



## REVIEW ARTICLE

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# The Influence of TikTok Content Formats: GRWM vs. Sponsored Advertisements on Gen Z Consumer Behavior

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## Introduction

TikTok has emerged as a platform that has fundamentally reshaped the business landscape for beauty and specifically makeup marketing practices, particularly amidst the female Generation Z (Gen Z) population, who progressively rely on the platform for peer validation, product discovery, and product education. This shift reflects a transformation in digital persuasion, where authenticity now drives trust and engagement rather than production quality alone [1].

One of the most prominent content styles on TikTok is the informal video format referred to as “Get Ready With Me” (GRWM) videos. These types of videos are an intimate, increasingly popular beauty content genre. GRWM’s are produced by online content creators/influencers who film themselves preparing for the day or an event, while applying makeup. These videos tend to incorporate conversational “storytimes”, which simulate peer-to-peer interaction and strengthen parasocial relationships, making viewers more receptive to their product recommendations and creating loyalty from a consumer to producer standpoint [2].

## TikTok Marketing

The structure of TikTok inherently shapes how marketing messages are produced by video creators and received by subscribers. Its short-form video design requires creators and brands to capture attention almost immediately - whether that’s a hook, a new product they are trying, or drama they are “spilling the tea on”. This makes perceived authenticity and emotional engagement vital performance factors [1]. Studies indicate that TikTok’s algorithm rewards content that appears relatable, often favoring videos that blend seamlessly into users’ “For You” feeds, where TikTok places content that they believe is interesting or compelling to the user based on previous videos and content they engaged with on the platform, rather than appearing blatantly promotional [3]. Based on third-party data, users frequently respond with skepticism towards content that appears overly scripted, heavily edited, or too perfect [4,5].

## Gen Z Consumer Behavior

Consumer behavior is vital as it “helps marketers learn what influences buying decisions” (American Marketing Association). Academic research actively illustrates that the Gen Z population demonstrates higher opposition to traditional advertising and greater skepticism toward obvious persuasion attempts compared to Gen X and Millennials [6]. This behavior reflects

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the persuasion knowledge theory that suggests consumers, who recognize persuasive intent, are more likely to resist advertising messages [7].

The Journal of Theoretical and Applied Management found that a majority of Gen Z consumers report trusting influencers more than brands, citing transparency and perceived honesty as important factors that professionals don’t always provide [8].

One-sided emotional bonds between viewers and media figures, known as parasocial relationships (PSRs), are a major predictor of trust and purchase intent. The scholars from the Journal of Consumer Services, Karina Sokolova and Hajer Kefi, found that PSRs often influence consumer behavior more strongly than traditional advertising trust measures. In addition, GRWM videos are especially effective at fostering PSRs by immersing viewers in the creators’ daily routines, increasing perceived familiarity and closeness.

The intersection between TikTok’s platform design and Gen Z consumer behavior is a dominant factor in contemporary marketing accomplishments, as purchasing decisions can start to be linked to the authenticity emerging from online creators using and endorsing products.

Approximately 63% of Gen Z consumers report greater trust in influencers than in brands, reinforcing the importance of peer-like communication [8].

## Content Format Determining Marketing Success

Beyond messages, graphics, music, and other content devices, the format in which information is delivered to the audience plays a critical role in persuasion. On TikTok specifically, platform-native content generates notably higher engagement than

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traditional advertising [9]. Given that TikTok has now emerged as a critical resource for consumers, users are spending hours on the platform engaging with creators and earning trust versus many other traditional advertising platforms.

Professor David Jiménez-Castillo and colleagues found that experienced authenticity mediates the relationship between influencer content style and consumer trust, suggesting authenticity functions as the primary mechanism driving persuasion [10,11].

The effectiveness of the persuasiveness in GRWM videos is further reflected in the rise of influencers such as Alix Earle, whose self-disciplining, casual GRWM content exemplifies the format's emphasis on intimacy and relatability. The *Alix Earle Effect* has had a tremendous impact on the marketing and TikTok community, specifically in the beauty sphere. Veronique Hyland notes that during Earle's GRWM videos, "the whole time, she's leaning in, utterly unselfconscious before the camera, looking like she's extremely interested in you, the viewer" [12].

