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Analyzing the effects of influencer marketing on consumer behavior: Insights from social influence theory in TikTok Campaigns

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of influencer marketing on consumer behavior through the lens of Social Influence Theory, focusing on campaigns conducted on TikTok, a platform renowned for its unique algorithm and highly engaged Gen Z audience. Employing a qualitative case study methodology, the research analyzes three successful TikTok campaigns: Chipotle's #GuacDance Challenge, Gymshark's fitness influencer initiative, and e.l.f. Cosmetics' #EyesLipsFace campaign. Findings reveal that influencers play pivotal roles as agents of both normative and informational influence. Normative influence fosters conformity and participation in viral trends, as demonstrated by Chipotle's campaign, which led to unprecedented digital sales. Informational influence builds trust in influencer expertise, evident in Gymshark's ability to enhance brand loyalty through fitness content. TikTok's features, such as user-generated content and virality potential, amplify these effects, making it a powerful tool for brand promotion. Thematic analysis highlights how influencer-driven strategies affect purchase decisions, brand loyalty, and user engagement. While these campaigns underscore TikTok's transformative role in digital marketing, the study acknowledges limitations, including its platform-specific focus and the use of a limited number of case studies. Future research could explore comparative analyses across different social media platforms to generalize findings. These insights offer theoretical contributions to understanding digital consumer behavior and practical recommendations for brands to optimize influencer collaborations on TikTok by selecting suitable influencers, crafting authentic content, and leveraging the platform's algorithm for maximum reach and engagement.

Keywords: Influencer marketing; TikTok; Social Influence Theory; Consumer behavior; Digital marketing; User-generated content

1. Introduction

Influencer marketing has emerged as a pivotal strategy in digital marketing, leveraging the credibility and reach of individuals with substantial social media followings to promote brands and products. Influencers are often regarded as trusted authorities or relatable peers within specific niches, making their endorsements more persuasive than traditional advertising [1]. This marketing approach capitalizes on the increasing consumer distrust of conventional advertisements and the shift towards personalized, authentic content consumption [2].

The rise of social media platforms has significantly amplified the influence of digital creators, giving them unparalleled access to audiences worldwide. Platforms like TikTok have revolutionized influencer marketing by combining short-form, engaging video content with algorithm-driven reach, enabling campaigns to achieve viral status rapidly [3]. TikTok's unique ability to foster organic interaction through challenges, duets, and hashtag campaigns has positioned it as a powerful medium for influencer-driven marketing initiatives.

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The importance of influencer marketing in the digital age is further underscored by its measurable impact on consumer behavior. Studies show that consumers are more likely to trust recommendations from influencers than from brand-owned channels, resulting in higher purchase intentions and stronger brand loyalty [4]. As such, influencer marketing has evolved from a supplementary tactic to a central component of many companies' digital marketing strategies, especially in engaging younger, tech-savvy demographics.

By examining the effects of influencer marketing through the lens of Social Influence Theory, this research aims to provide deeper insights into how influencers shape consumer decisions and behaviors on platforms like TikTok.

1.2. Research Problem

Despite the rapid rise of influencer marketing as a dominant digital strategy, significant gaps remain in understanding its nuanced effects on consumer behavior, particularly on emerging platforms such as TikTok. Existing literature has extensively explored influencer marketing on platforms like Instagram and YouTube, highlighting its impact on brand engagement, trust, and purchase intention [5, 4]. However, TikTok's unique features—such as its algorithm-driven content discovery, short-form video format, and emphasis on trends—create distinct conditions for influencer-consumer interactions that are not fully addressed in prior research [3].

TikTok's rapid growth and widespread adoption among Gen Z and Millennials have transformed it into a crucial platform for influencer marketing, yet its consumer behavior mechanisms remain underexplored [6]. For instance, while influencers on TikTok can rapidly generate trends and engage audiences through interactive features like challenges and duets, it is unclear how these engagements translate into behavioral outcomes such as purchase decisions or brand loyalty. Furthermore, the role of Social Influence Theory in explaining how consumers respond to influencers on TikTok—whether through normative pressures to conform or informational trust in expertise—has received limited scholarly attention.

This gap in understanding is particularly critical given the platform's ability to foster rapid virality, potentially amplifying both positive and negative consumer responses. As brands continue to allocate increasing budgets to TikTok influencer campaigns, there is a pressing need for empirical research to uncover how these campaigns influence consumer behavior and the psychological mechanisms underlying these effects. Addressing this gap will not only contribute to the academic discourse but also provide actionable insights for practitioners seeking to optimize their TikTok marketing strategies.

TikTok has emerged as a unique and influential platform for studying the dynamics of influencer marketing due to its distinct features and unprecedented user engagement. Unlike traditional social media platforms, TikTok relies on an algorithm-driven For You Page (FYP) that enables content discovery beyond a user's immediate network. This feature amplifies the visibility and virality of influencer content, making it an ideal environment for examining the broad reach and impact of influencer marketing campaigns [7]. Additionally, TikTok's short-form video format emphasizes creativity and relatability, elements that resonate particularly well with younger audiences and facilitate high levels of engagement with influencer-driven content [6].

The platform's demographic composition further underscores its relevance for influencer marketing research. With the majority of TikTok's users belonging to Generation Z and Millennials, brands and influencers are able to tap into a consumer base that is highly receptive to social media marketing and is characterized by its preference for authenticity and interactive content [8]. Moreover, TikTok's emphasis on participatory culture—evident through challenges, trends, and user-generated content—provides an interactive framework for influencers to establish strong connections with their audiences, thereby influencing consumer behavior in ways that are distinct from other platforms [9].

The platform's capability to foster virality is another critical factor that makes TikTok an ideal subject for studying influencer marketing. Successful campaigns, often spearheaded by influencers, can achieve massive reach in a short time span, influencing brand visibility and purchase intentions on a global scale [3]. This virality, combined with TikTok's ability to generate data on user engagement, offers researchers an opportunity to assess the direct and indirect effects of influencer content on consumer decision-making.

In this context, TikTok not only serves as a transformative platform for brands and influencers but also as a fertile ground for academic inquiry into the mechanics of social influence and consumer behavior. Its dynamic, participatory environment and unique algorithmic structure provide a rich foundation for exploring how influencers leverage social influence to shape consumer attitudes and actions.

