

**UNIVERSITY OF MEDIA, ARTS AND COMMUNICATION**

**ANALYSING THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN SHAPING BRAND  
NARRATIVES AND CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT.**

**BY**

**JUSTINA SORIZU**

**MASPRM24024**

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF MEDIA,  
ARTS AND COMMUNICATION, IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF A MASTER OF ARTS DEGREE  
IN STRATEGIC PUBLIC RELATIONS MANAGEMENT**

**DECEMBER 2025**

## DECLARATION

I, Justina Sorizu, declare that this thesis, except quotations and references contained in published works, which have all been identified and duly acknowledged, is entirely my original work, and it has not been submitted, either in part or whole, for another degree elsewhere. Therefore, I bear the responsibility for any shortcomings.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of stylized, overlapping loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

JUSTINA SORIZU

18/12/25

MASPRM24024

## CERTIFICATION

I, the undersigned supervisor, declare that I supervised the preparation and presentation of this work in accordance with the guidelines for the supervision of MA dissertation as laid down by the University of Media, Arts and Communication.



.....  
DR. PRISCILLA TEIKA ODOOM  
(SUPERVISOR)

19th December 2025

.....  
DATE:

## **DEDICATION**

To my husband, Gordon Baapiri, for your unwavering support and belief in me. To my children, Leslie Zunuo, Jayden Meyir, and Adrain Nuoyo, who are my constant inspiration and my greatest motivation. And to my incredible mother, whose strength and love have guided me every step of the way.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

I express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Priscilla Teika Odoom, for her exceptional guidance, encouragement, and unwavering support throughout this work. Her insights and dedication were invaluable to the completion of this project.

My heartfelt appreciation also goes to my husband, Mr. Gordon Baapiri, whose constant support, patience, and belief in my abilities kept me grounded and motivated.

To my mother, whose love, strength, and prayers have carried me through every stage of this journey, I say thank you. Your unwavering support has been my greatest foundation.

## ABSTRACT

This study analyses the role of social media in shaping brand narratives and consumer engagement. The study was guided by three key objectives: to explore how social media platform user-generated content (UGC) encourages the construction and development of brand stories, to explore ways in which consumers cognitively and emotionally engage with brand-related UGC and influencer content on social media, and to compare differences in brand narrative interpretation and engagement strategies across different generational cohorts. The research applied a qualitative interpretative paradigm and a multiple-case study approach to investigate the impact of social media on brand narratives and engagement. The interviews were conducted with 15 intentionally selected individuals consisting of both users and brand experts using validated, piloted semi-structured guides. The data analysis was done through content analysis using NVivo, while the trustworthiness was guaranteed through reflexivity, credibility, dependability, and ethical measures. The findings reveal that the processes of authenticity, co-creation, and the emotional–cognitive engagement significantly affect the interpretation. The dynamics of the platform are also accompanied by the construction of stories. The study found variations across generational cohorts. Gen Z likes unspontaneous, interactive content, while Millennials like curated, informative narratives. Brands are adapting the storytelling styles quite strategically to coincide with these audience preferences. In conclusion, meaning is not created in isolation but through collective perception. Consequently, brands can strengthen their authenticity by partnering with credible influencers who genuinely engage with their products.

## Table of Contents

<b>DECLARATIONS</b> .....	ii
<b>DEDICATION</b> .....	iv
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</b> .....	v
<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	vi
<b>CHAPTER ONE</b> .....	10
1.0 Chapter Overview .....	10
1.1 Background of the study .....	10
1.2 Problem Statement .....	10
1.4 Research Objectives .....	13
1.5 Research Questions .....	15
1.6 Scope of the Study.....	16
1.7 Significance of the Study .....	17
1.8 Organization of the Study .....	18
<b>CHAPTER TWO</b> .....	19
LITERATURE REVIEW.....	19
<b>CHAPTER THREE</b> .....	39
METHODOLOGY .....	39
3.1. Research Paradigm.....	39
3.2. Research Approach .....	40
3.3. Research Design.....	41

3.4 Population.....	42
3.5 Sample Size and frame.....	42
3.6 Sampling Technique.....	43
3.7 Instruments of data collection.....	44
3.8 Piloting of the Instrument.....	45
3.9 Data collection procedure.....	46
3.10 Data Analysis.....	47
3.11 Trustworthiness and Reflexivity.....	47
3.12 Ethical Consideration.....	48
<b>CHAPTER FOUR.....</b>	<b>50</b>
DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION.....	50
<b>CHAPTER FIVE.....</b>	<b>69</b>
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	69
5.1 Summary of Findings.....	69
5.2 Conclusion.....	71
5.3 Recommendations.....	72
<b>REFERNCES.....</b>	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
<b>APENDICES.....</b>	<b>83</b>

## **List of Abbreviations and Acronyms**

UGC- User Generated Content

UGT- Uses and Gratifications Theory

SIT- Social Identity Theory

SEM- Structural Equation Modelling

SEM-PLS-Structural Equation Modelling - Partial Least Squares

eWOM- Electronic Word of Mouth

S-O-R- Stimulus, Organism, and Response

NTT- Narrative Transportation Theory

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.0 CHAPTER OVERVIEW**

This research examines how social media influences the way brands construct and communicate their narratives to the public. It explores how platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and X shape consumer perceptions and foster interaction between brands and their audiences. The study basically aims at understanding the strategies that are used by brands to engage users and build loyalty in digital spaces. It also considers the active role consumers play in co-creating brand meaning through content and feedback. This chapter sets the stage for analyzing how these dynamics impact brand identity and consumer relationships in today's media landscape.

### **1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

The digital economy's great and fast development has made social media the most important way brands create their identities, tell their consumers what is valuable, and communicate with them. TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and X (the new name for Twitter) have transcended their roles as mere informants and turned into platforms where consumers are no longer passive observers but important co-creators of brand values. To put it simply, social media has been able to provide a real-time communication that is both outgoing and incoming, which is primarily the reason why consumer participation in Brand Message is not anymore just by consumption but also through shaping, interpreting and making new content along the lines of engagement, feedback and content creation (Azman & Mustaffa, 2023). Such a shift has brought about the brand narrative and the consumer-brand relations in a completely different way.

In this fast-changing environment, the marketing of products using content created by users and influencers has become the main way to communicate with brands. User-generated content consists of reviews, testimonials, short videos, and narratives of experiences created by consumers, and it is becoming more and more like the branded content in terms of authenticity and credibility. Researchers have found out that audio-visual user-generated content, especially on very interactive platforms like TikTok, has a tremendous impact on consumer perceptions and purchase intentions in the food and lifestyle-related industries (Azman & Mustaffa, 2023). Also, planned social media marketing worked with UGC has been proved to influence positively the consumer's choice in fashion and beauty industries (Hayat et al., 2022). These conclusions indicate that social media content has dual roles; it is not only a promotional tool but also a narrative mechanism through which consumers interpret and evaluate brands.

Influencer marketing thereby intensifies this narrative function by digital personalities who own symbolic and relational capital within the virtual communities. Influencers are mainly mediators between the brands and the customers, wrapping the commercial messages in personal and emotionally resonant stories. A Study for instance reveals that the genuine TikTok influencer content categories lead to a significant increase in impulse purchasing behavior, especially among the Gen Z consumers in Southeast Asia (Kamkankaew et al., 2024). As a parallel, consumers' reactions to UGC are greatly affected by the three factors; credibility, relatability, and perceived benefit, which also contribute to increasing engagement and purchase intentions (Pramesti & Alversia, 2023). Such findings have thrown light upon the crucial role of emotional connection and social trust in determining the effectiveness of brand storytelling on social media.

From a theoretical viewpoint, the described interactions can be explained by the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) model, which suggests that the external factors (like the content on social media, UGC and influencer stories) affect the customer's inner states (like emotions, thoughts and evaluations) and the customers' reactions involve engaging and making purchase decisions. New research reveals that emotions like pleasure, flow and perceived value play a part in the relationship between content on social media and consumers' actions (Minh et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2023). Moreover, customer engagement has been recognized as an important intermediary factor between UGC exposure and purchase intention, thereby confirming the theory that emotional connection and informational value are both responsible for branding outcomes on social media (Zahrah et al., 2024).

Notwithstanding the above-mentioned points, the social media branding environment is still fraught with considerable difficulties. Different generations play a major role in consumer UGC trust and interpretation, with younger ones being more and more inclined to consider it as a reality than the older ones (Ramos & Ramos, 2025). At the same time, doubts about the reliability of influencers, algorithmic manipulation, misinformation, and poor communication are still the main reasons for the weakening of trust and brand loyalty over the long term (Zhao & Wagner, 2024; Alcántara-Pilar et al., 2024). These conflicts reveal a wide gap between the aims of the brands, the characteristics of the platforms, and the expectations of the consumers, which raises urgent questions regarding the validity and impact of brand storytelling through social media in the long run.

It is noteworthy that a large part of the current research is focused on Western and Asian contexts, while very little empirical research has been conducted in Sub-Saharan Africa, especially Ghana. The use of social media in Ghana has grown enormously, mainly because of the widespread use of smartphones, the large number of young people, and the influence of popular content creators on TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook. Yet, the aspects of culture, trust, and online interaction may vary greatly in Ghana compared to other regions. Thus, the role that UGC and influencer-driven storytelling have in shaping consumer engagement and purchase intentions in the Ghanaian social media landscape is still an area that needs more research.

This contextual gap poses a significant research problem. Existing literature indicates that consumer behavior is influenced by UGC, influencer marketing, and emotional engagement, but there is still a lack of comprehension concerning the dynamics of these mechanisms in the Ghanaian social media context and how emotional and cognitive responses act as mediators between the two. Theories and practical applications alike will benefit from this gap being filled since it allows for a more context-aware digital brand storytelling comprehension and also helps brands aiming to create engagement strategies that are real, reliable, and emotionally appealing in the social media environment of Ghana to know exactly what to do.

## **1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

The contemporary marketing landscape has experienced a marked change in the way brand stories are told and lived due to the increasing importance of social media. A brand can now be co-created by customers and brands on such platforms as TikTok where the audience takes part through UGC, influencers, and even direct interaction. Existing literature has proven that UGC, influencer

credibility, and emotional involvement do not only attract but also engage consumers and affect their behaviors (Azman & Mustafa, 2023; Hayat et al., 2022; Kamkankaew et al., 2024). However, these factors are mostly analyzed one by one. Therefore, it remains unclear how social media content, as a whole, operates as a narrative device that do not only attracts consumer engagement in a sustained manner but also leads to transactional outcomes at various stages.

