

Tiktok and Beauty in the Age of Gen Z: A Baudrillard's Economic Sociological Analysis

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: April 29, 2024

Revised: May 13, 2024

Accepted: May 24, 2024

Available online: May 31, 2024

E-ISSN 3021-8179

How to cite:

Harahap, R. H., Asengbaramae, R., & Karindra, N. A. (2024). Tiktok and Beauty in the Age of Gen Z: A Baudrillard's Economic Sociological Analysis. *Journal of Sustainable Economics*, 2(1), 24-31. <http://doi.org/10.32734/jse.v2i1.16296>



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ABSTRACT

Through influencers and E-WoM, TikTok creates a favourable environment for users in adapting and trying new things, both in terms of consuming products and marketing products. Through Baudrillard's theory, it can be seen that Gen Z's consumption culture is influenced by their self-representation on social media. The background of this research lies in a shift in the paradigm of beauty consumption in the era of Generation Z. TikTok users quickly promoted and adopted a variety of beauty trends, creating a foundation for understanding the symbolic meaning created by the Gen Z's consumption culture. The theory used is Jean Baudrillard's theory of consumer society. In this theory, consumer society no longer consume objects based on exchange values or usage values, but because of symbolic values which are abstract and constructed in nature. This article uses a literary study research method that involves searching and critically analysing relevant literature related to the title of the article. This study aims to explain Gen Z'S consumption culture on Tiktok's beauty trend through Baudrillard's sociological economic perspective. Therefore, this article not only explains the beauty trends that are emerging in Tiktok, but also opens up a discussion about how tikTok contributes to the formation of Gen Z'S identity and consumption culture.

Keyword: Consumption Culture, Gen Z, Tiktok, Beauty Trends

1. Introduction

In the era of Generation Z, marked by technological advancement and digitalization, the phenomenon of consumption culture has become increasingly interesting to explore. TikTok is one such platform that steals the show as trends and lifestyles, including beauty trends, spread rapidly. In this case, beauty is not just about appearance, but also illustrates how this generation consumes, forms identities, and interacts socially. The background of this research lies in the shifting paradigm of beauty consumption in the Gen Z era. TikTok became a place of self-expression and intense visual consumption. Various beauty trends are promoted and adopted by TikTok users quickly, this creates a foundation for understanding the symbolic meanings that Generation Z's consumption culture creates. The theory used as the basis of analysis is Jean Baudrillard's theory of consumption society. In Jean Baudrillard's consumption theory, today's consumerist society is not based on class but on consumption ability. Now people no longer consume objects based on exchange value or use value, but because of the sign/symbolic value which is abstract and constructed.

The purpose of this research is to explain Gen Z's consumption culture within the scope of beauty trends on TikTok through the perspective of Baudrillard's economic sociology. Therefore, this article not only explains the emerging beauty trends on TikTok, but also opens a discussion on how TikTok contributes to the formation of Generation Z's identity and consumptive values.

2. Method

This article uses a literature study research method that involves searching and critically analyzing relevant literature related to the role of beauty trends on TikTok and its implications for Gen Z's consumption culture

based on Jean Baudrillard's consumption society theory. The criteria for Gen Z in this study include a group of 15-25 years old who actively use TikTok and participate in consumption culture as consumers of beauty trends spread on the platform.

The researcher used various reputable journal databases to search for relevant articles, scientific documents, and academic sources. Once the relevant literature was found, the researcher conducted a thorough text analysis to find the main conclusions and patterns found in the literature. The purpose of this study is to find out how beauty trends on TikTok are portrayed in previous research, as well as to show how much beauty content on TikTok influences Generation Z's preferences and desire to purchase beauty items and brands.

This literature research allowed the researcher to develop a solid conceptual framework based on the results, and provided a solid foundation for the analysis and conclusions regarding the influence of beauty trends on TikTok on Generation Z's purchase intention in this article. It discusses about how the research be done. This section supports and establishes the explanation which is contained in the finding chapter.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 Social Media Marketing on TikTok

Social media refers to a range of internet-based services that can facilitate user participation in developing/uploading user-generated content, online conversations, and user participation in the development of online communities. It first emerged in the late 1990s due to the widespread use of broadband internet by individuals. Social media has become an essential part of daily life as a communication channel. Broader communication has a positive impact as it allows sellers to reach large consumer groups ([Qotrunnada & Marsasi, 2023](#)).

