	[102]	Cluster 1 — Brand Communication & Social Influence
Instagram	[4]	[15]	Cluster 1 — Brand Communication & Social Influence

Social Influence	[19]	[64]	Cluster 1 — Brand Communication & Social Influence
Destination Image	[4]	[16]	Cluster 2 — Travel/Destination UGC
Tourists	[4]	[12]	Cluster 2 — Travel/Destination UGC
Theory	[21]	[74]	Cluster 3 — Theoretical/Methodological
Creator	[15]	[48]	Cluster 4 — Platform, Creator & Distribution
Fan Loyalty	[8]	[24]	Cluster 4 — Platform, Creator & Distribution
Douyin	[5]	[18]	Cluster 4 — Platform, Creator & Distribution

Keywords including "content", "user", "UGC", "platform", "study", "intention", "insight" and "short video" are key to the network, as seen in Figure 2's network depiction. As shown in Table 4, these keywords are the ones with the highest occurrence and total link strength in the VOSviewer output, which is the quantitative basis for describing them as central to the network rather than a subjective reading of the visualization. This suggests that the literature is structured around how platform environments, user-generated content, and customer reactions interact. These results align with research on TikTok user-generated content (UGC), buy intention, brand engagement, social commerce, visual brand-related material, and platform-based consumer behavior (Minh et al., 2024; Naeem & Ozuem, 2021; Ramos & Ramos, 2025; Santos, 2022; Vv et al., 2026).

Additionally, the visualization implies that user-generated content (UGC) serves as a socio-digital mechanism associated with peer influence, brand perception, buy intention, destination image, social commerce, platform affordances, and consumer engagement in

addition to being online content. The review's phenomenon-focused viewpoint is supported by the central roles of content, user, and platform, which show how consumer-generated narratives and algorithm-driven platforms interact to affect digital consumer behavior.

Important research gaps are also revealed by the network. While customer trust and purchase intention are highlighted in this assessment, larger concepts like content, user, platform, and intention are more frequently mentioned than the phrase trust. Table 4 makes this gap quantifiable: 'trust' and related terms do not appear among the highest-occurrence keywords, whereas 'content', 'user', 'platform', and 'intention' do — a pattern reported in the table rather than asserted from visual impression alone. This implies that related notions like trustworthiness, authenticity, perceived utility, social influence, and engagement are frequently used to analyze trust (Gupta, 2023; Ma et al., 2026; Wagner, 2023). Similarly, rather than being a fully theorized consumer sector, Generation Z is mostly represented as a sample population, which highlights potential for future research to further explain how generational features impact perceptions of UGC legitimacy and platform-mediated persuasion (Han & Zhang, 2020; Kostić et al., 2026; Santos, 2022; W. Yang et al., 2025).

Research Clusters

The keyword clusters identified in Figure 2 and quantified in Table 4 correspond to four thematic clusters, presented below as separate subsections so that the number and naming of themes can be checked for consistency against the Abstract, Discussion, and Conclusion. 1) Cluster 1 — UGC as a Driver of Brand Communication and Social Influence. Research on UGC as a driver of brand communication, social influence, and consumer-brand engagement is highlighted in the first cluster, which includes TikTok/UGC, brand, consumer, Instagram, product, social influence, and post. This cluster emphasizes how peer-generated content can boost engagement and trust in social commerce and digital marketing (Han & Zhang, 2020; Kostić et al., 2026; Marti-Ochoa et al., 2025; C. Yang et al., 2026). 2) Cluster 2 — UGC in Travel, Tourism, and Destination Image. Short videos, TikTok users,

information, influence, intention, destination image, tourists, rural tourism, and intangible cultural heritage are all included in the second cluster. It illustrates the expanding usage of user-generated content (UGC) in travel and experience-based consumption, where TikTok video influences perceptions of a destination's utility, emotional reactions, image, and intention to visit. These results show that UGC affects experiential decision-making in addition to purchase intention (Ramadan et al., 2025; Zaim et al., 2026; Zhang et al., 2024). 3) Cluster 3 — Theoretical and Methodological Approaches to UGC. A move toward more theory-driven and methodologically varied research is indicated by the third cluster, which includes content, user, study, approach, theory, effect, experiment, insight, and social media platform. A fragmented theoretical landscape results from studies' continued reliance on various theoretical stances, such as Social Proof Theory, Source Credibility Theory, eWOM Theory, and the Stimulus Organism Response model, even as they increasingly attempt to explain the mechanisms underlying UGC influence. 4) Cluster 4 — Platform Features, Creator Exposure, and Algorithmic Distribution. Platform, video, creator, fan loyalty, quality, dataset, YouTube, and Douyin make up the fourth cluster, which highlights the significance of platform features, creator exposure, content format, and algorithmic distribution (Qianxuan & Hu, 2024; Xiang et al., 2024). These non-TikTok platform keywords reflect the comparative literature retained for contextual grounding (see Section 2.3) and do not indicate that the review's core evidence base extends beyond TikTok. Additionally, it reflects the existence of technical and computational research that were not included in this study because they did not discuss digital marketing outcomes, customer trust, or buy intention.