This problem is made more difficult by theoretical limitations. Despite the fact that past studies recognize the impact of emotional and cognitive responses like enjoyment, flow, and perceived value on consumer behavior mediation (Zhang et al., 2023; Minh et al., 2024), these constructs are seldom combined into a clear explanatory framework that connects social media stimuli, internal consumer responses, and brand narrative outcomes. Consequently, the process of social media storytelling converting to significant consumer engagement is still not fully theorized.

Furthermore, the present empirical evidence is mainly taken from Western and Asian environments and frequently uses cross-sectional, platform-specific approaches that restrict generalizability (Ramos & Ramos, 2025; Zhao & Wagner, 2024). The case of Ghana, where people's cultural values, trust perceptions, and digital engagement patterns might vary a lot, lacks any specific research that studies how UGC and influencer-driven narratives interact on social media. Such a gap in context makes the situation worse for both theoretical progress and practical advice for companies in Ghana.

The central problem to which this research responds, against such a background, is the absence of a comprehensive and contextually grounded understanding of the role of UGC and influencer

content on social media in the creation of brand narratives and consumer engagement accord. The study attempts to clear up the issue of how social media storytelling impacts consumer engagement which is not limited to direct purchase decisions by investigating these connections in the context of Ghana and using a well-known theoretical framework.

#### **1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

1. To explore how social media platform user-generated content (UGC) encourages the construction and development of brand stories.
2. To explore ways in which consumers cognitively and emotionally engage with brand-related UGC and influencer content on social media.
3. To compare differences in brand narrative interpretation and engagement strategies across different generational cohorts (e.g., Gen Z and Millennials)

#### **1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. How do social media platform user-generated content (UGC) encourage the construction and development of brand stories?
2. What are the affective and cognitive responses of consumers when they engage with brand-related content by peers and influencers in social media?
3. How do Gen Z and Millennials differ in reading and engaging with brand narratives in TikTok versus Instagram?

## **1.6 SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

This study focuses on social media platforms, specifically TikTok and Instagram and The study aims to analyze how influencer and user-generated content (UGC) on these platforms lead to the creation, development, and dissemination of brand stories and influence consumer engagement. The research focuses on the lifestyle and beauty markets, where user engagement is most vibrant and brand storytelling most vibrant. These markets are most reliant on user engagement, visual storytelling, and influencer marketing and are therefore best placed to examine social media stories' role. The brands of focus include Voltic Ghana, Twellium Industrial, DyLuri Beauty, Fenty Beauty, and selected local lifestyle and beauty brands. The selection of these brands was based on the fact that they are very active on TikTok and Instagram and also on the fact that they are using user-generated content and influencer-led storytelling, which makes them perfect for the study of co-creation and sustainability of brand narratives via social media engagement all through other users' participation.

The target population of the study are social media consumers or extreme users aged 18 to 35, with Generation Z (18–24) and Millennials (25–35) being targeted, who constantly engage with brand content and influencers on Instagram and TikTok. The Population is selected because they are the most engaged age group in creating, sharing, and consumer decision-making via social channels. Geographically, the study is limited to urban consumers in Ghana, where smartphone penetration, social media usage, and influencer culture are most prevalent, especially among young adults and youth. The study does not cover other platforms like Facebook, Twitter, or LinkedIn, nor brand-

controlled advertising. Instead it focuses on organic, user-driven engagement and qualitative narratives that emanate from such interactions.

## **1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The study provides significant contribution to the current body of knowledge regarding the convergence of social media, brand communication, and consumer consumption, namely user-generated content (UGC) and consumer engagement on TikTok and Instagram. By exploring the co-creation and interpretation of brand stories in online spaces by consumers, this research provides new qualitative research on the affective and cognitive consumer engagement—a space too often overlooked in existing quantitative work. Through intensive analysis of user practice, the research deepens understanding of how everyday consumers make brand meaning outside corporate discourse. The findings will be beneficial to several critical stakeholders; firstly, it will be beneficial to brand managers and social media marketing executives who can utilize the findings in developing more authentic and compelling brand communication strategies. Secondly, influencer marketing agencies will likely receive additional insight into what role credibility and content relatability plays in creating consumer trust and engagement. Besides the above, researchers and scholars will be exposed to context-based qualitative research filling knowledge gaps regarding social media branding, especially within developing economies like Ghana. In addition, the study provides contextual insight for sub-Saharan Africa as little academic research has been conducted to explore how localized social media trends feed into global practice in branding. Lastly, this study not only involves practice but also provokes further scholarly research

into how online communities collectively co-create brand meaning, thus enriching theory and practice in consumer psychology and digital communication.

## **1.8 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY**

This study comprises of five chapters. Chapter one focuses on the Introduction. Chapter two focuses on literature review which includes conceptual review, theoretical review, empirical review and conceptual framework. Chapter three presents the methodology comprising of research approach, research paradigm, research design, population, sampling size and frame, sampling technique, etc. The data analysis and findings are discussion in chapter four. And lastly, chapter five focuses on the summary of findings, conclusion and recommendations.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.0 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter offers a structured literature review in line with the research topic. It begins by determining key theoretical models that explain user behavior and brand engagement on social media. Such theories form the basis of the explanation of interactivity and inter-generational variation in content interaction. The chapter continues with a review of empirical studies to establish trends, discrepancies, and research gaps. Finally, it introduces the conceptual framework, which links the empirical and theoretical outcomes with the study objectives. The literature review gives the foundation for understanding academic context and research design of this study.

#### **2.1 THEORETICAL REVIEW**

This section provides an overview of influential theories that conceptualize the basis for describing user behavior and brand engagement on social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok. As a result of the interactive and participatory nature of these platforms, theories emphasizing active audience agency and identity creation are most relevant. The overview takes into account two broad paradigms: Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) and Narrative-Based Theory. These theories have also been widely applied in consumer research, communication, and media. Their incorporation situates the research in the wider theoretical context as well as offers interpretive schemes for researching its fundamental issues on content, participation, and intergenerational differences.

### **2.1.1 Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT)**

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) is concerned with how individuals actively seek out media for satisfying specific psychological and social requirements such as entertainment, information, personal identity, and social interaction. Rather than being passive viewers, audiences make conscious choice based on the gratification they expect from media content. The theory is concerned with the transference from what media do to individuals to what individuals do with media. It considers the manner in which users read material, engage with it, and build meaning or satisfaction, and thus it is relevant for the study of interactive systems like Instagram and TikTok where users engage, collaborate, and co-create brand-related content (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1973; Whiting & Williams, 2013).

UGT facilitates the first two objectives of the study directly by explaining why users engage with influencer content and UGC on Instagram and TikTok. It provides a paradigm for understanding how active consumers make meaning and stories for brands from their own gratifications and needs. For instance, users may track influencer postings for identity reinforcement or affiliation needs. The theory also informs the analysis of emotional and cognitive engagement (Objective 2), indicating how media use is goal-directed. Its emphasis on interactive audience participation is in keeping with the interactive character of social media brand development (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1973).

### **2.1.2 Narrative Transportation Theory**

Narrative Transportation Theory (NTT) argues that story-telling has the power to absorb the individual both cognitively and emotionally, and thus, it is the deepest engagement and gradual

internalization of the story's meanings that are the results of this process (Green & Brock, 2000). When one is transported into the narrative world, they skimp on the real-world concerns and live through the narrative as if it were the truth; campaigns, beliefs, and intentions can thus be altered. NTT at such a level interacts with social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok whereby users' interactions with brand narratives, influencer content, and user-generated content (UGC) are somewhat dictated by the theory (Green & Brock, 2000). In this aspect, the second objective, emotional and cognitive engagement, has as a theoretical background NTT since it clarifies the reasons behind the popularity of some stories and their capacity to produce powerful emotional responses. When consumers get transported into the brand story, they may identify with the main characters of the story, draw the parallel of the story to their lives, and savor the content in a very personal way. This whole process is also supportive of reflective thinking, interpretation, and meaning creation, which is a salient manifestation of narrative structures to influence perceptions and engagement patterns.

## **2.2 REVIEW OF KEY CONCEPTS**

### **2.2.1 User-Generated Content in Brand Communication**

User-generated content (UGC) is a term for the media content produced and disseminated by the consumers rather than by the companies, and it includes such items as reviews, posts, videos, and social media shares. UGC is the major communication tool for brands which makes communication more authentic, credible, and trusted by consumers (Azman & Mustaffa, 2023; Hayat, Hermawan & Nuryadin, 2022). Through UGC on such platforms as TikTok and Instagram, users are able to create the surrounding stories of the brands together with the brands, thus increasing engagement through marketing that allows consumers' participation (Minh et al., 2024;

Ramos & Ramos, 2025). Various researchers have found that UGC has a positive impact on consumers' purchase intention, but the impact is accompanied by cognitive and emotional responses, since the consumers perceive peer content as more credible than the brand's ones (Alcántara-Pilar et al., 2024; Zahrah et al., 2024).

### **2.2.2 Consumer Engagement on Social Media**

Consumer engagement is the interaction of consumers with brands on social media through the user's behavioral, emotional, and cognitive investment (Bowden et al., 2018). This kind of interaction is shown by the likes, shares, comments, and challenges in which the users participate, and the stories they interact with. Social media engagement is a two-way street as it is both an outcome and a cause of brand loyalty since the interactions keep customers attached to the brand and make them identify themselves as part of the brand (Hu et al., 2017; Bowden et al., 2018). Some theoretical frameworks like Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1973; Whiting & Williams, 2013) are crucial in understanding engagement as a behavioral manifestation driven by a goal when the user is looking for entertainment, social connection, or self-expression through content interaction.

### **2.2.3 Influencer Content and Narrative Mediation**

Influencer content is mainly defined as posts made by influencers who have the power to convince, educate, or entertain others, which the brands then receive as promotions. Among others, these influencers' narrative mediation is one of the factors responsible for that emotional and cognitive engagement (Alcántara-Pilar et al., 2024; Kamkankaew, Thongyoy & Phonracharnon, 2024). In fact, influencers are such powerful mediators that they not only change people's views and attitudes

but also affect their buying behavior all through storytelling and relatable content (Zhang, Zhang & Daim, 2023). Research on TikTok shows that trusted influencers telling brand stories lead to better memory for the brand and more active involvement of users, hence the effect of UGC is even more pronounced (Pramesti & Alversia, 2023; Zhao & Wagner, 2024).

