

The Influence of Social Media Marketing Strategies on Consumers' Purchasing Behaviors

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ABSTRACT

Marketing has drastically developed over the years with the rise of technology, which has also brought about the rise of social media. This form of online interaction plays a huge role in helping products go viral, such as the Adidas Sambas, Maybelline lip products, or the Stanley cup. A product cannot go viral without the spread of word of mouth, specifically, electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), which has taken prevalence on social media. Review videos, a form of e-WOM, on social media platforms strengthen feelings of trust between the brand and the consumer. These are often posted on TikTok, a social media platform where many viral products got their initial spark due to a few special features of the app. One of the features is TikTok influencers, famous TikTok users who can influence others to purchase a product they are promoting. This is due not only to their relationship with their followers but also because of the fear of missing out (FOMO) that their followers feel when seeing how great a product is. Therefore, social media makes a great platform for brands to market and spread information about their products often through the use of influencers who leverage feelings of exclusion in consumers on platforms like TikTok. Ultimately, many consumers would feel compelled to purchase these products online.

Introduction

You have probably noticed the Adidas Sambas shoes that have recently become viral. Almost every “outfit of the day” video posted online, especially on TikTok, has been paired with this shoe. Perhaps, you have seen thousands of Maybelline-sponsored promotion videos posted by influencers on social media, promoting their new lip gloss. Another popular viral product is Amazon’s #1 best-selling water bottle, the Stanley cup, which is all over TikTok and Instagram. This cup just seems to be everywhere. All their limited edition colors and collaborations are swept off the shelves and sell out the moment they are launched. This could perhaps be due to everyone on TikTok endorsing the product and boosting its virality. As a result, the abundance of videos with famous influencers promoting the same product over and over again incentivizes many consumers to purchase the product.

Marketing has evolved over the years, from print media and newspaper ads to radio and television. With the rise of the internet and advancements in technology, marketing has transformed into banner ads and email campaigns. Finally, now that smartphones have become an everyday tool, social media has taken over, becoming one of the biggest methods to market products (Oumayma, 2019). Social media allows anyone to share their opinions with just a click of a button. This fact, combined with social media’s prevalence, has undoubtedly been leveraged by brands and marketers. This happens through various types of marketing strategies. Among these is electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), which is information shared online about a product or brand. It is most commonly spread on social media platforms and can shape customers' opinions on products and increase their desire to purchase them. TikTok is a popular social media platform that effectively demonstrates how e-WOM is spread. With features such as its unique algorithm that can easily become addictive, short videos with engaging effects, and TikTok shop, TikTok has become an effective marketing platform for brands to market and sell their products, as TikTok users are more likely to impulsively purchase products after seeing a few videos expressing approval of an item (Pangalila & Aprilianty, 2022).

TikTok also promotes e-WOM through the use of influencers, people with thousands or millions of followers who can impact their followers' purchasing decisions. They post content reviewing products and are a powerful source in arousing interest because of the trust and connection built with their followers (Serman & Sims, 2020). Influencers sway purchasing decisions because of the fear of missing out (FOMO) most consumers feel when watching their videos. Influencer content gives rise to upward social comparisons, and users often compulsively purchase products in response in order to fit in. Stressing the scarcity and uniqueness of products can also lead to a sense of urgency in consumers, ultimately leading to spontaneous spending (Dinh & Lee, 2022). Stanley has been through all these phases, which has helped it become the viral product it is today, making it hard for consumers' to get their hands on newly launched Stanley cups, or even just see one sitting on the shelves. Using Stanley as an example, this paper presents research explaining marketing strategies brands use on social media to increase consumers' inclination to purchase products.

Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM)

Social media has changed how people communicate with each other and share their opinions, especially regarding products. This has in turn resulted in brands changing how they market their products. Brands spread information about their items in many ways, known as word of mouth (WOM). The old-fashioned way was through direct face-to-face communication. However, more modern methods may be more efficient than this, so instead, brands use electronics to spread e-WOM, specifically focusing on customer-to-customer WOM. e-WOM is any positive or negative information about a product or company shared by anyone online, which anyone can access (Oumayma, 2019). One platform used to spread e-WOM is social media, which refers to websites or applications of virtual communities where anyone can share ideas or information while interacting with other users. It is an influential source that can shape consumers' perspectives on products or services, impacting their purchasing intentions (Joshi & Singh, 2017).