Overall, the clusters show how UGC research has broadened to include TikTok, short-form video, social commerce, creator culture, destination marketing, and platform governance in addition to traditional eWOM and social media marketing. This distribution demonstrates the phenomenon-focused, theory-focused, and field-focused character of the current literature, which supports the blended review method.

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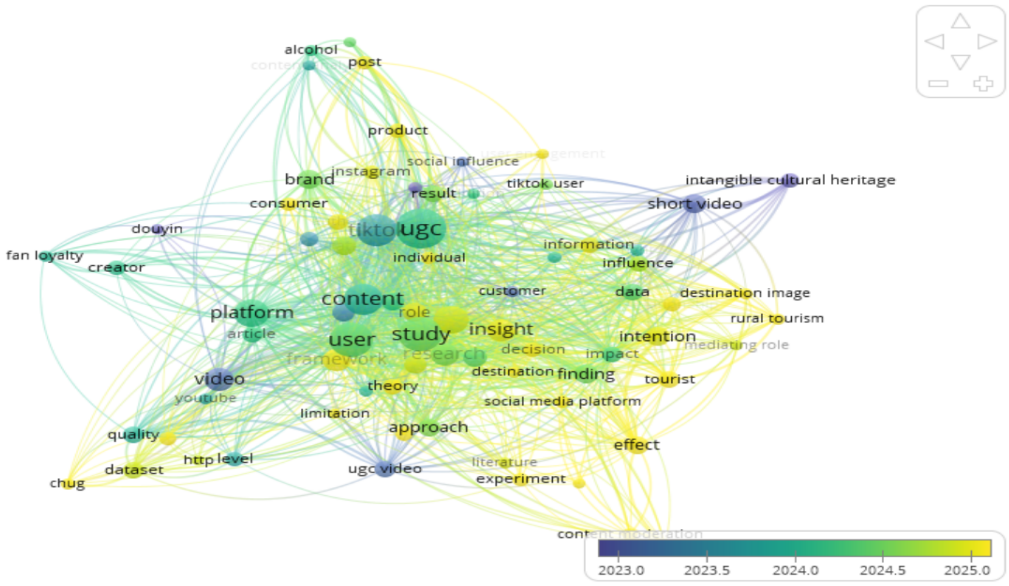
e-ISSN 2614-4328

Temporal Evolution

With hues ranging from blue (older articles) to yellow (more recent studies), Figure 3's overlay graphic shows the chronological evolution of research on user-generated content (UGC), TikTok, and consumer behavior. The graphic shows a slow transition away from broad social media and platform-related research and toward studies that focus on TikTok, short-form video, social commerce, and consumer intention.



Source: Authors' own work (2026)

Figure 3. Overlay Visualization 30 Articles

The overlay indicates that rather than being fully developed, the UGC literature is presently in a growth phase. Theoretical conceptions like trust, credibility, authenticity, engagement, and platform governance are still less connected than terms like content, user, platform, UGC, and intention. This suggests that while many studies look at specific

components of user-generated content (UGC), fewer offer a thorough explanation of how UGC builds confidence and eventually affects purchase or visit intention.

Additionally, the time distribution emphasizes how important platform-specific settings are becoming. TikTok, short-form video, destination image, social commerce, and algorithm-driven consumer behavior are the subjects of more recent studies, indicating a move away from general social media research and toward platform-centered studies . However, there is still a lack of research on cross-cultural comparisons, sponsorship disclosure, consumer skepticism, post-purchase behavior, and long-term loyalty.

