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The Role of User-Generated Content in Building Consumer Trust and Supporting MUA Booking Decisions on TikTok

Mauril Arbinnisa Haini [1*], Yulianto Umar Rofi'i [2]
[1*,2] Digital Business Study Program, Faculty of Economics, Business and Law, Universitas Bali Internasional Muhammadiyah, Denpasar City, Bali Province, Indonesia

Email: mauril.arbinnisa09@gmail.com [1*], yuliantoumarrofii1@gmail.com [2]

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Abstract
The rapid growth of TikTok in the beauty service industry has created a trust paradox, in which highly edited visual content may increase consumer skepticism. This study aims to analyze the role of User-Generated Content (UGC) in building consumer trust and supporting booking decisions for Makeup Artist (MUA) services on TikTok through the AISAS model and Trust Transfer Theory. A qualitative netnography approach was employed through non-participant observation of public TikTok content. The dataset consisted of 15 MUA accounts, 30 official portfolio videos, 25 UGC videos, and 150 user comments collected over a six-month observation period. Data were analyzed using thematic coding and the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. The findings indicate that visual authenticity, particularly the presentation of real skin texture without excessive filters, reduces consumer skepticism. Among 150 coded comments, 90 comments (60.0%) contained Action indicators such as availability inquiries, price requests, and booking intentions. UGC also facilitates horizontal trust transfer from previous clients to prospective customers. Post-purchase sharing is associated with satisfaction, altruism, authenticity validation, and reciprocity. UGC functions as an important trust-building mechanism and final confirmation stage in consumers' booking decisions. The findings extend the application of AISAS and Trust Transfer Theory in short-video service marketing.

Keywords:
User-Generated Content; Consumer Trust; AISAS Model; Trust Transfer Theory; Netnography.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Makeup Artist (MUA) service industry has currently experienced a massive shift to the digital realm, specifically on the short video platform TikTok. The latest report from We Are Social shows that as of January 2024, TikTok users in Indonesia reached 126.8 million users aged 18 and over, placing Indonesia as the second largest market in the world for the platform. With an internet penetration rate reaching 66.5%, TikTok has transformed into the main non-conventional visual search engine for Generation Z and Millennials in selecting wedding and beauty vendors instantly (Kemp, 2024). However, this phenomenon brings up a new paradox. The massive application of digital manipulation starting from instant beauty filters, smoothing effects, to intense studio lighting actually triggers a degradation of trust (trust issue) among prospective consumers. This aligns with the concept of Schiffman and Wisenblit (2019) regarding the decline of consumer perceptions toward the validity of visual information. Official MUA portfolios (Firm-Generated Content) are often considered to display a 'hyper-real' reality that is too perfect, thereby creating information asymmetry regarding actual skin texture and makeup durability.

In this situation of uncertainty (uncertainty), consumer behavior shifts to seeking more authentic validation through Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) (Ismagilova et al., 2020). This is where User-Generated Content (UGC) plays a crucial role. Honest review video content, the use of Stitch/Duet features, and unedited amateur footage of clients without filters are considered to have a significantly higher truth value (truth value) compared to official promotional content (Kotler & Keller, 2016). In line with this, previous

studies confirm that visual testimonials on social media serve as a primary validation instrument influencing quality perceptions and purchase intentions (Sari & Widowati, 2022).

Although previous research has highlighted the importance of UGC, e-WOM, and social media credibility in shaping purchase intention, there are still three main research gaps (research gap). First, regarding the context gap, research attention is still very limited in the high-involvement beauty services sector (high-involvement beauty services), specifically MUA services, where consumers cannot fully evaluate service quality prior to purchase. Second, regarding the mechanism gap, previous studies have not explained in detail how visual authenticity in UGC facilitates horizontal trust transfer (horizontal trust transfer) from previous clients to prospective consumers. Third, regarding the model gap, the integration between UGC-based trust transfer and the AISAS framework in the context of short video platforms like TikTok remains largely unexplored. This study fills these three gaps by examining how authentic UGC functions as a visual audit mechanism, facilitates trust transfer, and supports the transition from the Search stage to the Action stage in MUA service booking decisions.