Social media has transformed the role of consumers from passive listeners (audience) to active partisans. Social media platforms have become important marketing tools for building brand awareness during the Covid-19 pandemic due to their unique creativity, especially in increasing consumer knowledge about product brands ([Qotrunnada & Marsasi, 2023](#)). Research shows that consistent results related to consumer product information knowledge through social media can change consumer views on brand image and purchase intentions ([Qotrunnada & Marsasi, 2023](#)).

After being launched in 2016, TikTok has grown rapidly in popularity. Surpassing many apps like WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube in 2018. This Chinese application focuses on teenagers, prompting many companies to direct their marketing campaigns to this platform. The company's strategy is relatively simple, the company hires popular influencers and through them, the company advertises its products or services indirectly or directly to consumers ([Dirir, 2022](#)). Unlike other portable apps, TikTok offers quick video creation opportunities with integrated elements of recording, editing, and sharing footage similar to real-world gatherings where participants stay connected with friends and meet new people. TikTok is a virtual environment that allows clients to create 15-second videos with enhanced changes for camera speed control, blending, cooperative split-screen, camera movements, and special visualizations that enhance the attributes of conventional mobile phone use ([Dirir, 2022](#)).

TikTok is a social media platform that has low advertising costs, so users can save on promotional expenses. Users can promote brands with any advertising budget on TikTok. In addition, TikTok can help new or lesser-known brands gain organic reach without significant expense. Tiktok also provides many ad format options ranging from Top View Ads, In-Feed Ads, Brand Takeover Ads, and Branded Hashtag Challenge. TopView Ads appear for 5 seconds after the user opens the application. Users can display videos up to 60 seconds long and full screen with sound and an autoplay feature. Interestingly, users can include links in ads to increase traffic on internal and external pages.

In-Feed Ads are a type of TikTok ad that is similar to Instagram feed ads, appearing on the "For You" page. These video ads can be 9-15 seconds long and users can add a CTA (Call to Action) or link to encourage action from users. Thus, users can attract other users to shop, download apps, or visit the brand's website. In addition, In-Feed Ads also allow the audience to like, comment on, or share videos with other users. Brand Takeover Ads are very similar to TopView Ads, but have a static or dynamic full-screen display that provides a stronger visual impact. Brand Takeover Ads cannot be skipped by users, so they have to watch the video until it is finished. In this ad, users cannot provide feedback in the form of likes or comments.

Branded Hashtag Challenge utilizes hashtags for brand promotion. Usually, they can be found in the search feature on TikTok. True to its name, Branded Hashtag Challenge allows users to participate by creating content around a specific campaign theme. When users click on a brand-sponsored hashtag, they are immediately directed to a landing page that displays the sponsor's logo, website link, challenge description, and the most popular videos using the related hashtag. TikTok has a variety of influencers who can be partnered with to promote businesses. The presence of TikTok makes it possible for anyone to become famous, so there are many influencers that brands can choose from to help promote their business. However, make sure the chosen influencer has followers that match the target audience. Influencers can do live streaming if they have at least 700 followers and viewers can give gifts in the form of points that can be exchanged for money.

3.2 The Role of Influencers

An influencer is someone who is on social media and has a large number of followers so that it can encourage others to take action ([Agustin & Amron, 2022](#)). Influencers should have four characteristics known as VisCAP: Visibility (the degree to which an influencer is known and valued by the public), Credibility (the value of a person's ability or ability to demonstrate excellent performance that includes supporting expertise and reliability), Attractiveness (having an appeal to not only the physical but also lifestyle, personality, skills, etc.), and Power (the beauty emitted from the content creator influence the attitude, mind, and culture of the audience when introducing the product). An influencer must have the ability to convince the audience to use the promoted product ([Widaningsih et al., 2023](#)).

Many companies use influencer marketing as one of their product promotion strategies. Influencer marketing is a marketing strategy in product sales by promoting a product by someone who is considered to have influence ([Agustin & Amron, 2022](#)). By using this promotional strategy, buyers will get some information about the product they choose. An influencer must also be honest in promoting the product. The message conveyed must be in accordance with what is in it, not exaggerated or deducted because it can harm customers, the company as well as the influencer itself.

Influencers have the power to create new styles or spread new ideas. When an influencer with a large following wears a certain outfit or item, participates in a challenge, or comes up with an innovative idea, it can be the start of a new trend. By actively participating in trends, such as by creating related content or providing unique perspectives, influencers can reinforce existing trends. This can help trends stay relevant and evolving. In addition, influencers can influence people's propensity to buy certain goods or services. Influencers often encourage their followers to try the products they recommend, which can lead to increased product demand and create buying trends.