Industry analysis further demonstrates that the perceived intimacy of GRWM content translates into measurable commercial outcomes. According to Vogue, "Get Ready With Me videos collapse the distance between recommendation and consumption, turning everyday routines into direct purchase triggers" [13]. This indicates that the GRWM phenomenon functions not only as entertainment or relationship-building content but also as immediate drivers of consumer purchasing behavior, particularly when product recommendations are embedded naturally within a creator's routine rather than presented as obvious advertisements. This sales mechanism aligns with parasocial interaction theory, as exposure to a creator's daily routines strengthens emotional bonds and increases adherence with product recommendations over time [14,15]. An industry example can be seen in the Tarte Cosmetics TikTok marketing strategy. The brand has over one million followers on TikTok and has become widely associated with GRWM-style influencer promotions. Rather than relying on traditional advertisements, Tarte leaned into creator-led GRWM videos in which influencers incorporated Tarte products, such as their iconic "Shape Tape" concealer, into their everyday makeup routines. Industry reporting indicates that these GRWM integrations were followed by rapid product sell-outs and sustained increases in consumer demand, specifically among Gen Z audiences repeatedly exposed to the product across multiple creators' routines [1,12,16].

Conversely, some scholars argue that professional presentation enhances credibility. Professionally produced content increases perception of competence and expertise, strengthening pervasive impact, mainly for brands that rely on technical knowledge and product reliability for complex and high-risk makeup products [15]. With this being said, structured messaging can improve comprehension and recall, particularly when information intricacy is high [17]. Empirical research supports this position as professionally produced influencer content has been shown to increase informational value and perceptions of competence, especially for hazardous beauty products where accuracy and expertise are extremely prioritized

by consumers [15].

Makeup brands habitually leverage this format to educate consumers through scripted, professionally produced marketing campaigns designed to communicate product advantages, attributes, and benefits. For example, the brand Estee Lauder publishes cinematic advertisements and partnerships. Statistics show that this helps promote complex products such as their "Double Wear" foundation, highlighting claims related to long wear, professional application, coverage precision, and safe ingredients. These campaigns rely heavily on polished visuals and structured messaging to reinforce product reliability and have been associated with perpetual commercial success and strong brand authority within the prestige beauty industry [9].

Similarly, mass market brands such as L'Oreal Paris and Maybelline commonly utilize professionally produced scripted TikTok ads, videos, and television advertisements to showcase their well-known products through controlled demonstrations and clear performance claims. These advertisements reduce obscurity by guiding consumer interpretation, which is especially important when products promise specific functional outcomes rather than aesthetic inspiration [17,18].

The professional advertising perspective functions as a credible signal that translates directly into sales by assuring consumers that products will perform as advertised, promoting verified information. This suggests that professional scripted makeup advertisements may be more effective when consumer purchase decisions are driven by performance certainty, brand reputation, and technical accuracy rather than emotional appeal.

### Gap in Research

While existing research establishes that parasocial relationships, authenticity, and content format all influence consumer behavior, these factors are studied in isolation. There are limited studies that compare how different beauty TikTok content formats function within the same platform, demographic, and product category. More specifically, no experimental research has directly compared informal GRWM videos and scripted-sponsored TikTok advertisements in the context of makeup marketing among female Gen Z consumers. Prior research has studied these formats independently but not together.

Without more data comparing the two formats, it remains unclear whether authenticity-driven content or professionally produced advertising has a greater influence when both compete for attention on the same platform from the same audience. Today, both formats are used by brands to win consumers over and to influence their purchasing decisions, but there isn't enough quantifiable research to clearly define a winner in the category.

To address this gap, my study directly compares the two content formats using a within-subjects design. This is a type of "research methodology where each participant is exposed to all levels of the independent variable" [19]. The study allows for controlled measurements of perceived authenticity, engagement, trust, and purchase intent.

Addressing this important gap contributes to both practical marketing strategies and academic research. By experimentally comparing informal versus scripted TikTok beauty content, this study advances understanding of digital persuasion in platform-specific contexts in a world that is being heavily controlled and influenced by digital and social media. For marketers, the findings provide evidence-based guidance on optimizing content strategies targeting Gen Z consumers within the beauty market, which could potentially enhance outreach, increase sales, and improve engagement in the future. For researchers, my study deepens understanding of how authenticity functions as a persuasive tool on platform-specific environments like TikTok.