One way e-WOM increases consumers' intentions to spend is through ratings, reviews, and comments left by consumers who have already experienced or purchased the product. Many online shoppers tend to read or watch reviews by other buyers before buying a product to reduce risk and learn about past experiences. Positive reviews are more likely to entice users to purchase a new product and can significantly impact brands' reputations (Oumayma, 2019). Many online shoppers also leave reviews or create videos on social media platforms, sharing positive or negative experiences with products. e-WOM on social media has become a powerful tool for businesses to connect with customers, as more people have started relying on online reviews to make informed decisions relating to purchasing (Serman & Sims, 2020).

User-generated content reviewing products is highly trusted, especially when the content is unsponsored and the creator is unpaid. This means the user chose to share information on their own and was self-motivated, with no involvement from the brand, which is seen as genuine and authentic. This is great for spreading e-WOM because as feelings of uncertainty are reduced, feelings of loyalty are established in the eyes of potential customers (Serman & Sims, 2020). Especially if posted on popular social media platforms, like Instagram or TikTok, engagement with the product increases (Lal, 2021). User-generated WOM sways consumers' perception of a product and is one of the most important factors when considering whether to purchase a product or not (Gupta et al., 2020).

Spreading e-WOM is important for brands because this can easily impact others' purchasing behaviors. The Stanley cup became popular for exactly this reason. The century-old Stanley company, known for its durable and reusable "quencher", released its first vacuum-insulated bottle in 1913. Yet it has taken more than a hundred years for it to gain widespread popularity. The cup's newfound global popularity is due to the multitude of user-generated content posted by influencers and everyday users promoting the product, especially on platforms like TikTok. A major turning point for Stanley was when a user posted a video on TikTok in November of 2023 that went viral. The video showed a woman pulling a Stanley cup out of the cup holder of a car that a fire had wrecked, and her Stanley cup was intact, with ice still in it. This video has garnered over 96.9 million views, 9.2 million likes, and 450.6 thousand shares

as of August 2024.¹ The popular tumbler's viral success was due to users' strong response to this video, which helped spur the Stanley Quencher's popularity. As of January 2024, #stanleytumbler had amassed 1.1 billion views on TikTok. This resulted in purchases being made and overwhelmingly positive e-WOM messages showcasing genuine love and real experiences with the product on social media. This is just one example of how spreading e-WOM, especially through social media, has become an effective marketing tool as it can strongly influence an individual to purchase or not purchase an item.

Using TikTok as a Marketing Platform

TikTok is one of the most effective social media platforms to spread e-WOM because it is so widely used, especially among the Gen Z or younger population (Tee et al., 2023). The app contains a wide variety of content, ranging from entertainment to lip-syncing to educational videos (Nst & Khairat, 2023). Anyone can access the app, create an account for free, and post content, which means that anyone online can use TikTok not only to review products but also to market and sell products to increase customers' purchasing intentions. TikTok stands out because of its unique features, which differentiate it from other social media platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube. These features are what make TikTok a productive marketing channel.

One of the features is TikTok's algorithm, which appears on your "for-you page," TikTok's version of a home page, the first page that appears when you open the app. This is a curated feed with recommended videos tailored for users based on their interests and past content they have consumed, strategically designed to keep users hooked (Tee et al., 2023). As a result, this specific feature can make TikTok a potent platform for impulsive shoppers. If a user favors and continuously watches a certain style of content, similar content will be recommended based on patterns, causing frequent endless scrolling and addictions. The more an individual sees a certain type of content or product promoted, the more they experience the desire to buy.

Another key feature of TikTok is its special style of content. Short videos are one of the most distinct qualities of TikTok videos. Brevity is an influential element in appealing and digestible content especially for younger users, because of their shorter attention spans (Agrawal, 2023). Short videos immediately captivate viewers, increasing the likelihood of users watching the full video and allowing them to take in the whole message conveyed. This makes TikTok a powerful platform to draw more consumers. The more a video or ad catches and holds a user's attention, the more likely they are to purchase the item being shown (Agrawal, 2023). TikTok is also a great platform for users to showcase creativity. Most of the time, ads posted are funny or entertaining, because of the in-app special effects, such as filters and music to enhance the visuals of videos, which can involve dancing or acting. This makes information much easier to take in (Pangalila & Aprilianty, 2022). It has been shown that consumer perceived enjoyment, or the extent to which content is considered enjoyable, affects their desires to buy spontaneously. Because of this, advertising on TikTok is more effective and attracts more customers (Tee et al., 2023). Another unique feature of TikTok is the discreteness of advertisements. Most ads on TikTok are created by users who mimic their usual style of content, making ads less intrusive and blends seamlessly into regular content flow. The subtlety of an ad draws more views as people are less likely to scroll past it, thinking it is their usual type of content (Agrawal, 2023). These key features of TikTok videos make advertising on TikTok an effective marketing platform.

