



# Building brand awareness for local skincare brand glad2glow: The role of UGC, testimonials, and audience engagement on tiktok

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## ABSTRACT

This study seeks to investigate the impact of User Generated Content (UGC) and testimonials on brand awareness, with engagement serving as a mediating variable, for the skincare company Glad2Glow on TikTok. This study utilizes a quantitative methodology through the implementation of a survey technique. Data were gathered via questionnaires administered to respondents TikTok users and have encountered Glad2Glow's digital marketing content. Sampling technique was purposive sampling, with the respondent count established according to predetermined study criteria. The investigation utilized Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings demonstrate that testimonials have a significant effect on engagement and brand awareness, with engagement effectively mediating the relationship between testimonials and brand awareness. These findings indicate that genuine, experience-driven testimonials enhance audience engagement and bolster brand awareness. The study reveals that User Generated Content (UGC) does not significantly influence brand awareness, neither directly nor indirectly via engagement as a mediating variable. This suggests that broad or low-credibility user-generated content may inadequately facilitate meaningful connections and is insufficient for establishing robust brand perceptions in consumers' thoughts. The findings offer managerial insights for organizations to develop more effective digital marketing strategies by emphasizing credible testimonial-based material to improve brand awareness on social media platforms.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The skincare industry in Indonesia is experiencing very rapid growth as a result of increasing public awareness of self-care and stronger beauty trends. This growth is driven by rising demand for skincare products, making Indonesia now one of the largest beauty markets in the world (Puspitasari et al., 2023). According to a Forbes report, the global skincare industry is experiencing rapid growth. It is estimated that the industry's value will exceed \$200 billion by 2026. One of the main factors driving this growth is the purchasing power of young consumers who increasingly prioritize skincare. In fact, recent surveys show that 41% of Gen Z consider skincare to be the most important beauty product for them.

Local products have become a cheaper and high-quality alternative due to the high awareness of the community. They have also proven capable of competing with international brands (Lombongkaehe & Firdausy, 2023). In today's internet era, marketing through social media has become important because customers can make decisions based on reviews and recommendations on social platforms (Chandra & Ekawati, 2024). This shows how important it is to develop marketing strategies to reach a wider audience. The phenomenon occurring today, particularly on the TikTok platform, related to digital marketing strategies among Generation Z, shows that sales of local skincare are growing rapidly. However, there are obstacles or challenges in increasing product brand awareness amid competition with global skincare brands. One of the most effective digital marketing strategies currently for supporting the optimization of cosmetic product brand awareness is User Generated Content or UGC.

TikTok was selected as the research context due to its distinctive algorithm-driven discovery system, short-form video orientation, and high dominance of Generation Z users. Unlike follower-based platforms such as Instagram or Facebook, TikTok utilizes a behavioral recommendation mechanism that amplifies content reach beyond existing social networks, allowing testimonials and user-generated content to organically influence broader audiences. Its emotionally engaging short-video format encourages affective processing and peer-based credibility evaluation, which are central to testimonial effectiveness. Furthermore, the integration of TikTok Shop creates a seamless connection between engagement and commercial outcomes, making it a highly relevant platform for examining the formation of brand awareness in social commerce environments.

UGC refers to content created by end users and is often trusted by audiences more than conventional advertising, as it comes from the real experiences of other users (Ahmed et al., 2024). In the context of marketing, user-generated content tends to be perceived as more authentic and natural, which in turn increases the level of engagement between the brand and the audience (Hastiana & Astuti, 2023). Various studies show that UGC increases brand credibility. According to Sukmono & Kencana (2023) There is exponential power in user-generated content, where interactions and conversations between users create deeper trust in the promoted product or brand. Bustami & Noviaristanti (2022) also adds that UGC not only serves as information but also becomes a means to build an emotional connection with the audience. Audiences respond more positively to content that seems more genuine and less structured like commercial ads, which often appear forced (Suhandiah & Widayarsi, 2021). Engagement generated through UGC has the potential to drive sales, as revealed in research showing that consumers are more likely to engage and decide to make a purchase based on recommendations or experiences shared by other users on platforms like TikTok (Kim, 2021).