#### **2.2.4 Generational Cohorts and Digital Media Use**

Generational cohorts like Gen Z and Millennials show different digital media patterns that greatly affect their content consumption and brand interaction. Gen Z usually seeks content that is short, interactive, and full of visuals, and they are the ones who tend to get involved in trend-based challenges, take an active part in UGC (User Generated Content), and are sharing the most (Ramos & Ramos, 2025; Hayat, Hermawan & Nuryadin, 2022). On the other hand, Millennials are the ones who mainly require informational and aspirational content and, at the same time, they are the ones who engage through cognitive evaluation (Zahrah et al., 2024). It is very essential to know these differences when you are creating platform-specific strategies, since age-related preferences will determine how users react to influencer narratives, join brand communities, and turn engagement into purchase behaviors (Alcántara-Pilar et al., 2024; Minh et al., 2024).

### **2.3 EMPIRICAL REVIEW**

The section presents a systematic review of empirical studies on user-generated content (UGC), brand storytelling, and consumer engagement on Instagram and TikTok. In line with the research objectives, the review explains how UGC informs brand stories, how consumers cognitively and emotionally engage with branded and influencer content, and how generational cohorts such as Gen Z and Millennials differ regarding engagement strategies. The critique goes beyond summarization of existing findings in that it evaluates the theoretical foundations, research design,

and applicability of each study, identifying strengths, weaknesses, and limitations that guide the current research direction.

### **2.3.1 UGC's Role in Building Brand Stories**

In this digital age, User-Generated Content (UGC) has changed the way brands interact with customers, particularly on visually based media like Instagram and TikTok. The sites enable general users to be included in brand narratives as quick videos, remarks, and live posts that can easily go viral. It should be pointed out where UGC is located as far as creating brand narratives for marketers who need extra consumer interaction. The section presents a summary and discussion of some of the chosen empirical studies that examine how various aspects of UGC influence consumer perception, interaction, and purchasing intent, more specifically on the social media platform of Instagram and TikTok's unique content-sharing platforms.

Firstly, a study was embarked upon by Azman & Mustaffa (2023) in relation to the theme under review. It was aimed at the identification of user-generated content (UGC) components on TikTok that impacts food purchase intention. The research approach deployed was a qualitative study with an interview-based exploratory design. The sample size for the study was 5 participants who were sampled purposively. The research instrument on the other hand was a validated interview questionnaire analysed thematically. The findings of the study showed that Audio-visual elements and virality in food UGC increased purchase intention among participants.

The above study's strength lies in the focused thematic analysis deployed because it provides an in-depth insight into user behaviour and perception of UGC on TikTok. Also, the validated

interview instrument adds to the strength due to the fact that it enhanced the credibility and reliability of the qualitative data collected (Patton, 2015). However, the study is still weak based on the fact that it used a small sample size which limits the generalizability of the findings to a population beyond the one that was used for the study. Besides, the platform chosen for this study was specific to this study only and this therefore narrows the applicability of the findings across other social media platforms such as Instagram (Patton, 2015).

Moreover, the use of purposive sampling was a limitation to the study because it introduces selection bias which affects the diversity of perspectives. Also, the study failed to use quantitative data which clearly brings about a limitation to the strength of causal claims with regards to UGC and purchase intention (Creswell, 2014). Nonetheless, the study clearly aligns with the theme in its exploration of UGC's influence on brand storytelling through food content –an alignment with brand narratives on visual platforms. Additionally, the highlights on audio-visual and viral content from the findings as storytelling tools are consistent with Instagram and TikTok's content-driven brand strategies which shows a clear alignment with the theme (Azman & Mustaffa, 2023).

Besides the above, the determination of the effect of social media marketing and UGC on Luxcrime product purchase decisions on TikTok was studied by Hayat, Hermawan & Nuryadin (2022). The approach deployed in this study was quantitative with a descriptive survey design. The sample size was 130 respondents with an implied convenience or purposive sampling technique. The instrument for the data collection was questionnaire, analysed with SPSS 26 for descriptive and inferential results. The results of the study showed that both social media marketing and UGC significantly affect purchase decisions.

The above study's provision of measurable data on the influence of UGC and social media marketing on purchase decision is a strength of the study based on the fact that it adds quantitative backing to the discussion of UGC's impact. Also, the specific platform which was chosen; that is TikTok aligns with the current trends in user-generated brand storytelling on short-form video platforms –and that is another strength of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The study is however weak for its usage of purposive sampling technique which poses bias and affects the generalizability of the findings of the study. Also, the narrow focus on Luxcrime clearly limits the applicability to other brands or the broader UGC dynamics (Creswell, 2014).

Furthermore, there is a limitation based on the study's exclusive focus on TikTok; and that definitely excludes Instagram which misses cross-platform UGC Comparisons. Also, the Survey design provides only a short-term insight or captures a snapshot in time which lacks a longitudinal depth on the evolving UGC trends (Patton, 2015). Nevertheless, the study aligns with the theme of this section based on the fact that it directly assesses how UGC influences brand-related purchase decisions which is central to the comprehension of brand storytelling. Also, the reinforcement of TikTok's role as a key space for interactive consumer-brand narratives shaped by users clearly shows alignment with the theme (Hayat, Hermawan & Nuryadin, 2022).

Additionally, Pramesti & Alversia (2023) study adds to the above findings. The study aimed at the examination of how attitude toward TikTok UGC affects purchase intention and brand engagement. The researchers used a quantitative approach coupled with a structural equation modelling (SEM). The sample size was a total of 256 respondents who were admitted using the

purposive sampling technique. The research instrument on the other hand was a questionnaire due to the survey design deployed. Data collected was then analysed using SEM-PLS. The findings of the study revealed that there was positive attitude toward UGC and this is influenced by source credibility, homophily, and benefit. These attitudes had an effect on purchase intentions.

Pramesti & Alversia (2023) study's strength lies in the use of SEM-PLS for deep insight which provides strong statistical validation of the relationships between UGC attitudes and brand-related behaviours. Also, the effective establishment of a link between positive attitudes toward TikTok UGC and key marketing outcomes such as purchase intention and brand engagement is another strength of the study (Bryman, 2016). Meanwhile, it is evident that the focus on only TikTok creates platform bias –and this clearly limits comparative insight into UGC effectiveness across both Instagram and TikTok as reflected in the theme of this section. Besides the above, the purposive sampling also presents a generalizability issues since the participants may not represent a broader population of social media users (Neuman, 2014).

The limitation of the study is seen in its reliance on questionnaires which may introduce response bias –and that affects the reliability of the results. The cross-sectional design used also presents a limitation because the one-time data collection does not allow for the analysis of how UGC influences may change over time –in short it has no causal inference (Patton, 2015). Meanwhile, the study undoubtedly aligns with the theme based on the fact that it shows how TikTok UGC through elements like source credibility and perceived benefits immensely contributes to brand storytelling and engagement. Besides the above, it reinforces the idea that users' attitudes toward UGC have a direct effect on their willingness to engage with brands and make purchases which

clearly validates UGC's narrative power on social platforms (Pramesti & Alversia, 2023). Supportively, Alcántara-Pilar et al. (2024) study aimed at exploring the impact of influencer credibility on TikTok purchase intentions and customer loyalty adds to the findings of the studies reviewed. The researchers deployed a quantitative approach. The sampled participants were a total of 880 who responded to the study through a questionnaire. The collected data was analysed using the SEM and Neural Network. The findings of the study showed that influencer credibility significantly affects purchase and brand loyalty.

The strengths of the study lie in the methodological robustness due to its usage of both SEM and Neural Network which offers a very high analytical precision and this also strengthens the validity of the study's findings. Also, the usage of a large sample size which is 880 participants make it easy for the study to be generalizable –and it also give statistical reliability (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). However, the specific platform chosen which is on only TikTok may bring a limitation in the applicability of the study's findings to platforms like Instagram or other UGC platforms. Moreover, based on the fact that the study was purely quantitative, the study clearly overlooked deeper, narrative-driven aspects of how UGC shapes brand stories (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016).

Additionally, there are no clear demographic details, cultural or regional influences on influencer credibility, and this poses a limitation to the study. Also, the findings may be limited to later date or outdated due to the fast changing trends on TikTok and Instagram (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016). Nonetheless, it is evident that the findings of the study align with the theme – and this is based on the fact that it demonstrates how influencer-generated content directly shapes

consumer behaviour and loyalty. Also, the study, reinforces the idea that credible UGC influences brand narratives and customers' perceptions on social platforms.

### **2.3.2 Consumer Engagement with UGC and Influencer Content**

Increased relevance of social media platforms like TikTok has been causing research attention towards how consumer-generated (UGC) and influencer-generated content shape the behavior of consumers. As consumers online continue increasing, understanding mechanisms to consumer involvement is vital. The following section describes recent empirical studies concentrating on how the dynamics between UGC, influencer content, and consumer involvement function. It delineates purchase intention determinants, cognitive and affective responses, and the way different methodological designs reflect user engagement. Drawing from a review of these studies, this section lays the basis for theorizing engagement as an interactive process within online marketing contexts.

To start with, the determination of the factors that influences online purchase among TikTok users was studied by Zahrah et al. (2024). A quantitative approach was deployed by the researchers. Also, the Survey-based design was used with 320 participants sampled for the study. The research instrument used was a Standardized online survey which was analysed with Smart-PLS. The findings of the study revealed that UGC and eWOM (Electronic word of Mouth) positively influence purchase intention. Meanwhile, consumer engagement clearly mediates the relationship. Zahrah et al. (2024) study's use of Smart-PLS for the analysis of collected data adds statistical rigor and reliability to the study's findings. Also, the study was able to identify consumer engagement as a mediating variable which offers depth to the UGC-purchase intention link

(Bryman, 2016). In spite of the strengths mentioned above, the study presents some weaknesses. The study is weak in its focus on TikTok users only which clearly reduces cross-platform generalizability. Also, the usage of standardized online surveys undoubtedly introduces biasness due to self-reporting by the participants to the study (Neuman, 2014).

Besides the above, the study focusing solely on a quantitative approach presents a limitation to the understanding of how and why users engage with UGC. Also, there is no clear indication of diverse demographic segmentation which introduces a limitation in the applicability of the study's findings to a broader context (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Nevertheless, the study directly explores consumer engagement as a central variable in UGC influence –and this clearly aligns with the theme of this section. Also, there is an empirical information on how UGC and eWOM drives purchase intentions, being an alignment with influencer content discourse (Zahrah et al., 2024).

Furthermore, Zhang et al. (2023) study adds to the theme of this section. The study aimed at the investigation of the role of perceived value, flow experience, and emotional pleasure in purchase intention on TikTok. The researcher deployed a quantitative approach with a Survey-based design. The researchers sampled a total of 257 respondents to respond to the study. The data was collected from these respondents using a questionnaire. Moreover, the researchers used SEM to analyse the collected data. The findings of the study revealed that Hedonic and Utilitarian values influence purchase intention. And also, it was evident that emotional pleasure mediates, and flow moderates key relationships.