Based on these research gaps, this study formulates the main problems regarding: (1) how consumers interpret the visual authenticity of UGC amid the prevalence of filter manipulation; (2) how the Trust Transfer mechanism is formed horizontally (peer-to-peer); (3) how UGC acts as a final trigger (final trigger) in converting the Search stage into Action in the AISAS model; and (4) the drivers for clients to share their experiences (Share) voluntarily. Based on these formulations, the main objectives of this research are to evaluate the perception of UGC authenticity compared to official content, describe the visual Trust Transfer process, analyze how UGC plays a role as a final trigger in guiding consumers from the Search stage to Action in the AISAS model, and identify the driving motives for participation in the Share stage.

This study provides theoretical contributions by enriching the Digital Consumer Behavior literature regarding the integration of Trust Transfer Theory and the AISAS model on short video platforms. Practically, this research provides strategic guidance for MUA practitioners that the effectiveness of digital marketing relies on transparency and honest client reviews to increase bookings. Academically, this study serves as a reference regarding social media consumer behavior and e-WOM in similar service sectors.

This article is organized into five main sections: Section I (Introduction) presents the background, theoretical foundation, research gap, problem formulation, objectives, and study contributions; Section II (Research Method) explains Netnography procedures and passive observation of digital footprints; Section III (Results) presents the frequency coding distribution of comments and qualitative visual evidence; Section IV (Discussion) dissects the Trust Transfer mechanism, redefinition of the Search stage, and e-WOM motives; and Section V (Conclusion) summarizes the conclusions, managerial implications, research limitations, and future research directions.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with the Netnography method, an adaptation of ethnography specifically designed to observe and analyze social interactions and communication culture within online communities (Kozinets, 2010). The qualitative netnography design was chosen because the phenomenon of trust building (trust) and the appeal of User Generated Content (UGC) develop naturally on the TikTok digital platform. This approach allows researchers to deeply explore how prospective consumers conduct a "visual audit" of UGC to overcome a trust crisis caused by beauty filter manipulation without compromising the authenticity of the user interaction context. The nature of this research is qualitative descriptive to provide a systematic and factual overview of the consumer decision journey for MUA (Makeup Artist) services in the digital era.

The object of this research is the content ecosystem of MUA services in the wedding (wedding) and graduation (graduation) categories in Indonesia uploaded on the TikTok platform, with data sources in the form of qualitative data from digital footprints (digital footprints). Sample selection was carried out using purposive sampling techniques. Inclusion criteria included: (1) Visual UGC content in the form of Stitch videos, Video Replies, Mentions, or independent uploads by real clients without beauty filters; (2) public MUA accounts in Indonesia with high engagement levels (engagement); and (3) Textual data in the form of netizen comments discussing makeup results quality, real skin texture, makeup durability, or booking intentions (booking). Meanwhile, exclusion criteria were applied to paid promotional content (endorsement) identified as non-neutral, locked personal accounts (private accounts), and spam comments (such as affiliate promotions "check yellow basket" or meaningless emoticons). Data were collected from public posts and interactions within the last 6 months to maintain accuracy and trend relevance. Based on these criteria, data collection generated a digital footprint dataset consisting of 15 public MUA accounts, 30 official portfolio videos (FGC), 25 UGC video content, and 150 netizen comments. The primary unit of analysis in this study is UGC videos and textual user interactions in the form of TikTok comments. Meanwhile, FGC videos were used as contextual comparison material to identify differences in visual authenticity perceptions and audience responses.

Data collection was carried out through non-participant observation techniques (observational netnography), where the researcher acted as a passive observer (lurker) without intervening or participating in

the comment section discussions to maintain data purity. The data collection stage began with exploration (entrée) using relevant hashtags such as #MUAJakarta, #ReviewMUA, and #MakeupWedding, followed by data capture (data capture) via screenshots (screenshots) and manual notes on interactions that met the criteria. The primary instrument of this research was the researcher themselves (human instrument) supported by digital observation protocols. The operationalization of conceptual variables in this netnographic analysis is presented in Figure 1.

