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How TikTok Key Opinion Consumers Help Distribution

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Abstract

Purpose: By combining entertainment, user-generated content (UGC), and e-commerce features, digital platforms—particularly TikTok—are changing how consumers behave and interact with marketing messages. TikTok has developed into a powerful communication tool in Vietnam, where customers are beginning to trust key opinion consumers (KOCs) more when making decisions about what to buy. User-generated content produced by key opinion consumers (UGC by KOCs), has the power to impact consumer behavior through emotional appeal, informativeness, entertainment value, and educational value. This is due to its emotional qualities, personal experience, and high recommendability. This study uses the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) to investigate how social and content factors—such as online opinion leadership and parasocial interaction—affect users' intentions to share and shop on TikTok. **Research design, data and methodology:** A structured questionnaire was used to gather data from 568 TikTok users in Ho Chi Minh City, and the PLS-SEM method was used for analysis. **Results:** The findings demonstrated that while viewer arousal was significantly influenced by content factors, viewer arousal only had an effect on sharing intention; purchase intention was not significantly impacted. In the meantime, both intentions benefited from social factors. **Conclusions:** The study helps to expand the ELM model for short videos and offers useful advice for companies looking to maximize user-generated content on TikTok in order to enhance marketing efficacy and establish brands.

Keywords : TikTok, Content Attributes, Viewer Arousal, Parasocial Interaction, Online Opinion Leadership, Distribution

JEL Classification Code: L81, M31

1. Introduction

Nowadays, digital platforms and social networks have profoundly changed consumer behavior, especially in the field of marketing. In particular, TikTok has emerged as an effective marketing communication tool thanks to its unique combination of entertainment, user-generated content (UGC) and e-commerce functionality. Launched in September 2016, TikTok has rapidly grown globally with more than 500 million users after only three years of operation. According to the WeAreSocial and Hootsuite report (2023),

TikTok has had impressive success in the Asian region, including countries such as Cambodia, Japan, Indonesia, Thailand, and Vietnam. In particular, Vietnam ranks sixth globally in terms of social media usage, with nearly 50 million TikTok users aged 18 and over, including 49.7% female and 50.3% male (WeAreSocial & Hootsuite, 2023). Vietnam also has very high ecommerce growth rate (Kieu, 2022).

The popularity of TikTok has accelerated the digital transformation and shopping habits of users, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic (Kemp, 2023). In particular,

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short video content has become the main form of marketing communication, helping businesses in the distribution and retail sectors to convey messages vividly by combining advertising content and entertainment elements. TikTok's short-form videos, which often incorporate product placements and endorsements, have created a distinct advertising environment that differs from earlier platforms like YouTube and Instagram. Unlike Facebook or Instagram platforms that recommend content based on users' existing relationships, TikTok's algorithm prioritizes operations based on the ability to spread and the level of interaction with the content. According to Weimann and Masri (2020), TikTok recommends content based on the appeal and interest of viewers, regardless of social connections or previous interaction history.

In Vietnam, TikTok is regarded as an ideal marketing communication platform for deploying marketing campaigns within the user community due to its capability to directly connect brands with users. Compared to e-commerce platforms like Shopee, Lazada, or Tiki, TikTok provides a more engaging experience and encourages consumer behavior (B. Zhang et al., 2023). Notably, consumers today tend to rely on online influencers (often practically termed as key opinion consumers - KOCs) as a reliable reference source when making purchasing decisions (Li & Du, 2017; Kieu et al., 2021). This trend has created favorable conditions for KOCs to spread content and influence consumers. Influential consumers create content (also known as user-generated content by key of consumers—UGC by KOCs) that not only reflects personal experience but also cleverly integrates emotional content, authentic stories, and product recommendations. For example, KOCs in the beauty industry can post videos that share product experiences, explain how to choose the right product for each skin type, and present captivating content. This content not only helps meet the need to search for information but also helps consumers have a basis for making purchasing decisions.

The outstanding features of UGC by KOCs on the TikTok platform contain elements such as emotional appeal, informativeness, entertainment value, and educational value to contribute to reinforcing consumer behavior. When combined with social factors such as parasocial interaction and online opinion leadership, UGC by KOCs could influence sharing and purchasing intentions. Notably, consumers can still be attracted to what KOCs convey, even if they are not following them. UGC by KOCs is employed in effectively conveying product information and fostering emotional connections with viewers, which plays a key role in driving consumer engagement and purchase intention (Lee & Hong, 2016; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Despite TikTok's widespread application in marketing communications, relatively few studies have focused on

deeply examining the specific role of UGC by KOCs in influencing purchase and sharing intention, particularly in the Vietnamese market.