3.3 Beauty Trends on TikTok

TikTok has many trends, so users can explore various video content. Brands can be very helpful because they can make them relevant to trends that spread among Tiktok application users As long as the trend continues to exist, content creators will not run out of ideas to create business promotional content. Therefore, brands should always be up-to-date with trends or viral content, and take advantage of the moment to create creative content so that it can attract audiences. TikTok has also implemented an effective algorithm to display trending videos that are relevant to each user's interests. That way, brand videos can be easier to reach the appropriate target audience.

Many viral products are coming from the beauty industry, which includes skincare, makeup, colored cosmetics, hair care, perfumes, and self-care ([Henriksen et al., 2023](#)). The industry continues to expand globally ([Henriksen et al., 2023](#)), and on TikTok, the hashtag "BeautyTok" has 6.9 billion views ([Henriksen et al., 2023](#)). Some product characteristics can contribute to the virality of UGC (user-generated content) about beauty products on TikTok. One of the most important product characteristics that can make a beauty product go viral is its uniqueness ([Henriksen et al., 2023](#)). Products with unique features easily grab the user's attention, and statements that differ from ordinary nature stand out ([Henriksen et al., 2023](#)). In addition, products with unusual or multifunctional textures or colors tend to get more attention. Another product feature that can contribute to virality is its effectiveness or ability to solve problems. When a product works well, it increases the likelihood of users recommending it to others, leading to more views and video shares ([Henriksen et al., 2023](#)).

The importance of practical value as an aspect that contributes to making content viral, because consumers want to provide information that is considered useful to others so that they can provide suggestions and recommendations. Products in the beauty industry have various effects, both long-term and instant ([Henriksen et al., 2023](#)). For example, AHA 30% + BHA 2% Peeling Solution from Ordinary is an exfoliator product that is viral on TikTok because it improves skin texture and brightens skin over time. Conversely, products that have an instant effect are, for example, the Maybelline Sky-High mascara, where people can clearly see the effect of use directly in the video ([Henriksen et al., 2023](#)).

Lastly, a product's affordability can play a role in its virality. Affordable products are more accessible to a wider audience and more likely to be recommended and shared. Sharing such information also places the information sharer as someone who cares about the safety of the recipient of the information, thus increasing the degree of the informant ([Henriksen et al., 2023](#)). For example, Elf Cosmetics Poreless Putty Primer has gone viral for its low price and effectiveness in smoothing the skin ([Henriksen et al., 2023](#)).

3.4 E-WoM

When influencers speak or create content regarding a trend, their followers often respond with their own comments, reviews, or content discussing the trend. This creates E-WoM against the trend. E-WoM or Electronic Word of Mouth is now the most effective and efficient marketing communication media because it does not require large costs, wide reach, and fast dissemination of information ([Lestari & Gunawan, 2021](#)).

Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) states that E-WoM refers to positive or negative statements made by potential, actual, or existing customers about a product or company, which are available to many people and institutions via the ([Fadhilah et al., 2023](#)). E-WoM includes informal communication from consumers about the characteristics and features of a product or ([Fadhilah et al., 2023](#)). It can also be considered as a continuation of traditional interpersonal communication into a new generation cyberspace. Consumers interact by talking about specific products as expressions of their thoughts, and in various forms of user-generated content, product reviews, and social media posts ([Fadhilah et al., 2023](#)). The existence of E-WoM will encourage natural interactions known as promotions, this promotion is based on experiences felt ([Putri & Junia, 2023](#)).

E-WoM has become an important part of people's considerations when making purchasing decisions ([Elseidi & El-Baz, 2016](#); [Hussain et al., 2017](#)). Social media often affects brand reputation both positively and negatively. The importance of customer online reviews has been extensively researched to find their influence on determining business performance, customer propensity to recommend brands or products, predicting customer purchase intent product sales and marketing plans and customer decision making. The credibility of information is the first step in the persuasion process, when the information can be perceived as convincing. E-WoM that is considered trustworthy by consumers will be more likely to be accepted and assist them in adopting information.