This study has the following two objectives:

- To analyze the effects of influencer marketing on consumer behavior.
- To explore how Social Influence Theory applies to TikTok marketing campaigns.

To achieve the above objectives, the following questions were asked:

- How does influencer marketing influence consumer purchasing decisions on TikTok?
- What types of social influence (e.g., normative, informational) are most prominent in TikTok campaigns?
- How do consumers engage with influencer content (e.g., likes, shares, comments) and what behaviors result?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing refers to a strategic partnership between brands and individuals who possess a significant social media following, leveraging their credibility and personal brand to promote products or services [4]. Unlike traditional advertising, influencer marketing relies on the perceived authenticity of influencers, who often create relatable, personalized content tailored to their audiences [5]. This approach aligns with consumers' increasing preference for peer-like recommendations over brand-driven messaging [1].

Influencers are typically categorized based on their follower count, with macro-influencers having a substantial audience (typically over 100,000 followers) and micro-influencers attracting smaller but highly engaged communities (usually between 1,000 and 100,000 followers) [10]. Macro-influencers often command a broader reach, making them ideal for increasing brand visibility. However, their perceived authenticity may be lower due to their commercialized image [4]. In contrast, micro-influencers are perceived as more relatable and trustworthy, often resulting in higher engagement rates and stronger personal connections with their followers [11].

Research has consistently shown that influencer marketing positively affects brand awareness. Influencers' ability to present products organically within their content enables brands to integrate into their audiences' everyday lives, thus increasing visibility [5]. Macro-influencers, in particular, are effective in enhancing brand awareness due to their extensive reach and the viral nature of their content [10]. For example, studies have found that campaigns involving macro-influencers tend to generate greater impressions and brand mentions across social platforms [12].

Influencers play a pivotal role in shaping purchase intentions, particularly through mechanisms such as trust and perceived expertise. Informational influence, where followers view influencers as knowledgeable figures within their niche, has been found to significantly increase consumers' likelihood of purchasing recommended products [2]. Micro-influencers often excel in this regard, as their closer relationships with their followers foster a higher degree of credibility [11].

Trust is a critical factor in the success of influencer marketing. Influencers who consistently produce authentic, relatable content are more likely to establish strong trust bonds with their audiences [4]. This trust translates into a greater acceptance of product recommendations and a stronger influence on consumer decisions [1]. However, trust may be compromised when influencer promotions appear overly commercialized or when disclosure of sponsorship is not transparent [10].

While prior research has established the general effectiveness of influencer marketing, gaps remain in understanding its mechanisms on platforms like TikTok, where algorithmic content delivery and participatory culture may further amplify or alter these effects. This study aims to address this gap by exploring how TikTok influencers, both macro- and micro-, impact brand awareness, purchase intention, and consumer trust.

2.2. Social Influence Theory

Social Influence Theory provides a framework for understanding how individuals' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are shaped by the presence or actions of others. This theory categorizes social influence into three main types: normative influence, informational influence, and the mechanisms of compliance, identification, and internalization [13].

Normative influence occurs when individuals conform to the expectations of others to gain social approval or avoid disapproval. This type of influence is driven by the desire to belong to a group or align with perceived social norms [14].

In the context of influencer marketing, followers may adopt the preferences or behaviors of influencers to feel included in a community or trend.

Informational influence arises when individuals accept information from others as evidence about reality. This occurs particularly in situations where individuals lack sufficient knowledge or experience and rely on others as credible sources [15]. Influencers, seen as experts or authorities in their niches, often wield informational influence by providing recommendations that shape consumer decisions.

Compliance refers to outwardly conforming to others' expectations without necessarily internalizing the behavior or belief. In influencer marketing, compliance may manifest in consumers making one-time purchases based on temporary external pressures, such as a limited-time offer promoted by an influencer. Identification involves adopting behaviors or beliefs to establish a desired relationship with an influencer or their community. Followers may emulate influencers they admire, fostering brand loyalty through the association with the influencer's persona [13]. Internalization occurs when individuals integrate the beliefs or behaviors of an influencer into their value system, leading to enduring changes in attitudes or preferences. This mechanism highlights the deeper impact influencers can have on shaping consumer attitudes toward brands or lifestyles.

2.3. Influencers as Agents of Social Influence

Influencers act as powerful agents of social influence by combining normative and informational mechanisms to guide consumer behavior. Through their curated content, influencers often establish a sense of relatability and aspirational lifestyles, encouraging followers to comply with or internalize their recommendations [1]. Their ability to engage audiences through authentic storytelling and personal branding enhances their perceived credibility and expertise, reinforcing their informational influence [5].

Additionally, the parasocial relationships that followers develop with influencers amplify their role as trusted advisors and role models. Parasocial interaction, characterized by a one-sided emotional connection, strengthens identification, as followers perceive influencers as relatable peers or authoritative figures [16]. This dynamic is particularly evident on platforms like TikTok, where interactive features such as challenges and duets foster a sense of community and active participation [10].

The ability of influencers to harness both normative and informational influences has profound implications for consumer behavior. By shaping perceptions of social norms and providing credible endorsements, influencers can drive significant changes in brand awareness, purchase intentions, and consumer trust. Understanding these dynamics through the lens of Social Influence Theory is essential for comprehending the mechanisms behind successful influencer marketing campaigns.

2.4. Consumer Behavior

2.4.1. Key Consumer Behaviors Driven by Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing has become a significant driver of consumer behavior, shaping key actions such as purchase decisions, brand loyalty, and social sharing. By leveraging trust, authenticity, and relatability, influencers create a direct impact on how consumers interact with brands and make decisions in the digital marketplace.

One of the most direct effects of influencer marketing is its ability to drive purchase decisions. Consumers often rely on influencers as trusted sources of recommendations, especially when making decisions about new or unfamiliar products. Influencers act as intermediaries between brands and their followers, translating marketing messages into relatable content that resonates with their audience's preferences and needs [5]. Studies have shown that influencers' endorsements significantly increase purchase intentions, particularly when the content is perceived as authentic and aligns with the influencer's expertise [17]. Moreover, the sense of immediacy created by limited-time offers or exclusive deals promoted by influencers further motivates consumer purchases, often leading to impulsive buying behavior [10].