In relation to the above study, its use of SEM for analysis of the study's data ensured rigorous analysis of the complexity in the relationships among variables. Also, the researchers integrating

both hedonic and utilitarian values alongside emotional and experiential factors clearly offer a holistic view of the consumer behaviour (Babbie, 2020). Meanwhile, the study is weak in the small respondents (257) admitted which may not sufficiently represent the broader TikTok user population –and this in turns presents limitation in generalizability of the study’s findings. Also, solely focusing on TikTok clearly narrows the applicability of the findings to other social media platforms (Israel, 1992).

Moreover, the study’s deployment of cross-sectional design captures data at one point in time which undoubtedly prevents causal inferences or tracking behavioural change. Also, the reliance on self-reported questionnaires may clearly lead to social desirability or recall bias which is a limitation to the study (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016). In spite of all the above, there is strong alignment of the study to the theme because it directly explores how content value and emotional engagement influence consumer responses. It also highlights how flow and emotional pleasure mediates and moderate’s user engagement which is a key constructs in UGC dynamics.

Additionally, Zhao & Wagner (2024) study buttressed the above findings. The researchers in this study examined how diverse user experiences on TikTok have an impact on purchase intention via influencer and platform commitment. The researchers in order to achieve this key aim of the study deployed a quantitative approach with a Survey-based design. The sampled participants to the study was a total of 458. The data was then collected using a questionnaire and then analysed through SEM. The findings of the study showed that User experiences brings about commitment which influences purchase intention. Also, it was clear or evident that the effect experienced varies by customer type. Zhao & Wagner (2024) study have a robust methodology because of its usage

of SEM which provides in-depth insights into the relationship complexity among user experience, commitment, and purchase intention. The study also used an adequate sample size which adds to its strength because it enhances the reliability and generalizability of the findings across TikTok users (Teddle & Yu, 2007). Meanwhile, the study is weak due to its sole reliance on quantitative surveys which limits understanding of the nuanced user perceptions and motivations. Also, there is an overemphasis placed on commitment which potentially overlooks other psychological or social engagement drivers (Teddle & Tashakkori, 2009).

Furthermore, the study is limited in its focus on only TikTok which brings restriction in the applicability of the findings to other UGC or influencer platforms such as Instagram or YouTube. Also, the cross-sectional design deployed makes the survey a one-time data collection study which prevents understanding of long-term engagement or changing behaviours over time (Patton, 2015). Nevertheless, the reinforcement of UGC influence validates how user-generated content and influencer interactions have an impact on consumer purchase intentions which shows an alignment of this study to the theme. Also, the study clearly highlights that consumer engagement effects vary by user type which is an alignment to the theme which also focused on the diverse audience responses to UGC.

Besides the above, the investigation of how TikTok UGC videos affect online purchase intention, with cognitive states as mediators was studied by Minh et al. (2024) which adds to the findings of the theme. The approach used by the researchers was a quantitative approach with a cross-sectional survey design using the S-O-R model. Also, a total of 318 participants were admitted and data was collected using a Convenience sampling technique. Moreover, a structured questionnaire was the

instrument used for the data collection which was analysed using PLS-SEM. The findings of the study shown that UGC affects purchase intention directly. Meanwhile cognitive states mediate this relationship.

The strengths of the above study lie in the study's use of S-O-R model which offers a robust theoretical framework for understanding the impact of UGC on consumer behaviour. Also, PLS-SEM study is another strength due to the fact that it enhances the study's ability to assess the complexity in the mediating effects which adds depth to the interpretation of consumer cognitive responses (Kumar, 2019). However, the study is weak in its usage of convenience sampling which limits the representativeness of findings across diverse consumer groups. Also, the use of cross-sectional design is a weakness since it focuses on only one-time data collection thereby preventing assessment of changes in consumer behavior over time (Patton, 2015).

On the other hand, the exclusive usage or focus on TikTok brings a restriction of the study in its generalizability to other UGC platforms such as Instagram or YouTube. Also, the reliance on questionnaire which constitute self-report bias may lead to socially desirable responses and reduces the accuracy of cognitive state measurement (Patton, 2015). Nonetheless, the study aligns strongly with the theme based on its investigation of how user-generated TikTok content influences purchase behavior. Also, the mediating role of cognitive states reinforces the theme's interest in consumer engagement mechanisms.

### **2.3.3 Generational Differences in Brand Interpretation and Engagement**

The emergence of digital platforms and user-generated content (UGC) has significantly altered how customers engage with brands, and therefore, it is important to know how different generations view and respond to such content. This section identifies generational contrast—Millennials and Centennials (Gen Z)—in engaging and interpreting brands on digital platforms like TikTok and Twitter. Through the analysis of empirical data, this section aims to examine how credibility, emotional response, and influencer effect differ by age group. Understanding such differences between generations provides insight into shifting consumer behaviors in today's age and their implications for marketing strategies.

The comparison of the impact of UGC on tourism purchase intent between Millennials and Centennials on TikTok was a study embarked upon by Ramos & Ramos (2025). The researchers used a quantitative approach with a Comparative Survey design. There is no exact sample size stated in the study. However, the study does include both the Millennials and Centennials aged between 18 to 42. The data collection instrument was a questionnaire. Meanwhile, a comparative analysis was used by the researchers to the study. The findings of the study revealed that Credibility and Usefulness of UGC significantly have an impact on the purchase intent with generational differences noted.

The above study distinguishing between the Millennials and Centennials effectively allows for a targeted analysis of generational differences in UGC influence which is a strength of the study. Also, usage of TikTok as the platform of focus enhances the relevance of the study based on its popularity among the younger generations. Meanwhile, the weakness of the study is seen in its

absence of an exact sample size which undermines transparency –limiting the credibility of the findings (Walliman, 2017). Moreover, the study is limited because of the broad age range (18-42) used in the study which may blur generational boundaries which possibly affects the clarity of generational comparisons. Lastly, the study’s focus on TikTok only may limit generalizability to other platforms where UGC functions differently (Walliman, 2017). In spite of the above, the study directly engages with how different generations interpret and respond to UGC content –a strong alignment to the theme. Also, by connecting generational engagement patterns to behavioural outcomes like purchase intent aligns with the theme.

Supportively, Hu et al. (2017) study’s findings was seen to be a contribution to the other revealed findings. This study aimed at analysing user sentiment towards industries and brands via Twitter. The researchers deployed a quantitative approach with a Sentiment analysis from the gathered data from a total of 330 million tweets from 19 million users. The instrument used was a Twitter API and text analytics tools. The findings of the study shown that Sentiment varies by industry and brand –and the users thus express stronger emotions when they are engaging with brands.

The above study’s strength is seen in its analysis of 330 million tweets from 19 million users which provides a robust dataset for the generalizability of the study’s insights into online brand engagement. Also, the usage of sentiment analysis and Twitter API clearly allows for accurate detection of user emotions and engagement patterns (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). However, the study is weak based on the fact that it did not segment data by age or generation which limits its ability to directly address generational differences. Moreover, it focuses solely on Twitter which may not capture generational preferences to other platforms in this new age (Creswell, 2014).

Nonetheless, the findings on emotional variation by industry/brand throws light on how different age groups might interpret brand identity and messaging. Besides this, the study clearly supports the idea that users' express emotions during brand interactions which is relevant to the understanding of generational engagement. Thus, the above makes the study align with the theme though moderately.

Besides the above, Bowden et al. (2018) study which aimed at examining how brand equity have an influence on engagement in online brand communities adds to the body of literature on the theme. A quantitative approach was deployed by the researchers. The sample size of the study wasn't stated explicitly. Regardless, data was collected and this gathered data was analysed through conceptual modelling, that is both macro and micro levels. The findings of the study revealed that brand equity have a positive impact which drives engagement. Meanwhile, it was also evident from the findings that lower quality leads to more content interaction.

Bodwen et al. (2018) deployment of both macro and micro-level conceptual modelling is a strength to the study due to the fact that it offers a layered understanding of brand equity and engagement. Additionally, the findings of the study which reveals nuanced insights such as the paradox where lower brand can lead to higher content interaction is a strength and this is because it enriches engagement literature (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). However, the lack of transparency with regards to the sample size is a weakness because it limits the credibility and applicability of the study's findings. More so, the absence of demographic segmentation clearly weakens the applicability to specific audience groups (Creswell, 2014).

Meanwhile, since the study failed to directly analyse generational cohorts, this restricts the direct relevance of the study to the theme of generational differences. Also, the sole reliance on quantitative data may overlook interpretive nuances and subjective meanings across age groups (Kumar, 2019; Patton, 2015). In spite of the above, the study's focus on engagement in online brand communities undoubtedly aligns with the theme's concern for user-brand interaction. Besides, exploring brand equity as a driver of perception and behaviour touches on brand interpretation, although not on generational segmentation.

Lastly, Kamkankaew, Thongyoy, & Phonracharnon (2024) contributes to the already reviewed studies. The researchers in this study focused on the assessment of how digital celebrities and content marketing on TikTok influence impulse purchases among Gen Z in Thailand. A quantitative research approach was deployed coupled with Survey-based correlational study. The participants of the study were a total of 400 sampled for data collection. The research instrument for data gathering was an online questionnaire. The analysed data was done with SPSS being it descriptive statistics, correlation and multiple regression. The findings of the study showed that digital celebrities, authentic content, and content marketing had a great significant influence on impulsive buying.

The strengths of this study lie in the targeted generational focus of the study, that is, the study specifically examining Gen Z provides clear insights into the behaviors of a distinct generational cohort. Also, the statistical analysis done on the collected data is robust through the use of correlation and multiple regression in SPSS; and this clearly enhances the credibility and depth of the findings (Kumar, 2019). Meanwhile, the focus of the study solely on TikTok may not capture

cross-platform behaviors or broader digital habits of Gen Z which is a weakness. There is also potential Survey bias based on the usage of online questionnaires and this is because it may have excluded less tech-savvy Gen Z individuals or introduced self-reporting bias (Creswell, 2014). Moreover, the confinement of the study to Thailand limits the generalizability of the study to Gen Z populations in other cultural or economic contexts. Also, as a correlational study, the study cannot establish causal relationships between digital celebrity influences and impulse buying (Patton, 2015). Nonetheless, the study clearly aligns with the theme because it addresses generational interpretation by analysing how Gen Z perceives and responds to digital celebrity marketing. The fact that the study demonstrates how content and celebrity endorsement foster specific forms of brand engagement within a generational context aligns with the theme as well.