This study addresses the existing theoretical gaps by exploring how the unique characteristic of UGC in conjunction with social factors influences consumers' purchase and sharing intentions on TikTok. Specifically, this study focuses on examining how consumer behavior is shaped by factors such as emotional appeal, informativeness, entertainment value, educational value, parasocial interaction, and online opinion leadership. By applying the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), this study aims to broaden our understanding of the mechanisms that influence consumer behavior in the digital marketing communication environment. The peripheral route influences behavior even when people are not thinking deeply and includes feelings and social aspects like emotional appeal, entertainment value, parasocial interaction, and online opinion leadership, while the central route requires more thought and significant cognitive processing, such as informativeness and educational value (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). The current study differs from previous research in that most of the previous studies have predominantly studied macro-influencers or social media sites like Instagram and YouTube or multiple platforms (e.g. Han & Jang, 2024), whereas the study specifically concentrates on exploring micro-influencers that are KOCs on emerging short-form video platform Tik Tok. Additionally, conducting analysis of one of the emerging and digitally dynamic contexts, such as the Vietnamese market, the study in question provides context-related findings that can serve as the basis of the wider comparative study. These additions do not only distinguish the current work among the existing one but also lead to further research opportunities on different platforms and different cultural backgrounds.

The research results are expected to bring practical suggestions for businesses in the field of distribution and retailing to utilize marketing communication strategies on TikTok, enhance the capacity to approach target customers, and accomplish expected outcomes. Additionally, the study contributes to a better understanding of the distinctive characteristics of UGC by KOCs and the social signals that influence consumer behavior in the rapidly changing digital landscape.

2. Theoretical Basis

2.1. Theoretical Foundation

According to Petty and Cacioppo (1986), the ELM is a vital theoretical framework for comprehending how persuasive communication can form and change people's

attitudes. The central route and the peripheral route are the two primary routes of influence. The central route involves consumers carefully considering the message and evaluating its logic. On the other hand, the peripheral route does not require deep cognitive processing and instead depends more on outside factors like the communicator's credibility, attractiveness, or the presence of expert opinions. Based on ELM, the study examines the salient characteristics of UGC by KOCs (emotional appeal, informativeness, entertainment value, and educational value) and social signals (parasocial interaction and online opinion leadership) to better understand how each of these factors influences consumer behavior on TikTok. The use of content-based features like informativeness and educational value are usually associated with central route, whereas such features as emotional appeal, entertainment value, parasocial interaction and opinion leadership are peripheral route.

Informativeness and educational value are regarded as central route factors because of their ability to provide and receive valuable, relevant information and support consumers in the shaping of decision-making. Informativeness is a crucial characteristic that facilitates user responses since it engages consumers deeply in cognitive processing by offering substantive content about products and services (Lee & Hong, 2016). Informativeness contributes to the shape of attitudes and intentions by mollifying consumers' need for knowledge and reducing uncertainty (Ducoffe, 1996). On social media platforms, UGC by KOCs is considered a reliable source of information for consumers to make decisions thanks to its independence, authenticity, and high relevance (Schivinski, 2021). In addition, educational value is also an important factor in the central route of the persuasion process. Unlike emotional or entertaining content, educational value refers to the ability to provide useful, in-depth, and highly applicable information. This content helps consumers better understand the product, its usage, or other relevant contexts in their lives. When receiving educational value content through interactions and content shared on social networks, consumers tend to engage in deep cognitive processing to absorb, evaluate, and relate new information to existing knowledge (Dholakia, Bagozzi, & Pearo, 2004). Most KOCs often share real-life experiences with products and possess the ability to convey information in a vivid, understandable, and approachable way, thereby increasing the educational value of the content they spread to consumers.

In contrast, emotional appeal and entertainment value should be subtly considered within the ELM framework. Although both of these elements can attract attention and evoke strong emotions from viewers, they are not necessarily related to cognitive processing. Therefore, they could be classified as peripheral in the ELM theoretical

framework. Emotional appeal refers to the use of content that stimulates viewers' emotions to increase excitement and emotional engagement without requiring a deep thinking process (Alhabash et al., 2013; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Similarly, entertainment value makes content intriguing and accessible, contributing to the formation of positive attitudes toward the brand without requiring high cognitive effort, thereby stimulating participatory behaviors such as interacting or sharing (Logan et al., 2012).