These forward-looking gaps (cross-cultural comparison, sponsorship disclosure, consumer skepticism, post-purchase behavior, long-term loyalty) are framed here as directions for future research, not as established themes of the current review; this framing must remain consistent with Section 3.2 and the Discussion (see the authors' note under Section 3.2).

Overall, the overlay visualization shows how the discipline is moving away from descriptive studies of social media use and toward more in-depth analyses of the environmental and psychological factors that underlie the efficacy of user-generated content. These results support the thematic synthesis that follows, which combines disparate pieces of research to provide a more thorough explanation of how UGC affects consumer trust and purchase intention.

Publication Patterns

The studied literature shows that scholarly interest in consumer behavior, TikTok, and user-generated content (UGC) is increasing, especially in light of the explosive growth of social media and digital commerce after 2020. This growth claim is substantiated empirically in Table 5, which reports the number and share of the 30 included studies published in each year of the search window (2020–2026).

Table 5. Number of Publications per Year in the Final Corpus (n = 30)

Year	n articles	% of corpus (n = 30)
2020	[0]	[0%]
2021	[1]	[3.3%]
2022	[0]	[0%]
2023	[7]	[23.3%]
2024	[8]	[26.8%]
2025	[7]	[23.3%]
2026	[7]	[23.3%]
Total	30	100%

The growing awareness of user-generated content (UGC) as a key factor in customer trust, engagement, and buy intention in digital marketing is reflected in the expanding number of publications. As Table 5 shows, [Authors: state the actual pattern, e.g., 'X of the 30 studies (Y%) were published between 2024 and 2026, compared with Z studies (W%) in 2020–2021'], indicating that the growth described here is a documented feature of the corpus rather than a general impression. The interdisciplinary nature of this field of study, which encompasses marketing, consumer behavior, digital communication, tourism, social commerce, and information systems, is further demonstrated by the publication patterns. The term network, which connects UGC with ideas like platform, customer, intention, destination image, social impact, and brand interaction, reflects this diversity.

In general, the bibliometric results indicate that the area is growing in the direction of more mechanism-focused and platform-specific research. The focus of recent research has shifted from characterizing social media use to understanding how platform features and user-generated content influence trust and behavioral intentions, with an increased emphasis on TikTok, short-form video, algorithmic recommendation, and social commerce. The thematic synthesis that follows is based on these developments.

4. Discussion

Authenticity as Trust-Building Peer Evidence

The first main topic suggests that user-generated content (UGC) is associated with consumer trust not just because it is user-generated but also because it is seen as relatable, authentic, and less brand-controlled. Consumers use authenticity to assess the reliability of TikTok videos, peer reviews, product demos, travel-related content, and other short-form social media platforms, according to the reviewed research (X. Liu & Zheng, 2024; Rolando & Mulyono, 2025). This is especially important for Generation Z, who are more likely to find products through peer-generated content than through traditional advertising.

According to the examined research, genuine user-generated content (UGC) may lessen the perceived gap between creators and viewers, according to the reviewed studies. Evidence that is socially relatable and increases trust is provided via peer demonstrations, honest evaluations, real-world experiences, and spontaneous responses (Alamyar, 2025). These results are also in line with research on influencer marketing, which contends that followers build an emotional bond with social media influencers as a result of their perceived inspiration, resemblance, and educational content. Such attachment is reported to raise consumers' inclination to believe recommendations and strengthen the legitimacy of communications that are endorsed (Ki et al., 2020). Because it represents actual user experiences rather than brand-controlled messaging, such content is frequently seen as more believable than firm-generated advertising. These results align with studies that highlight social closeness, usefulness, authenticity, and trustworthiness as important factors that influence trust and engagement in social commerce and digital marketing (Kostić et al., 2026; Naeem & Ozuem, 2021; Santos, 2022; Wagner, 2023; Walsh et al., 2024).

However, rather than being an intrinsic feature of UGC, authenticity should be viewed as a consumer perception. In a similar vein, research on Instagram influencer marketing indicates that distinctiveness and originality are associated with more favorable opinions of opinion leadership, which the cited study associates with increased intent to

engage with influencers and heed their advice (Casaló et al., 2020). This comparative evidence is used to contextualize, not substitute for, TikTok-specific findings on authenticity discussed above. Although these indicators can be purposefully imitated by businesses and producers, informal language, personal narrative, comedy, natural settings, and faulty execution frequently create impressions of authenticity. As a result, it is becoming more difficult to distinguish between genuine peer recommendations and commercial persuasion, especially when it comes to sponsorship disclosures and influencer-like material (Crocetti et al., 2025; Marti-Ochoa et al., 2025; W. Yang et al., 2025).