TikTok integrated a new feature in September 2023, known as TikTok Shop, which incorporates the whole process of online shopping within the platform. Customers can browse and shop for any item on TikTok Shop, and anyone can sell their products through this feature (Tee et al., 2023). Usually, promotion videos on TikTok have a yellow shopping cart symbol at the bottom of the video with a link that goes directly to the TikTok Shop link of the product shown in the video. This allows users to immediately purchase products if they like what they see in the video, fulfilling instant gratification needs, and increasing urges to spend (Hamizar et al., 2024; Solikah & Kusumaningtyas,

¹ From TikTok as of August 28, 2024

2022). TikTok Shop's browsing, ordering, purchasing, and reviewing are all easy to use. It is also a very convenient shopping platform, as customers can purchase products without having to switch to another website, and purchased items are delivered directly to the consumer's home, making the shopping experience easier (Solikah & Kusumaningtyas, 2022). TikTok Shop's convenience can increase the desire to buy products and make TikTok a significant marketing channel. Additionally, items sold on TikTok Shop tend to offer discounts, because the platform offers free shipping and often provides promotions and discount codes, making it more enticing for users to purchase products (Solikah & Kusumaningtyas, 2022). TikTok's unique features such as TikTok shop influence users to increase their impulsive spending.

In relation to the viral TikTok video that showcased the durability of Stanley cups, the platform has proven to be an effective marketing strategy. A concrete example of TikTok's effectiveness is shown in the graphs below. The number of TikTok users worldwide has been increasing steadily since 2019 (Figure 1). Stanley's worldwide revenue has also followed a similar trend of rising since 2019 (Figure 2). As this paper discussed, this phenomenon might be related to the virality of their Stanley Quenchers on TikTok. Both the number of TikTok users and Stanley's sales revenue follow the same trend of increasing over the years. This example, along with TikTok's personalized algorithm, short videos, and TikTok Shop illustrates how effective TikTok is as a marketing platform.

Number of TikTok users worldwide from 2019 to 2023 (in millions)

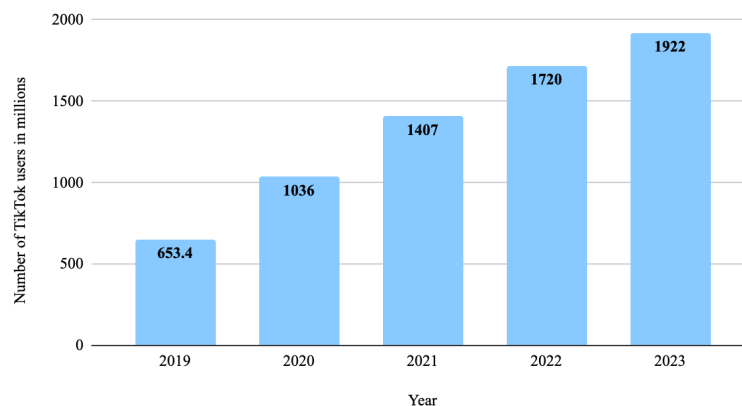


Figure 1: This chart illustrates the increase in TikTok users globally from 653.4 million users in 2019 to approximately 1.92 billion users worldwide in 2023 (Ceci, 2024; Statista). (193%)

Stanley sales revenue worldwide from 2019 to 2023 (in million U.S. dollars)

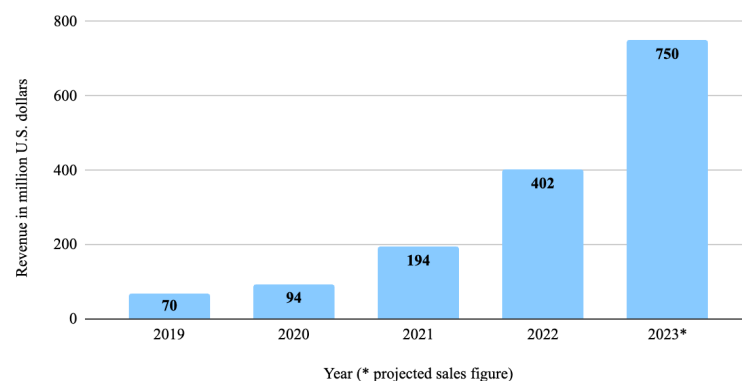


Figure 2: This chart illustrates the increase in Stanley's annual sales revenue worldwide from 70 million U.S. dollars in 2019 to a projected 750 million U.S. dollars in 2023 (Tighe, 2024; Statista). (971 %)

