

How Short-Video Marketing Shapes Generation Z Consumer Decision-Making: Evidence from the UK Fast-Fashion Market

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Abstract

While many studies have described the effects of short-video platforms in the context of fast-fashion communication with younger generations, the relationship between exposure, evaluation and purchase behaviour has rarely been described through a psychological mechanism. With the case of fast fashion in the UK, this study aims to explore the influence of short video marketing from exposure to purchase and reflection of Generation Z consumers. The analysis is based on semi-structured interviews with 15 consumers in the UK belonging to Generation Z, using an integrated model based on the stimulus-organism-response (SOR) model, uses and gratifications theory (UGT) and social identity theory. The results demonstrate that external stimuli with the highest saliency are influencer-led IP marketing, scarcity cues and algorithmic network diffusion. These stimuli are not just about making it more visible, it's also about making it more valuable, more of an emotion and more of a sense of belonging-a sense of community-which leads to buying intent, quick conversion, and-at least at times-impulsive buying. The study also tells of the existence of a defensive consumption loop. Given poor buying experiences, participants are more apt to check reviews, compare creators and even seek out negative information before purchasing again. The article provides a qualitative understanding of the functioning of short-video marketing in the context of fast fashion and provides actionable insights for brands interested in cultivating long-term trust with Generation Z, not just short-term conversions.

Keywords

Fast Fashion; Short Video Marketing; Consumer Decision-making; Generation Z; Social Identity and SOR Model.

1. Introduction

Gone are the days when short video was a supporting promotional tool – now it's a key way for brands to generate interest, build desirability and boost conversions. As for fast fashion, where the lifespan of a product is short, and visual appeal matters most, platforms like TikTok and Instagram Reels are particularly useful as they combine the elements of entertainment, platform-native interaction, and almost immediate links to purchase. Previous studies show that short video marketing can stimulate a sense of immersion and increase brand engagement and purchase intention, especially when the video is short and easily shareable on social media [1-3].

Generation Z is a very special target in this context. This generation has also been raised with mobile internet, algorithmic feeds, and creator culture, which makes them not only use digital platforms as channels of communication but also as spaces for searching information and presenting identity, and consuming daily. Previous research has characterised Gen Z as being "digital" and very sensitive to value evaluation, peer feedback, and entertainment value of

online platforms [4,5]. Meanwhile, this generation has been characterised as being sensitive to immersive content, creator recommendations, and impulse buying in social commerce settings [6,7].

The social media marketing literature is ever-increasing, and there are two limitations to it. First, a large proportion of the current literature is quantitative and examines the linear relationship between platform characteristics, credibility of the influencers, and purchase intent. Second, there is relatively little research to explain how and why short-video stimuli can be translated into consumer choices in the fast-fashion context, particularly among young consumers in the UK. We now know that short-video marketing is important, but we don't know how important it is in real decision-making scenarios.

To fill this gap, the present study is conducted based on semi-structured interviews with 15 Generation Z consumers primarily residing in the UK, and the interpretation of their experience based on an integrated model of the SOR model and UGT with social identity theory. The study aims to answer three questions: what are the influences of specific short video marketing stimuli on the perception of fast fashion products by Generation Z; what are the internal psychological mechanisms between exposure and purchase; and what are the influences of post-purchase reflection on subsequent decision-making? The article addresses these questions by providing a qualitative understanding of the effectiveness of short-video marketing, by explaining the mechanism between the short video as a stimulus and the consumer as a response and by providing the brand with some practical tips in the context of the fast fashion market in the UK.