Implementing effective social marketing techniques, such as using influencers and storytelling strategies, has also been proven to increase brand awareness. Influencers with loyal followers can help introduce products in a more personal and authentic way, creating a stronger connection with the audience (Djawa & Rahman, 2023). However, it is important for brands to maintain the integrity and authenticity of the UGC they use, so as not to diminish consumer trust in the brand. Besides UGC, another influencing factor is testimonials.

A testimonial is a review or statement given by an individual or group regarding their views on a product, service, and so on. The statement given can be either positive or negative, depending on the impression received by the person providing the testimonial. Essentially, the presence of testimonials can benefit many parties. Through testimonials, sellers will be helped to market their products for free from the positive testimonials given by customers. Positive testimonials can attract others to buy the products being sold and can also serve as material for evaluation to improve product quality, service, and reputation.

Engagement audiens yang berupa interaksi seperti likes, komentar, dan share sangatlah krusial dalam menilai efektivitas strategi pemasaran digital. Berdasarkan penelitian, penggunaan media sosial, dalam hal TikTok, telah terbukti memperluas jangkauan konten dan meningkatkan brand awareness, terutama untuk merek-merek lokal (Anisa & Marlina, 2022). The high level of interaction on the TikTok platform provides opportunities for brands to gain wider recognition through engaging and relevant content that can capture the audience's attention.

Many businesses are now using new strategies such as digital collaboration and brand development due to digital transformation (Yuliati et al., 2022). Digital marketing through social media increases the sales of local products and brand awareness. Consumers now have more choices and tend to choose products that align with their aspirations and values due to easier access to products and information (Asir et al., 2023).

Although prior studies generally suggest that user-generated content (UGC) enhances brand awareness through authenticity and peer influence, empirical findings remain inconsistent. Several studies report a significant positive effect of UGC on brand recall and brand perception, particularly in image-based social media contexts such as Instagram and Facebook. However, other research indicates that UGC does not automatically translate into stronger brand awareness, especially when the content lacks informational depth, credibility, or emotional relevance. These inconsistencies suggest that the effectiveness of UGC may be contingent upon contextual factors such as platform characteristics, content quality, and audience processing mechanisms. Given the distinct algorithm-driven and short-form video environment of TikTok, it remains unclear whether UGC functions as a strong cognitive stimulus capable of building brand awareness. This gap motivates the present study to re-examine the role of UGC in shaping brand awareness within the TikTok ecosystem.

Glad2Glow demonstrates how the use of social media and digital marketing can aid the development of local brands amid intense competition with international brands. The growth of the skincare industry in Indonesia shows that the development of new products and marketing tactics, especially through social media platforms like TikTok, can help local brands excel compared to their competitors. This not only benefits customers by providing more choices but also supports the economic growth and local creative industry in Indonesia. (Wulandari & Sukaatmaja, 2022).

Based on data obtained from the kalodata source, glad2glow ranks first with revenue reaching IDR 80.07M and successfully selling up to 1.31M products. Careful social media management can enhance consumers' positive perception of a brand, especially if the strategy implementation focuses on strong engagement (Yuliati et al., 2022). In this case, Glad2Glow needs to consider how they can better leverage UGC and user testimonials to craft a narrative that not only sells products but also builds a community around them. As the volume of user-generated content increases, consumers tend to respond more to brands that can actively and relevantly engage on social media platforms. By optimizing digital marketing strategies for local skincare brands like Glad2Glow, emphasizing audience engagement through UGC and user testimonials is key to boosting brand awareness and driving deeper interactions with the target audience.

In this study, the engagement variable was chosen as a mediating variable because it can explain its effects both directly and indirectly on brand awareness. Thus, the title of this study is "Building Brand Awareness of the Local Skincare Brand glad2glow: The Role of UGC, Testimonials, and TikTok Audience Engagement."

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a quantitative approach method. The quantitative method is widely used in various research fields due to its compatibility with positivist philosophy. This research focuses on collecting data that can be measured and analyzed using a scientific approach. The definition of quantitative includes that this method is used to study a specific population or sample with systematic and organized procedures and aims to answer previously formulated hypotheses (Shantilawati et al., 2024).

The location of this research was conducted in Ungaran, Semarang Regency. The reason the researcher chose this location is because it has a very high level of popularity for the Glad2Glow product, indicating a very significant purchase interest. The time period required for this thesis research started from November 2025 to January 2026. The time allocated to conduct this research is 4 months. This will facilitate the research to be carried out and completed on time according to the schedule planned for the research.