Parasocial interaction and online opinion leadership are often identified as peripheral routes in the ELM framework because they are related to the characteristics of the communicator rather than the content of the message. Parasocial interaction refers to a one-way relationship between a viewer and a content creator, in which the viewer feels a sense of personal closeness and social connection even though the relationship does not actually exist (Labrecque, 2014). Although this interaction occurs at the individual level, it is still considered a peripheral factor because it influences attitudes and behaviors based on the perception of the relationship rather than a systematic evaluation of the content (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Through parasocial interaction, consumers' interaction and purchase behavior can be strongly influenced by KOCs (Kieu et al., 2021). Similarly, online opinion leadership also belongs to the peripheral route. According to Casaló et al. (2020), KOCs are online opinion leaders who have the ability to strongly influence consumer behavior without necessarily processing content in depth. They are often viewed as trustworthy sources of information because they maintain high levels of engagement and build genuine emotional relationships with their followers (Kieu et al., 2021). The current study is also in line with the Hierarchy of Effects Model, also known as the Standard Learning Model, which assumes that consumers first receive information, then form emotions, and finally lead to behavior (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961). The central route can create a lasting change in attitude and have a lasting effect on behavior, while the peripheral route usually creates a short-term change but can stimulate immediate behavior.

In the social media marketing context, many previous studies have focused on the role of influencers and UGC because they are key elements of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) marketing (Casaló et al., 2020; Schivinski, 2021). According to Schivinski (2021), brand interaction behaviors on social media can be arranged along a spectrum from passive to proactive, starting from viewing or reading content to sharing, commenting, and finally creating content. TikTok stands out with its content dissemination algorithm based on the level of interaction and appeal of the content instead of on the existing relationships of users. This mechanism increases the effectiveness of reach and promotes proactive content creation behavior. A view or

interaction can be considered a form of implicit recommendation, while sharing behavior shows active agreement with the content. In today's context, consumers increasingly trust information from other users more than from brands, especially KOCs. The role of UGC by KOCs becomes important for forming consumer behavior. As social media change from purely online social spaces to social commerce by integrating e-commerce functionalities, the influence on purchase decisions becomes more relevant and measurable, attracting increased research attention (Zhao et al., 2023).

2.2. Related Prior Studies

The previous study on social media marketing research has examined the mechanism by which content characteristics and opinion leaders affect consumer behavior. The impact of social media influencers on consumer behaviors has been a crucial area of research. For example, Sokolova and Kefi (2020) discovered that influencers on Instagram and YouTube have considerable influence on purchase intentions by utilizing their credibility and the parasocial relationships they cultivate with their audiences. Casaló et al. (2020) also emphasize that consumers' behavioral intentions are significantly influenced by the originality and uniqueness they perceive in Instagram influencers. Finally, Kieu et al. (2021) fortify these notions by demonstrating how micro-influencers positively influence consumer intentions through parasocial interactions and opinion leadership and increase engagement through eWOM marketing.

Moreover, there is a stream of study focuses on examining the causes and effects of consumer interaction with social media content. Kulkarni et al. (2020) discover that personality traits, which are moderated by the attractiveness of the content, affect young consumers' intentions to share branded viral video advertisements. Lee and Hong (2016) determine three important factors that influence positive online behavioral responses and purchase intentions, including emotional arousal, informativeness, and creativity. Petrescu et al. (2015) emphasized that attitudes toward the advertisement and intentions to share are influenced by the ad source as well as ad attributes like humor, sex appeal, and informativeness. Finally, C. Zhao et al. (2022) indicate that parasocial interaction greatly increases content sharing in the context of short travel videos. This interaction is motivated by entertainment motivation, value congruence, and emotional engagement.

Generally, earlier research has shown the complex relationship between content features, the trustworthiness of influencers, and consumer engagement in digital marketing. When combined with the ELM, this knowledge provides a theoretical foundation for investigating the salient features

of UGC by KOCs that impact consumers' behavioral intentions on TikTok. This study is particularly significant for the Vietnamese market due to the substantial changes in shopping behaviors brought about by the rise of social commerce and short-form video platforms.