2. Literature Review

2.1. "Fast-Fashion" and Short-video Marketing

In the fast-paced world of the fast fashion industry, short-video marketing is an ideal fit, as it encapsulates product showcasing, styling tips, and emotional appeal in a format that can be easily digested and repeated. Xiao et al. reveal that content features of short-video marketing can have an impact on consumer purchase intention through increased attention and evaluative immediate [1]. More recent studies indicate that the short video platforms have an impact on brand engagement through user-generated content, interaction features, and algorithmic recommendations [2,5]. Within the fast-fashion space, social media is a vital platform for keeping customers engaged, trending and visible. Nurnafia et al. illustrate that during the pandemic, Instagram marketing activities proved to be the focal point for a fast-fashion brand to maintain engagement [8]. This dynamic has been amplified in the short-video landscape, where products are woven into the creators' content, as well as in day-to-day videos about styling and sharing trends and hashtags.

2.2. Generation Z and Digital Consumption Behaviour

Gen Z buyers are often described as "digital-first" decision makers, meaning that they make their decisions based on information that they find online. Grigoreva et al. state that this audience has a thorough information search, comparison, and familiarity with the product online [4]. But being a digital literate does not make you insensitive emotionally. In social commerce environments, the time to consider may be shortened as a result of the rapid presentation of the visuals, creators' recommendations, and the perceived social endorsement, which may lead to impulsivity [6,7]. The dual nature of Generation Z – information and emotion – is significant for the current study. It implies that short video marketing isn't all about persuasion. Instead, it impacts the consumers by integrating information assurance, affective appeal and social recognition in the same browsing environment. A qualitative point of view is thus helpful as it can reveal the conflict of attraction, hesitation and post-purchase correction.

2.3. Theoretical Framework: SOR, UGT, and Social Identity

The SOR framework is used as the structure of this study. Within a digital marketing context, external factors like immersion, recommendation and interface design could be seen as stimuli which influence internal cognition and feelings, ultimately leading to behaviour. This logic has been widely used in the field of consumer research today to explain the impact of technological environments on purchase-related responses [9,10].

UGT is an addition to SOR by stating the main reasons why users actively approach digital media in the first place. Short video consumption does not happen passively, but through platforms for informational, hedonic and practical purposes. According to Pereverzieva and Gubar, digital transformation has influenced the transformation of the microeconomic model of consumer behaviour, which is manifested in a greater degree of consumer participation in the selection of information and value search [11]. Generation Z, in the current setting, is looking to short videos to mitigate uncertainty, to get styling hints and tips, and to assess the usefulness of a product based on demonstrations and commentary from fellow ‘Zers’.

Finally, social identity theory explains the significance of belonging, similarity and peer recognition for platform settings. Short video marketing frequently showcases a product via a brand personality that is relatable, aspirational, or part of a community known to viewers. This explains the significance of the comment section, repost culture, and the creator-follower relationship as an important source of legitimacy. Recent research on digital influencers also demonstrates that commitment and behavioural intention can be enhanced when people perceive that they are socially and emotionally connected with the communicator [6,12].

2.4. The Research Gap and Analytical Framework

As a whole, the literature indicates that short video marketing is persuasive not just because of the exposure of the message but because it creates a platform experience by organising information, emotion and social meaning into one. Despite this, current research fails to fully account for the interactions between these layers in the concrete decision-making activities of Generation Z consumers in the UK fast-fashion environment. Based on this, this article proposes an integrated analytical framework in which short-video marketing cues are regarded as stimuli, the perceived value, emotional resonance and social identity are regarded as organism-level mechanisms, and the purchase conversion and post-purchase defensive correction are regarded as responses. The analytical framework structures the empirical analysis around the stages of the platform cues to the internal interpretation and the behavioural outcomes as depicted in Figure 1.

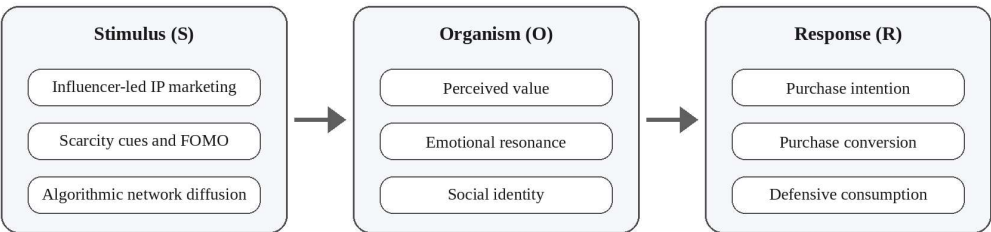


Figure 1. Integrated SOR framework for short-video marketing (Source: Author's elaboration)