I created the question: How does exposure to informal GRWM videos versus scripted sponsored TikTok makeup content influence female Gen Z consumers’ perceived trust and purchase intent? By asking this question, I was able to address a critical gap in digital marketing and media psychology research. Understanding why Gen Z responds differently to these formats is essential for improving and informing ethical marketing practices.

Research Design

My study consisted of a quantitative-dominant mixed methods experimental survey designed to examine how exposure to informal GRWM TikTok videos versus scripted sponsored TikTok makeup advertisement videos influences perceived authenticity, trust, engagement intention, and purchase intent among female Gen Z TikTok users. My experimental survey format allowed me to compare reactions in a controlled way while collecting both numerical data and written explanations.

Table 1: Studies Variables and Measurements.

| Variable Type | Variable          | Operational Definition                     | Measurement          |
|---------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Independent   | Content format    | Type of TikTok video viewed                | GRWM vs. Sponsored   |
| Dependent     | Perceived trust   | Degree of trust toward influencer/content  | 5-point Likert Scale |
| Dependent     | Purchase intent   | Likelihood of buying the featured product  | 5-point Likert Scale |
| Dependent     | Engagement intent | Likelihood to like, share, or save content | 5-point Likert Scale |
| Control       | Demographics      | Age, gender, and screen time               | Multiple choice      |

The independent variable was content format (informal GRWM versus scripted-sponsored advertisement). The dependent variables included perceived authenticity, perceived trustworthiness, engagement intention (likelihood to like, comment, or share), and purchase intent. Notably, each survey participant evaluated both formats as part of their participation in the survey.

Methodology

For my research, I created my own survey instrument using Google Forms. My research followed a structured, two phase process. In the first phase, I measured participants' general perceptions of GRWM content and sponsored advertisements initially before they watched any of the video content. In the second phase, I introduced two video stimuli and measured reactions to each one individually and together.

The informal GRWM video used in my study was originally posted by @alixearle, and the sponsored advertisement was posted by @tartecosmetics. The TikTok posted by Alix Earle reflects a conversational, routine-based makeup application style. The sponsored advertisement from Tarte Cosmetics reflects a structured promotional format with direct product emphasis. However, because Google Forms does not permit TikTok videos to be directly embedded within a survey, I had to download both videos and re-upload them as unlisted videos on my personal YouTube channel. This was necessary because the only video formats that are permissible with Google Forms are published via YouTube link. This method allowed me to insert them directly into my survey while keeping viewing conditions consistent for every participant. An important factor to note is that the original TikTok watermarks remain visible when you download a TikTok video. This preserves attribution and maintains the authentic appearance of the content similar to how they would consume it on the official TikTok platform. Since most existing research relies on observational studies or surveys of general attitudes, an experimental design was necessary to isolate content format as the key variable influencing differences in trust and purchase intent.

Before officially distributing my survey, I piloted it with my administrator to ensure the videos and questions worked on the published version. Her feedback helped me clarify certain questions and simplify sections with excessive wording/ explanations to improve question flow.

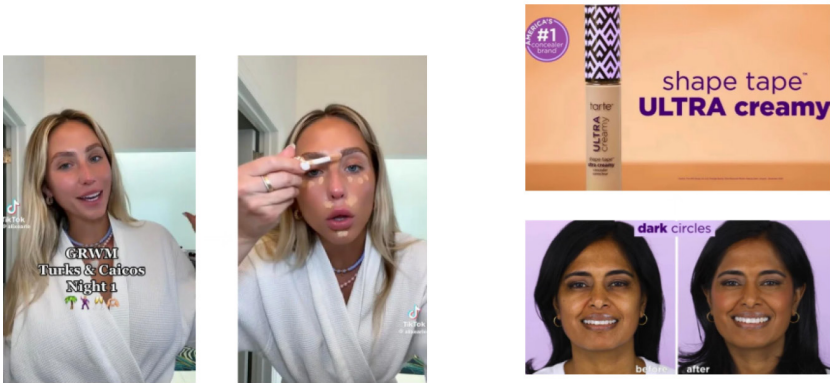


Image 1. Informal GRWM video (@alixearle) Image 2. Scripted Video Advertisement (@tartecosmetics)

## Subjects of Study

My research focused on avid female Gen Z TikTok users as survey participants. To participate, individuals had to identify themselves as female, Gen Z age range, and a TikTok user or a person with the app downloaded. I included screening questions at the beginning of my survey to confirm eligibility prior to allowing individuals to participate. Once user profiles were confirmed, the survey was sent to people who fit into the right target audience.