Beyond purchase decisions, influencer marketing plays a pivotal role in fostering brand loyalty. Influencers' ability to build long-term relationships with their followers often translates into sustained consumer engagement with the brands they endorse. This loyalty is driven by the trust and affinity that followers develop toward influencers, which extends to the products or services they recommend [18]. Micro-influencers, in particular, are effective at creating brand loyalty due to their niche appeal and deeper engagement with smaller, targeted audiences [11]. Research has indicated that repeated exposure to a brand through influencer content reinforces brand recall and strengthens emotional connections, contributing to higher levels of loyalty [1].

Another critical consumer behavior influenced by influencer marketing is social sharing, where consumers actively participate in spreading brand-related content within their networks. Influencer campaigns often incorporate interactive elements such as challenges, hashtags, and user-generated content, encouraging followers to engage and share their experiences [10]. TikTok, in particular, has become a hub for participatory marketing, where viral trends initiated by influencers prompt widespread social sharing and brand amplification [6]. Such activities not only increase brand visibility but also enhance consumers' sense of involvement and affiliation with the brand's community.

The interplay of these behaviors—purchase decisions, brand loyalty, and social sharing—highlights the transformative potential of influencer marketing. By leveraging the dynamics of social influence and digital connectivity, influencers shape consumer behavior in ways that traditional marketing approaches often fail to achieve. Understanding these behaviors is essential for comprehending the broader implications of influencer marketing in the digital age.

2.5. TikTok as a Marketing Platform

TikTok has emerged as a leading platform for influencer marketing due to its unique algorithm, diverse audience demographics, and innovative features that facilitate brand engagement. The platform's rapid growth and emphasis on short-form video content make it an ideal space for influencers to connect with audiences and drive marketing campaigns.

The success of TikTok as a marketing platform can largely be attributed to its algorithm, which is designed to maximize user engagement. TikTok's "For You Page" (FYP) employs a recommendation system based on user interactions, such as likes, comments, shares, and watch time, as well as video information like captions, hashtags, and sounds [19]. This algorithm ensures that content is tailored to individual preferences, allowing influencers to reach highly targeted audiences with minimal effort. Additionally, TikTok's algorithm promotes the discovery of new creators and trends, enabling micro- and nano-influencers to achieve significant visibility despite having smaller followings [20]. This democratized content distribution system enhances the effectiveness of influencer marketing campaigns by ensuring that compelling content has the potential to go viral, regardless of the creator's follower count.

TikTok's global user base is predominantly composed of younger audiences, making it an attractive platform for brands targeting Generation Z and Millennials. As of 2023, approximately 60% of TikTok users were aged 16 to 34, with a notable concentration of users under 24 years old [21]. This demographic is known for its preference for authentic, visually engaging content and its tendency to rely on social media for product discovery and purchasing decisions [22]. Moreover, TikTok's diverse and growing user base, which spans various age groups and regions, allows marketers to tailor campaigns to specific cultural and demographic segments. This adaptability positions TikTok as a versatile platform for executing both niche and mass-market influencer marketing strategies.

TikTok offers a range of features that support influencer marketing campaigns, including interactive tools, creative formats, and in-app commerce solutions. Features such as branded hashtag challenges, duets, and filters encourage user participation and amplify the reach of influencer-driven campaigns [11]. For instance, branded hashtag challenges often inspire millions of users to create content, resulting in exponential exposure for the associated brand.

In addition to these features, TikTok has introduced the Creator Marketplace, a platform that connects brands with influencers based on analytics such as audience demographics, engagement rates, and content performance [23]. This data-driven approach allows marketers to select influencers whose audience aligns with their target market, ensuring a higher return on investment. Furthermore, TikTok's integration of e-commerce features, such as shoppable ads and live-stream shopping, enables influencers to drive conversions directly within the app [6].

TikTok's innovative algorithm, youth-oriented user base, and influencer-friendly features make it an unparalleled platform for influencer marketing campaigns. By fostering a dynamic ecosystem of content creation, discovery, and commerce, TikTok enables brands to engage audiences in ways that are highly personalized, interactive, and impactful.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study employs a qualitative case study approach to explore the dynamics of influencer marketing on TikTok and its impact on consumer behavior. The case study method is well-suited for examining complex phenomena within their real-life context, allowing for an in-depth understanding of how specific marketing campaigns leverage TikTok's unique features and influencer strategies. By focusing on several successful TikTok marketing campaigns, this research aims to

identify patterns and mechanisms through which influencers drive consumer actions, such as brand engagement and purchase decisions.

3.2. Case Study Selection

For this study, successful TikTok influencer marketing campaigns were selected based on a set of specific criteria aimed at ensuring the campaigns were both impactful and relevant to the research objectives. The selection criteria included:

High Engagement: Campaigns with high levels of user interaction, measured by the number of likes, shares, comments, and video views, indicating a strong audience connection and viral potential [25].

Clear Call-to-Action: Campaigns where the influencer's content explicitly promoted a product, service, or brand, incorporating a direct and measurable call-to-action (e.g., click-through to purchase, hashtag challenge participation). This is crucial for analyzing the effect of influencer marketing on consumer behavior [5].

Brand Collaboration with Influencers: Only campaigns where the brand worked directly with influencers—whether macro, micro, or nano influencers—were selected. This ensures the cases reflect authentic influencer marketing strategies and allow for analysis of the influencer's role in shaping consumer decisions [1].

Based on the above criteria, the following case studies were chosen:

3.2.1 Case Study 1: Chipotle's #GuacDance Challenge

In 2019, Chipotle launched the #GuacDance Challenge on TikTok to promote its "National Guacamole Day" event. The campaign invited TikTok users to engage in a fun and creative dance challenge set to a catchy song created specifically for the campaign. Influencers across various categories, including comedy, lifestyle, and food content creators, led the charge by performing the dance and encouraging their followers to join the challenge.