2.3. Hypothesis Development

2.3.1. Emotional Appeal and Viewer Arousal

Emotional appeal involves the ability of content to evoke emotional responses from viewers, such as happiness, excitement, empathy, or even fear (Alhabash et al., 2013). Viewer arousal refers to the intensity of physiological and psychological arousal stimulated by engaging content, thereby enhancing the viewer's level of awareness and response to the message conveyed (Berger, 2011). Based on the ELM, emotional appeal can work through both central and peripheral routes, depending on the level of cognitive processing it stimulates (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Amplified emotional states increase engagement and information processing, thereby enhancing the audience's arousal level. UGC by KOCs is often personalized, casual, and intimate, which easily evokes emotions and creates a strong connection with the audience. KOCs' diverse, natural, and emotional content not only promotes products but also attracts attention and enhances the ability to receive messages. According to Alhabash et al. (2013), content that is capable of evoking strong emotions is often shared and discussed more, thereby improving communication effectiveness. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Emotional appeal (EA) of UGC by KOCs positively influence viewer arousal (VA) on TikTok.

2.3.2. Informativeness and Viewer Arousal

Informativeness refers to the extent to which content provides valuable, relevant, and factual information that helps consumers make informed decisions (Lee & Hong, 2016). Within the ELM framework, informativeness is directly related to the central pathway—where messages are processed with high levels of cognitive engagement, leading to attitude change. When consumers receive information that is in-depth and factually valuable, they will increase their level of cognitive processing and increase their level of arousal (Ducoffe, 1996). KOCs often deliver content by cleverly embedding product information into intimate sharing, such as real-life experiences and direct reviews, to make the content clearer and easier to absorb, while minimizing information ambiguity. Lee and Hong (2016) emphasized that informativeness plays a pivotal role in engaging consumers because it satisfies information-seeking needs and helps reduce uncertainty. This process leads to higher levels of arousal and enhances consumers'

engagement with the content. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Informativeness (IN) of UGC by KOCs positively influence viewer arousal (VA) on TikTok.

2.3.3. Entertainment Value and Viewer Arousal

Entertainment value refers to the extent to which content is enjoyable and engaging, creating a pleasant experience for viewers (Logan et al., 2012). Although entertainment content often requires little cognitive effort, it still can stimulate attention and deep emotions through feelings of satisfaction and enjoyment, thereby increasing the level of arousal in viewers (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). UGC by KOCs is often presented vividly in the form of challenges, comedy skits, everyday situations or popular trends, while naturally incorporating product images. Thereby, viewers can maintain attention and increase the level of engagement when receiving highly entertaining content. Logan et al. (2012) also asserted that content with high entertainment value not only attracts but also retains viewers, thereby increasing emotional and cognitive stimulation. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Entertainment value (EN) of UGC by KOCs positively influence viewer arousal (VA) on TikTok.

2.3.4. Educational Value and Viewer Arousal

Educational value refers to the perceived benefits that consumers receive from consuming and sharing information in a social network community (Dholakia et al., 2004). This type of benefit is considered a form of functional value when users gain useful knowledge, information, or new insights through content (Babin et al., 1994). Within the ELM framework, educational value acts as a trigger for information processing through the central pathway to increase attention and enhance the arousal level of viewers when interacting with and consuming content. UGC by KOCs typically contains educational content to help viewers become more familiar with information, usage, or extended application contexts. This process increases the arousal level because viewers feel that their understanding is expanded and they locate the content practically useful. Educational value is identified as a key factor in helping users understand new and profound content to increase engagement (Hall-Phillips et al., 2016), which contributes to reinforcing emotional value (Liu & Huang, 2025). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Educational value (EDU) of UGC by KOCs positively influence viewer arousal (VA) on TikTok.

2.3.5. Viewer Arousal and Sharing Intention

When consumers have a highly arousing experience, they tend to share content that has had a strong emotional or

cognitive impact on them in order to spread that personal experience to the community (Zillmann, 2018). In UGC by KOCs, viewers are often easily emotionally aroused by authenticity and intimacy. This content often contains real-life experiences, expressing emotions naturally and unforced, thereby creating a deeper connection with consumers. Berger (2011) also points out that emotionally charged content creates a deep impression and promotes the need to share for self-affirmation or social connection. This relationship is documented in the context of social media, where highly arousing content tends to spread widely. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5: Viewer arousal (VA) positively influences sharing intention (SI) on TikTok.

2.3.6. Parasocial Interaction and Sharing Intention

Parasocial interaction refers to the one-sided relationships that individuals form with media personalities or influencers, where they perceive a personal connection despite the relationship being mediated (Horton & Wohl, 1956). In the ELM, PSI operates as a peripheral cue, influencing attitudes and behaviors through the perceived relationship with the influencer rather than through the content's critical evaluation (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Sokolova and Kefi (2020) found that strong parasocial relationships enhance viewers' willingness to share content, as they feel personally connected to the influencer and want to support or endorse their content. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H6: Parasocial interaction (PSI) positively influences sharing intention (SI) on TikTok.