I recruited participants through school networks (e.g. regular classes, clubs, AP Capstone students and more), social media posts inviting voluntary participation via my personal social media accounts like Snapchat, as well as additional market outreach by messaging home friends, camp friends, and other Gen Z girls in the U.S. and traveling internationally. This resulted in a convenience sample which was collected over a one-month period. Although this approach does not fully represent all female Gen Z consumers, and was a limited sample audience, to base my findings on, it reflects transparent feedback from a realistic group of highly-addicted TikTok users who regularly encounter influencer marketing and GRWM content.

I chose this population intentionally as Gen Z females are the main audience for makeup-related influencer marketing on TikTok and cosmetic companies typically target this market for their products. Gen Z females' familiarity with influencer and cosmetic culture makes them especially relevant for a study examining authenticity perceptions and purchasing behavior. Furthermore, this demographic is highly comfortable with and fluent in social media practices and frequently engages with GRWM content, product reviews, and sponsored posts as a part of their everyday media consumption. Since they are regularly exposed to both influencer content and paid brand promotions, they are more likely to recognize differences in transparency, tone, and promotional intent. This strengthens the relevance of my findings when analyzing how various content formats influence trust and purchase decision making.

## Instruments and Procedure

The survey included both quantitative and qualitative questions split up into categories to measure authenticity, trust, engagement intention, and purchase intent. I also identified each variable of my study to further help me measure and analyze the results of my survey. Most of my quantitative items used a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (5). I also asked their thoughts on authenticity, how many times participants watched videos, whether individuals believed the product claims, as well as did they find the content reliable and relatable on the Likert scale. Their responses measured perceptions such as whether the content felt genuine, the creator seemed trustworthy, and the participant would consider purchasing the featured product after watching each video.

After the multiple choice section, I concluded with three open-ended questions asking participants to explain why the content for both formats felt authentic or inauthentic and whether it ultimately would influence their purchase considerations. These written responses allowed me to gather deeper insight beyond

just the numerical ratings I received earlier in the survey. The table below acknowledges my data analysis plan.

**Table 2:** Survey Question Categories.

| Category               | Question Numbers | Purpose                                     |
|------------------------|------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Media exposure         | Q1–Q2            | Establish baseline content exposure         |
| Authenticity & trust   | Q3–Q6            | Measure perceived authenticity and trust    |
| Purchase intent        | Q7–Q10           | Assess likelihood of purchasing behavior    |
| Engagement behavior    | Q11–Q12          | Measure interaction likelihood              |
| Comparative perception | Q13–Q14          | Compare GRWM vs. Sponsored content directly |
| Influencer credibility | Q15–Q16          | Assess general trust in influencers         |
| Open-ended responses   | Q17–Q19          | Gather qualitative insights and reasoning   |

To analyze the qualitative data, I calculated mean scores for each Likert-scale variable, including trust, engagement intention, authenticity, and purchase intent. Since participants evaluated both video formats, I compared responses between the two strategies. An Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) is a strategy used to determine whether differences between the informal GRWM video and the sponsored advertisement were statistically significant by comparing the means of each variable to each other. For the open-ended responses, I conducted thematic coding by grouping similar responses into categories such reliability, skepticism toward sponsorship, and consumer motivation. I then compared how often these themes appear across both video conditions to identify patterns in participant perceptions qualitatively.

**Table 3:** Data Analysis Plan.

| Data Type                | Analysis Method               | Purpose                                       |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Likert-scale responses   | Descriptive statistics (Mean) | Summarize overall trends                      |
| Between-group comparison | One-way ANOVA                 | Compare GRWM vs. Sponsored content effects    |
| Open-ended responses     | Thematic coding               | Explain qualitative and quantitative findings |

My form was ethical as an informed consent statement was included at the beginning of the survey, ensuring responses were anonymous, noting participation was optional, communicating that participants could exit the survey at any time, and verifying that names, emails or any other specific identifying details were not collected for participation. I stored all response data in a password-protected digital Google file accessible only to me. Only participants who agreed to consent participated in the survey.