Influencers

User-generated content is highly trusted, and a form of this that has taken prevalence is influencer content. On all forms of social media, especially TikTok, there are people known as influencers with thousands, sometimes millions, of followers. They can push an opinion, service, or most commonly, product, onto a large group of people by promoting or recommending items on social media to “influence” them. They are of great interest to brands and businesses, as they help attract customers and are a great way to spread e-WOM (Dinh & Lee, 2022). They are often the creators of engaging product promotion videos (Agrawal, 2023). The credibility of user-generated influencer content allows them to be successful at marketing products (Kamaldeep, 2021).

Influencers present themselves as more “ordinary” people online compared to huge celebrities, actively interacting with followers by responding to comments or direct messages. This makes them appear more accessible, authentic, and friendly. Eventually, this results in their followers viewing them as trustworthy and credible sources of information, which leads to a strong connection between the influencer and their followers (Croes & Bartels, 2021). A tight bond makes convincing followers to purchase their endorsed products much easier (Serman & Sims, 2020).

Because companies must establish healthy customer relationships built on a foundation of trust, reliability, and successful experiences, working with influencers has many benefits. Influencers, who connect with their followers at a deeper level, are a useful source for advertising newly launched or existing products because customers tend to trust each other more than endorsements from traditional mass media. (Dinh & Lee, 2022; Sönmezay, 2024). To ensure positive e-WOM sentiment, companies send their products to different influencers for free and the influencer is paid to promote and review the product. This strategy effectively increases sales and attracts more customers who are inclined to follow current trends (Oumayma, 2019; Sumanti et al., 2022). However, in other cases, influencers would voluntarily upload non-sponsored, unpaid content praising or criticizing products if they have strong positive or negative attitudes towards a particular product. Not only is this type of content seen as the most credible in the eyes of possible buyers, but because the influencer is not biased, the content is raw and genuine, making it beneficial for brands when reviews are positive (Lal, 2021).

Influencers are great resources for helping brands communicate their visions to consumers and endorsing products engagingly and efficiently (Oumayma, 2019). Large follower bases allow influencers to make a brand more recognizable and popular, helping companies reach bigger audiences to spread e-WOM. This increases the chances of people purchasing the brand’s products. Many consumers buy items simply because influencers recommend them, mostly commonly seen in promotion videos posted on social media (Gupta et al., 2020). Influencer promotion content praising and recommending products to their followers is another example of a strategic marketing tactic that increases consumers’ intentions to purchase (Croes & Bartels, 2021).

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)

Influencers are one of the main sources on social media that cause FOMO in consumers. Seeing constant product promotion videos, or review videos online stressing how great a product is, can lead to feelings of uneasiness and longing to belong (Dinh & Lee, 2022). In psychology, this term is FOMO, short for “fear of missing out” (McGinnis, 2023). As its name suggests, FOMO is associated with anxiety from being excluded and is often related to feelings of loneliness and jealousy (Dinh & Lee, 2022). In 2013, British psychologists defined it as a “pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent” (Gupta & Sharma, 2021). The first part of this phenomenon is the awareness of missing out on experiences or physical items, which can often lead to the second part: compulsive behavior to maintain social connections. FOMO is characterized by the desire to stay connected and informed about what others are doing, and some believe this phenomenon is due to problematic attachment to social media (Gupta & Sharma, 2021). Nowadays, with social media being such a regular day-to-day tool, people consume a lot of content on what others are doing online, leading to uncertainty about themselves. This results in

constant social media use to obtain gratification, which can contribute to depression and poor mental health (Dinh & Lee, 2022).