## **2.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

A detailed literature review is presented in this chapter, covering the topics of user behaviors, brand engagements, and differences among generations in the use of social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok. The chapter starts with introducing the conceptual background based on Uses and Gratifications Theory and Narrative Transportation Theory, which are used to make sense of users' participation in dynamic content and how stories affect emotional and cognitive responses. It pays particular attention to concepts such as user-generated content (UGC), influencer marketing, and consumer engagement, indicating that they all have strong influence on the decision to consume or buy a product. The empirical part of the literature review discusses various studies concerning UGC, influencer credibility, and generational cohorts, pointing out trends, methodological strengths and weaknesses, and research gaps, thus establishing the conceptual framework for the research study.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter covers the research methodology used in this study as well as the population, sample size, sampling techniques, research paradigm, research approach, and research design. The instruments used for data collection, their validation and piloting, the data collection and analysis processes, ethical considerations, the positionality and reliability of the researcher, and a chapter summary are also covered in this chapter. The qualitative research methodology that was employed exclusively in this work is based on the interpretative paradigm.

#### **3.1. RESEARCH PARADIGM**

This study examined how social media shapes brand narratives and customer engagement using the interpretive paradigm. According to the constructivist epistemological paradigm, reality is socially constructed via interaction and experience (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019). It is relevant to this inquiry given the main goal or objective of the study. The interpretivism paradigm supports the notion that meaning is contingent on history, culture, and context (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019). Because it can co-construct meaning from researcher-participant interaction, it is most appropriate for analysing how social media shapes brand narratives and consumer engagement (Schwandt, 2015). This is because it enables in-depth qualitative understanding of inclusive education practices beyond general outcomes through qualitative techniques like interviews, the paradigm aligns well with the qualitative research design of this study.

Despite being frequently criticized as subjective and non-generalizable, interpretivism is relevant for its depth and context-rich sensitivity (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019; Schwandt, 2015). Using this approach, the researcher was able to investigate how participants perceived social media's influence on consumer engagement and brand narratives. It also demonstrated the effectiveness of interpretivism research in emphasizing the lived realities that are crucial to this investigation.

### **3.2. RESEARCH APPROACH**

Based on the fact that qualitative research design provides greater insight into the experiences, beliefs, and social context of both individuals and groups, its application was adequate in this study's examination of respondents' perceptions of the role of social media in shaping brand narratives and consumer engagement. In line with the study's objectives, this approach allowed the researcher to gain a better understanding of respondents' perspectives on the role of social media in shaping brand narratives and consumer engagement that they believe are essential (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Also, the qualitative research approach gave the researcher the freedom to gather rich and detailed data by allowing participants to describe their lived experiences in their own words through interviews. Furthermore, the approach made it possible to employ open-ended questions, which were essential in emphasizing the diverse viewpoints of participants to the study. Because the research aimed to explore subjective experiences in real-world settings, the qualitative approach was effective in explaining meanings and behaviors that were not measurable and statistically non-generalizable (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

### **3.3. RESEARCH DESIGN**

This study employed a multiple case study research design. Yin (2018) defines a case study as an empirical examination of a current phenomenon in its real-world context, especially when it is challenging to discern between the two. This is because it made it possible for the researcher to investigate in detail how social media shapes brand narratives and customer engagement. Thus, the multiple case study design was chosen by the researcher. Gaining a comprehensive grasp of the diverse perspectives and contextual realities regarding the function of social media in influencing brand narratives and customer engagement was made feasible by the design.

Hudon et al. (2021) emphasize the case study method's usefulness in describing participant perspectives, while Yin (2018) contends that it provides a comprehensive analysis and explanation of a bounded system. According to the goals of the study, the design allowed for the investigation of how people perceive and react to the way social media shapes brand narratives and customer engagement. The naturalistic setting of the schools allowed for real insights, which made the design ideal for the exploratory nature of the study.

Additionally, the study was able to perform comparative observations from various locations by selecting participants from a diverse pool. This improved the validity of the results and provided a thorough grasp of how social media shapes brand narratives and customer interaction. Because the case study approach is action-oriented, it does not only promote the practical application of findings but also evidence-based interventions (Hudon et al., 2021).

### **3.4 POPULATION**

The study population is all social media users in Ghana with active use of brand content on platforms such as Instagram, and TikTok. The researcher concentrated on adults 18 years old and older given that they are more likely to get involved in brand discussions online, decode stories, and formulate purchasing decisions shaped by social media engagements. It further includes brand-generated, and also user-generated content (UGC), that is shared on such platforms. This also allows for the study to acknowledge the ways narratives are enacted, read and rewritten through digital participation by looking at both official brand posts and consumer posts. Regarding practicability, the target population is social media users in Ghana who own accounts and interact with specific brands on social media between the periods. It presents a manageable but representative context to investigate the role of social media in the construction of brand narratives and consumer engagement.

### **3.5 SAMPLING**

#### **3.5.1 Sampling Criteria and Participant Selection**

Consistent with the exploratory nature of the study and also considering that its focus is on how social media drive brand narratives and consumer engagement in Ghana, a total of fifteen (15) participants were purposively selected. Ten of these participants were adult who have been active social media users aged 18 and above following and engaging with the official (public) accounts of brands on TikTok, and Instagram. These users reported having interacted with brand content—by liking, commenting, sharing, or user-generated content, for the past three months. A further five (5) participants were chosen from brand communication and digital marketing departments/cells/units of Voltic Mineral Water, Twellium Ind. Ghana Ltd., Dyluri Beauty, GCTU

and Duffy’s health and Beauty to give different perspectives on brand storytelling strategies. This sample size was appropriate for a qualitative investigation which aimed at understanding the depth of consumer and brand perceptions and was a manageable amount of data to collect and analyse. Polit and Beck (2012) agreed that indeed qualitative studies usually use small samples and focused groups to generate richer and more significant findings.

**Table 3.1: Participant Selection**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Brand/Institution</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>	<b>Criteria</b>
Social Media Users	Followers of Voltic Mineral Water, Twellium Ind. Ghana Ltd., Dyluri Beauty, GCTU and Duffy’s health and Beauty on Instagram and TikTok	10	Active users (18+), engaged with brand content in past 3 months
Brand/Marketing Professionals	Teams of Voltic Mineral Water, Twellium Ind. Ghana Ltd., Dyluri Beauty, GCTU and Duffy’s health and Beauty.	5	Professional involvement in Instagram/TikTok brand communication and consumer engagement
<b>Total</b>		<b>15</b>	

**Source: Researcher’s idea**

### 3.5.2 Sampling Technique

The study employed purposive sampling due to its exploratory, qualitative nature. By employing this non-probability approach, the researcher was able to select participants who were actively

involved in creating, interpreting, or responding to brand-related content on Instagram and TikTok. According to Creswell & Creswell (2018), purposeful sampling is most effective in qualitative research when it is required to gather deep insight and rich information from participants who can meaningfully respond to the topic under investigation. In this study, participants were selected based on clearly defined criteria, including active engagement with brand content and, in the case of brand professionals' direct involvement in digital marketing or brand communication activities.

### **3.6 DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT**

#### **3.7.1 Semi-structured interviews**

A semi-structured interview was used to gather data for this study. In qualitative research, interviews are commonly structured around a loose structure of key themes (Patton, 2015). According to Adams (2015), semi-structured interviews are guided by an interview guide that organizes interviewing while enabling the researcher to rearrange, and lengthen or truncate, questions in response to the flow of conversation. In this research, semi-structured interviews had been identified as the most suitable method to explore the question: how user-generated content (UGC) and influencer posts on Instagram and TikTok, narrate the brand, engage consumers and differ across generations interpretations in the narratives. The open-ended questions enabled participants to articulate rich, nuanced experiences and values.

The reason this method was chosen was due to its flexibility that provided the strength of the researcher-participant interaction. Because the study investigates consumers spanning different generations, semi-structured interviews enabled gathering nuanced perspectives about the co-creation, interpretation and the experience of brand narratives on social media platforms.

Additionally, this approach facilitated access to rich narratives of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural engagement with brand-connected UGC and influencer content (Kallio et al., 2016).

This decision to select semi-structured interviews was based on three main considerations: participants enjoy the freedom to express different opinions while the researcher can follow the emerging lines of thought, it ensures some measure of comparability between respondents to allow for thematic analysis; and it offers an opportunity to acquire thick narrative accounts and experiences that foster an understanding of how consumers interpret and engage with brand content (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Kallio et al., 2016).

### **3.7.2 Validation of the Instrument**

Creswell and Creswell (2018) define validation in qualitative research as the process of evaluating the study's results and determining their reliability from the perspectives of the researcher, participants, and readers. In order to increase the validity of the interview guide, it was reviewed by an expert who was a scholar in the area of social media and consumer research. The expert evaluated the guide in terms of its clarity, relevance to the research objectives, and the appropriateness of question wording and sequencing. After taking the expert's opinions into consideration, a number of changes were made which included, rephrasing of unclear questions, rearranging the items for better logical flow, and making sure that the study's goals were met. The changes made did not only improve the instrument's clarity and coherence but also its methodological transparency.

### **3.7.3 Piloting of the Instrument**

A pilot study was set up with a small group of Instagram and TikTok users. This was done to test the clarity, sequencing, and relevance of the interview guide to the research objectives. Participants

were drawn from a pool of existing contacts to provide convenient access and to ensure that participants would have key characteristics of the target population; that is, active engagement with user-generated and influencer content on social media. The pilot interviews enabled the researcher to identify vague or redundant questions, to clarify the wordings of items, and to ascertain that the interview guide was exhaustive and logically presented. Comments from the pilot further emphasized the value of probing strategies to elicit both detailed narratives of consumer engagement and generational perspectives. Based on the above, the pilot intended to improve the dependability and validity of the data collection tool by confirming its suitability in the main study (Patton, 2015).

### **3.8 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE**

Following clearance from within the institute, the researcher approached the TikTokers and Instagram users selected and requested their consent to be part of research. The research focused on user-generated content, influencer posts, and interacting with brands over generations. Building rapport was also stressed since trust is critical in qualitative research. Reminder calls were placed to participants two days ahead of interviews. Interviews, conducted on pre-agreed dates, lasted about 30 minutes and were either face-to-face or online, as preferred by the participants. Every interview commenced with informing the participants about the study objectives and the informed consent procedure. Interviews were audio-recorded on a secure audio-recorder, and hand-written notes were kept as a backup system. The participant names were changed to maintain anonymity and confidentiality, and the data were stored confidentially. Volunteers were personally thanked lastly; appreciation letters were sent to them officially.