2.3.7. Viewer Arousal and Purchase Intention

Purchase intention refers to the volition of a consumer to buy a product or service based on what they engage with in content (Pöyry et al., 2013). Arousal can enhance consumer engagement, but it is unclear how it influences the intention to make a purchase. Theories of consumer behavior suggest that while arousal can make people more interested and likely to share, they often need other things like trust or perceived value to transform that interest into a purchase decision (Petrescu et al., 2015). Petrescu et al. (2015) found that while arousal makes people more likely to share content, it does not inescapably convert into purchase intentions unless other factors are present. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H7: Viewer arousal (VA) positively influences purchase intention (PI) on TikTok.

2.3.8. Parasocial Interaction and Purchase Intention

Parasocial interaction can impact purchase intention because consumers who feel a connection with influencers

are more likely to trust suggestions and purchase the products recommended (Labrecque, 2014). Based on the ELM framework, parasocial interaction can influence purchase intention through the peripheral route by utilizing the trust and connection that consumers have with influencers (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Labrecque (2014) highlighted that viewers who have strong parasocial interactions with influencers are more likely to follow advice and have purchase intentions. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

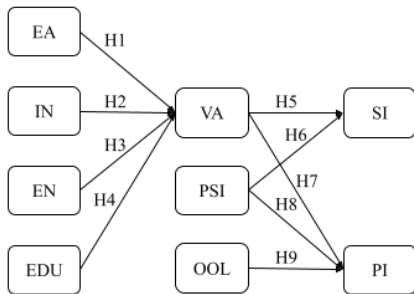
H8: Para-social interaction (PSI) positively influences purchase intention (PI) on TikTok.

2.3.9. Online Opinion Leadership and Purchase Intention

Online opinion leadership involves the effect that individuals or entities have on forming the opinions, attitudes, and behaviors of others, particularly in an online environment (Casaló et al., 2020). Based on the ELM framework, online opinion leadership is a peripheral route that can significantly affect purchase intentions by utilizing the opinion leader's credibility and authority (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Casaló et al. (2020) point out that opinion leaders, especially KOCs, can have a significant impact on their followers' purchasing decisions through their perceived expertise and credibility. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H9: Online opinion leadership (OOL) positively influences purchase intention (PI) on TikTok.

Figure 1 represents the visual integration of hypothesized relationships to be tested in this study.



Note: EA: Emotional Appeal; IN: Informativeness; EN: Entertainment Value; EDU: Educational Value; VA: Viewer Arousal; PSI: Parasocial Interaction; OOL: Online Opinion Leadership; PI: Purchase Intention; SI: Sharing Intention

Figure 1: The Proposed Research Model

3. Methodology

This study applied a predominantly quantitative method to empirically test the relationships between various factors,

including emotional appeal, informativeness, entertainment value, educational value, parasocial interaction and online opinion leadership, with consumer reactions such as viewer arousal, sharing intention and purchase intention on the TikTok platform. Data were collected through a structured survey distributed to TikTok users living in Ho Chi Minh City. The study employs a convenience sampling method that is well-suited for social network research, particularly when there is a need to quickly and flexibly engage willing participants. The survey subjects are TikTok users aged 18 and over who have used the app regularly for at least six months. The survey was conducted in Ho Chi Minh City because it is a major economic and social center in Vietnam with a high density of social networking users and e-commerce activities. The survey was sent out both online and in person to increase the response rate and ensure the sample's representative. The online form was promoted on social media and email lists, while the offline survey was conducted in high-traffic public locations like shopping malls and universities.

To ensure the questionnaire was accurate and reliable, the study utilized validated scales from previous research. Emotional appeal (EA) and informativeness (IN) scales were inherited from Lee and Hong (2016). Entertainment Value (EN) was measured using a scale from Logan et al. (2012), while educational value (EDU) scale was inherited from Hall-Phillips et al. (2016). Viewer arousal (VA) scale was employed from Bradley and Lang (1994) and Berger (2011). Parasocial interaction (PSI) was assessed using scale from Lee and Watkins (2016). whereas online opinion leadership (OOL) scale was adapted from Casaló et al. (2020). Sharing intention (SI) scale was inherited from C. Zhao et al. (2022), while purchase intention (PI) scale was inherited from Lin et al. (2013).