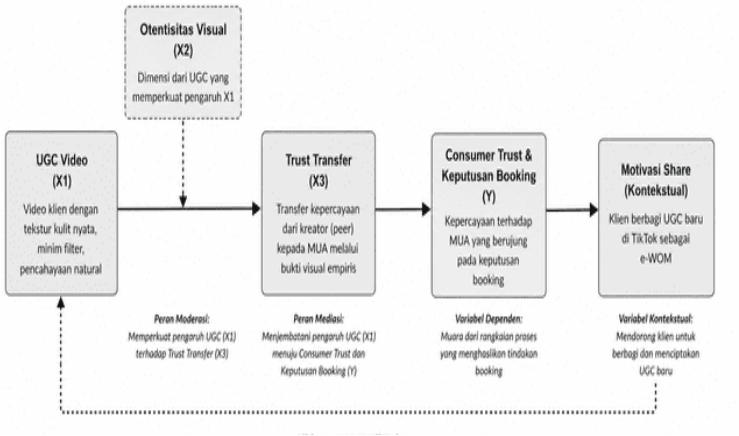

Figure 1. Operationalization of Conceptual Variables in Netnography Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using the Interactive Model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which was operationally applied cyclically through three main stages: data condensation (data condensation), data display (data display), and conclusion drawing and verification (conclusion drawing/verification). In the data condensation stage, the researcher performed data cleaning (data cleaning) and classified textual data (N = 150 comments) through thematic coding (thematic coding) based on the AISAS framework (Attention, Interest, Search, Action, Share; Sugiyama & Andree, 2011). To map the proportion of audience behavior shifts in a measurable way, the qualitative data were quantized (quantitizing qualitative data; Kozinets, 2020) using a binary coding sheet (coding sheet) (1 = meets indicators, 0 = does not meet). The Action category specifically focused on comments showing indications of booking intent (booking intent), such as questions about date availability, location, price (pricelist), or transaction commitments. Furthermore, data were presented in a thematic coding scheme matrix (coding scheme matrix) and supporting narratives based on visual evidence (screenshot) to map audience trust conversion patterns. To enhance analytical credibility, coding categories were iteratively reviewed by comparing textual comments with the context of related videos and UGC characteristics. Discrepancies in interpretation were re-examined until a consistent thematic classification was reached. Conclusions were formulated and re-verified through data source triangulation (FGC, UGC, and comments) until reaching data saturation (data saturation).

This netnographic study adheres to digital media research ethics standards (Kozinets, 2010). All data were obtained from public accounts without intervening in or manipulating research subjects. To protect privacy rights, all personal user identities (username, profile photo, and account name) on screenshots were anonymized (anonymization). The methodological limitations of this study lie in the personalized nature of the TikTok algorithm (For You Page), such that observed content distribution was influenced by device search history. Additionally, as a qualitative netnography research, the results of this study emphasize the depth of meaning of social digital phenomena and are not intended for statistical generalization across the entire service industry.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

Netnographic observations conducted on popular MUA accounts in the wedding and graduation categories on TikTok show a highly dynamic pattern of interaction. The comment section and video reply features (video reply or stitch) become the main space where differences in perceptual narratives occur between official MUA content (Firm-Generated Content / FGC) and user-generated content (User-Generated Content / UGC).

The findings indicate a disparity in responses between MUA cinematic video content (neatly curated with studio lighting) and UGC content. Out of a total of 150 coded comments, the interaction pattern on 30 FGC videos tended to be dominated by normative price inquiries and expressions of skepticism. Conversely, interactions on 25 UGC video contents shifted substantially into a space for discussion regarding real quality, actual skin texture, and makeup durability when viewed through amateur videos without digital manipulation.