3. Methodology

In this study, a qualitative research design is used as this aims to explain the mechanism and not estimate the effect size. A qualitative methodology would be particularly appropriate if the

researcher is interested in understanding how consumers make sense of platform cues, as well as how they make sense of their own decision-making and how they retrospectively assess their purchase decision results.

The data gathered is from semi-structured interviews with 15 Generation Z consumers primarily within the boundaries of the UK. The participants' age range was 18-30 years and comprised students, early-career professionals and young occupationally diverse workers. The sample was not selected to be statistically representative of the total population, but to include variation on platform usage, frequency of using these platforms, and satisfaction with short video shopping experiences. To enhance the analysis, the participants are coded as R1-R15 in the article.

The interview prompts were directed towards four areas: the platforms which the respondents used most often; the kinds of short video content that caught their eyes; the importance of creator credibility, scarcity cues, and comments section engagement on their judgments of the content; and the extent to which short-video exposure led to a purchase, regret, or future behavioural change. Table 1 summarises the participant profile.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics and short-video consumption behaviour of participants
(Source: Primary interview data)

ID	Gender	Age	Occupation	Content satisfaction (1-10)	Purchases via short video	Primary platforms
R1	M	18-20	Student	6	6+	ASOS, Amazon, TikTok
R2	F	21-23	Student	8	3-5	ASOS, Amazon, TikTok
R3	M	24-26	IT	6	1-2	Amazon, Zara, ASOS
R4	F	18-20	Retail	5	0	Zara, H&M
R5	M	21-23	Education	7	1-2	Amazon, ASOS, TikTok
R6	M	21-23	Education	7	1-2	ASOS, TikTok, Zara
R7	F	24-26	Finance intern	9	6+	Amazon, ASOS, Zara
R8	M	19-21	Art student	6	1	Etsy, Amazon, Instagram
R9	F	22-24	Nurse	4	0	Boots, Sainsbury's
R10	M	23-25	Sports coach	7	2-3	Nike, Decathlon
R11	F	21-23	Freelance photographer	8	6+	Amazon, Etsy, ASOS
R12	M	25-27	Software engineer	7	2-3	Amazon, Apple
R13	F	26-28	Social worker	5	1	Tesco, Sainsbury's
R14	M	28-30	Cafe owner	8	2-3	Amazon, ASOS, Instagram
R15	F	24-26	Teacher	6	1	Waterstones, Amazon

The interview content was read again and again and subjected to a thematic interpretation with respect to the SOR framework. Cues for platform level 1 were clustered into one stimulus category, and cues for platform level 2 were clustered into another. Second, the term recurrent internal states, referring to perceived value, emotional resonance and social identity, was understood as organism-level mechanisms. Third, behavioural responses like purchase conversion, hesitation, and defensive cross-checking were taken as 'responses'. In order to explain at the organism level, UGT and social identity theory were not used as an alternative to the SOR structure, but rather as a means of deepening the explanation.

As shown in Table 1, there were 13 out of 15 respondents who made at least one purchase after seeing the short video, with a conversion rate of 86.7% in the sample. A higher content satisfaction score (7 or higher) was also associated with more frequent purchase behaviour, indicating that content satisfaction has a reinforcing effect between exposure and conversion.

The study has a small qualitative sample size and is for analytical insight only and not for generalisation. Nevertheless, it is of explanatory value because it allows for the understanding of the relationship between platform exposure, psychological interpretation and behavioural response from the perspective of the individual consumers in their own words.

4. Argument and Analysis

The results indicate that short-video marketing is not only an exposure-based process, but also a multi-stage one that impacts the consumer decision-making process. Data are thus analysed using the SOR approach, and UGT and social identity theory are used to explain why specific forms of content are persuasive. The following Table 2 summarises the main patterns found in the interviews.