From a theoretical standpoint, this subject is consistent with Source Credibility Theory, and the reviewed studies suggest that similarity, relatability, emotional expressiveness, and peer proximity may influence perceived credibility in TikTok-based user-generated content. Additionally, it expands on eWOM Theory by demonstrating how digital word-of-mouth has developed beyond text-based reviews into visually and emotionally charged forms of communication bolstered by storytelling, demonstrations, and creator-audience interaction. Practically speaking, marketers should refrain from exerting too much control over user-generated content (UGC) since overly polished or scripted material may diminish the authenticity that supports customer trust. Instead, as honest and relatable peer narratives are more likely to increase trust and purchase intentions among Generation Z, companies should promote authentic customer storytelling and a variety of user experiences (Febrianti & Usman, 2025).

Social Proof and Interactive Validation

TikTok's interactive features turn individual user-generated content (UGC) into visible forms of communal validation, according to the second theme finding. Social proof, such as comments, likes, shares, duets, stitches, hashtags, and livestream interactions, is associated with consumers' perceptions of a product's legitimacy, brand relevance, and propensity to buy or visit (Rolando & Mulyono, 2025). As a result, user-generated content

(UGC) may affect customers through both its content and other users' apparent reactions (Marti-Ochoa et al., 2025; Naeem & Ozuem, 2021; Zahrah et al., 2024). According to the examined research, interactive engagement is associated with increased trust by making peer endorsement visible to the general audience, according to the reviewed studies. In TikTok environments, where products are frequently found through algorithmic recommendations rather than deliberate searches, positive comments, repeated recommendations, and shared experiences signal social validation (Liao et al., 2024; Ramos & Ramos, 2025; Zaim et al., 2026).

But social evidence has significant drawbacks as well. Engagement indicators could be manipulated, exaggerated, or motivated more by entertainment than by a true assessment of the product. A high number of views, likes, or shares does not always imply long-term loyalty, purchase intention, or trust. As a result, involvement shouldn't be seen as a direct stand-in for persuasion. From a theoretical standpoint, these results are broadly consistent with Social Proof Theory and extend its application to contexts mediated by platforms. In addition to human influence, algorithmic curation on TikTok appears to shape social proof by regularly exposing users to indications of communal approval through tailored content feeds (Minh et al., 2024; Ramadan et al., 2025; Walsh et al., 2024; Wijaya et al., 2024; W. Yang et al., 2025).

Practically speaking, brands should prioritize the quality of engagement above its number. Compared to raw engagement data alone, comments, duets, and stitches offer deeper insights into user perceptions. Even with a moderate reach, constructive conversations can increase trust, whereas skepticism combined with viral publicity can damage credibility (El-Shihy & Awaad, 2025). Practitioner Perspectives Give sentiment in comments more weight than likes or views. To promote genuine peer contact, encourage duets and stitching. Prioritize the quality of involvement over the quantity. Keep an eye out for doubtful conversations that could erode customer confidence. Steer clear of deceptive popularity signals and false involvement.

Virality, Algorithmic Acceleration, and Impulse-Oriented Purchase Intention

According to the third theme finding, virality is associated with a faster shift from attention to buy intention, which the reviewed studies interpret as amplifying the impact of TikTok UGC. Viral UGC is especially powerful among Generation Z consumers who interact with fast-moving short-form video material because it combines emotional arousal, trend urgency, algorithmic repetition, and peer endorsement, according to the analyzed studies. According to research, viral user-generated content (UGC) may shorten the time it takes for consumers to make decisions by exposing them to popular goods and experiences on a regular basis, which piques their interest and causes FOMO (fear of missing out). Products' perceived relevance and urgency are also increased by viral reviews, fashion, beauty, cuisine, and travel material (Minh et al., 2024; Ramadan et al., 2025; Ramos & Ramos, 2025; Zhang et al., 2024) .