Next, participants completed eligibility screening questions to confirm they met my criteria (female, over the age of 18 or below [with parent consent], Gen Z, and active TikTok user). After screening, participants answered baseline questions about their general attitudes toward GRWM videos and sponsored TikTok advertisements such as how often do you watch each video. This step allowed me to measure existing perceptions before introducing the video stimuli. Participants then viewed both

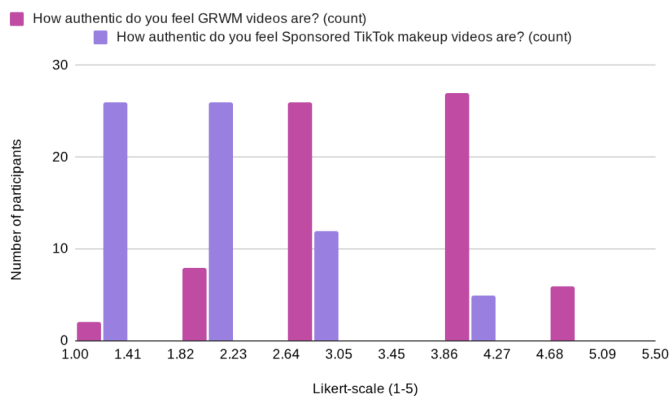
embedded videos. Immediately after watching, participants answered Likert-scale and open-ended questions evaluating authenticity, trust, engagement intention, and purchase intent for that specific video. Using identical measures about each video allowed me to directly compare responses between informal GRWM and sponsored content.

Once all questions were completed, participants submitted their responses to the survey. Responses were automatically recorded in Google Forms and later exported into a secure spreadsheet for analysis. I stored all data in a digital file. The step by step structure of this procedure allows another researcher to replicate my study using the same survey instrument, eligibility criteria, and embedded video method.

In my survey, a total of 70 responses were collected from female Gen Z TikTok users. Descriptive statistics, including distributions and means, were used to identify overall trends. A subject design within the Google form allowed for direct comparison between responses to GRWM and sponsored content. Furthermore, a one way repeated ANOVA was conducted to determine whether differences between content formats (the independent variable) were significant.

Qualitative responses were then coded into themes such as “relatable”, “scripted”, “trustworthy”, and “sales-driven”. These codes were compared across both formats to support the statistical findings and provide a deeper explanation for observed patterns.

## Results



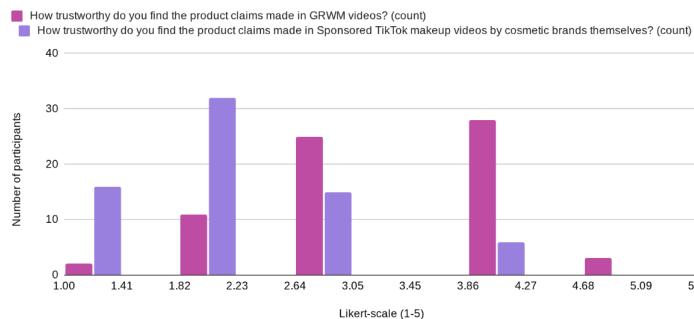
**Figure 1:** Mean higher authenticity ratings for GRWM versus sponsored TikTok content.

Perceived authenticity showed a clear difference between the two content formats. GRWM videos had a mean of about 3.4 out of 5, while sponsored content had a much lower mean of about 1.9. In addition, over 75% of participants rated GRWM videos as a 4 or higher.

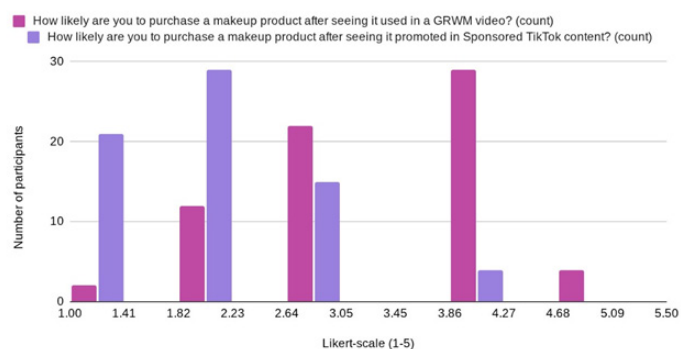
This indicates a strong difference in how authentic each type of content is perceived.