### **3.9 DATA ANALYSIS**

Content analysis was carried out using the guidelines for finding and documenting patterns in data provided by Nowell et al. (2017). Digital recordings of the interviews were made, transcribed, and coded for themes that emerged from recurring patterns. To improve familiarity and comprehension, the researcher read the transcripts several times to become familiar with the data. Instead of drawing from previous theories, themes were extracted from the data through the use of inductive analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This gave a detailed but adaptable account of the participants' answers. Additionally, the NVivo content analysis software was utilized to clean the data and extract precise themes from the responses.

Furthermore, the themes were charted in relation to the study objectives and categorized by domains covered in the interview guide (Nowell et al., 2017). Participants received their transcripts back so that accuracy could be verified by member checking. The final analysis incorporated and implemented the corrections. According to Braun and Clarke (2021), qualitative analysis lacks a distinct origin. As a result, throughout the study, the researcher consistently examined data under broad themes derived from the research questions.

### **3.9 TRUSTWORTHINESS AND REFLEXIVITY**

This study ensured methodological rigor by addressing key dimensions of trustworthiness such as credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability, alongside explicit researcher reflexivity. Credibility was guaranteed through the data triangulation from three different types of participants—creators/consumers (n = 10) and brand representatives (n = 5). Re-readings, member checking of the quoted texts, and continual comparisons all contributed to the accuracy of

representation. The themes were based on the very words of the participants to stay very close to the data in the process of interpretation (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Nowell, et.al., 2017). Dependability was insured via the systematic maintenance of recording the coding decisions and keeping track of the different versions of category development. Peer debriefing and re-coding of the randomly chosen transcripts verified the consistency of interpretations (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Confirmability was supported by the use of reflexive journaling that aimed at documenting the analysis' assumptions, possible biases, and the reasons for including or excluding a category. Direct quotations serve as a link between the interpretation and the raw evidence, thus providing an audit trail (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). By providing a detailed description of the participants' backgrounds, the platform contexts, and the interaction patterns, the authors give the readers the power to evaluate the applicability to other similar digital marketing environments. The preferred outcome is analytical generalization instead of statistical inference. The analyst came to the study as a practitioner-observer who knew about social media interactions but, on the other hand, always sought to avoid personal biases through constant revisits to the raw data. Reflexive memos were implemented to challenge the researcher's emotional responses to participants' excitement or scepticism which in turn guaranteed that the interpretations were data-driven and not expectation-led. In Schreier's (2012) terms, reflexivity is a part of the analytic frame that bolsters confirmability.

### **3.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION**

Ethical considerations were central to the conduct of this study. Informed consent, which was obtained from each participant after they were fully informed about the purpose of the research, the methods involved, their voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw at any stage without

consequence. This process ensured respect for participant autonomy (Scribbr, 2021). Confidentiality and anonymity were key considerations as de-identifying data was followed by the safe and secure storage of sensitive information to allow participants to maintain their privacy and anonymity (InnovateMR, 2024). Additionally, the study was designed to minimize participant burden by conducting semi-structured interviews at convenient times and durations, with sensitivity to participants' wellbeing (Stadnick et al., 2021). Altogether, these measures ensured that the research was conducted in a responsible, transparent, and ethically sound manner.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

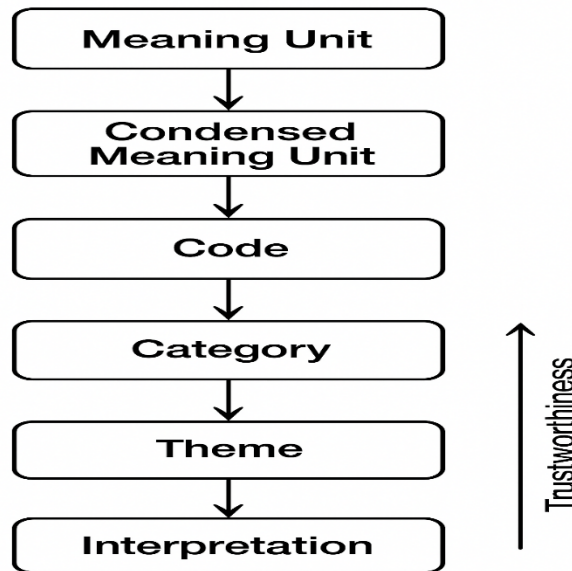
#### 4.0 Chapter Overview

A qualitative content analysis was done according to Schreier (2012) and Graneheim & Lundman (2004) to uncover the meanings behind fifteen semi-structured interviews. The social media users and creators (influencers, students, lifestyle and beauty content producers) comprised the ten interviewees and the five others were company brand representatives (Voltic Ghana, Twellium Industrial, DyLuri Beauty, and two additional marketing officers from allied firms). Their collaboration made it possible for the researchers to derive a rich understanding of the brand communication and the engagement supported by UGC and influencer activities on Instagram and TikTok. The analyses were based on the verbatim transcripts representing the units of analysis. The analysis took place in several stages:

- Familiarisation and Initial Coding: all transcripts were read multiple times, so immersion could be achieved. The “meaning units” were defined as sentences or paragraphs that expressed complete ideas relevant to the research being done.
- Condensation and Categorisation: “meaning units” were condensed so that core sense was preserved; descriptive codes were assigned; similar codes were collected into categories.
- Abstraction into Themes: the broader latent themes that were less visible but still capturing the underlying significance across cases were formed from the categories.
- Refinement and Validation: the coding frames were refined with constant comparison and peer debriefing. Every theme was then checked against raw data to make sure of internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity.

Analysis was conducted for both manifest content (explicit statements) and latent content (underlying interpretations). There were reflexive notes taken to ensure that decisions made were transparent as well as the researcher’s point of view. The conceptual illustration below depicts the analytic process:

**Figure 2.2: conceptual illustration**



*Meaning unit* → *Condensed meaning unit* → *Code* → *Category* → *Theme* → *Interpretation*  
(Schreier 2012; Graneheim & Lundman 2004)

## **4.1 OBJECTIVE 1: HOW INSTAGRAM AND TIKTOK UGC ENCOURAGE CONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF BRAND STORIES**

### **4.1.1 Theme 1: Demonstrative Authenticity**

Participants, virtually all influencer and brand transcripts indicated that demonstration rather than verbal persuasion was the core of storytelling. UGC acts as visual proof—converting brand

commitments into reality. As one influencer explained “I showed how it looked on my natural lips before and after. That made people connect more.” (Influencer 1). Another influencer noted that everyday use, rather than overt promotion, shaped credibility: “My Voltic video wasn’t an advert; I filmed how staying hydrated keeps me active.” (Influencer 2). From the brand perspective, this logic was reinforced by the perceived persuasive power of consumer-created content: “Customers post their results using our lotion, and that tells the story better than we ever could.” (Brand Representative A).

Beyond individual accounts, the analysis showed that product-in-use, routine integration, and personal transformation posts formed the core meaning units underpinning perceptions of authenticity. This can be seen as a thematic highlight of meaning units ("before/after", "routine", "real reaction") compressed into the experiential quality of trust through demonstration. Thus, authentic demonstrations make consumers part of the story. As Schreier (2012) points out, qualitative content analysis categories should reflect how phenomena are represented; in this case, authenticity is built through visibility and emotion rather than advertising rhetoric. Graneheim & Lundman (2004) would treat this as a transition from manifest description to latent meaning of truthfulness and self-evidence in brand communication.

#### **4.1.2 Theme 2: Collaborative Story-Building (“Seed and Remix”)**

The participants exhibited the process of storytelling as a unified chain connecting the influencer, the audience, and the brand. The influencers initiate the idea or the trend; the audiences create their own versions through duets, hashtags, or comment threads; then, the brands boost those posts which are already performing well. This phenomenon is clearly reflected in the respondents’

remarks. Influencer 1 noted that “Influencers start a trend, but regular users keep it going,” highlighting the initial spark provided by influencers and the subsequent momentum created by ordinary users. Influencer 2 described a personal example, stating, “After my Voltic clip, followers tagged me in their own ‘stay hydrated’ videos,” demonstrating how audience engagement amplifies the reach of content. A brand representative also emphasized this collective dynamic, explaining, “Our #StayHydratedWithVoltic campaign relied on that ripple effect—each user added their voice,” underscoring the importance of user participation in sustaining campaign impact.

Based on the above, the process of such co-creation gradually eliminates the factors that distinguish the producer and the consumer. To put it differently, in Schreier's (2012) perspective, the categories of collaboration and remix have a hierarchical relationship under the wider theme of participatory narrative. This therefore means that Storytelling through user-generated content is a dialogic process that takes place over time. The brand's message is changed through users' copying and adapting. This is in line with Graneheim & Lundman's remark that hidden themes usually indicate the continuity of meaning across different overt expressions, here, it is the case of co-authorship.

#### **4.1.3 Theme 3: Symbolic Meaning and Identity Formation**

Under this section of the analysis, it is evident that many of the creators linked product use to identity construction, confidence, lifestyle, or empowerment, as seen in the quotes from the respondents. Influencer 1 stated, “It made me feel confident; that’s the story I shared,” illustrating how personal feelings shape the content shared. Influencer 3 described their experience with Rush Energy, noting, “Rush Energy isn’t just a drink—it’s motivation and rhythm,” connecting the product to lifestyle and energy. A brand representative further emphasized this connection,

explaining, “For us, Verna stands for empowerment and wellness; people post their personal wins with it,” highlighting how the brand embodies values that resonate with user experiences.

Based on the above, the condensation of meaning units like "confidence," "motivation," and "empowerment" leads to the latent theme symbolic self-extension, where brands are the bearers of personal and collective identity. Thus, UGC facilitates the symbolic attachment: the items act as channels for the individual's representation. And in Schreier (2012) taxonomy, such a process of abstraction is considered the highest category development, transitioning from the descriptive to the conceptual generalization level.

#### **4.1.4 Integrative Commentary for Objective 1**

The research results of the ten creators along with the five brand representatives suggest that user generated content (UGC) is main channel of brand storytelling mainly through three interlocked ways of communication:

- Authentic demonstration – replacing persuasion with experiential proof.
- Collaborative remix – the brand narrative is participatorily continued.
- Symbolic attachment – associations with an emotional and identity content that go beyond utility.

Together they show how the modern-day creativity and relational authenticity are the basis of the digital brand meaning construction. Instead of brands telling their stories to consumers, consumers are the ones living the stories that brands later recognize and promote. This back-and-forth circulation of meaning is what Graneheim & Lundman characterize as interpretive depth—the transition from communicational visibility to the underlying experiencing of identification and belonging.