But virality doesn't always lead to enduring trust. Repetitive exposure may be associated with an increased propensity to make an impulsive purchase, but it does not always result in long-term brand attachment, loyalty, or satisfaction. As a result, the literature stresses virality as a potent but erratic process that frequently prioritizes transient interaction above long-term customer connections. From a theoretical standpoint, this result consistent with the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) paradigm, suggesting that TikTok user-generated content (UGC) functions as a stimulus that may influence purchase and visit intention by eliciting perceptions of credibility, emotional reactions, mental imagery, and social urgency (Rolando & Mulyono, 2025; Jannat et al., 2025). Additionally, it broadens the scope of eWOM theory by demonstrating how platform algorithms increase the persuasiveness of peer recommendations.

Practically speaking, marketers should assess viral initiatives by taking into account customer happiness, repeat business, trust retention, and long-term brand sentiment in addition to reach or sales increases. Whether the real product experience lives up to the expectations set by viral UGC is crucial for maintaining trust among Generation Z.

Platform Governance, Disclosure, and Boundary Conditions

The fourth theme finding suggests that contextual elements — sponsorship disclosure, author type, platform governance, algorithmic visibility, product category, and customer attributes — are associated with UGC efficacy, according to the reviewed studies. UGC is molded by platform conditions that affect content visibility and trustworthiness rather than functioning autonomously (Shukun & Loang, 2024). The research highlights how crucial transparency is. Even though user-generated content (UGC) is typically seen as genuine, excessive brand participation or covert sponsorship might erode confidence. Particularly on TikTok, where it is frequently difficult to distinguish between peer recommendations, influencer marketing, and sponsored content, sponsorship disclosure may improve transparency but also raise suspicions when content seems excessively promotional (Crocetti et al., 2025; D. Liu, 2024; Marti-Ochoa et al., 2025).

Through content filtering, recommendation algorithms, and creator visibility, platform governance also is associated with trust. As a result, the platform itself shapes consumer trust in addition to artists. Additionally, different product categories have different levels of UGC effectiveness (El-Shihy & Awaad, 2025). While high-involvement products need greater informational credibility, visual and experiential items like beauty, fashion, gastronomy, and travel gain more from peer demonstrations.

These results imply that trust and authenticity are conditional rather than automatic. A more thorough explanation of UGC influence can be obtained by combining Source Credibility Theory, Social Proof Theory, eWOM Theory, and platform viewpoints. When social validation, algorithmic visibility, openness, and authenticity all support one another, trust is at its strongest.

Integrated Theoretical Framework and Cross-Theme Integration

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e-ISSN 2614-4328

Table 6 synthesizes the four themes discussed in Sections 4.1–4.4 into an integrated antecedent–mechanism–trust–purchase intention framework, showing how Source Credibility Theory, Social Proof Theory, eWOM Theory, and the SOR model combine sequentially — rather than as parallel lenses — to explain the pathway from UGC exposure to purchase or visit intention.

Table 6. Integrated Theoretical Framework: Antecedent–Mechanism–Trust–Purchase Intention Pathway with Boundary Conditions

Stage	Theoretical anchor	Key constructs (from Sections 4.1–4.4)	Boundary conditions / moderators
Antecedent — UGC characteristics	Source Credibility Theory	Authenticity, peer narrative, relatability, creator identity, visual demonstration (Section 4.1)	Perceived staging/scripting; ability to imitate authenticity cues
Mechanism — social validation & algorithmic amplification	Social Proof Theory; platform-algorithm literature	Comments, likes, shares, duets, stitches, hashtag visibility, algorithmic (FYP-type) exposure, virality (Sections 4.2–4.3)	Manipulated/inflated engagement metrics; entertainment-driven vs. evaluative engagement
Trust formation	eWOM Theory; Stimulus–Organism–Response (Organism)	Perceived credibility, emotional arousal, mental imagery, FOMO (Sections 4.1–4.3)	Sponsorship disclosure; perceived commercialization
Purchase / visit intention	Stimulus–Organism–Response (Response)	Purchase intention, visit intention, social commerce participation (Section 4.3, 4.5)	Product category (experiential vs. high-involvement); post-purchase satisfaction not guaranteed
Boundary conditions (cross-cutting moderators)	Platform governance / disclosure literature	Sponsorship disclosure, platform governance and algorithmic visibility, product category, consumer skepticism,	Moderates strength/direction of all paths above; not yet tested for Gen Z vs. general population separately — see Section 4.0

	cultural context (Section 4.4)

Source: Authors' own synthesis (2026), integrating Source Credibility Theory, Social Proof Theory, eWOM Theory, and the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) model

The results suggest that, rather than a clear cause-and-effect relationship, UGC is associated with purchase intention through a networked process, as summarized in the framework above. Virality is associated with increased attention and emotional urgency; authenticity is associated with credibility-building; social proof is associated with stronger trust through visible peer engagement; and platform governance appears to shape whether user-generated content (UGC) is viewed as manipulative or trustworthy (Chung, 2025).