The amount of information, as explained by Filieri (2015), refers to the frequency or number of times information, eWOM, or reviews are exposed to consumers. The frequency or number of high reviews helps consumers in evaluating the quality of a brand or product as compared to a small frequency or a small number of reviews. The amount of information can help with the consistency of reviews. Product or service reviews are usually written by several reviews and presented to the reader as a whole. As a result, readers can quickly get confirmation from other users and analyze the consistency of this online communication ([Ismagilova et al., 2017](#)).

Hussain et al. (2017) stated that the usability of information offers useful, informative, valuable, and useful indicators. Information is considered useful when consumer performance is improved. The likelihood of consumers to adopt information increases when the information is considered useful because consumers will be more likely to use information that suits their needs and goals. Shen et al., (2014) state the adoption of information as a receiving process for internalizing information and receiving information from external sources, including how information helps them in acquiring their knowledge and improving their decision-making process.

One brand that utilizes social media is Skintific. The brand promotes its products continuously through video posts and live streaming. Through electronic word of mouth on TikTok social media, Skintific moisturizer products are booming. This is very helpful for the development of Skintific which includes new products in

Indonesia. In addition, many beauty enthusiasts on social media review and recommend Skintific moisturizer products. So far the review of Skintific moisturizer products spread on social media is in the form of positive reviews. Skintific moisturizer products have recently been phenomenal with its 5x Ceramide product innovation. Through its social media, the brand often voices its patented 5x ceramide formula (compass.co.id). The more interesting the content created in electronic word of mouth, the greater the likelihood of consumers continuing to make purchase decisions. The results of electronic word of mouth variable research proven to have a significant, strong and positive effect on purchasing decision variables ([Dewi & Hasanah, 2023](#)).

3.5 Gen Z's Consumption Culture through the Baudrillard Lens

Generation Z is the generation born in 1995 –2010. Generation Z is known as the Net Generation or Internet generation. This is because this generation was born when the internet began to enter and developed rapidly in life ([Utamanyu & Darmastuti, 2022](#)). The ability of Generation Z to adapt to technological advances is interesting and makes it easier for this generation to interact with the brands they like ([Utamanyu & Darmastuti, 2022](#)). TikTok is a great place to show creativity and Gen Z is a very creative generation. Gen Z is active in consuming content on TikTok; They spend a lot of time watching videos from other creators, learning about the latest trends, and interacting with their community. They can also use TikTok to create engaging videos by using various editing tools and special effects.

According to Bloomberg, Gen Z has an extraordinary purchasing power, which is 360 billion dollars compared to 4 years ago, where the figure of spending on shopping only reached 143 billion dollars. With this significant increase, over the next 20 years when this generation has begun to enter the workforce and optimize their income potential, the number of expenses they will spend on shopping will certainly continue to increase. So far, Generation Z is often referred to as a very critical consumer group because it has a different view of shopping than previous generations. Because some of them are the latest generation to enter the workforce, they have now begun to have stronger purchasing power. However, Gen Z, who has the ability to spend some of their money on shopping, also has a different consumption pattern from previous generations.

On average, Gen Z who are exposed to the internet as they grow up are very familiar and understand current issues that are currently crowded. In fact, most of them are very concerned about the planet and environmental sustainability. This also has a major influence on their consumption patterns, where Gen Z believes that previous generations represented excessive consumption, capitalism, and materialism. Thus, Gen Z also tends to prefer sustainable products with higher quality.

According to a report from First Insight, 73% of them are willing to pay 10% more for a sustainable product. They value personalized products and are often drawn to brands that have views or visions and missions that align with theirs. They also don't hesitate to leave brands that don't have the same ethical standards as them. One in three Gen Z consumers have left brands they consider to have a bad reputation in terms of sustainability—over the past 12 months. As the first generation to grow up with smartphones, social media has become part of Gen Z's daily routine. Around 88% of Gen Z use at least one social media platform multiple times a day, with YouTube being the most preferred platform to use on a daily basis (67%), followed by the almost equally popular Instagram (65%).

Gen Z uses social media to communicate, follow trends, and build identity, but social media also has a huge influence on their views as consumers and on products. About 43% of young consumers say they are willing to buy products based on a recommendation from an influencer, and 49% state that they enjoy shopping directly through social media. This is because most Gen Z consumers (63%) use social media platforms to keep up with trends. In general, Gen Z is more interested in brands that care about the environment and are socially responsible. So, if they make a purchase and they have to be complicated by a payment system, no discounts, or shipping vouchers, then most of them will discourage their intention to shop at a certain brand.

