

Tik Tok, Trends, and Dupe Culture: Understanding Gen Z's Purchasing Behavior

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Problem Definition:

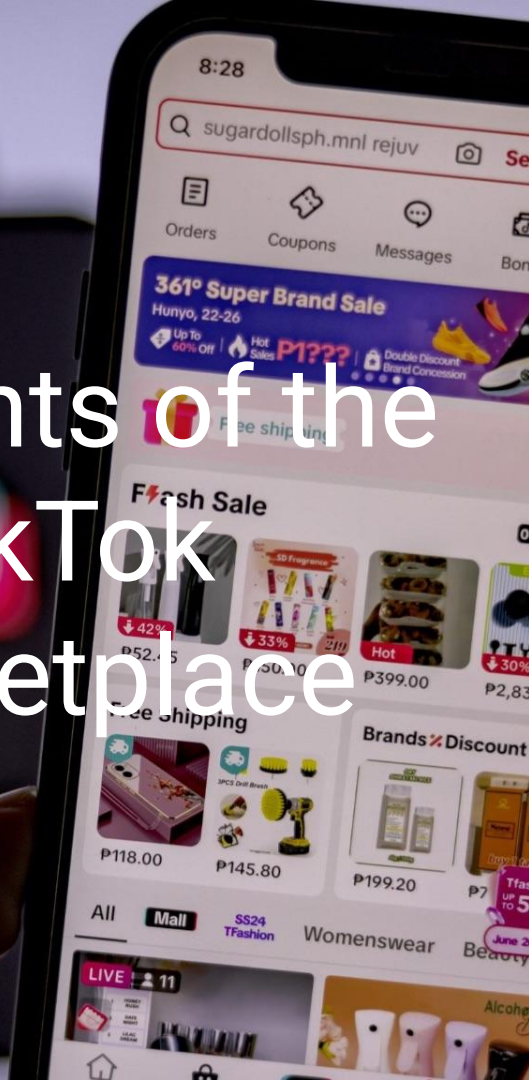
Elements of the TikTok marketplace influences consumer behavior towards sellers of beauty dupes and fads to the detriment of middle-grade beauty brands such as Tarte, Urban Decay, It Cosmetics, Glossier, etc.



Objectives

1. Identify and examine influential elements of the TikTok “marketplace” that elevate purchase intention for dupe beauty products compared to name-brand alternatives.
2. Research how TikTok’s social commerce elements impact on consumer behavior and attitudes.
3. Design a hypothetical experiment to test whether TikTok dupe-style content increases impulse-buying intentions among Gen Z consumers relative to quality-focused or neutral advertisements.
4. Based on literature review and proposed findings of experiment, offer managerial solutions to middle-tier beauty companies struggling to increase engagement with their promotional content and compete in the social commerce space.

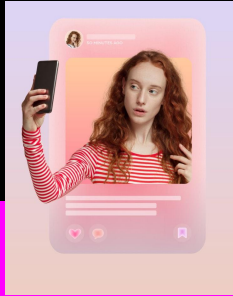
Elements of the TikTok Marketplace



1. Influencers
2. TikTok Shop
3. Business Presence

The Elements of the TikTok Marketplace

The reasons behind why sellers of dupe beauty products are having more success than established, name-brand beauty companies on this new social commerce platform



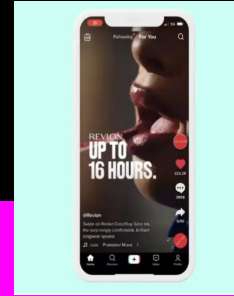
Influencers

Influencers are digital **opinion leaders**; they show viewers the products they claim to use and display themselves as either an idol or someone relatable, making their product recommendations persuasive.



TikTok Shop

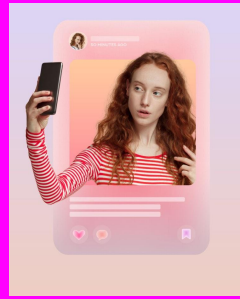
Launched in 2023 as an in-app commerce engine, this feature blends ads, short-form content, recommendations, and in-app checkout in a way that collapses the marketing funnel into a single video.



Business Presence

Dupe sellers' ads often resemble user-generated content (UGC), whereas middle-grade beauty companies' ads and organic marketing tend to adhere to the overly produced style of traditional advertising aesthetics.

Influencers



There are three main reasons for influencers impact on what consumer's purchase:

- **Connection to Influencers:** Connecting to an influencer and seeing them as a valid and reliable source who is 'like them' for what to purchase and use influences consumers.
- **Parasocial Behaviors:** A psychological feeling that the consumer knows the influencer that causes them to treat the influencer and their opinions the same way they would a friend's opinion.
- **Idolization:** Consumers see influencers as people who have traits of their desired self or traits that are socially attractive they want to emulate, which they can do through products.