In order to explain credibility, usefulness, emotional engagement, mental imagery, and trust, the proposed framework starts from UGC qualities such as authenticity, peer narrative, visual demonstration, and creator identity. Then, although algorithmic amplification is associated with increased visibility, heightened FOMO, and greater buy intention, interactive elements like comments, likes, shares, duets, and hashtags offer social approval. These interactions, which are associated with trust, brand engagement, purchase intention, and social commerce participation, are mediated by elements like sponsorship disclosure, product category, platform credibility, creator type, consumer skepticism, and cultural context (Z. Chen, 2025; Schröder et al., 2025; Suson et al., 2024; Ulyanova & Tsymbal, 2025).

Four major conflicts are also highlighted in the synthesis: platform empowerment versus algorithmic control, virality versus long-term trust, social evidence versus manipulation, and authenticity versus commercialization. Overall, the results suggest that user-generated content (UGC) can be understood as a socio-digital marketing mechanism whose association with purchase intention depends on the interplay of platform circumstances, algorithmic amplification, social validation, and authenticity. This comprehensive paradigm offers theoretical and practical implications for digital marketing

while directly addressing the research issues of the review. Because this review is a secondary synthesis (SLR) rather than a primary empirical study, the framework above should be read as an integrative, literature-derived model, not as evidence of tested causal paths; empirical testing of the proposed pathway (e.g., via SEM or experimental designs) is noted as a direction for future research.

5. Conclusion

This study examined how user-generated content (UGC) in social media settings — specifically TikTok among Generation Z consumers — is associated with consumer trust and purchase intention. Using a blended systematic literature review that integrated bibliometric analysis and thematic synthesis, four interlocking themes emerged from the thematic synthesis reported in Section 4: authenticity as trust-building peer evidence (Section 4.1), social proof and interactive validation (Section 4.2), virality and algorithmic acceleration (Section 4.3), and platform governance and disclosure as a boundary condition (Section 4.4) — integrated into the theoretical framework presented in Section 4.5 (Table 6). Rather than functioning only as a promotional channel, TikTok is better understood as an algorithmically mediated environment in which peer interaction, platform features, and emotionally compelling content jointly appear to shape trust and purchase decisions, according to the reviewed studies.

By expanding on Social Proof Theory, Source Credibility Theory, and eWOM Theory, and by situating the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) model as the mechanism linking these constructs to purchase and visit intention (Section 4.3, 4.5), the results make a theoretical contribution: whereas prior reviews have generally treated these theories separately or applied them to UGC in general rather than to a single algorithmically-mediated platform, this review positions them as sequential, mutually reinforcing stages —

credibility formation, public validation, and algorithmic amplification — that jointly generate are proposed to generate, per the integrated framework in Table 6, a dual cognitive–affective trust pathway specific to TikTok. In TikTok contexts, trust appears to be shaped by the interplay of algorithmic amplification, peer validation, and authenticity in addition to informational credibility. The review also highlights virality as a boundary-sensitive mechanism: it is associated with increased purchase intention in the reviewed studies, but may also be associated with distrust when content seems excessively promoted.

In terms of methodology, this study illustrates how useful it is to combine thematic synthesis with bibliometric mapping — grounded in the keyword occurrence and total-link-strength evidence and the four-stage PRISMA selection process — to offer both structural and interpretive insights into the UGC literature. Compared to single-disciplinary approaches, integrating viewpoints from marketing, communication, sociology, and information systems provides a more thorough understanding of platform-based consumer behavior.

Practically speaking, the results suggest that rather than depending just on highly polished promotional content or algorithmic reach, marketers should give priority to genuine, transparent, and community-driven user-generated content. While excessive commercialization and ambiguous sponsorship declarations may erode credibility, interactive elements like comments, duets, livestreams, and peer recommendations are highlighted in the reviewed studies as important contributors to building confidence.

Overall, this review offers theoretical, methodological, and managerial insights for future research and practice in digital marketing by positioning user-generated content (UGC) as a socio-digital mechanism through which authenticity, social validation, and platform dynamics are collectively associated with shaping consumer trust and purchase intention.

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