In this figure, I measured trust in product claims. GRWM content again scored higher, with a mean of 3.28 compared to sponsored advertisements with a mean of 2.07. Around 70% of participants rated sponsored content at the lowest

levels of trust. This suggests that lower perceived authenticity in sponsored content is closely linked to lower trust. This 58% increase in trust suggests that authenticity directly enhances perceived credibility, reinforcing prior research linking informal communication styles to stronger consumer trust which then drives loyalty and purchase intent.



**Figure 2:** Mean trust ratings for product claims in GRWM versus sponsored content.

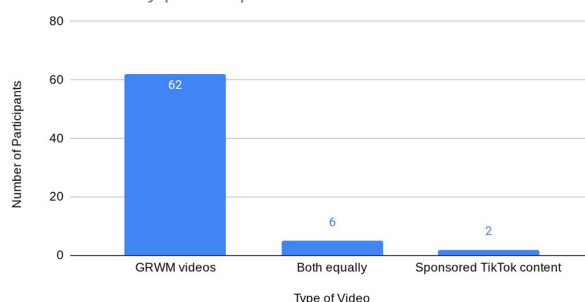


**Figure 3:** Mean purchase intent ratings for GRWM versus sponsored content.

This graph focuses on purchase intent. Sponsored content scored a mean of 2.03, while GRWM content had a mean of about 3.31. This 63% difference demonstrates that higher authenticity and trust translate directly into stronger consumer decision making and behavioral intention. Looking at behavior, 55.1% of participants reported purchasing a product one to two times based on GRWM videos, while 53.6% reported never purchasing from sponsored content.

This shows that GRWM content has a much stronger influence on actual consumer behavior.

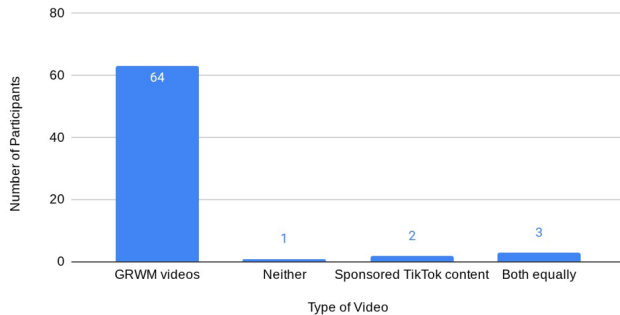
Which type of video do you feel gives you a more realistic idea of how a beauty product performs?



**Figure 4:** Number of participants who perceived each content type as realistic.

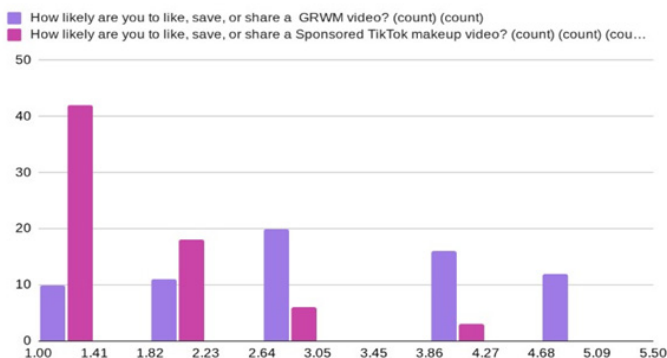
In terms of perceived realism, 62 out of 70 participants (88.57%) indicated that the GRWM video felt more realistic, while only 2 participants (2.85%) said the same for the sponsored advertisement. There was also a tie with 6 participants (8.57%) saying that each video portrayed the same standard of realisticness. This highlights the extent to which scripted content fails to align with audience expectations of authenticity.

Which type of content feels more pressure-free and relatable to watch?



**Figure 5:** Number of participants who found each content type relatable.

Relatability showed one of the strongest contrasts in the data. A total of 64 participants (90%) found the GRWM content relatable, compared to only two participants (2.85%) for the sponsored advertisements. Such an extreme imbalance in data shows that relatability is not a minor factor, but a dominant mechanism driving engagement and trust. This being said, one participant reported neither format is relatable and four participants reported that both formats were equally relatable. This was one of the strongest and most consistent findings in my data, showing a clear preference for more natural, informal content.