TikTok Shop



Four key psychological and social drivers of impulse buying shape consumer behavior on TikTok Shop:

- **Economy:** Low prices attract budget-conscious Gen Z consumers.
- **Reliability:** Product info appears trustworthy via demos, reviews, and influencer endorsements.
- **Interaction:** Direct and publicly-viewed questions to sellers and other consumers stimulates engagement and, therefore, rapid online **word of mouth**.
- **Sales Promotions:** Discounts and subsidized shipping create urgency and scarcity

These variables are especially powerful in the beauty product category as not only are they in high demand but they are in high demand because these products are tied to identity expression and confidence-boosting benefits, aiding in attaining **ideal selves**.

TikTok Shop



Why these factors work for beauty dupes:

- Affordable dupes feel accessible compared to premium brands (**economy**).
- Social proof in the form of comments, stitches, and “real-time” testimonials creates quick trust (**reliability**).
- Interactivity spreads information about dupes beyond the seller’s initial post (**interaction**).
- There are not only heightened promotional incentives for beauty dupes (**sales promotion**), but also emotional/social incentives for products such as these that promise appearance-enhancing effects.

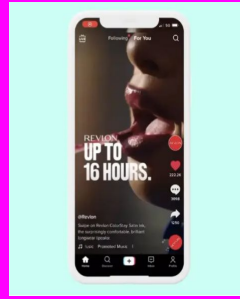
TikTok Shop



The role of hedonic browsing and viral content:

- According to many studies, hedonic (pleasure-driven) browsing strongly predicts impulse buys.
- Beauty content is visually appealing, short, and entertaining, which is not only ideal for hedonic browsing but also virality.
- Sellers of beauty dupes have taken note the power of viral content in the beauty influencer realm and have merged it with strong content marketing.
 - Sellers and endorsers design posts to evoke enjoyment, inspiration, and curiosity, nudging impulsive purchases.

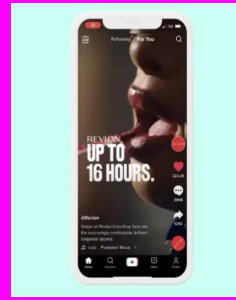
Business Presence



Dupe sellers' content seems to have the advantage because it mimics UGC-style content:

- Features of UGC-style content:
 - Everyday settings, natural lighting.
 - Follows trending formats of a “Get ready with me” or “testing viral product” video.
 - Unscripted reactions.
 - Casual and authentic in tone.
- UGC, which is part of what is called organic marketing, increases perceived authenticity and builds trust because consumers prefer content that feels like genuine peer recommendations (**social identity theory** and **reference groups**)
- High engagement boosts algorithmic visibility and virality.

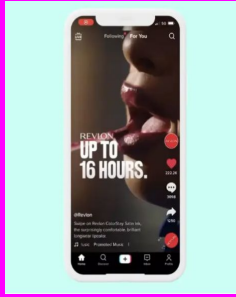
Business Presence



Middle-grade beauty brands' promotional content follows more traditional aesthetics, seemingly to their detriment:

- Brands like Tarte, Urban Decay, and Nars use polished, professional visuals that utilize high quality lighting, curated backgrounds, scripted talking points.
- Even influencer collaborations feel overly produced and scripted.
- Focus on refined aesthetics and scripted, precise messaging suggests that these brands prioritize brand identity and product positioning over building relationships with existing and potential customers.
 - **Result:** Content feels less personal and less relatable, which typically calls for lower engagement.

Business Presence



Overall marketplace effect:

- TikTok algorithmically favors authentic, informal content; thus, dupe sellers have the advantage with their UGC-style promotional content.
- Despite achieving stronger brand recognition, middle-grade beauty brands struggle to match the relatability of UGC that dupe sellers successfully mimic.
- Ultimately, TikTok's design naturally amplifies visibility for smaller sellers who imitate everyday user behavior.

The Impact of Elements of the TikTok Marketplace on Consumer Behavior

1. Brand Loyalty
2. Customer Retention
3. Wasteful Consumption

Brand Loyalty

- Decline in Traditional Brand Loyalty
 - Consumers shift quickly between products and prioritize trends over brand attachment.
- Influencer Impact on Purchasing Behavior
 - Buying decisions are shaped by influencer endorsements.
- Long-Term Brand Relationships Weakening
 - Impulse purchases from TikTok recommendations rarely lead to sustained customer loyalty.