Exclusion is a feeling many try to avoid, so brands and influencers make use of this unpleasant feeling to promote their products. Even though FOMO may appear negative, for marketers, it is a strategy to increase consumers' purchasing behavior (Cinar, 2021). This makes social media an excellent marketing platform. Brands instill FOMO in consumers by promoting products and emphasizing the uniqueness of an opportunity with messages such as "do not miss" or "unmissable opportunity" (Cinar, 2021; Dinh & Lee, 2022). In addition, stressing the scarcity with "limited stock" or "limited-time offer" messages is also a marketing tactic to take advantage of the fear in consumers to lure them into purchasing products and triggering their impulsive behavior (Sönmezay, 2024). Once again, Stanley utilized this potent technique to get to where they are today. Stanley has created many "limited-edition" special products, such as collaborations with well-known influencers like Olivia Rodrigo or highly anticipated collaborations with popular brands such as Love Shack Fancy and Starbucks. Stanley even launches limited edition color palettes that are available for a short period of time. "Limited-edition" products result in fast-selling, sold-out releases that create a sense of urgency and a stronger sense of desire in customers to purchase the product (Sönmezay, 2024). This is an example of how a brand took advantage of FOMO on social media, resulting in many users purchasing the product without thoughtful prior consideration.

Another way brands make use of FOMO to showcase and make their products more attractive is through social media influencers. Influencers are a powerful form of social proof, which is a psychological and social phenomenon where people tend to copy and adopt the behaviors of others to conform. When influencers create content reviewing products that can become viral, a bandwagon effect is produced (Cinar, 2021). This is when individuals adopt specific behaviors, in this case, purchasing behaviors, due to a widespread number of people participating in the trend (Cinar, 2021). This results in more people "jumping on the bandwagon" just because it is popular to do so, to avoid FOMO. This shows that generating FOMO in users from seeing everyone else on social media using the same products, is a great marketing strategy for brands to lure consumers into purchasing more products.

Influencers also generate a great amount of social comparison in their followers, leading to FOMO, effectively increasing purchasing intentions. Some followers of influencers consider the influencer to be the ideal version of themselves. They take them as a model regarding their physical appearance or possessions, which they think are signs of happiness and success. These followers tend to be more materialistic, comparing themselves and their material belongings with others. They also check social media platforms regularly to avoid being left out of experiences or viral products. The social comparison theory indicates that 'individuals usually compare their material possessions and significant items with others to determine their social status'. Usually, these comparisons are made to someone more popular or famous, such as influencers. For a follower to achieve their desired state based on comparisons, they would imitate the influencer with the products or experiences shared online (Dinh & Lee, 2022). Constant "upward social comparisons" can harmfully impact one's self-esteem (Gupta & Sharma, 2021). People with high social comparison orientation are more prevalent among those suffering from mental health issues, such as depression or anxiety, and they are more likely to develop FOMO (Dinh & Lee, 2022). The social comparison ignited by FOMO is yet another example of how social media impacts consumer purchasing behaviors.

Social media is often the cause of the fear of exclusion, contributing to the psychological pressures that result in impulsive purchasing behaviors to avoid the loss of missing out (Cinar, 2021). These individuals can develop a marketing phenomenon known as "buyer's regret" when feelings of disappointment are experienced when an individual does not purchase a desired product. The priority of fulfilling current emotions over considering whether the purchase will meet the consumer's long-term needs is the effect of "buyer's regret." This can provide relief and alleviate feelings of anxiety (Hamizar et al., 2024; Hodkinson, 2019). Furthermore, feelings of FOMO are one of the main causes of spontaneous purchasing decisions in individuals who value social approval, their self-esteem, and shame avoidance (Hodkinson, 2019). Ultimately, social media is an effective and important platform to bring about FOMO in users to promote products and attract customers as the emotions aroused in reaction to seeing FOMO-inducing content, or to avoid feelings of regret can encourage them to buy what is seen online.

Conclusion

Along with the technological developments of smartphones, marketing has advanced over recent years with the proliferation of social media. Spreading e-WOM has increased on social media platforms such as TikTok, where influencers are key in creating FOMO-inducing content. These are some of the steps that can lead to a viral product, such as the Stanley cup, which shows how improvements in social media have brought plenty of changes to both how marketers promote products and consumers' habits regarding shopping. Spreading e-WOM with user-generated reviews, which makes brands more widely known, has gained popularity through platforms like TikTok. TikTok has distinguished features that make consumers compelled to purchase products compulsively, especially with the help of influencers. Furthermore, influencers can reduce feelings of uncertainty and promote trust in consumers because of the way they carry themselves and interact with others on social media, making it easier to persuade their followers to purchase products they endorse. Consumers tend to buy these products seen online because of FOMO, which is a feeling ignited after seeing many people own and love a certain product. This is a strategy brands utilize to pique interest in their products and lift sales. Overall, social media is a powerful tool that has impacted how and why people purchase products.

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