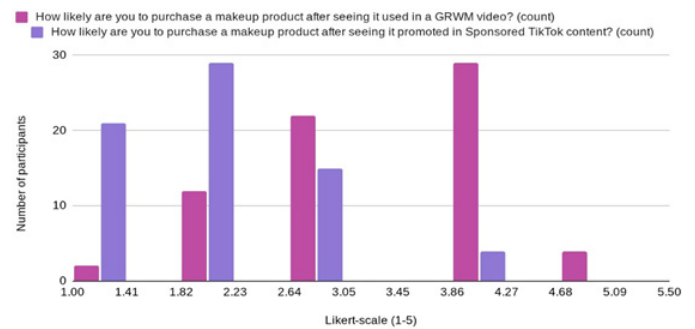


**Figure 6:** Participant engagement intention across content formats.

This graph shows engagement intentions, such as liking, sharing, or saving content. Engagement intention was also calculated to be higher for GRWM style content. GRWM videos had a mean of about 3.13, while sponsored content was much lower at about 1.67. In fact, 60.9% of participants rated sponsored content at the lowest level of engagement, suggesting users are far less likely to interact with it.

Finally, participants reported differences in purchasing behavior. More respondents stated that they had previously purchased products after viewing the informal influencer approach of a makeup video (GRWM) rather than purchasing a product after

watching a more formal sponsored video. Approximately 71.4% of participants rated sponsored content in the lowest purchase intent range (1–2), indicating a strong reluctance to buy products promoted through traditional ads. In contrast, GRWM content shifted responses toward higher levels, with about 72.9% of participants electing moderate purchase intent ratings (3–4), and an additional 5.7% of participants selecting the highest range. This suggests that viewers are significantly more open to purchasing products when they are presented in an informal, relatable context rather than a scripted advertisement.



**Figure 7:** Self-reported past purchase behavior influenced by content type.

**Table 4:** Frequency of key qualitative themes across content formats.

| Theme         | GRWM | Sponsored |
|---------------|------|-----------|
| “Natural”     | 48   | 3         |
| “Trustworthy” | 44   | 5         |
| “Scripted”    | 2    | 50        |
| “Fake”        | 1    | 46        |

In addition to numerical data, the qualitative data found repeated themes describing GRWM content in more of a bubbly diction, such as “natural”, “honest”, “unscripted”, and “like talking to a friend”. In contrast, sponsored content was described in more of a dull diction, referring to them as “scripted”, “paid”, “fake”, and “overhyped”. These patterns help explain why GRWM content performed better across all categories. Some of the repeated qualitative themes I found are down above.

In conclusion, the thematic coding and ANOVA results indicated that these differences were significant. I calculated  $p < .05$ . This shows that content format has had a measurable impact on all variables related to marketing and consumer behavior in the makeup industry for Gen Z females.

### Interpretation and Analysis

The figures above visually present the differences between GRWM and sponsored content across all identified dependent variables. The charts, tables, and data help reinforce the statistical patterns found in my research.

The results of my study imply that content format plays a major role in shaping how consumers perceive and respond to videos, but especially TikTok recordings. Across every variable measured, GRWM content drastically outperformed sponsored advertisements.

## Connection to Research Question & Literature

My findings and research align with existing research that suggests influencer content is generally perceived as more credible and engaging than traditional advertising. Previous studies have found that consumers are more responsive to content that feels organic and experience based rather than overtly promotional.

Additionally, the relationship between authenticity and purchase intent supports existing theories in consumer behavior, which emphasize the importance of trust in decision making. My conclusion suggests that when viewers perceive content as authentic, they're more likely to trust the message and act on it, whether that is actually purchasing the product or reacting to the video itself. At the same time, my study builds on prior research by directly comparing two specific TikTok content formats within a controlled experimental design. By isolating content formats as the independent variable, my research provides clear evidence on the impact of content styles on consumer perception and behavior.

Essentially, these findings display the growing importance of authenticity in the digital marketing space, especially when targeting Gen Z audiences. My study set out to examine how informal GRWM TikTok videos compare to scripted sponsored TikTok makeup advertising videos in shaping perceived authenticity, trust, engagement, and purchase intent among female Gen Z users. Overall, my findings show a clear and consistent pattern: Informal GRWM content is perceived as significantly more authentic, trustworthy, and influential than sponsored content.

The data strongly supports this conclusion. For example, I recorded that 89.9% of participants reported that GRWM videos provide a more realistic understanding of product performance, while only 2.9% selected sponsored content. Similarly, 91.3% identified GRWM videos as more relatable and pressure-free, reinforcing the idea that casual, unscripted content creates a stronger emotional connection with the viewers. In contrast, sponsored videos were consistently rated lower in authenticity and trust, with the majority of participants selecting the lowest possible ratings for both measures.