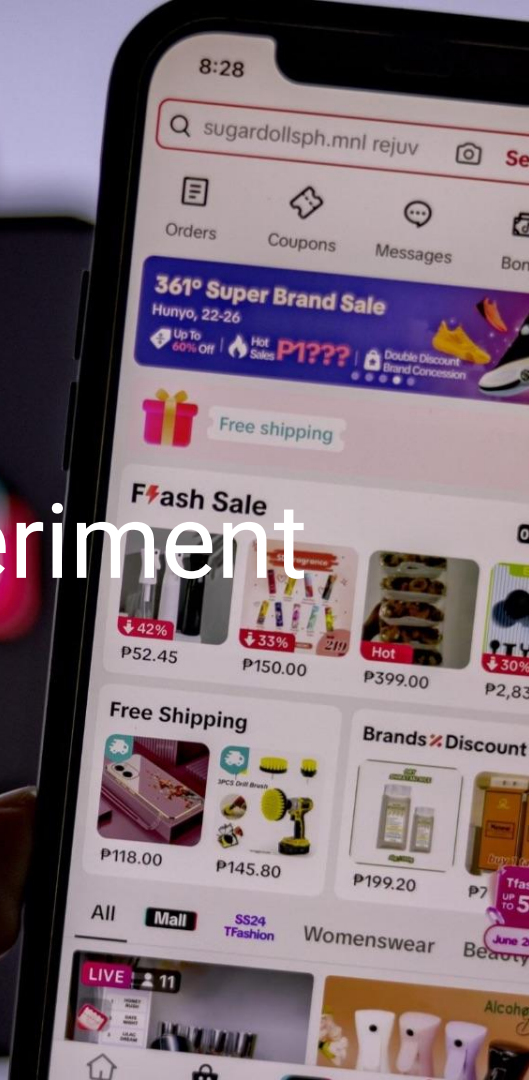
Customer Retention

- Limited Repeat Purchases
 - Consumers rarely repurchase after trends die down.
- Cheaper Options
 - Cheaper alternatives that resemble or imitate expensive products drive consumers away from the original brands.
- Product Switching
 - One-time product purchases and waiting for the next “big thing.”

Wasteful Consumption

- One-Time Use
 - Viral and impulse product purchases often go unused and lead to unnecessary waste.
- Impulse Buying
 - TikTok Shop, influencer recommendations, and parasocial relationships push users to buy products with little long-term consideration
- Increased Buyer's Remorse
 - Consumers regret impulse purchases that don't match their expectations or were made from social pressures.

Experiment



1. Conceptual Model
2. Hypotheses
3. Main Experiment
4. Research Method
5. Results
6. Discussion
7. Limitations

Conceptual Model

Exposure to content → Emotional Engagement → Impulse buying

Trend videos vs. quality-focused ads

Hypothesis

H0 : Exposure to TikTok trend/dupe-style content does not significantly affect Gen Z consumers' impulse-buying intentions compared to exposure to quality-focused or neutral advertising content.

H1: Exposure to TikTok trend/dupe-style content increases Gen Z consumers' impulse-buying intentions compared to exposure to quality-focused or neutral advertising content.

Research Method

- Participants (Gen Z sample)
 - Target population: Generation Z (born 1997–2012)
 - Sample size: Approximately 50 participants per condition (total N = 200)
- Online survey setup
 - Likert Scale

TikTok Trend/Dupe-Style Video (Trend-Framed)

<https://youtu.be/OeqPCm6RJMI>



Quality-Sustainable Video <https://youtu.be/8VfFk3YrVEc> (Value-Framed, Traditional Commercial)