In this study, the sample size was determined using the Lemeshow formula. The number of samples used is 96.04, which is rounded to 97 people. In this study, the sample to be taken is 97 people. After the sample was determined using the Lemeshow formula, the sampling in this study

was carried out using a non-probability sampling technique. The sample size of 97 respondents meets the minimum requirements for PLS-SEM analysis, particularly based on the “10-times rule,” which suggests that the minimum sample should be ten times the maximum number of structural paths pointing at any latent construct. In this model, the largest number of structural paths directed at a single construct is three, indicating a minimum requirement of 30 observations. Therefore, the sample size of 97 exceeds this threshold and is considered adequate for stable parameter estimation. However, while medium to strong effects can be estimated with sufficient stability, smaller effect sizes may be more sensitive to sampling variability. To enhance robustness, bootstrapping procedures were applied to obtain reliable standard errors and significance testing. Nevertheless, the moderate sample size implies that findings should be interpreted with contextual caution and future research with larger samples is recommended to strengthen generalizability.

The selection of testimonial as a core independent variable is theoretically strengthened by the dominance of Generation Z respondents in this study. Gen Z, as digital natives, demonstrates a strong reliance on peer-generated information and authentic user experiences rather than formal corporate advertising. This cohort exhibits high sensitivity to social proof and tends to evaluate products based on experiential narratives shared by other users on platforms such as TikTok. Testimonials function not only as informational stimuli but also as mechanisms of social validation that align with Gen Z’s preference for authenticity, emotional relatability, and participatory engagement. Therefore, incorporating testimonial into the research model is contextually and behaviorally justified within the Gen Z digital consumption framework.

Primary data refers to original information obtained directly from respondents or primary sources that are specifically intended for research purposes. This data has a high level of authenticity and applicability to the needs of certain research analysis (Hansen et al., 2023). In this study, primary data was obtained by distributing online questionnaires to respondents.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Measurement model analysis using three criteria for the data analysis approach using SmartPLS to assess the outer model, namely Convergent Validity, Discriminant Validity, and Composite Reliability. The following are the results of the outer model testing data processing.

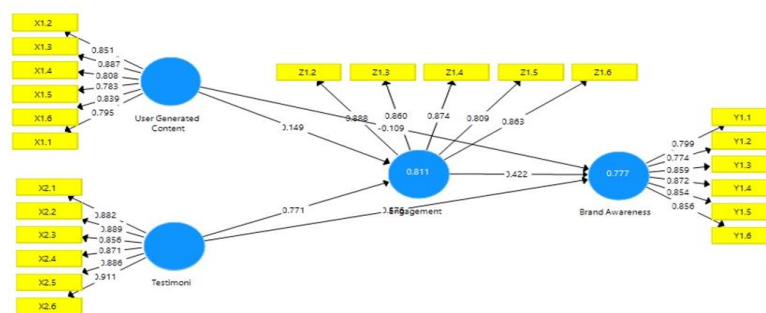


Figure 1. Outer Model Analysis

#### Convergent Validity

Testing is done using outer loading values. An indicator is considered to have convergent validity if its outer loading exceeds 0.70. The following are the results of the outer model testing showing the outer loading values obtained by SmartPLS 3.0. The outer loading values obtained for each indicator in the research variables, as shown by the test results above, are as follows:

Table 1. Outer Loading

Variable	Indicator	Outer Loading	Result
UGC	X1.1	0,795	Valid
	X1.2	0,851	Valid
	X1.3	0,887	Valid
	X1.4	0,808	Valid
	X1.5	0,783	Valid
	X1.6	0,839	Valid

Variable	Indicator	Outer Loading	Result
Testimonial	X2.1	0,882	Valid
	X2.2	0,889	Valid
	X2.3	0,856	Valid
	X2.4	0,871	Valid
	X2.5	0,886	Valid
	X2.6	0,911	Valid
Engagement	Z1.2	0,888	Valid
	Z1.3	0,860	Valid
	Z1.4	0,874	Valid
	Z1.5	0,809	Valid
Brand Awareness	Y1.1	0,799	Valid
	Y1.2	0,774	Valid
	Y1.3	0,859	Valid
	Y1.4	0,872	Valid
	Y1.5	0,854	Valid
	Y1.6	0,856	Valid

Source: Primary data was processed using SmartPLS 3.0, 2026

Based on Table 4.3 above, it is known that each variable indicator in this study has an outer loading value  $> 0.70$ . These outer loading values are considered sufficient to meet the criteria for convergent validity. The data shows that no variable indicators have an outer loading value  $< 0.70$ . Therefore, all indicators are considered feasible and valid for use in the study and can be used for further analysis.