The campaign's central message was simple: If users participated in the #GuacDance challenge, they would receive a free order of guacamole with their Chipotle purchase. This incentivized users to create and share their own dance videos while also promoting the brand's popular product—guacamole. Influencers, including well-known creators like David Dobrik and Charli D'Amelio, posted their videos under the hashtag, effectively helping the campaign gain viral traction.

3.2.2. Case Study 2: Gymshark's Fitness Influencer Campaign

Gymshark, a fitness apparel brand, has been a notable success story in leveraging TikTok influencers to promote its activewear. In this campaign, Gymshark partnered with fitness influencers such as Whitney Simmons, Noah Beck, and others to create and share workout videos while showcasing Gymshark's products. The influencers encouraged their followers to participate in fitness challenges, share workout routines, and showcase how Gymshark apparel supported their fitness journeys. The campaign was not only about promoting the products but also about building an authentic connection between the brand and the audience by aligning with fitness experts and motivational figures.

Gymshark used TikTok's viral format to further increase brand visibility, with influencers generating unique content that resonated with their followers, particularly targeting younger, fitness-focused audiences. Influencers shared their personal fitness experiences, helping to build credibility and trust with their audience.

3.2.3. Case Study 3: e.l.f. Cosmetics' #EyesLipsFace Campaign

e.l.f. Cosmetics launched the #EyesLipsFace Challenge in 2019, capitalizing on TikTok's viral potential with a catchy, original music track and an engaging hashtag. Influencers such as James Charles, and makeup artists, beauty influencers, and celebrities, encouraged users to showcase their makeup looks using e.l.f. products while participating in the challenge. The influencers created a huge buzz by not only showing off makeup techniques but also using e.l.f. products in a fun, entertaining way.

The #EyesLipsFace campaign quickly became a cultural phenomenon, with users uploading videos of their makeup transformations, dances, and funny skits, all while incorporating e.l.f. products. The campaign was one of the most successful influencer-driven marketing efforts in the beauty industry, particularly because it successfully integrated both normative and informational influence.

These case studies demonstrate how TikTok's unique platform characteristics, combined with strategic influencer partnerships, can drive viral marketing campaigns. By analyzing these campaigns, the research will explore the specific ways in which TikTok influencers impact consumer decisions and contribute to brand success.

3.3. Primary Data

Primary data for this study were collected by analyzing the selected campaign videos, user engagement metrics, and the content of user comments. TikTok's built-in analytics tools were used to extract data on video views, likes, shares, comments, and hashtag performance. Additionally, the content of the influencer videos was analyzed for key themes, messaging strategies, and product placements to identify how influencers framed their endorsements and engaged with their audiences. By examining user comments, the study also gained insights into audience perceptions, brand sentiment, and the effectiveness of the call-to-action.

3.4. Secondary Data

Secondary data were collected from a variety of sources to supplement and contextualize the primary data. These sources included industry reports, articles on the effectiveness of TikTok influencer marketing (e.g., [11]), and brand-provided reports or press releases that offered insights into the strategic goals and outcomes of the campaigns. These secondary sources provided additional context, such as metrics related to brand awareness, sales figures, or overall campaign ROI, which helped to triangulate the findings from the primary data analysis [26].

By combining primary data from campaign videos and user engagement with secondary data from industry reports and brand insights, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play in TikTok influencer marketing campaigns.

3.5. Analytical Tools

In order to effectively analyze the impact of TikTok influencer marketing campaigns on consumer behavior, a combination of qualitative and quantitative analytical tools will be employed. These tools will help examine the content of influencer videos, user engagement metrics, and themes related to social influence. The following methods will be used to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the selected case studies:

3.5.1. Content Analysis

Content analysis will be employed to systematically categorize and examine the themes, visual strategies, tone, and calls to action present in the TikTok influencer marketing videos. This method allows for the identification of patterns within the content and helps to assess how influencers' messages are structured to promote brand engagement [27]. Specific elements to be analyzed include:

- **Video Themes:** A categorization of the content into types such as product demonstrations, personal testimonials, entertainment-driven content, or instructional content.
- **Influencer Tone:** Assessment of the tone used by influencers (e.g., persuasive, humorous, authoritative) and its alignment with the brand's intended message.
- **Visual Strategies:** Examination of the visual elements used (e.g., product placements, background settings, creative editing) to determine how these strategies support brand identity and appeal to the target audience.
- **Calls to Action (CTAs):** Identification of explicit or implicit CTAs encouraging viewers to purchase the product, participate in challenges, or visit a brand's website, assessing the effectiveness of these prompts in driving consumer behavior.

By analyzing these content elements, the study aims to understand the influence of various messaging and visual strategies used by influencers in shaping consumer perceptions and actions.

3.5.2. Engagement Metrics

Quantitative engagement metrics will be examined to measure the success of each campaign and the level of consumer interaction with the content. These metrics will include:

- **Likes, Comments, Shares, and Views:** These are direct indicators of consumer engagement and can provide insights into the effectiveness of influencer marketing strategies in reaching and resonating with the target audience [28]. Higher levels of engagement are often associated with greater campaign visibility and increased likelihood of consumer action.

- Audience Sentiment Analysis: A qualitative examination of user comments will be performed to gauge audience sentiment, including positive, negative, or neutral reactions to the campaign. Sentiment analysis will provide deeper insights into how consumers perceive the brand and influencers involved, helping to assess the impact on brand trust and loyalty [29]. This analysis will highlight the emotional connection between the audience and the campaign.

3.5.3. Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis will be utilized to identify recurring themes in both the content and audience interactions. This will focus on the application of Social Influence Theory, particularly the concepts of normative and informational influence [15]. Thematic analysis will allow for the exploration of how influencers act as agents of social influence and how these behaviors impact consumer decisions.

- Normative Influence: This theme will explore how influencers encourage consumers to conform to social norms through participation in challenges (e.g., the #GuacDance Challenge) or by showcasing the social desirability of a brand or product. The analysis will investigate how peer pressure and social belonging motivate consumers to engage with the brand [30].
- Informational Influence: This theme will examine how influencers, particularly those positioned as experts or thought leaders (e.g., fitness influencers for Gymshark), provide valuable information that shapes consumer behavior. The study will explore how trust in influencer expertise influences consumers' perceptions and purchase intentions [13].