This study employed Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to analyze the data that was collected because this technique can accommodate complex models with multiple constructs and is proper for exploratory research where theory development is still ongoing. The study applied Cronbach's alpha to determine the internal consistency and reliability of the constructs, composite reliability and average variance extraction to confirm their convergent validity, and the HTMT criterion to assess discriminant validity. Constructs that accommodate the threshold criteria (Cronbach's alpha > 0.7, CR > 0.6, AVE > 0.5, HTMT < 0.9) were deemed valid and reliable for further steps (Hair et al., 2016). The structural model was evaluated by examining the path coefficients, R² values, and the significance of the hypothesized relationships. Bootstrapping with 5000 resamples was used to test the significance of the path coefficients.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Result

The study collected 568 valid surveys from TikTok users. The demographic characteristics of the survey sample are presented in Table 1. The analysis results show that the majority of participants are young individuals with university degrees and relatively low monthly income. This target group accurately reflects the core user base of the TikTok platform in Vietnam nowadays.

Table 1: Sample Demographic Statistics

Demographic Variables	Frequency (n = 568)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	182	32%
Female	375	66%
Other	11	2%
Age		
18 – 25	358	63%
26 – 35	170	30%
Above 35	40	7%
Education		
Postgraduate	91	16%
University	392	69%
College	34	6%
High school	51	9%
Monthly Income		
Below 7 million VND	233	41%
8 – 10 million VND	96	17%
11 – 20 million VND	142	25%
Above 21 million VND	97	17%
Marital Status		
Single	466	82%
Married	102	18%

Note: One million VND ~ 38 USD

The reliability and validity of the constructs used in this study were confirmed (Table 2). The outer loadings for all constructs were above the acceptable threshold of 0.70, with most exceeding 0.80, indicating strong indicator reliability. The Cronbach’s alpha values ranged from 0.847 to 0.881, showing high internal consistency. The Composite Reliability (CR) values were also well above the threshold of 0.60, and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values ranged from 0.658 to 0.800, indicating that the scales used in the study are reliable.

Table 2: Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	Outer Loadings Range	Cronbach’s Alpha	CR	AVE
EA	0.825 – 0.851	0.860	0.905	0.704
EDU	0.843 – 0.852	0.870	0.911	0.719
EN	0.876 – 0.889	0.861	0.915	0.782
IN	0.833 – 0.862	0.868	0.910	0.716
OOL	0.776 – 0.821	0.861	0.900	0.643
PI	0.847 – 0.868	0.881	0.918	0.737
PSI	0.796 – 0.827	0.870	0.906	0.658
SI	0.865 – 0.886	0.847	0.907	0.765
VA	0.885 – 0.899	0.875	0.923	0.800

Note: EA: Emotional Appeal; IN: Informativeness; EN: Entertainment Value; EDU: Educational Value; VA: Viewer Arousal; PSI: Para-social Interaction; OOL: Online Opinion Leadership; PI: Purchase Intention; SI: Sharing Intention

The discriminant validity of the constructs was assessed using the HTMT ratio. The HTMT values were all below 0.90, indicating that the constructs are distinct from one another (Table 3).

Table 3: HTMT Discriminant Validity

Pair	EA	EDU	EN	IN	OOL	PI	PSI	SI
EDU	0.090							
EN	0.032	0.076						
IN	0.098	0.089	0.088					
OOL	0.040	0.048	0.094	0.036				
PI	0.048	0.028	0.063	0.057	0.561			
PSI	0.051	0.041	0.075	0.077	0.058	0.536		
SI	0.226	0.231	0.259	0.275	0.078	0.299	0.570	
VA	0.415	0.457	0.493	0.489	0.068	0.055	0.070	0.580

Note: EA: Emotional Appeal; IN: Informativeness; EN: Entertainment Value; EDU: Educational Value; VA: Viewer Arousal; PSI: Para-social Interaction; OOL: Online Opinion Leadership; PI: Purchase Intention; SI: Sharing Intention

The adjusted R² value for viewer arousal (VA) is 0.548, indicating that 54.8% of the variance in VA is explained by emotional appeal, informativeness, and entertainment value. The adjusted R² value for purchase intention (PI) is 0.442, meaning that 44.2% of the variance in PI is accounted for by para-social interaction, online opinion leadership, and viewer arousal. The R² value for sharing intention (SI) is 0.463, indicating that 46.3% of the variance in SI is explained by its antecedents. These values suggest a moderate to substantial explanatory power, supporting the model’s robustness in understanding consumer behavior on TikTok.