### Reliability

Composite Reliability is a part used to assess reliability, based on the reliability value of a construct and the average variance extracted (AVE) from each variable indicator. A variable meets composite reliability if the value of each variable  $> 0.70$ , the average variance extracted (AVE) is above 0.50, composite reliability is greater than 0.70 (with a minimum threshold of 0.60, which is allowed), and Cronbach's Alpha exceeds 0.60, indicating that the value is acceptable and reliable. The following presents the values of Cronbach's alpha, Composite Reliability, and AVE for all variables.

Table 2. Reliability Test

Variable	Cronbach'Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extractes (AVE)
UGC	0.914	0.929	0.686
Testimonial	0.943	0.955	0.779
Engagement	0.911	0.934	0.738
Brand Awareness	0.914	0.933	0.700

Primary data sources were processed using SmartPLS 3.0, 2026

Based on the test results in the table above, it shows that all variables have Cronbach's Alpha values exceeding 0.70, indicating that each construct demonstrates strong internal consistency. The highest value is found in the testimonial variable at 0.943, while the engagement variable has the lowest value at 0.911, but it is still in the reliable category. The composite reliability values for all constructs are greater than 0.70, indicating that each construct has adequate composite reliability. The testimonial variable has the highest value at 0.955, while both the User Generated Content variable show results that are acceptable. Overall, the constructs in this study are considered reliable. The results of convergent validity testing through AVE values show that the AVE values of all variables are greater than 0.50. The highest value is found in the testimonial variable at 0.943, while the lowest value is in the engagement variable at 0.911, so all variables are considered reliable and all indicators can represent the four variables that have been measured.

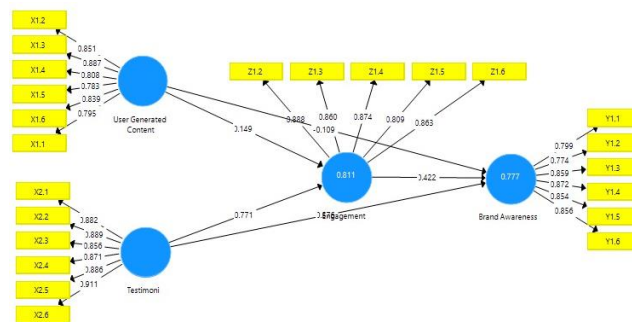


Figure 2. Inner Model Analysis

- a) Model fit, or model goodness-of-fit in this study uses the criterion that if the SRMR value is below 0.10, the model is considered to be a good fit. The results of the model fit test are as follows:

Table 3. Results Of Model Fit Testing

	Sturated Model	Estimated Model
SRMR	0,070	0,070
d_ ULS	1,357	1,357
d_ G	1,204	1,204
Chi-Square	593,510	593,510
NFI	0,760	0,760

Based on Table 4.7 above, it is known that the SRMR value in this research model is 0.070. This value is less than 0.10, which means this research model is declared a fit model. The d\_ ULS value is 1.357 and the d\_ G value is 1.204, which means the values are < 0.95, so the model is considered fit. The Chi-square value in this model is 593.510 > 0.05, indicating good model fit. The NFI value is 0.760, which means the NFI value in this study is close to 1, thus the model fit is quite good.

- b) R-Square, the structural mode is assessed using R-square for the dependent construct. The R<sup>2</sup> value evaluates the effect of a particular endogenous variable and ensures the significance of the influence of exogenous variables. R<sup>2</sup> values of 0.67, 0.33, and 0.19 categorize the model as “good,” “moderate,” and “weak,” respectively.