3.5.4. Comparative Analysis

Comparative analysis will involve comparing the engagement and consumer behavior across different campaigns to identify patterns and differences. This comparative approach will focus on variations in the effectiveness of campaigns based on the type of influencer (e.g., macro vs. micro), the style of content (e.g., educational vs. entertainment), and the call to action employed. By comparing campaigns such as Chipotle's #GuacDance Challenge, Gymshark's Fitness Influencer Campaign, and e.l.f. Cosmetics' #EyesLipsFace Campaign, the study will highlight the factors that contribute to greater consumer engagement and purchasing decisions. This comparison will provide insights into how different types of influencer strategies and campaign structures resonate with distinct audiences, helping to identify best practices for future influencer marketing on TikTok.

The comparative approach will allow for a nuanced understanding of how influencer-driven content on TikTok can produce varying levels of consumer impact, depending on campaign design, influencer credibility, and audience targeting [31].

By combining these analytical tools, the research will offer a comprehensive examination of the effectiveness of TikTok influencer marketing campaigns, specifically in how they influence consumer behavior through the mechanisms of social influence. Through content analysis, engagement metrics, thematic analysis, and comparative analysis, the study will provide valuable insights into the strategies that drive successful influencer marketing on TikTok.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Case-by-case Analysis

This section presents a detailed case-by-case analysis of three successful TikTok influencer marketing campaigns: Chipotle's #GuacDance Challenge, Gymshark's Fitness Influencer Campaign, and e.l.f. Cosmetics' #EyesLipsFace Campaign. Each campaign is examined in terms of its influencer strategy, engagement metrics, audience responses, and behavioral outcomes. The findings highlight how influencer marketing can shape consumer behavior, enhance brand visibility, and drive engagement.

4.1.1. Case Study 1: Chipotle's #GuacDance Challenge

- Influencer Strategy: Chipotle's #GuacDance Challenge used a lighthearted, trend-driven approach to engage users. Influencers participated by creating videos of themselves dancing to a catchy tune, which helped popularize the challenge. The use of a fun, viral trend-based strategy aimed at encouraging participation and fostering a sense of social belonging within TikTok's community.
- Engagement Metrics and Audience Responses: The campaign saw over 250,000 video submissions and 430 million views within six days, highlighting the substantial user engagement generated by the influencer posts. Audience responses were overwhelmingly positive, with many users commenting on the fun aspect of the campaign and

expressing excitement over the opportunity to engage in the challenge. The sense of belonging and participation in a viral trend were significant drivers of this positive response.

- Behavioral Outcomes: The campaign led to Chipotle’s highest digital sales day, demonstrating a direct link between influencer engagement and purchase behavior. The increased engagement on TikTok resulted in heightened brand awareness, especially among younger, social media-savvy consumers, which translated into increased sales.

4.1.2. Case Study 2: Gymshark’s Fitness Influencer Campaign

- Influencer Strategy: Gymshark’s campaign involved partnering with prominent fitness influencers, such as Whitney Simmons and Noah Beck, who shared workout routines, fitness challenges, and personal testimonials while showcasing Gymshark apparel. The strategy focused on authenticity and trust by presenting influencers as credible fitness experts, offering informative content and motivating their followers.
- Engagement Metrics and Audience Responses: The campaign generated millions of views, with Gymshark videos accumulating significant engagement in terms of likes, comments, and shares. Audience responses were positive, with many followers expressing admiration for the influencers’ fitness knowledge and the quality of the Gymshark products. User-generated content also increased, with many fans sharing their own workout videos featuring Gymshark apparel.
- Behavioral Outcomes: The campaign boosted brand loyalty and consumer trust, particularly among younger, fitness-focused consumers. Gymshark’s association with trusted fitness influencers resulted in increased purchase intent, as consumers were motivated by the influencers’ expertise and credibility. This shift in consumer behavior highlights the effectiveness of using influencers to build long-term brand loyalty.

4.1.3. Case Study 3: e.l.f. Cosmetics’ #EyesLipsFace Campaign

- Influencer Strategy: e.l.f. Cosmetics utilized an innovative approach with the #EyesLipsFace campaign, combining a catchy music track with influencer-created makeup tutorials. Influencers, including James Charles, showcased their makeup skills while using e.l.f. products, encouraging followers to participate in the challenge by creating their own videos. This strategy combined entertainment with product promotion, capitalizing on TikTok’s short-form, viral video culture.
- Engagement Metrics and Audience Responses: The campaign achieved over 4 billion views and generated more than 5 million user-generated videos, indicating high engagement levels. Audience responses were generally positive, with users expressing excitement and creativity in showcasing their makeup skills. The challenge became a major trend, and the ease of participating in the challenge contributed to its success.
- Behavioral Outcomes: The campaign increased both brand visibility and product demand, particularly among Gen Z consumers. The high volume of user-generated content resulted in significant social proof, further reinforcing brand awareness. As a result, e.l.f. Cosmetics saw a boost in product sales and brand recognition, further cementing its position in the competitive beauty market.

Table 1 Summary of Findings Case-by-case Analysis

Element	Chipotle #GuacDance Challenge	Gymshark Fitness Influencer Campaign	e.l.f. Cosmetics #EyesLipsFace Campaign
Influencer Strategy	Trend-based viral challenge, dancing influencers	Fitness influencers sharing workout routines and testimonials	Influencers showcasing makeup techniques, viral challenge with music
Engagement Metrics	250,000 submissions, 430 million views	Millions of views, increased user-generated content	4 billion views, 5 million user-generated videos
Audience Responses	Positive, excitement over participation, social belonging	Positive, trust in influencer expertise, admiration for products	Positive, creative participation, high engagement from Gen Z
Behavioral Outcomes	Highest digital sales day, increased brand awareness	Increased brand loyalty, boosted purchase intent	Increased brand visibility, higher product demand, boosted sales

4.1.4. Discussion

- Influencer Strategy: In all three campaigns, influencers played a central role in driving engagement and influencing consumer behavior. Chipotle’s #GuacDance challenge relied on creating a viral trend, while Gymshark and e.l.f. Cosmetics used influencers as trusted experts to promote fitness and beauty products, respectively. The use of

entertainment and expertise aligns with established theories of influencer marketing, where influencers serve as both trendsetters and sources of trust [31].