3.1.1. AISAS Comment Coding Distribution

Netnographic observations of 15 popular MUA accounts (wedding and graduation) on TikTok map the interaction dynamics between FGC, UGC, and viewers (audience). To provide a measurable quantitative overview prior to entering in-depth qualitative discussion, a total of 150 textual comment samples from netizens were analyzed using binary thematic coding (1 = meets indicator, 0 = does not meet indicator) based on the AISAS framework (Attention, Interest, Search, Action, Share). This coding process specifically separates comments that represent passive aesthetic responses from comments indicating active transactional motivation (booking intent). The frequency distribution and percentage of coding from the total comment sample are presented in Table 1.

Tabel 1. Distribution of Netizen Comment Coding Based on the AISAS Framework (N = 150)

AISAS Stage	Behavioral Indicators	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Attention & Interest	Expressing visual admiration, aesthetic praise of makeup results, emotional reaction/emoticons ("Bagus banget kak", "Pangling banget")	35	23,3%
Search	Technical & product inquiry, specific questions regarding product brand, application technique, or studio location ("Pake foundation merk apa kak?")	25	16,7%
Action	Booking intent & direct inquiry, questions on date/slot availability, price list requests, and transaction commitment	90	60,0%
Total	Analyzed Comment Sample	150	100,0%

(Source: Processed Data, 2026)

Based on Table 1, findings show that 90 out of 150 coded comments (60.0%) met the Action indicators in the form of questions regarding date availability, price list requests, and indications of transaction commitment. This finding demonstrates a high occurrence of transactional responses within the UGC interaction ecosystem, but it is not intended as a statistical measure of the magnitude of UGC's influence on booking decisions. The application of this frequency percentage calculation serves as initial pattern mapping to describe the actual interaction patterns of netizens in the TikTok comment section.

Table 1 is used to map comment responses that can be directly identified at the Attention/Interest, Search, and Action stages. The Share stage is not included in the comment frequency distribution because this behavior is analyzed qualitatively through captions, independent UGC uploads, and post-purchase interactions. Thus, the Share stage is analyzed as an e-WOM process that complements the AISAS mapping, rather than as a comment frequency category in Table 1.

After this interaction pattern map is confirmed through frequency data, the descriptive discussion in the subsequent sub-sections (Sub-sections 3.2 to 3.4) examines in depth the qualitative findings related to audience skepticism, the role of UGC as a decision trigger, and client participation motives.

3.1.2. Skepticism toward Filtered Beauty and Visual Audit

Generation Z and Millennial consumers on TikTok demonstrate a high level of visual literacy. They are aware that transition videos or before-after clips on official MUA profiles are often production results with perfect lighting (ring lights) and built-in application smoothing effects. This creates skepticism, where such visual results are considered a "hyper-reality" that may not necessarily match the actual condition of the client's face.

In response, consumers actively seek UGC as a comparison (visual audit). UGC, particularly in the form of amateur videos using the Stitch feature or videos from event guests' cameras, is considered to hold higher authentic value because it displays real skin texture, pores, and complexion color.

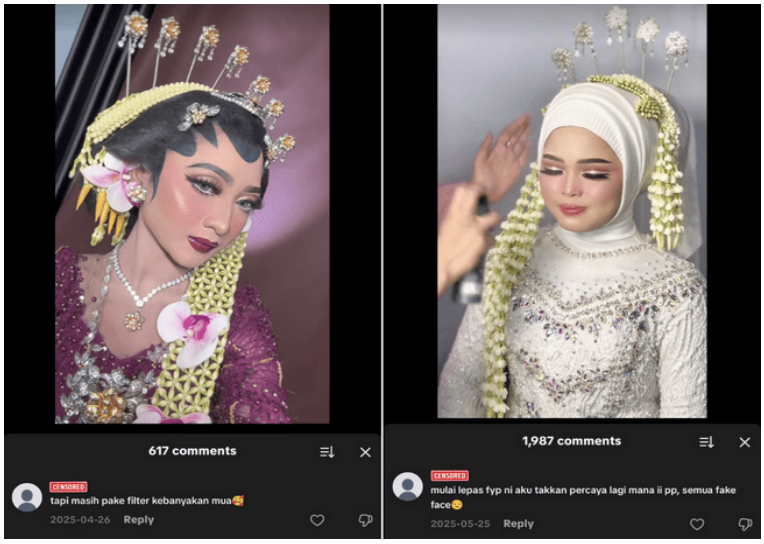

Figure 2. Evidence of Consumer Skepticism and Search for Visual Authenticity
(Source: Processed Data, 2026)