Table 4. Result R-Square Test

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Brand Awareness	0,777	0,770
Engagement	0,811	0,807

Source: Primary data processed with SmartPLS 3.0, 2026

Based on the table above, it is known that the R-square value for the latent variable Brand Awareness is 0.777, which indicates that User Generated Content and testimonials have an impact of 0.777, or 77.7%, on Brand Awareness, with the remaining 22.3% caused by external factors from other studies outside this research. Meanwhile, for the latent variable Engagement, the R-square value is 0.811, indicating that User Generated Content and testimonials have an impact of 0.811, or 81.1%, on Engagement, with the remaining 18.9% caused by external factors from other studies outside this research.

- c) F-Square, the F-Square (F<sup>2</sup>) test assesses the influence of predictor factors (independent variables) on the dependent variable in a structural model. The following table presents the results of the F-Square test as follows.

Table 5. Result F-Square Test

	Brand Awareness	Engagement
Engagement	0,151	
Testimoni	0,224	0,893
UGC	0,015	0,033

Source: Primary data processed with SmartPLS 3.0, 2026

Based on the table above, it is known that the  $F^2$  test result for the User Generated Content variable is 0.015, which has a moderate effect on Brand Awareness and a moderate mediating effect on Engagement at 0.033. Then, for the Testimonial variable, the  $F^2$  test result is 0.224, which has a moderate effect on Brand Awareness, and a high mediating effect on Engagement at 0.893. Meanwhile, for the Engagement variable, the  $F^2$  test value is 0.151, which has a moderate effect on Brand Awareness.

### Path Analysis

Hypothesis testing is conducted by assessing the significance of the relationships between variables using the bootstrapping method. A hypothesis is accepted if the P Value  $< 0.05$  and the T Statistic  $> 1.662$  (significance level = 5%). The hypothesis testing in this study employed a one-tailed significance test at a 5% significance level ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ), resulting in a T-statistic critical value of 1.662. The use of a one-tailed test is methodologically justified because all hypotheses were formulated directionally, predicting positive relationships between testimonial, engagement, and brand awareness based on established theoretical frameworks such as Consumer Behavior Theory and social influence perspectives. Since the study aimed to confirm whether the effects occur in the hypothesized positive direction rather than merely testing for the existence of an effect, the one-tailed testing approach is appropriate. With a sample size of 97 respondents, the critical T-value approximates 1.645–1.662, thereby validating the use of 1.662 as the threshold for statistical significance. The statistical computation model using bootstrapping in SmartPLS 3 is as follows:

Table 6. Hypothesis Test Results Using Path Coefficient Bootstrapping Technique

		Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standart Deviation(STDEV)	T Statistics(O/STDEV)	P Values
Engagement Awareness	-> Brand	0,422	0,425	0,131	3,228	0,001
Testimoni Awareness	-> Brand	0,576	0,580	0,156	3,689	0,000
Testimoni	-> Engagement	0,771	0,767	0,095	8,113	0,000
User Generated Content	-> Brand Awareness	-0,109	-0,120	0,095	1,142	0,254
User Generated Content	-> Engagement	0,149	0,154	0,103	1,449	0,148
Testimoni	-> Engagement -> Brand Awareness	0,325	0,328	0,116	2,816	0,005
User Generated Content	-> Engagement -> Brand Awareness	0,063	0,063	0,047	1,327	0,185

Based on the hypothesis results through the path coefficient using the Bootstrapping technique with SmartPLS 3.0 in the table above, it can be seen that: a) Engagement to Brand Awareness TikTok Glad2Glow. Engagement has been proven to have a positive effect on brand awareness. Consumer involvement in digital content can increase visibility and awareness of the brand because the audience not only passively views the content but also actively interacts with it through comments, likes, and shares. This interaction can expand the reach of content through the algorithms of the social media platform TikTok Glad2Glow. Research findings indicate that audience interaction significantly affects brand awareness. This study aligns with and is supported by Rachman & Azhar's (2025) research, which states that brand value is directly influenced by the level of user engagement with digital content; b) The Influence of Testimonials on Brand Awareness. The analysis results show that testimonials have a positive and significant effect on Brand Awareness. Consumer testimonials on the Glad2Glow TikTok platform are a type of social proof that can be trusted, as they come from authentic user experiences. This research is also supported and aligned with Mulyani & Hermina (2023), who stated that testimonials greatly influence purchasing decisions. Testimonials offer external validation and are very convincing, especially when the comments come from individuals who have actually used the product or service and shared their experiences. Every business has clients who often express their opinions about the products and services they like. Therefore, it is very important for companies to highlight