- **Engagement Metrics and Audience Responses:** All three campaigns garnered significant engagement, with millions of views and high levels of user-generated content. This level of engagement is a testament to TikTok's unique ability to create viral trends that resonate with users. Audience responses were primarily positive, with consumers expressing excitement and motivation to participate in the challenges, highlighting the power of social media in shaping user behavior [4].
- **Behavioral Outcomes:** The direct link between engagement and purchase behavior is evident in all three campaigns. Chipotle's campaign, for example, resulted in a significant sales spike, demonstrating the effectiveness of influencer-driven marketing in influencing consumer decisions. Similarly, Gymshark and e.l.f. Cosmetics saw increased brand loyalty and product demand, underscoring the power of influencer marketing in building long-term consumer relationships [5].

4.2. Thematic Insights

This section delves into the thematic insights derived from the analysis of the three case studies, focusing on how Social Influence Theory (SIT) helps explain the mechanisms by which influencers impact consumer behavior. Specifically, the analysis draws on normative influence and informational influence to better understand how influencers shape consumer behavior through conformity and trust-building, respectively.

4.2.1. Normative Influence: Encouraging Conformity

Normative influence refers to the social pressure individuals feel to conform to the expectations and behaviors of others, particularly in a group or peer context. In the case of TikTok influencer marketing, this form of influence is frequently used to encourage users to engage with challenges, trends, or behaviors that are deemed "socially desirable" within a specific community.

In the Chipotle #GuacDance Challenge, influencers encouraged users to join the viral dance challenge, creating a sense of social belonging and camaraderie among participants. The social validation from peers, who engaged in the same behavior, reinforced users' participation. As a result, many TikTok users felt compelled to participate, not just for the reward of free guacamole but also to fit in with the growing trend within their social group [32]. This demonstrated how influencers, acting as agents of normative influence, could foster large-scale behavioral conformity.

Similarly, in e.l.f. Cosmetics' #EyesLipsFace Campaign, influencers used the power of social validation to prompt users to share their makeup looks, creating a viral loop of user-generated content. This campaign is an example of how influencers can utilize normative influence to drive mass participation by normalizing and popularizing certain behaviors, such as showcasing makeup skills, which in turn leads to increased brand visibility.

4.2.2. Informational Influence: Building Trust through Expertise

Informational influence, on the other hand, occurs when individuals are influenced by the information or expertise of others, particularly when they trust the knowledge or experience that an influencer provides. This form of influence is particularly prevalent in campaigns where the influencer is perceived as an expert in a particular domain.

In the Gymshark Fitness Influencer Campaign, influencers like Whitney Simmons and Noah Beck shared workout routines and fitness tips while wearing Gymshark apparel. Their followers, many of whom were likely fitness enthusiasts, viewed them as credible sources of fitness advice. The campaign's success was based on informational influence, where the followers trusted the expertise of the influencers and used the provided information to inform their purchase decisions [33]. The influencer's personal experience in fitness was leveraged to drive brand loyalty and increase the likelihood of purchase, as consumers were motivated not only by the product but by the expertise demonstrated by the influencers.

This approach highlights how informational influence builds trust between influencers and their audience, thus encouraging consumers to make informed decisions that align with the influencers' suggestions. The increased user-generated content, particularly workout videos featuring Gymshark apparel, further validated the effectiveness of this strategy.

Table 2 Summary of Findings on Normative and Informational Influence

Element	Chipotle Challenge	#GuacDance	Gymshark Influencer Campaign	Fitness	e.l.f. Cosmetics #EyesLipsFace Campaign
Normative Influence	Influencers encouraged users to join the viral dance challenge, fostering social conformity and group participation.	-	-	-	Influencers encouraged users to showcase makeup looks, creating a trend-driven conformity.
Informational Influence	-	-	Influencers provided fitness expertise and advice, influencing consumer trust and purchase behavior.	-	Influencers shared makeup tutorials and product usage tips, building trust and motivating purchases.

4.2.3. Discussion

Normative Influence: Both the Chipotle and e.l.f. Cosmetics campaigns effectively utilized normative influence to drive engagement. By encouraging users to participate in a fun, viral activity (the dance challenge or makeup showcase), influencers capitalized on the social pressures that drive conformity. As highlighted by Cialdini [32], the desire for social acceptance and the fear of being left out are potent motivators in online behavior, which was evident in the massive response to both challenges. The normative influence led to a snowball effect, where the more people participated, the more others felt the need to join in.

Informational Influence: The Gymshark campaign is a prime example of how influencers can exert informational influence. By positioning themselves as experts in fitness, influencers like Whitney Simmons and Noah Beck leveraged their credibility to guide consumer decisions. According to [33], consumers are more likely to trust influencers when they perceive them as knowledgeable and authentic. The success of Gymshark's campaign underscores the power of informational influence, where consumers rely on influencers' advice and expertise to guide their purchasing behavior. The personal testimonials and workout routines created a deeper connection with the audience, driving both brand loyalty and purchase intent.

The findings from the case studies illustrate how both normative influence and informational influence are instrumental in shaping consumer behavior through TikTok influencer marketing. Influencers act as agents of social influence, encouraging conformity through viral trends and fostering trust through expertise. These insights underscore the effectiveness of leveraging Social Influence Theory in understanding the dynamics of influencer marketing and its impact on consumer behavior.

4.3. Consumer Behavior Impact

In this section, we discuss the impact of influencer content on consumer behavior, focusing on three critical areas: purchase decisions, brand loyalty, and user-generated content (UGC). The analysis is based on the case studies of Chipotle's #GuacDance Challenge, Gymshark's Fitness Influencer Campaign, and e.l.f. Cosmetics' #EyesLipsFace Campaign, which illustrate how influencer marketing influences consumer actions and engagement.

4.3.1. Purchase Decisions

Influencer content plays a crucial role in driving purchase decisions by shaping consumers' perceptions of products and brands. In the Chipotle and Gymshark campaigns, the direct correlation between influencer marketing and increased sales is evident. For Chipotle, the #GuacDance challenge led to the highest digital sales day in the company's history, demonstrating how engaging, influencer-driven campaigns can influence immediate purchase behavior. Similarly, Gymshark influencers demonstrated how incorporating product showcases into fitness-related content can enhance purchase intent, particularly among fitness enthusiasts who trust the expertise of the influencers.