Not only that, because Gen Z is also very shrewd and meticulous in terms of technology, they are very concerned about reviews from other buyers and conditions in returning goods if there is an error in ordering. This is confirmed by the words of a Generation Z source, "Usually that's why yes, it's influenced by TikTok's FYP, it's often like celebrities". From this it can be concluded that Generation Z can easily trust someone he doesn't even know, but he feels that this KOL/influencer is already an expert in his field, therefore he trusts. But not only that, Generation Z is also still looking for reviews about the goods or services they will buy, "so like looking at the reviews, continue to be interested in buying." (Tasia, interview, January 19, 2022). From

the words conveyed by the source, it can be seen that good testimonials or reviews can make consumers more confident and interested in the goods/services to be purchased ([Utamanyu & Darmastuti, 2022](#)).

According to Wikipedia, Jean Baudrillard (Reims, 20 June 1929 – Paris, 6 March 2007) was a French cultural theorist, philosopher, political commentator, sociologist, and photographer. Baudrillard's work is often associated with postmodernism and poststructuralism. He was the most important post-structural social theorist. In the 1980s, Baudrillard became known as the new McLuhan or leading theorist of media and society in the so-called postmodern era. His theory of postmodern society is based on the central assumption that media, simulations, and what he calls "cyberblitz" have constituted new fields of experience, historical stages, and new types of society.

In Jean Baudrillard's theory of consumption, today's consumerist society is not based on class but on its ability to consume. Anyone can be part of any group if they are able to follow the consumption pattern of that group. Consumption according to Baudrillard is a systematic act in the manipulation of signs, and to be an object of consumption, the object must contain or even be a sign ([Margareth, 2017](#)).

According to Baudrillard's theory, now the logic of public consumption is no longer based on use value or exchange value but a new value called "symbolic value". That is, people no longer consume objects based on exchange value or use value, but because of the sign / symbolic value which is abstract and constructed. This is because some parts of the advertising offer actually deny the consumer's need for product excellence, but by attacking the hidden sense of arrogance in humans, the product is offered as a symbol of prestige and a luxurious lifestyle that fosters a clichéd sense of pride in the wearer ([Margareth, 2017](#)). In consumer society, public relations are transformed in relationships of objects controlled by code. Objects are signs. The difference in status is interpreted as the difference in sign consumption, so wealth is measured by the number of signs consumed. Consuming certain objects signifies we are different or considered the same as certain social groups, so the code takes a control function over individuals ([Margareth, 2017](#)).

The theory of consumption society refers to the study of the tendency of modern society to emphasize the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services as essential components in social life. On the other hand, consumption culture refers to the way individuals or groups consume goods and services, create social meaning, and identify themselves through their consumption patterns.

When we link Baudrillard's theory of consumption society with Gen Z's consumption culture, we can see some interesting relationships:

1. **Simulation and Reality:** Baudrillard discusses the concept of simulation in which reality is replaced by images and signs. Generation Z often lives in a highly digitally connected world where social media, video games, and online content dominate their experience. Gen Z tends to construct their identity through digital representations. It can create simulations of different realities from the original life.
2. **Hyperconsumption:** Generation Z often engages in a culture of overconsumption, both in terms of physical goods and digital content. This phenomenon can be seen in the popularity of social media platforms, trends, and their tendency to always seek new experiences.
3. **The Role of Signs and Symbols:** Baudrillard underlines how signs and symbols shape social reality. Generation Z's digital identity reinforces the concept of individuality that is heavily influenced by consumption culture as they often express themselves through consumption and content gathering on social media platforms, creating unique consumptive narratives. The things they consume are curated in such a way as to create an image that they want to display in the eyes of the public.

4. Conclusion

TikTok plays a big role in beauty trends among Generation Z. TikTok creates an environment where beauty trends can evolve and change quickly, creating new challenges for brands and consumers to constantly adapt and try new things.

Influencers also have a significant impact in shaping perceptions and opinions on beauty topics. Their influence can be seen in their role behind the creation of E-WoM on a product. E-WoM, or recommendations and talks about beauty through digital platforms, shapes consumer beliefs and preferences significantly. The recommendations and opinions they express can affect the sales of a product drastically, especially if the influencer has a relatively large number of followers.

When looking at this phenomenon through the lens of Baudrillard's theory of consumption society, it can be concluded that Generation Z is involved in a reality where they represent themselves through the things they consume. This concept reflects how beauty norms and status acquired afterwards are created and maintained through representations obtained from social media, creating a reality that is sometimes more important than the actual reality.

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