The structural model results in Table 4 reveal that most of the hypothesized relationships were supported. Specifically, emotional appeal (EA) (H1: β=0.302, p<0.001), informativeness (IN) (H2: β=0.348, p<0.001), entertainment value (EV) (H3: β=0.377, p<0.001), and educational value (EDU) (H4: β=0.323, p<0.001) all significantly influenced viewer arousal (VA), confirming their importance in

engaging TikTok users. In turn, viewer arousal (VA) significantly influenced sharing intention (SI) (H5: $\beta=0.472$, $p<0.001$) but did not have a significant effect on purchase intention (PI) (H7: $\beta=-0.025$, $p=0.448$). The finding concerning the impact of viewer arousal implies that the TikTok users can be shown emotional or cognitive stimulation without necessarily translating this into purchase behavior perhaps caused by the existing tendency towards providing entertainment rather than sales-oriented activities on the platform. Parasocial interaction (PSI) also had a significant impact on both sharing intention (SI) (H6: $\beta=0.462$, $p<0.001$) and purchase intention (PI) (H8: $\beta=0.450$, $p<0.001$). Online opinion leadership (OOL) was found to be a significant predictor of purchase intention (PI) (H9: $\beta=0.470$, $p<0.001$).

Table 4: Structural Model Results

	Path	Path Coefficient	t value	p value	Hypothesis testing
H1	EA → VA	0.302	11.226	0.000	Supported
H2	IN → VA	0.348	12.285	0.000	Supported
H3	EN → VA	0.377	14.608	0.000	Supported
H4	EDU → VA	0.323	11.287	0.000	Supported
H5	VA → SI	0.472	16.089	0.000	Supported
H6	PSI → SI	0.462	16.031	0.000	Supported
H7	VA → PI	-0.025	0.758	0.448	Not supported
H8	PSI → PI	0.450	16.920	0.000	Supported
H9	OOL → PI	0.470	16.862	0.000	Supported

Note: EA: Emotional Appeal; IN: Informativeness; EN: Entertainment Value; EDU: Educational Value; VA: Viewer Arousal; PSI: Parasocial Interaction; OOL: Online Opinion Leadership; PI: Purchase Intention; SI: Sharing Intention

The study also examined indirect influence, as in Table 5, showing that some characteristics of UGC by KOCs have a significant impact on sharing intention and purchase intention. Specifically, entertainment value ($\beta = 0.178$, $p<0.001$), informativeness ($\beta = 0.164$, $p<0.001$), emotional appeal ($\beta = 0.142$, $p<0.001$), and educational value ($\beta = 0.153$, $p<0.001$) all have a positive impact on sharing intention through viewer arousal. However, other indirect relationships do not show a statistically significant impact.

Table 5: Assessment of Indirect Effects

Path	β (Sample Mean)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	t value	p value
EN → VA → SI	0.178	0.016	10.793	0.000
IN → VA → SI	0.164	0.017	9.817	0.000
EA → VA → SI	0.142	0.015	9.24	0.000
EDU → VA → SI	0.153	0.016	9.241	0.000
EN → VA → PI	-0.009	0.012	0.755	0.450
IN → VA → PI	-0.009	0.011	0.757	0.449
EA → VA → PI	-0.008	0.010	0.749	0.454
EDU → VA → PI	-0.008	0.011	0.753	0.451

Note: EA: Emotional Appeal; IN: Informativeness; EN: Entertainment Value; EDU: Educational Value; VA: Viewer Arousal; PSI: Parasocial Interaction; OOL: Online Opinion Leadership; PI: Purchase Intention; SI: Sharing Intention

The impact of emotional appeal, informativeness, entertainment value, and educational value on viewer arousal shows the importance of the prominent features of UGC by KOCs. These findings are consistent with previous studies that have shown that content characteristics such as informativeness and emotional appeal (Lee & Hong, 2016), entertainment value (Logan et al., 2012), and educational value (Hall-Phillips et al., 2016) can influence consumers' attitudes, emotions, and engagement toward social media content.

The unique dynamics of TikTok clearly reflect the statistically insignificant relationship between viewer arousal and purchase intention, while a strong relationship exists between arousal and sharing intention. The ELM (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), the traditional Hierarchy of Effects Model (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961), and the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) all suggest that attitudes and emotions lead to intentions and behaviors. This finding goes against those assumptions. This finding contradicts the conclusions of previous studies by Lee and Hong (2016) and Petrescu et al. (2015), which support the notion that behavioral intentions directly result from emotional arousal. Unlike traditional platforms where arousal may lead to purchase intentions (Berger, 2011), TikTok's structure encourages rapid content consumption, frequently without immediate commercial outcomes, emphasizing entertainment and virality (Weimann & Masri, 2020). Hence, rather than aiming for quick sales conversions, marketers should concentrate on increasing brand recognition and fostering long-term relationships. This finding can be explained by the fact that TikTok is an entertainment-oriented platform where people usually use it temporarily and it is not necessarily connected to the transactional results. It may be that the arousal induced no purchase intent due to a lack of relationship between entertainment contents and perceived credibility or valued product. Other mechanisms should be studied in the future.