The figure above presents two distinct yet interrelated spectrums of skepticism. On the left evidence, the netizen comment "tapi masih pake filter kebanyakan mua" (but most MUAs still use filters) demonstrates high technical consumer literacy in detecting digital manipulation. Meanwhile, the right evidence displays an emotional impact in the form of trust fatigue through the comment "mulai lepas fyp ni aku takkan percaya lagi... semua fake face" (starting from this FYP I won't believe anymore... all fake faces). When consumers are exposed to excessive over-polished content, they reach a saturation point and refuse to believe any content that appears on their home page (For You Page / FYP).

3.1.3. UGC as Final Trigger of Booking Decision

UGC plays an important role in the final stage of decision making. Many prospective clients have actually been observing MUA profiles for a long time, yet remain hesitant due to doubt. Based on data coding, the dominance of responses at the Action stage (60.0%) was identified in the form of transactional inquiries triggered by exposure to honest testimonials or positive responses on visual UGC. Amateur client videos serve as a final confirmation (final trigger) that reduces prospective consumer hesitation.

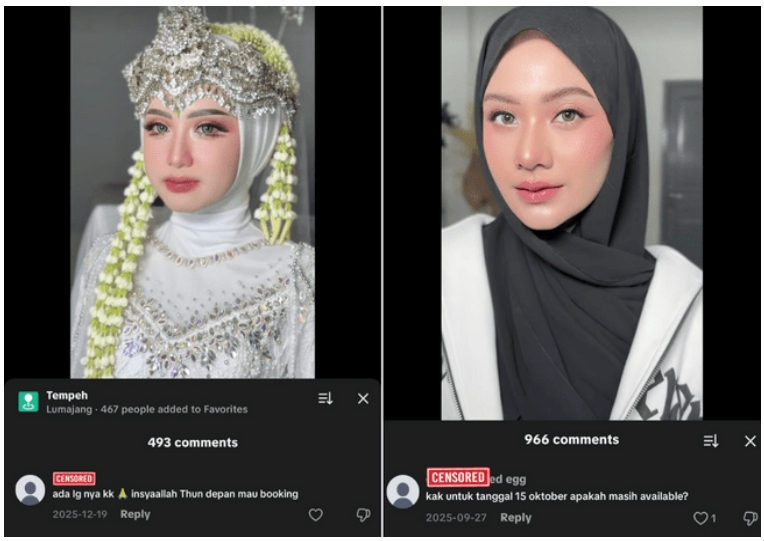

Figure 3. UGC as Confirmation of Booking Decision
(Source: Processed Data, 2026)

The interactions recorded in Figure 3 show two dimensions of Action indicators: long-term planning ("Insyaallah tahun depan" / God willing next year) and urgent transactional action ("apakah tanggal 15 oktober available" / is October 15th available). Specific questions regarding date availability confirm that consumers have passed the evaluation phase (Search) and entered the stage of transaction indication (Action). This indicates that visual transparency presented in UGC can drive passive interest into active booking inquiries.