In both cases, the informational and normative influences exerted by the influencers had a direct impact on consumer decisions, encouraging them to purchase based on both peer behavior (conformity) and trust in the influencer's recommendations (expertise).

4.3.2. Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty is another significant outcome of influencer marketing. In the Gymshark campaign, fitness influencers not only promoted products but also fostered a sense of community by sharing personal fitness journeys. This created a deeper emotional connection with the audience, leading to long-term loyalty. The audience's trust in the influencers' fitness expertise and their alignment with the brand's values helped to solidify Gymshark's position as a preferred brand among its target demographic.

The e.l.f. Cosmetics campaign also had a positive effect on brand loyalty. By engaging users in a fun and interactive challenge, e.l.f. Cosmetics was able to build a lasting relationship with its audience, particularly within the Gen Z demographic. The emotional connection fostered through user participation in the #EyesLipsFace challenge reinforced consumer commitment to the brand.

4.3.3. User-Generated Content (UGC)

User-generated content is a powerful outcome of influencer-driven campaigns, particularly on platforms like TikTok. The #GuacDance Challenge generated over 250,000 video submissions in just six days, exemplifying how influencer content can prompt large-scale participation and content creation. Similarly, e.l.f. Cosmetics saw over 5 million user-generated videos associated with their #EyesLipsFace hashtag, further amplifying brand visibility.

UGC plays an essential role in the success of influencer marketing campaigns because it creates organic content that resonates with audiences. In the case of Gymshark, influencers were able to generate content that encouraged fans to replicate workout routines and share their experiences with Gymshark products, further promoting the brand.

Table 3 Summary of Findings on Consumer Behavior Impact

Element	Chipotle Challenge	#GuacDance	Gymshark Fitness Influencer Campaign	e.l.f. Cosmetics #EyesLipsFace Campaign
Purchase Decisions	Influencer-driven campaign led to the highest digital sales day, showing a direct link between participation and purchase.		Influencers' fitness expertise influenced purchase intent among fitness enthusiasts, leading to increased sales.	Influencers demonstrated product use, driving purchase decisions through social proof and engagement.
Brand Loyalty	-		Fitness influencers fostered strong brand loyalty through personal fitness journeys, creating a sense of community.	e.l.f. Cosmetics built emotional connection through the #EyesLipsFace challenge, enhancing brand loyalty, especially among Gen Z.
User-Generated Content (UGC)	Generated over 250,000 video submissions, showcasing widespread consumer participation and content creation.		Increased user-generated content, with fans sharing their workout videos in Gymshark gear, amplifying brand visibility.	Over 5 million user-generated videos showcased makeup looks, amplifying brand recognition and engagement.

4.3.4. Discussion

The findings from the case studies highlight the significant role of influencer content in shaping purchase decisions. In the case of Chipotle, the #GuacDance Challenge directly translated into increased sales, demonstrating how viral, influencer-driven campaigns can trigger immediate consumer action. This aligns with the findings of previous research, which suggests that influencer endorsements can drive consumer behavior by creating a sense of urgency or exclusivity [34]. Similarly, in Gymshark and e.l.f. Cosmetics, the influencers' product promotions led to a direct increase in product purchases, as consumers were influenced by the perceived expertise and social validation provided by influencers.

Brand loyalty was most prominent in the Gymshark and e.l.f. Cosmetics campaigns. The long-term connection fostered by influencers through personalized content (e.g., fitness journeys, makeup tutorials) contributed to the development of stronger brand loyalty. Consumers who engaged with these influencers did not only purchase products; they were drawn into a brand community. This outcome corroborates existing literature suggesting that influencer marketing not

only affects short-term sales but also cultivates enduring brand loyalty, especially when consumers perceive the brand as an integral part of their lifestyle [35].

User-generated content proved to be a key component in the success of all three campaigns. As consumers participated in challenges or shared their experiences with the brands, they generated organic content that contributed to the virality of the campaigns. The massive number of UGC submissions, particularly for Chipotle and e.l.f. Cosmetics, illustrates the effectiveness of influencer-driven campaigns in encouraging consumer engagement and fostering brand advocacy. UGC not only increases brand visibility but also serves as social proof, further reinforcing the effectiveness of influencer content in influencing consumer perceptions and behaviors [36].

The analysis of these three case studies demonstrates that influencer content on TikTok has a profound impact on purchase decisions, brand loyalty, and user-generated content (UGC). Influencers play a pivotal role in guiding consumer behavior through both normative and informational influences, shaping how users perceive and interact with brands. These findings provide valuable insights into the mechanisms behind successful influencer marketing campaigns and underscore the importance of aligning influencer strategies with consumer behavior drivers.

5. Conclusion

This research has examined the impact of influencer marketing on consumer behavior, with a specific focus on TikTok as a platform for engaging audiences through influencer-driven campaigns. The analysis of three case studies—Chipotle's #GuacDance Challenge, Gymshark's Fitness Influencer Campaign, and e.l.f. Cosmetics' #EyesLipsFace Campaign—provides significant insights into how influencer marketing shapes purchase decisions, brand loyalty, and user-generated content (UGC).

Key findings reveal that influencer marketing plays a critical role in influencing consumer behavior, particularly through the mechanisms of normative and informational influence. In all three case studies, influencers effectively used their platform to encourage audience engagement and participation, driving both short-term sales and long-term brand loyalty. Notably, the #GuacDance Challenge demonstrated the power of social trends and peer influence in motivating immediate purchase decisions. Similarly, Gymshark and e.l.f. Cosmetics leveraged influencers' credibility and expertise to foster brand loyalty and boost user-generated content, which further contributed to increased brand visibility and consumer engagement. These results align with existing literature, which underscores the effectiveness of influencers in shaping consumer behavior through trust-building and social validation.

Moreover, the campaigns analyzed illustrate how TikTok's unique algorithm, which promotes viral content through its emphasis on engagement and trends, provides an ideal environment for brands to tap into the power of influencer marketing. By creating entertaining, interactive content that encourages audience participation, TikTok allows influencers to seamlessly blend brand promotion with entertainment, leading to more organic and authentic consumer engagement.