these consumer stories and encourage customers to share their opinions; c) The Influence of Testimonials on Engagement. The test results show that testimonials have the strongest influence on engagement. The strong influence can be explained by the characteristics of the respondents, who are dominated by Generation Z and tend to be more interested in authentic content and real experiences compared to formal promotional content. Testimonials that showcase personal experiences encourage the audience to feel a sense of shared conditions or needs, thereby fostering empathy and a motivation to engage. This aligns with the indicators of testimonials, which are appeal, the psychological value of the story, and the credibility of the source. This supports and is consistent with the research by Djawa & Rahman (2023), which explains that positive testimonials from customers about their experiences can increase the trust of potential buyers. This not only provides social proof of the product's quality but also helps convince potential buyers that Glad2Glow products are worth considering; d) The Influence of User Generated Content (UGC) on Brand Awareness. The test results showed that UGC does not have a significant effect on Brand Awareness. User-generated content (UGC) that lacks a strong reason cannot pass through the central processing route, resulting in an inability to build strong brand memory. Essentially, UGC that does not have a narrative of a distinct experience is insufficient to generate awareness. This study shows that the mere presence of UGC is not enough to increase Glad2Glow brand awareness. The effectiveness of UGC is greatly influenced by content quality, message relevance, and source reliability. Repetitive, trivial, or uninformative user-generated content will undermine effective brand memory (E.Fanggidae, 2025). The negative but non-significant direct coefficient of UGC on brand awareness ( $-0.109$ ) should be interpreted cautiously. Statistically, the non-significance indicates that there is insufficient evidence to conclude a systematic negative effect in the population. However, the negative direction may reflect a potential dilution effect, where excessive or low-quality user-generated content does not strengthen brand memory and may even obscure brand positioning. In the short-form video environment of TikTok, UGC may be processed superficially through peripheral routes, leading to exposure without meaningful cognitive internalization. Furthermore, the stronger explanatory power of testimonial content in the model may suppress the unique contribution of general UGC, resulting in a negative but statistically unstable coefficient. These findings suggest that the effectiveness of UGC depends not merely on volume but on perceived credibility and experiential depth; d) The Influence of User Generated Content (UGC) on Engagement. The analysis results indicate that UGC does not have a significant effect on engagement. From the perspective of consumer behavior, which consists of a series of psychological processes, including information acquisition, evaluation, and reactions to marketing stimuli. In this context, UGC should function as a social stimulus that encourages audience participation (Fauzi, et. al., 2026). However, research findings indicate that merely the presence of user-generated content (UGC) alone is not enough to trigger interaction. Users have a significant impact on digital conversations through actions such as sharing experiences, uploading creative content, or writing reviews. These changes affect how brands interact with their audiences in various contexts, including marketing, allowing for direct consumer engagement, even though the reach is broad; e) The Influence of Testimonials on Brand Awareness through Engagement. The results of the mediation hypothesis test indicate that Engagement is able to significantly mediate the effect of testimonials on Brand Awareness. The prevalence of Generation Z and women among respondents reinforces this mediation mechanism, as this demographic is generally more vocal and receptive to the experiences of other consumers. These findings align with behavioral theory, which states that consumers do not directly build brand awareness; instead, they go through a psychological process including attention, emotional engagement, and cognitive processing. Testimonials serve as a credible social stimulus, while engagement acts as an emotional response that connects this stimulus with brand knowledge. This research aligns with Pertiwi (2025), who stated that the level of consumer interaction and emotional engagement with a brand is defined as the active participation of consumers in providing reviews, sharing content, or recommending products to others. High engagement can enhance brand credibility, especially through testimonials and User Generated Content (UGC); f) The Effect of User Generated Content (UGC) on Brand Awareness through Engagement. The test results show that Engagement is not able to mediate the effect of User Generated Content (UGC) on Brand Awareness. According to consumer behavior