3.1.4. Reciprocity and Altruism as Motives for Sharing Experience (Share)

Analysis of UGC captions and comments shows that MUA clients' motives to voluntarily produce and share their experiences (the Share stage in the AISAS model) arise from a combination of several drivers:

a. Expression of Satisfaction as Initial Trigger: Emotional surge of satisfaction post-positive experience, such as long-lasting makeup results ("masih speechless... awet dari akad sampai resepsi"/still speechless... lasted from akad to reception). The act of sharing arises from a personal need to capture a proud moment.
b. Altruism and Intent to Help Prospective Consumers: Clients upload or reply to videos because they realize their position as a reference source ("siapa tahu ada yang lagi cari MUA daerah sini"/in case someone is looking for an MUA in this area), shifting from merely answering individual questions to an altruistic action for the community.
c. Authenticity Validation as Social Responsibility: Conscious awareness by clients to intentionally present honest visual evidence without manipulation ("real result tanpa filter"/real result without filters) as a form of information honesty guarantee for fellow users.
d. Reciprocity in the e-WOM Cycle: A reciprocal pattern where clients who previously decided to book after viewing others' reviews feel called to "take turns" sharing their experience after the event is completed.

3.2. Discussion

This discussion examines empirical findings through the integration of Trust Transfer Theory and the AISAS framework (Attention, Interest, Search, Action, Share) to explain the phenomenon of trust building in Makeup Artist (MUA) service marketing on the TikTok platform.

3.2.1. UGC and Visual Authenticity in Overcoming Trust Fatigue

The findings of this study reinforce that the high visual literacy of Generation Z and Millennial consumers alters the way they respond to marketing messages. Official MUA portfolios (Firm-Generated Content / FGC) that are perfectly curated with intensive studio lighting and filter manipulation which frequently incorporate augmented reality face enhancements (Javornik et al., 2022) are often perceived as a form of "hyper-reality."

In such situations of uncertainty, visual authenticity presented through User-Generated Content (UGC), such as real skin texture display, pores, and makeup durability without filters, serves as an instrument to restore trust. This finding aligns with the view of Schiffman and Wisenblit (2019) regarding consumer tendencies to re-validate visual information when confronted with information asymmetry, as well as supporting the study by Ismagilova et al. (2020) concerning the shift in search of truth value of information through visual Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM), and Lou and Yuan (2019) regarding how message value and credibility directly impact consumer trust in digital content environments.

3.2.2. Trust Transfer Mechanism via UGC Videos

In high-involvement service industries (Tjiptono, 2019; Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019), trust is the primary currency. UGC solves the issue of skepticism through the Trust Transfer mechanism. Consumer trust is not directly given to the MUA, but rather "deposited" first with the UGC creator (the previous client).

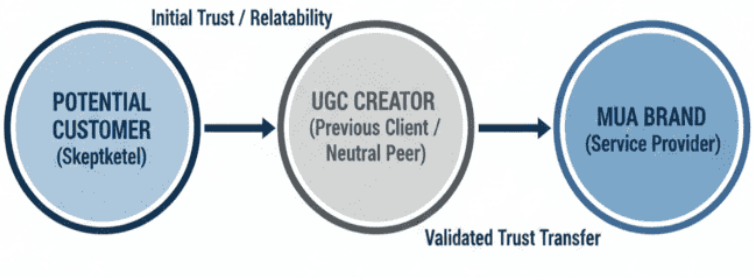

Figure 4. Trust Transfer Mechanism via UGC Video
(Source: Processed Analysis Data, 2026)

When UGC video creators display makeup results close-up and in detail, that trust is transferred (transferred) to the MUA. UGC converts an intangible service into tangible moving visual evidence, thereby reducing perceived risk for prospective buyers. This horizontal trust transfer mechanism aligns with the findings of Wang and Chan-Olmsted (2024) as well as Almahdi et al. (2022), who emphasize that credibility transfer on social media platforms occurs more strongly through perceived identity similarity among users (peer-to-peer) compared to unilateral claims from brand providers, reinforcing the findings of Coutinho et al. (2023) regarding how audience perception of creator authenticity outweighs traditional promotional claims.