4.1. Stimulus: The Persuasive Architecture of Short-video Marketing

Interviews revealed that the first significant stimulus is influencer-driven IP marketing. Over and over again, participants stated that it was creator relatable content and presentational authenticity that had more impact than slick brand advertising. One female student (R2) said that she watched the video, and "the authenticity of the video and approachability of the blogger" made her think about buying from ASOS. Similarly, a finance intern (R7) said that an Instagram styling video was persuasive because it was "real experience and professional advice" and was not merely a promotional video. As can be seen in these examples, IP marketing can bring the product closer to the consumers by making it relatable to their daily lives.

A second stimulus is scarcity-based persuasion. Promotions like "limited edition", "last day" or "only a few left" were cited repeatedly as being decision time compressors. Scarcity messages are particularly effective in the short-video landscape because they're integrated into the fast-paced browsing environment, and there are often direct links to make purchases. Respondents said these cues provide urgency and fear of missing out, particularly when the promoted product was seen as trendy, cheap, or already "proven" by having high visibility on metrics like likes, comments, or shares.

Another stimulus comes from algorithmic diffusion in a network. There were a few instances where participants were exposed to products through any one single means of interaction. Rather, the same product or brand would keep resurfacing on TikTok, Instagram or nearby recommendation spaces. Hashtags, reposts, and creator networks also helped build a sense of familiarity, as repetition led to familiarity. The diffusion mechanism is significant because it increases salience and normalises attention even before the courageous buy decision is made.

4.2. Organism: Activation within the Individual's Psyche

Perceived value was the most common mechanism at the organism level. The participants didn't find short-video content valuable just for the sake of fun-they found it valuable because

it provided a better view of the texture, fit, context and practical detail than product photos. Some respondents said that the short video was “far more intuitive than just viewing pictures and text introductions.” A male IT practitioner (R3) also repeated the importance of a short try-on video that wasn't overly embellished but was “real and reliable”. That is, perceived value was created when the video alleviated ambiguity and made the products more feelable.

The second mechanism is emotional resonance. Short videos don't just convey messages, they create atmosphere too. Participants reported that they were drawn to the colour, styling, music, speed, and tone of aspirational creators. R11 is a freelance photographer who linked persuasive content with the “realism and creative atmosphere” of the video, whilst R14 stated that product demos' colours and overall mood made him want the item before rationally assessing it. Emotional resonance is the connection that makes aesthetic immersion correlate to increased purchase readiness.

The third mechanism is a social identity. The use of comment sections, creator communities, and visible audience responses was used by participants as indicators of products being endorsed by ‘people like me’. This was particularly clear if the interviewees wanted confirmation from their peers of the same age, lifestyle or taste. Thus, the persuasiveness of short-video marketing was not only contingent upon creator authority, but also upon the product's social context, or whether it seemed socially located in a relevant group identity.

4.3. Response: Buy Conversion and Defensive Consumption

The response stage includes not only actual buying behaviour, but also the revision of decision routines that will occur over a period of time. First, it validates that “the short video format can directly bring purchase conversion as long as the content is persuasive and the platform is convenient. If participants were presented with appealing videos, they could quickly view, click and purchase – particularly if a link to the product was created on the platform or the product was already seen more than once through different feeds.