## **4.2 OBJECTIVE 2 – HOW CONSUMERS COGNITIVELY AND EMOTIONALLY ENGAGE WITH BRAND-RELATED UGC AND INFLUENCER CONTENT**

### **4.2.1 Theme 1: Emotional Resonance as the Entry Point**

The first gate for engagement was characterized by emotion in all fifteen participant's opinions. They brutally reacted to tone, facial expression, humour, and authenticity before any technical information was taken into account. The statement, “If it feels real, I stay; if it looks forced, I scroll”, was made by almost all of the respondents.

Influencer 1 noted, “If it feels relatable and genuine, I feel inspired to try it,” emphasizing the motivational power of sincerity. Influencer 4 added, “When someone shows genuine excitement or gives a realistic review, not a scripted one, I watch,” pointing to the appeal of honest, unscripted engagement. Influencer 3 further remarked, “The energy and creativity catch me first; I enjoy videos that have rhythm and originality,” illustrating how dynamic and original presentation draws attention and fosters interest.

Notably, the meaning units were condensed into the descriptive codes of relatable, funny, energetic, and inspiring. At the latent level, these codes merged into a single category called emotional resonance which refers to the emotional alignment between the audience and the content creator. This means that the emotional connection is the primary factor for engaging the audience. According to Graneheim & Lundman (2004), a manifest description (“I feel inspired”) is the most straightforward way to indicate the latent theme of genuine connection. The immediate emotional response is the kingmaker for whether or not the following cognitive appraisal will take place. Schreier (2012) assures that such emotional indicators are not general but rather very specific

categories that make the coding frame comprehensible: emotion preceding cognition is the common pattern linking different accounts.

#### **4.2.2 Theme 2: Cognitive Appraisal and Credibility Evaluation**

Under this section, the findings of the study showed that once emotionally engaged, participants evaluated content cognitively—examining usefulness, product details, ingredients, and source credibility. The process moved from *feeling* to *thinking*.

Influencer 4 stated, “I look for details and compare before buying,” highlighting a deliberate approach to decision-making. A brand representative observed, “People comment asking about prices or ingredients; that shows they’re thinking about it,” indicating that audience inquiries reflect active consideration. Influencer 5 added, “When I see a post, I notice lighting and attitude first; then I check if it looks real or edited,” showing that visual authenticity and presentation significantly influence perception before any product assessment.

This stage of analysis included codes like checking, comparing, verifying, and questioning. These were summarized into the category cognitive appraisal, which is a rational examination of credibility and personal relevance. Evidentially, participation not only includes emotional contagion but also informed judgement. The audience could tell the difference between real advocacy and paid publicity seeking to be in the same position as what is shown and what they believe. The underlying meaning here is trust-testing: consumers evaluate not only the message but also the messenger. Schreier (2012) view is that qualitative content analysis evolves from surface description to conceptual understanding; the concept that emerges is reflexive scepticism—a critical literacy among digital audiences.

### **4.2.3 Theme 3: Behavioural Enactment and Participatory Response**

The findings of the study showed that emotional resonance and cognitive appraisal produced tangible actions: likes, comments, saves, shares, duets, remixes, purchases, or brand mentions.

Engagement thus culminated in behavioral enactment, as reflected in the respondents' statements. Influencer 1 noted, "I like, comment, and sometimes create my own videos and tag brands," illustrating active participation beyond passive viewing. Influencer 4 echoed this, stating, "I also tag brands when I post reviews or tutorials," showing how content creation reinforces interaction with brands. Brand representatives highlighted the measurable aspects of this engagement, with one explaining, "We track duets and challenges as signs of engagement," and another adding, "Customers send me videos after using products; I post them with permission," demonstrating how user-generated content and participatory actions contribute to the campaign's reach and impact.

Based on the above, from the perspective of a manifest, these discrete actions can be easily seen; however, at the latent level they represent active participation, consumers transforming their thoughts into contributions. Thus, the users' behavioural enactment brings the emotional-cognitive-behavioural sequence to a close. The users are walking through the phases from spectators to co-creators of brand meaning. Graneheim & Lundman's idea of the interpretive pattern is evident: energy, the perception that one's participation is not merely a way of expressing oneself but also has an impact, is the central thread. Schreier (2012) would classify this as a move to one of the process themes: engagement as emerging performance.

### **4.2.4 Theme 4: Authenticity and Trust as the Core Mediator**

Under this section, it was evident that across all groups, authenticity re-emerged as the mediating condition linking emotion, cognition, and action. Without perceived honesty, even visually perfect

content failed to hold attention. Influencer 1 stated, “Trust is everything. I only post or recommend products I’ve tried myself.” Influencer 4 added, “My followers trust me because I don’t exaggerate or fake results.” A brand representative also noted, “We choose influencers who actually use our product; for scripted content never works.”

Based on the above, the condensation of “trust,” “honesty,” and “real use” formed the latent theme authentic credibility, the invisible contract between brand, influencer, and audience. Thus, authenticity operates as a relational currency. It bridges affective and cognitive domains, sustaining behavioural loyalty. In Schreier (2012) typology, this represents *cross-category linkage*, a unifying principle that integrates multiple lower-level codes under a single interpretive dimension.

#### **4.2.5 Integrative Commentary for Objective 2**

The findings at this section revealed that across the fifteen participants, they all demonstrated that consumer engagement on TikTok and Instagram unfolds as a sequential yet cyclical process. Emotional Resonance occurs first, where an affective connection initiates attention. This is followed by Cognitive Appraisal, during which viewers evaluate information for credibility and relevance. Behavioural Enactment comes next, as authentic interest translates into visible actions and content creation. Finally, Trust Maintenance ensures that perceived authenticity sustains the cycle and strengthens long-term attachment.

It is evident that brands that manage this sequence well, emotional tone and transparent information in the right proportion, are the ones that really connect. According to the authors,

Graneheim & Lundman (2004), the latent meaning that can be found in all the stories told is the genuine engagement that is experienced as a relational dialogue. Not only do users receive the messages, but they also interact with them, passing the truth claims through membership of the community and thereby testing them.

### **4.3 OBJECTIVE 3 – DIFFERENCES IN NARRATIVE INTERPRETATION AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES ACROSS GENERATIONAL COHORTS (GEN Z VS MILLENNIALS)**

#### **4.3.1 Theme 1: Gen Z’s Participatory and Trend-Driven Interpretation**

Across the transcripts, participants aged between 18 and 25 (primarily students, emerging creators, and micro-influencers) described engagement as playful, communal, and experimental. For them, brand stories are not static; they are memetic materials to be remixed, challenged, and reinterpreted, as seen in the quotes of the respondents. Influencer 4 stated, “Gen Z—we don’t like over-edited videos. We want something spontaneous and fun.” Influencer 1 added, “TikTok users want quick, creative content that feels real.” Influencer 3 noted, “I join trends when they’re funny or relatable; if a brand fits that mood, I’ll use it.”

Based on the above, it can be seen that condensed meaning units such as “*quick*,” “*fun*,” “*real*,” and “*trends*” produced the category participatory interpretation, whose latent theme is *co-creation through humour and immediacy*. Thus, Gen Z audiences engage through *active play*. They interpret brand stories as open scripts rather than finished messages. Graneheim & Lundman (2004) highlight that latent themes represent the unifying meaning underlying diverse expressions; here, that meaning is *belonging through participation*. Schreier (2012) would classify this as an inductive category that captures a context-specific orientation—fluidity and spontaneity.

### **4.3.2 Theme 2: Millennials' Curated and Informational Interpretation**

Millennial participants (aged 26–38) and most brand representatives emphasized a more reflective mode of engagement. They valued aesthetics, structure, and informational clarity, especially on Instagram, as seen in the quotes. Influencer 2 stated, “On Instagram people expect cleaner, well-curated visuals.” Brand Consumer 1 (31) noted, “I like posts that look organized and tell me what I’m buying.” A brand representative added, “Millennials appreciate detailed captions and CSR messages; it feels responsible.”

The statements resulted in codes like "clean visuals," "detailed captions," "responsibility," and "polish." The hidden theme is the interpretation that was curated—one that was intentional, conscious of image, and evaluative of content at the same time. This therefore shows that Millennials look at brand stories as if they are being told through a lens that shows the story's coherence and credibility. They are attracted to nice pictures and information that is backed up with evidence. This shows a more mental and trust-in-brand-oriented approach than Gen Z's creative improvisation. In Schreier (2012) vocabulary, this means a distinction by audience-based attributes in the same category.

### **4.3.3 Theme 3: Brand Adaptation Across Platforms**

The five brand representatives confirmed that storytelling strategies were consciously differentiated by platform and cohort. TikTok was used for virality and informality, while Instagram was used for aesthetics, CSR narratives, and lasting impression. Brand Representative A stated, “TikTok’s viral nature suits Gen Z; Instagram is for storytelling and CSR.” Brand

Representative B added, “We adapt tone, humour, and visuals per audience.” Brand Representative C noted, “For DyLuri, short fun videos attract youth, but Instagram builds brand trust.”

From the above, condensed units such as “*adapt tone*,” “*viral*,” “*CSR*,” formed the latent theme platform-sensitive storytelling. This adaptation represents what Graneheim & Lundman (2004) describe as *contextual meaning variation*, how a core phenomenon (storytelling) shifts expression across environments. The latent significance is *strategic calibration*—brands adjusting semiotic style to fit generational interpretive communities.

#### **4.3.4 Integrative Commentary for Objective 3**

Analysing differences between Gen Z and Millennials on the two platforms offers the following interpretative insights:

- Gen Z: involvement through being, activities, and laughter—giving priority to novelty, rapidness, and peer genuineness.
- Millennials: involvement through presenting and providing—giving priority to beauty, thoroughness, and ethical consistency.
- Brands: they are the storytellers connecting the worlds of these two interpretive ecosystems and making the messages understandable.

The hidden message connecting the above patterns is adaptive storytelling, the strategic interplay of fun and professionalism to keep different generations engaged. In the words of Schreier (2012), the coherence of qualitative categories determines their legitimacy; the present analysis reveals coherent distinctions based on interaction norms and platform traits that are observable.

#### 4.4 CROSS-OBJECTIVE SYNTHESIS

Various interpretative threads that unify come to the front across the three objectives:

- ***UGC as Experiential Narrative:***

User-generated content turns marketing into a live demonstration. By using real, first-hand visuals, consumers take on the role of narrators and, in a way, become the brand's promise. Clearly, manifest expressions disappear in the active concept proof through participation, e.g., "showing," "trying," or "sharing" are compressed to the latent concept of proof through participation.