theory, this implies that the engagement generated from user-generated content (UGC) is shallow rather than deep. Long-term memory can only be influenced by engagement that involves deep processing. Engagement generated from user-generated content (UGC) is often random (for example, 'likes' without reflection), making it less effective in building brand recognition. Engagement fails to function as a bridge between brand awareness and content when there is no emotional relevance or quality experience. This is due to the shallow nature of UGC and minimal engagement, exemplified by short and unsubstantial comments. Such engagement is not sufficient to significantly increase brand awareness and recall.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that consumer engagement plays an important role in shaping Glad2Glow brand awareness on the TikTok platform. Audience involvement through attention, emotional interest, and interaction with content encourages consumers to process brand information more deeply. From the perspective of Consumer Behavior Theory, engagement represents the affective stage in the decision-making process, where consumers not only become aware of the brand's existence but also begin to build memory and emotional closeness to the brand. The more meaningful the engagement formed, the stronger the brand awareness ingrained in the consumer's mind. Furthermore, consumer testimonials have proven to be the most effective stimulus in increasing brand awareness, both directly and through increased engagement. These findings indicate that consumers are more responsive to information coming from the real experiences of other users than to company promotional messages. Conversely, User Generated Content (UGC) does not show a significant impact on engagement or brand awareness, nor can it serve as a mediating factor through engagement. This suggests that consumers are selective in responding to digital content and only process information that is considered relevant, credible, and emotionally valuable. In Consumer Behavior Theory, this condition can be explained through the concepts of selective perception and information overload, where content that is general and less meaningful is only processed superficially and therefore cannot form long-term brand memory. The structural path pattern indicates differential levels of information processing among respondents. The strong and significant relationships between testimonial, engagement, and brand awareness suggest that respondents engaged in deeper cognitive elaboration when exposed to authentic experiential narratives. This reflects central route processing, where message content is evaluated meaningfully and integrated into long-term brand memory. In contrast, the non-significant effect of user-generated content implies relatively shallow or peripheral processing, where exposure does not necessarily translate into cognitive internalization. These findings suggest that not all digital stimuli trigger the same depth of psychological processing; credibility and experiential richness play a crucial role in determining whether brand-related information is processed deeply or superficially.

The research results indicate that engagement acts as a psychological mechanism that bridges the influence of marketing stimuli on brand awareness formation, although this mediating role is not universal across all types of content. Engagement is only effective as a mediator when the stimuli received by consumers have strong cognitive and emotional value. From the perspective of Consumer Behavior Theory, engagement reflects the internal processes of consumers involving attention, information processing, and emotional attachment, thereby allowing brand information to move from the exposure stage to the awareness stage more deeply. Specifically, engagement has been shown to mediate the relationship between testimonials and brand awareness, indicating that the authentic experiences of other users not only directly influence consumer perceptions but also encourage active audience involvement in the form of interaction, attention, and emotional attachment. Within the framework of Consumer Behavior Theory, this condition aligns with the concepts of social influence and reference groups, where consumers form attitudes and perceptions through the social experiences of others. Testimonials trigger cognitive processes (information reception) and affective processes (emotional closeness), which are then reinforced through engagement, thereby accelerating the internalization of the brand in consumer memory. Conceptually, strengthening engagement quality requires shifting from superficial interaction metrics toward deeper cognitive and affective involvement. Long-term brand memory is more likely to emerge when engagement stimulates central route processing,

encouraging consumers to evaluate message content meaningfully rather than responding passively. Integrating emotional resonance with informational depth, particularly through credible experiential narratives, can enhance memory encoding and retention. Moreover, engagement should facilitate self-referential processing, allowing consumers to associate the brand with their personal identity and values. Future brand strategies should therefore prioritize meaningful interaction and reflective participation over mere quantitative engagement indicators to ensure sustainable brand awareness development.

Future research is encouraged to incorporate moderating variables such as perceived credibility and emotional attachment to refine the explanatory power of the model. Given that testimonial effectiveness appears contingent upon authenticity and experiential richness, perceived credibility may strengthen the relationship between testimonial and engagement. Furthermore, emotional attachment may moderate the pathway between engagement and brand awareness by determining whether interactive involvement translates into durable brand memory. Testing these moderating mechanisms through moderated mediation models or experimental designs would provide deeper insight into the psychological processes underlying digital brand communication on short-video platforms.

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