The strength of online influencers on TikTok is expounded by the significant effect that parasocial interactions have on sharing and purchase intentions. This result is coherent with Sokolova and Kefi (2020), which found that virtual relationships can effectively drive consumer behavior. These relationships are especially effective because TikTok's algorithm places an order on content engagement rather than follower count, enabling trusted influencers to reach sizable viewers (Rach, 2021). Similarly, online opinion leadership significantly impacts consumer behavior, enhancing the effectiveness of influencers in encouraging both sharing and purchasing behavior. This result is consistent with Casaló et al. (2020), which reinforces that online opinion leadership plays a critical role in shaping consumer decisions through peripheral persuasion in the rapid social media environments.

These research results advance a broader understanding of social media marketing by demonstrating how various platforms modify the impact of content and social motivation. While a previous study has highlighted the emotional and cognitive arousal in converting purchasing behavior (Berger, 2011), the TikTok environment may entail different strategies to transform viewer engagement into sales. The viral nature of TikTok and its rapid content consumption mean that, despite high engagement levels, immediate commercial results are less predictable. Therefore, the study points out that there must be strategies that prioritize brand awareness and long-term relationship building over direct conversions from viewer arousal. Even though this study examines content attributes separately, it is worth noting that such traits as emotional, entertaining and informative content are common features of UGC in practice. It would be best to investigate possible interaction as well as content synergies in the future because of the importance of determining how these combinations affect consumer response.

5. Conclusions

With the use of Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), the present research makes a contribution to theoretical knowledge on consumer behavior and distribution, as it clearly defines the respective roles of the central route and the peripheral one in determining consumer intentions in the context of the digital marketing and commerce, and specifically, in the environment of dynamically-changing social media such as Tik Tok. Results demonstrate that UGC by KOCs in the form of emotional appeal, informativeness, entertainment value and educational value has a solid contribution in increasing viewer arousal. At the same time, social factors including para-social encounters and internet opinion leadership have great impact on consumer sharing and purchase intentions. These findings highlight the fact that the level of consumer engagement on social networking sites is a highly complex interplay between cognitive, emotional, and social motivation needs, and build on ELM theory to explain the short-form video media content (in particular UGC by KOCs) and the peculiarities of using it in practice.

The focus on defining the peculiarities of TikTok helps highlight the significance of creating content plans that should be specifically designed to reach people effectively via the digital channel. However, unlike one would have originally expected, increased viewer arousal on TikTok does not translate into direct purchase conversions. Thus, the distribution tactics via TikTok are to focus on distributing organic content, augment brand presence, and continuously

engage the consumers to become a long-term success in distribution.

In practical distribution terms, the study highlights an important role of UGC by KOCs that increase the reach of content and attract consumer attention necessary in achieving successful distribution results. The analysis also determines the current shortcoming of TikTok as a direct distribution channel, which means that the various means of distribution and promotional bonuses are needed in order to meet potential consumer interest with real purchasing process. As a result, any business needs to adopt promotional strategies, effective supply chain and streamlined shopping experience into its distribution models to ensure successful conversion and sustainability in their businesses.

Moreover, the analysis demonstrates the algorithm tendencies favored on TikTok in terms of the content interaction that considerably boost the distribution efficiency, improving the organic presentation. The next step that businesses, particularly those in retail and distribution, are advised to take therefore involves strategically placing interactive and engaging content that fits the algorithm of TikTok as a way of boosting their competence in distribution in the digital world. Proper utilization of the TikTok content recommendation algorithm can reach a significant brand expansion level and functionality of consumer base, which would correlate into the real distribution-associated benefits.

Notwithstanding these contributions, there are a number of shortcomings identified. Due to the cross-sectional research design, it is difficult to establish causality and there is need to carry out a longitudinal study which could give more information on how such consumer behaviors and distribution are linked over the years. Also, due to being geographically confined to Ho Chi Minh City, the applicability is limited, and further research in diverse territories to provide more effective distribution-related approaches is destined. Another campaign variable that should be researched further is the message quality, different types of influencer roles and sound logistical support systems to enable digital marketing to distribute effectively into every aspect.

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