Influencer marketing on TikTok has proven to be a powerful tool for influencing consumer behavior across various dimensions. It has been shown to impact purchase decisions by driving immediate consumer action by leveraging both normative (peer pressure) and informational (expertise) influences. It also enhances brand loyalty by fostering long-term emotional connections as influencers share personal experiences and align with brand values. Through campaigns like challenges, influencers motivate their followers to create content that further amplifies brand visibility and consumer engagement.

These findings underscore the growing importance of influencer marketing in the digital age, particularly in platforms like TikTok, where viral content and peer influence can significantly shape consumer behavior.

5.1. Theoretical Contributions

This study has demonstrated the significant role of Social Influence Theory in explaining consumer engagement in influencer marketing on TikTok. By utilizing both normative and informational influence, influencers act as social agents who shape consumer behavior through peer pressure and expertise. Normative influence, which encourages conformity to social norms, is particularly evident in TikTok campaigns such as Chipotle's #GuacDance Challenge, where influencers promoted participation in viral challenges, leading to massive engagement. In contrast, informational influence is exemplified by campaigns like Gymshark's fitness influencer strategy, where influencers are perceived as experts whose recommendations shape followers' purchasing decisions. Social Influence Theory thus provides a robust framework for

understanding how influencers generate both emotional and rational consumer engagement, shaping purchase behaviors, brand loyalty, and user-generated content.

The case studies examined in this research reveal how influencers serve as conduits for both compliance—where consumers mimic influencer behaviors to gain social approval—and internalization, where the values and behaviors of influencers are adopted because of genuine trust in their expertise and authenticity. TikTok's algorithm, which amplifies popular content through high engagement metrics, further enhances the effects of social influence by creating a feedback loop of peer-driven engagement and content creation.

5.2. Practical Implications

Based on the findings, several key recommendations for brands using TikTok influencers are offered. Firstly, brands should carefully select influencers who align with their target audience's values and interests. Influencers who have a genuine connection with their followers and demonstrate expertise or authenticity are more likely to generate higher engagement and drive consumer actions. As evidenced in the Gymshark campaign, fitness influencers with established credibility significantly impacted brand loyalty and sales.

Secondly, Influencer content should be both engaging and authentic to resonate with TikTok's audience. Consumers on TikTok are drawn to creative, fun, and relatable content rather than overtly promotional material. The #EyesLipsFace Challenge by e.l.f. Cosmetics is an excellent example, where influencers made the content entertaining while subtly promoting the brand's products. Brands should encourage influencers to incorporate storytelling and user interaction in their posts to foster deeper emotional connections with consumers.

Lastly, TikTok's algorithm rewards high engagement rates with increased visibility, making it essential for brands to create content that is likely to go viral. Content that encourages user participation, such as challenges and interactive campaigns, can tap into TikTok's viral nature. The #GuacDance Challenge is a prime example of how creating a fun, shareable campaign can lead to massive consumer participation and significantly boost brand visibility. Brands should optimize their content for engagement by focusing on creating trends that motivate followers to contribute their own content, thus amplifying the brand's reach through organic user-generated content.

This study highlights how Social Influence Theory offers a comprehensive framework for understanding consumer engagement through TikTok influencer marketing. By harnessing both normative and informational influences, brands can leverage influencer partnerships to drive consumer behavior, enhance brand loyalty, and stimulate user-generated content. The findings underscore the importance of selecting the right influencers, producing authentic and engaging content, and using TikTok's algorithm to maximize the viral potential of marketing campaigns. These practical insights provide valuable guidance for brands seeking to effectively use TikTok influencers to achieve marketing success.

5.3. Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into the impact of influencer marketing on consumer behavior, it is not without limitations. A primary constraint is the reliance on a limited number of case studies—three TikTok campaigns—that may not fully represent the diversity of influencer marketing strategies across different industries or cultural contexts. The cases selected for this research were successful campaigns, which may introduce selection bias, as the behaviors observed could differ from less successful or niche campaigns. Moreover, the analysis is focused solely on TikTok as a marketing platform, which may overlook the nuanced differences in consumer behavior and influencer impact on other social media platforms, such as Instagram, YouTube, or Twitter. TikTok's unique algorithm and user dynamics may not apply to platforms with different engagement models or audience behaviors. Therefore, the findings here may not be fully generalizable across all digital platforms or to brands operating in less mainstream industries.

Additionally, this study primarily examines quantitative metrics such as likes, shares, and views, which may not fully capture the depth of consumer engagement. The subjective nature of user comments and the nuances of influencer-consumer relationships may require a more in-depth qualitative approach, such as interviews or focus groups, to better understand the motivations behind consumer behavior.

5.4. Future Research

Given the limitations of this study, several areas for future research emerge. First, comparative studies across multiple social media platforms—such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube—could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how platform-specific dynamics influence consumer behavior. Differences in audience demographics, content formats, and algorithmic features may lead to distinct effects on brand engagement, loyalty, and purchase intent.

For example, research could explore how influencer marketing strategies on Instagram, which emphasizes curated aesthetic content, differ from TikTok's focus on short-form, viral videos. Such studies could further enhance the understanding of platform-specific influence and provide a more holistic view of influencer marketing.

Another promising avenue for future research is to explore the long-term impact of influencer marketing on brand loyalty and consumer retention. While this study highlights the immediate effects of TikTok influencer campaigns on consumer behavior, more longitudinal studies are needed to examine whether such marketing strategies foster enduring relationships between brands and consumers. Future research could also investigate the potential ethical implications of influencer marketing, particularly around the authenticity of influencer endorsements and the transparency of sponsored content, an area that has gained increasing attention in recent years [38].

Lastly, given the rapid evolution of social media marketing, it would be valuable to explore the role of micro-influencers—individuals with smaller but highly engaged followings—compared to macro-influencers in shaping consumer decisions. Micro-influencers may have a more authentic relationship with their followers, and their influence could differ significantly from that of celebrities or influencers with a larger reach. Investigating this dynamic could offer deeper insights into the nature of consumer trust and engagement in influencer marketing.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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