3.2.3. Redefining the Search Stage as Visual Audit in the AISAS Model

These findings strengthen the relevance of the AISAS model (Attention, Interest, Search, Action, Share) in the short video era (Haq & Chiu, 2024). The Search stage on TikTok is no longer merely searching for price,

but conducting a "visual audit" by comparing official MUA portfolios and tagged client videos. The failure of an MUA to provide or encourage the creation of authentic UGC leaves consumers stuck in the Search phase without ever proceeding to the Action stage (booking). Qualitatively, field results confirm the conceptual framework of the research:

a. UGC as Primary Stimulus: The quality of visual authenticity (real skin texture) becomes the determinant of content appeal.
b. Trust Transfer as Mediating Mechanism: Trust is transferred from the visual experience of previous clients to prospective new clients.
c. Booking Decision as Final Outcome: The accumulation of stimulus and trust transfer drives actual transactional actions.

3.2.4. Share Motives within the Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) Framework

UGC is not merely a passive emotional outburst, but a deliberate communication action that carries social functions (Kotler & Keller, 2016). The pattern of reciprocity confirms that e-WOM is cyclical: an information seeker transforms into an information provider. This aligns with the study by Nguyen et al. (2024), which demonstrates that user participation in sharing UGC content is driven by positive cognitive states and a sense of post-transaction community attachment, which aligns with Adapon et al. (2024) regarding how TikTok's interactive eWOM dynamics encourage collaborative user engagement.

The Share stage in the AISAS framework is not a static endpoint, but rather the starting point for the next trust cycle. Every new UGC upload becomes an Attention stimulus for other prospective consumers, creating a self-sustaining trust ecosystem mechanism that continues rolling without requiring active marketing costs from the MUA.

4. CONCLUSION

This study aims to analyze the role of User-Generated Content (UGC) in building consumer trust and driving booking decisions for Makeup Artist (MUA) services on the TikTok platform through the framework of the AISAS model and Trust Transfer Theory. Based on the netnographic analysis, four main conclusions are drawn. First, UGC acts as the primary stimulus, where visual authenticity such as the appearance of real skin texture without filters serves as a validity indicator far more trusted by consumers than official MUA promotional content. Second, a horizontal (peer-to-peer) trust transfer mechanism occurs, wherein prospective consumer trust is first deposited with the UGC creator (the previous client) before being transferred to the MUA service provider. Third, visual transparency in UGC functions as a final trigger (final trigger) in the Search phase, converting search intentions into actual booking decisions. Fourth, post-service sharing behavior (Share) is driven by a combination of personal satisfaction, altruism, authenticity validation, and reciprocity, thereby forming a cyclical and sustainable e-WOM ecosystem.

These findings offer theoretical implications by enriching the application of Trust Transfer Theory (Stewart, 2003) regarding horizontal trust transfer among consumers through moving video media, strengthened by perceptions of homophily. Furthermore, this study extends the AISAS model by demonstrating that the Search stage on short video platforms transforms into a "visual audit" activity, while the Share stage serves a dual function as the closure of one cycle and a trigger (Attention) for a new consumer cycle. Practically, MUA business practitioners are advised to avoid excessive filter usage that triggers trust fatigue, shifting instead toward lighting quality and high-resolution shooting techniques that display natural pore details (skin-like finish). MUAs also need to proactively facilitate satisfied clients to voluntarily share their experiences to maintain the sustainability of the e-WOM cycle.

This study has several methodological limitations. First, the use of a qualitative netnography approach focuses on the depth of contextual meaning, so it is not designed to empirically measure the magnitude of UGC's influence on purchase intention statistically or for statistical generalization across the entire service industry population. Second, the observed content distribution was influenced by TikTok's personalization algorithm (For You Page / FYP), which is unique to the researcher's device. Third, data collection was limited to textual and visual digital footprints without involving direct interview interactions with content creators. Therefore, future researchers are suggested to: (1) conduct cross-platform comparative studies (for instance, comparing the TikTok ecosystem with Instagram or YouTube) to observe variations in trust transfer characteristics; (2) apply quantitative approaches (such as explanatory surveys or Structural Equation Modeling) to statistically test and measure the significance of UGC authenticity's effect on booking decisions; and (3) expand the method through direct in-depth interviews (in-depth interviews) with clients to explore the psychological motivations behind sharing behavior (Share) more comprehensively.

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of the authors.

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