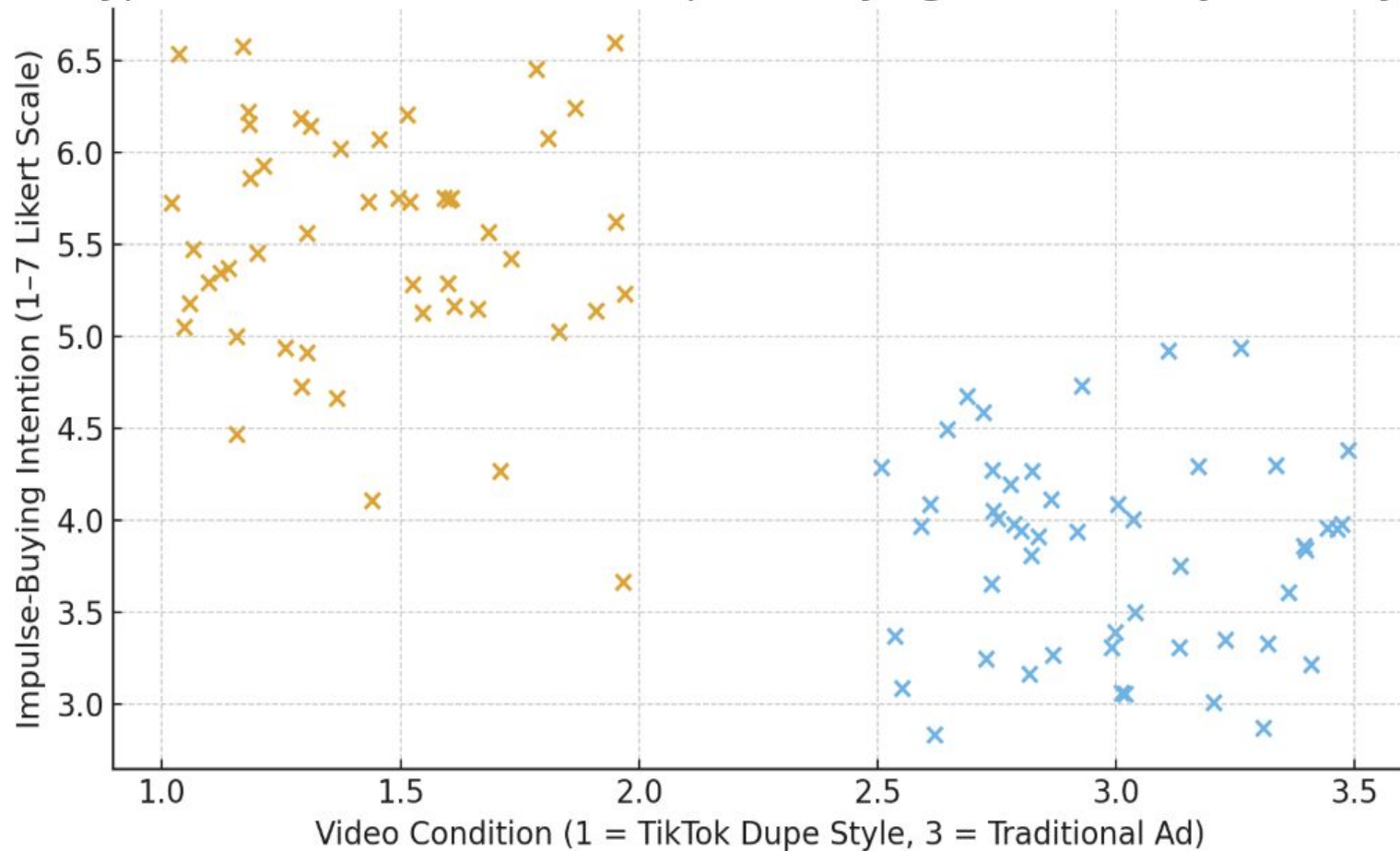
Experiment Design

- Between-subjects design
- Condition 1: TikTok dupe-style video
 - Condition 2: Traditional quality-focused ad
- Watch assigned video
- Complete impulse-buying questionnaire
- Manipulation checks & control variables

Results

1. Run a two-sample t-test
2. Anticipated finding: TikTok-style content → higher impulse intention
 - a. Casual, relatable, and enthusiastic tone of real influencer trend videos
 - b. Rapid stimuli

Hypothetical Scatter Plot of Impulse-Buying Intentions by Video Type



Discussion

- TikTok videos work better
 - Quick
 - Stimulating
 - Hyper-relatable
- Emotional triggers & social proof
 - Belonging and participation



Limitations

- Environment
 - Distractions
 - Algorithm cues
 - Personalized content
- Single stimuli
 - Unique characteristics
 - Generalizability
- Self-reports
 - Actual opportunity to purchase
- Sample bias
 - Cultural
 - Regional
 - Socioeconomics



Managerial Recommendations

1. Solutions
2. Wrap up and Conclusion

What Can Middle-Grade Beauty Brands do to Effectively Compete with Dupe Sellers ?



Change the *messaging* of Promotional Content

Shift focus of verbal elements from emphasis on product utility and aesthetics to product quality and sustainability through use of fact-based and emotional appeals and comparative advertising.



Change the *style* of Promotional Content

Take a page out dupe sellers' playbook: Style promotional content after the casual, authentic appearance and tone of UGC.

Solutions



- Shift Gen Z's attitude by promoting sustainable, high-quality products.
 - Draw attention away from dupes.
- Create marketing campaigns that highlight the damaging effects of dupes in order to reduce impulse purchases.
 - Global waste, environmental damage, and harmful labor practices.
- Use comparative marketing to show difference in quality between dupe and authentic products.
- Shift marketing strategies to UGC so that middle-grade companies feel more relatable and trustworthy.

Conclusion

- Dupes and fast-fashion create impulsive consumer behavior while weakening brand loyalty.
 - TikTok shop fuels this by combining entertainment and e-commerce.
- The hypothetical study conducted predicts that these forms of marketing trigger the urge for Gen Z to make a purchase.
- UGC gets better results saleswise than traditional marketing strategies, increasing repeat purchases and decreasing waste.
- As marketing evolves, traditional strategies used by middle-grade companies must change as well.