Purchase behavior also reflected this divide. Participants reported a high likelihood of purchasing products after viewing GRWM content, and over half (55.1%) had purchased a product 1-2 times in the past six months based off of GRWM videos, compared to a majority (53.6%) reporting zero purchases made from sponsored content. These results emphasized that authenticity is not just a perception, but that it directly impacts consumer decision making.

From these findings, my new understanding is that content format plays a critical role in shaping trust and consumer behavior, and that perceived authenticity acts as a key mediator between exposure and purchase intent. Informal, personality-driven content is more effective because it reduces perceived persuasive intent, making viewers feel like they are receiving genuine recommendations rather than advertisements.

## Limitations

While my findings are strong, there are several limitations that affect how broadly this conclusion can be applied and how credible it is overall. First, my study relied on a convenience sampling, primarily drawing participants from my personal networks and school community. This means the sample does not fully represent all Gen Z consumers. It is limited in scope and may not represent people from all cultural backgrounds, different levels of social media usage, and socioeconomic statuses. As a result, findings may overemphasize GRWM effectiveness for lesser-known creators or in communities with different media consumption patterns. I only had 70 participants, who may have had potential biases. For example, my participants may already be loyal Alix Earle supporters given she is a hugely popular public figure.

Second, my method used only two video stimuli, one GRWM video and one sponsored video advertisement. Although I selected these carefully to represent each format, they cannot capture the full range of content styles on TikTok. Differences in creator personality, brand reputation, or video quality may also influence participant responses, meaning the results may not apply to all GRWM or sponsored videos universally.

Another limitation is that my data is based on self-reported perceptions and intentions, rather than actual tracked behavior, so this may not predict actual behavior. Participants may overestimate or underestimate how likely they are to purchase a product, which introduces another potential bias. The Tarte Cosmetics video advertisement could have also underperformed in my survey due to other brand-specific factors rather than format; since it has a higher production quality (e.g. ring light, logos, backdrop in the setup).

When I coded my qualitative findings, the process grouped themes manually. Although I found clear patterns (such as repeated mention of "scripted", "paid", and "natural"), the interpretation can involve some subjectivity, which could influence how themes were categorized.

## Implications

These findings have important implications for both digital media and marketing fields now and in the future. For brands, the results suggest that traditional sponsored advertisements may be out of date and less effective with Gen Z audiences, especially when they appear overly promotional. Instead, brands may benefit from integrating products into more natural influencer-driven formats that mimic the GRWM-style Alix Earle uses.

For influencers, my study highlights the importance of maintaining authenticity and credibility. Participants consistently emphasized that honest, casual tone, and the lack of obvious sponsorship increased trust in creators and their favored products. This suggests that influencers who prioritize genuine engagement over purely promotional content may have stronger long term influence on their audience.

More broadly, my research contributes to the understanding of how digital audiences interpret and respond to advertising in

social media environments. It shows that Gen Z consumers are highly aware of persuasive intent and actively adjust their trust based on content format.

### Future Directions and Conclusion

This study opens several directions for future research. First, future studies could expand the sample size and use random sampling methods to improve generalizability and better represent the broader Gen Z population. Including participants from different geographic regions or cultural backgrounds could reveal whether these patterns hold true across more diverse groups.

Second, researchers could analyze a larger variety of video stimuli, including multiple content styles and brands. This would help determine whether the patterns observed in my study are consistent across different types of GRWM and sponsored content. Another important direction would be to incorporate behavior tracking data, such as actual purchase history or click-through rates, rather than relying solely on self-reported intentions. This would strengthen the connection between perception and real consumer behavior.

Additionally, future research could apply inferential statistical tests to further examine the significant differences between content types and interactions between variables like authenticity, trust, and purchase intent. This could include tracking orders and metrics from purchases made directly from each video or due to having products mentioned or linked within the content.

Finally, researchers should focus on engagement across all different types of social media platforms (e.g. Instagram), not just TikTok. This will also help describe how user behavior can change over time. As social media in the makeup sector continues to evolve, grow, and impact consumers' purchasing behaviors, understanding what content format followers are drawn to can help future brands and influencers when publicizing products.

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