Table 2. The results of the interview were interpreted using SOR (Source: Author's synthesis based on the interview data)

Dimension	Key theme	Mechanism	Observed outcome
Stimulus	Influencer-led IP marketing	Relatability and authenticity reduce distance between brand and viewer	Higher trust and product consideration
Stimulus	Scarcity cues and FOMO	Urgency compresses evaluation time within fast browsing flows	Impulse-prone intention and faster conversion
Stimulus	Algorithmic network diffusion	Repeated exposure normalises the product as a visible trend	Greater salience and recall
Organism	Perceived value	Short videos reduce uncertainty through demonstration and practical detail	Stronger confidence in utility and fit
Organism	Emotional resonance and social identity	Aesthetic immersion and peer recognition make the product feel desirable and socially legitimate	Desire to imitate, belong, or try
Response	Purchase conversion and defensive consumption	Low-friction buying is followed by post-purchase reflection and cross-checking	Actual purchase, regret, or revised future routines

Second, and more analytically important, the interview data show a defensive consumption circuit. Multiple respondents reported dissatisfaction as a result of trends and/or overly slick

videos. Because of this, later decision-making was more conservative, with participants checking several creators and searching for independent reviews before making a purchase and on purpose looking for negative reviews before purchasing. One respondent summed this transformation up directly: "I would also say that short videos have helped me to consume in a more rational way, since I have gotten used to looking at a few more videos, and even look for the negative comments, so as to make a more rational choice.

This discovery is significant because of the way it challenges the notion that the millennial generation is an impulsive group. While short-video marketing definitely can cause quick conversion, failed consumption experiences also lead to learning effects. The behavioural reaction is thus dynamic: sometimes the stimulation can lead to buying, sometimes repeated trial and error can lead to reflexive and defensive digital consumption.

5. Discussion

The first theoretical contribution of this study is to demonstrate that the impacts of short video marketing can be viewed as a mechanism instead of a dependent variable. The evidence from the interviews also clearly supports the notion that content features at the platform level are important, but only insofar as they elicit internal states-particularly value assessment, emotional resonance, and social belonging-that connect to behavioural outcomes. This finding will enhance the use of the SOR model in digital marketing, as well as explain or expand upon the organism level, not as two separate theories, but as one that can be supported by UGT and social identity theory.

The second contribution is the recognition of the important category of defensive consumption. Previous research tends to focus on conversions, impulse or brand engagement. The current research demonstrates that disappointment and regret can also alter subsequent decision-making processes. Generation Z consumers are therefore not all impulsive, nor are they all sceptical. When they have bad buying experiences, they change their ways and switch to greater cross-verification.

The research results indicate that from a management point of view, brands should focus on authenticity rather than being too polished, particularly when working with creators. Content that shows the fit, texture, use context and limitations in a credible manner is most persuasive for short video content. Brands also need to look at the comment section and see how it can be a place of community engagement and trust recovery – not an ancillary area. In the long term, it might be better to opt for responsive behaviour with respect to critical feedback than for a quick jump in conversions based on false scarcity cues.

There are also limitations to the study. It is small, qualitative, and UK-based, and the findings cannot be statistically generalised. Also, the content is based on self-reported experiences, not observed clickstream behaviour. Future studies might therefore use an experimental design and/or a cross-country comparison and/or qualitative interviews to test the boundary conditions of the mechanism found here at the platform level.

6. Conclusion

This article has explored the influence of short-video marketing on Generation Z's consumer decision-making process in the UK fast-fashion industry. The qualitative interview data, analysed using an integrated SOR-UGT-social identity approach, demonstrate that the external stimuli that are most significant are influencer-led IP marketing, scarcity cues, and algorithmic diffusion. These cues are effective as they trigger perceived value, emotional response and social identification, leading to purchase intent, conversion and post-purchase appraisal.

The results also prove that the impact of short-video marketing isn't necessarily finished upon the initial purchase. However, when the persuasion fails to produce the desired results, Gen Z consumers begin to engage in comparison, review checking and negative-information search. This is why it is important for sustainable marketing to be effective, not just for grabbing attention, but also for being trustworthy, for engaging with the community, and for offering a realistic depiction of the product.

In sum, this study brings a more nuanced understanding of the concept of short-video marketing, clarifying the mechanism of how visibility functions to persuade and how persuasion leads to action and reflexive correction. Such a view based on mechanisms can prove beneficial for the study of digital consumer behaviour to be more precise and, for the practitioner, to create short video strategies that not only are effective in conversion but also build long-term credibility.

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