- ***Engagement as Emotional-Cognitive Cycle:***

Engagement starts with affective resonance, the next step is cognitive appraisal, and it grows up to behavioural participation. Authenticity is the tie that each stage has, and it connects emotion and cognition into trust-based reciprocity.

- ***Platform and Generational Mediation:***

TikTok fosters immediacy, remix culture, and humour—are things Gen Z likes. On the other hand, Instagram stimulates pondering, aesthetic framing, and informational depth, things Millennials like. Finally, brands operate in these areas through adaptive calibration, the precision tuning of tone and narrative structure to correspond with community expectations.

- ***The Co-Creation Loop:***

Influencers seed → consumers remix → brands amplify → communities validate → brands evolve. This loop transforms storytelling into a two-way communication between the brand and the public, where the public is an active contributor to the story.

The main idea that can be found in all of the data is true co-creation. Also, brand storytelling on social media is not a result of the firm's strategy but rather a joint interpretation process of the brand and its audience. This is in line with Graneheim & Lundman (2004) who believe that interpretation finds the meaning thread running through the data and aligns with Schreier (2012) focus on systematic, transparent abstraction from concrete utterances to conceptual insight.

## **4.5 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The present section provides a detailed overview of the results in connection with empirical evidence as well as theoretical frameworks especially the Sociocultural Model of Meaning-Making, Social Learning Theory, and Consumer Engagement Theory. The main topic is to see the impact of user-generated content (UGC), influencer presence, and generational differences on brand storytelling and engagement through the two platforms, TikTok and Instagram. The results are integrated with previous studies to show the similarities and differences in consumer meaning co-creation, cognitive and emotional engagement with brand narratives and digital interpretation by different generational cohorts.

### **4.5.1 UGC and Brand Storytelling in Digital Contexts**

The study revealed that UGC acts as a joint storytelling device that helps consumers to collaboratively define the brands. Short-form videos, comments, and live interactions on TikTok and Instagram enable the users to incorporate personal experiences into the brand stories which make them more authentic and relevant. This is in line with Azman and Mustaffa (2023) results that TikTok food content's audio-visual elements and virality facilitate purchase intention and

emotional connection. UGC converts consumers from being inactive spectators to active narrators who make brands' identities by reinterpreting them creatively.

In theory, this is consistent with the Sociocultural Model of Meaning-Making, a model that describes the process of creating a common understanding through cultural interactions of the group. Symbolic participation acts as a means of authenticity legitimation and brands and consumers are co-creators of meaning in these digital communities (Vygotsky, 1978). Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1986) also points out that people copy the consumption practices of the influencers and peers whose UGC shows the "socially rewarded" actions. The process of imitation and social validation makes UGC very powerful in shaping consumer's brand story identification.

Empirically, this interpretation is backed by the studies conducted by Hayat, Hermawan, and Nuryadin (2022) as well as Pramesti and Alversia (2023), which indicate a significant impact of UGC credibility and homophily on purchase decisions and engagement. Nevertheless, the heavy dependence of these studies on TikTok and non-random samples restricts their generalizability, thereby pointing out the necessity for cross-platform comparisons. The current results add to this discussion by asserting that TikTok favours performative virality while Instagram continues to cultivate aspirational storytelling, both methods relying on UGC to make brand narratives more human and to maintain relational depth.

#### **4.5.2 Cognitive and Emotional Engagement with Influencer and UGC Content**

The research indicated that the interaction of customers with UGC and influencer content is cognitive and emotional at the same time. Users give emotional reactions to the perceived authenticity of the content and cognitive reactions to its credibility and personal relevance to them. Research done by Zahrah et al. (2024), Zhang et al. (2023), and Minh et al. (2024) among others verifies that emotional pleasure, flow experience, and perceived value are the factors that influence the intention to buy, with emotional pleasure and flow experience being the two main ways through which perceived value affects the intention. The application of the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model by Minh et al. (2024) in particular gives a strong support to the current study's assumption that UGC operates as a stimulus that determines the type of cognitive and affective responses leading finally to behavior change.

Consumer Engagement Theory postulates that engagement happens on the levels of affect, cognition and behaviour (Hollebeek, 2011). On TikTok, the algorithmic exposure makes parasocial attachment stronger, certain consumers feel that they are emotionally linked to the influencers, and so through this affective resonance, they act e.g. comment, share, or buy. The results show that emotional flow, authenticity and visual immersion are the main factors in engagement cycles; by the same token, Zhang et al. (2023) pointed out that flow and pleasure are the moderators of engagement outcomes.

Nevertheless, a good deal of the literature relies on cross-sectional quantitative designs, which mean that engagement is not fully understood as a process that evolves over time. The present reading broadens the view by regarding engagement as an ever-changing and cyclical process in

which consumers keep creating meaning together through their participation and the acknowledgment they get within the social networks. This is similar to the Social Learning Theory where a consumer's repeated exposure to the influencer's norms leads to the internalization of the consumption practices and the Sociocultural Model that views engagement as a culturally rooted digital behaviour.

#### **4.5.3 Generational Differences in Brand Interpretation and Engagement**

The outcomes of the research reveal that there are differences between the interpretative and engagement perspectives of Millennials and Gen Z in the case of UGC-supported brand storytelling. Moreover, Ramos and Ramos (2025) reveal that the credibility and usefulness of UGC vary as to which generation is affected by them, with Gen Z predominantly depending on visual authenticity and influencer relatability, whereas Millennials are more inclined towards the provision of informational depth and alignment with values. These distinctions have their source in different digital socialization: for example, Gen Z who are used to working with media that permit active participation, expect storytelling that is quick, interactive and of the same nature as that of the brand they are dealing with; on the other hand, Millennials turn out to be looking for brand values that are consistent and experiential depth.

In support of this, Kamkankaew, Thongyoy, and Phonracharnon (2024) mentioned that in the case of TikTok, digital celebrities and real content were the main factors motivating Gen Z and Emotions and Peer Validation; the driving forces behind their fast purchase behavior. Moreover, the research conducted by Hu et al. (2017) and Bowden et al. (2018) has also brought to light the fact that emotional expression and brand equity are the main engagement factors in the online

world but they do not target the specific generation that is affected. The present research contributes to the existing literature by presenting the generational differences through the Sociocultural Model, regarding digital behavior as technology-based culture.

Differences in engagement among generations are also consistent with the principles of Social Learning Theory. The new generation usually learns by watching, imitating, and trusting the influencers and the group while the older one learns by thinking and analysing whether the brand's presentation is consistent and socially responsible. The differences suggest that TikTok's lively and interactive atmosphere is more suitable for Gen Z while Millennials' desire for brand stories that are meaningful and value-based is satisfied through Instagram's aesthetic appeal.

#### **4.5.4 Integrative and Theoretical Interpretation**

Bringing together the three aims, the results indicate that digital brand storytelling is a combination of UGC, influencer credibility and generational culture. TikTok and Instagram are not simply marketing tools but rather participatory ecosystems where brands and users collaborate in forming the meaning. Such a viewpoint not only supports UGC literature but as well establishes it as a cultural discourse rather than a marketing technique through which narratives are developed via audience participation, peer endorsement and algorithmic amplification.

In theory, the findings affirm that Sociocultural Meaning-Making is the process through which digital storytelling becomes a collective work of art. The Social Learning Theory gives an explanation for the behavior normalization of branded practices by means of observation,

imitation, and reinforcement. Consumer Engagement Theory on the other hand amalgamates these theories to illustrate that the emotional and cognitive investments of the consumers result in their lifetime loyalty to the brand. Thus, they all together offer a multi-faceted comprehension of the way the social media ecosystems keep the participatory branding alive.

On the methodological side, the existing studies have been piling up single-platform, cross-sectional, and purposive designs which have severely restricted the longitudinal insight. The future researches should move forward with mixed or comparative methodologies to keep track of the changing UGC engagement patterns across different platforms and generations. By adding qualitative analysis, the consumers' symbolic and identity-based meanings in the digital spaces can be revealed.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.0 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter has provided a rigorous interpretive analysis of a set of 15 interviews that investigated the impact of user-generated content and influencer activity on Instagram and TikTok on brand storytelling and consumer engagement. In accordance with Schreier (2012), Graneheim, and Lundman (2004), the data were meticulously condensed, coded, categorized, and then abstracted into themes that altogether elucidate the phenomenon of social-media-based brand co-creation.

#### **5.1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

The research aimed at looking into the impact of user-generated content (UGC) and influencer posts on Instagram and TikTok on the brand's narrative and the consumers' participation/events. The research method used was a combination of semi-structured interviewing of content creators, social media users, and brand representatives for a total of fifteen interviews, the data from which were analysed by means of qualitative content analysis (Schreier, 2012; Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). When analysed, it became obvious that the creation of brand meaning on digital platforms is a community-driven and multi-tiered process affected by emotional, cognitive, and behavioural interactions.

To start with, UGC is the main way to show the brands are real and authentic. The influencers and brand representatives pointed out that showing products in actual situations rather than through a clearly highlighted ad makes the brands win the trust of consumers. Visual evidence, e.g., "before-and-after" demonstrations, routine integration, and personal transformations, helped the audience

to co-create the brand's narrative. Such a conclusion is built on the concept of experiential narrative, where the hidden meaning reaches far beyond the product characteristics to lived authenticity (Schreier, 2012).

Second, the investigation revealed the collaborative story-building process which was characterized by, as, a "seed and remix" process by the respondents. Influencers are the ones who start the stories, consumers remix them, and the brands contribute to the resulting content. This cyclical co-creation progressively reduces the traditional producer-consumer divide and instead, creates a dialogic process where brand meaning is collectively formed. The latent themes like participatory narrative highlight the depth of interpretation that is made possible through audience's participation in brand storytelling (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004).

Thirdly, symbolic meaning and identity construction were the main factors that drove consumer engagement. The products were associated with certain characteristics like confidence, motivation, and empowerment, which are typical of the consumers' identities. In this manner, the brands become the means for personal and group representation. User-generated content promotes symbolic self-extension; thus, the users are enabled to express their values, lifestyles, and dreams through their participation.

Additionally, the study expressed a sequential for consumer engagement but nevertheless a cyclical process. The emotional resonance was characterized by the entry point that caught the attention and created the affective bond. In the next step, the participants were involved in cognitive appraisal where they were assessing content credibility, significance, and genuineness.

The outcome of this appraisal was behavioural response through likes, comments, content sharing, and brand tagging. The mediators' authenticity and trust were at the core of this engagement process, and thus, the participants moved from being passive consumers to active co-creators.

The differences between the generations also influenced the strategies for interpretation and engagement. Generation Z audience was the most active not only in TikTok but also in creating platforms for spontaneous, humorous, and remix culture, which were content made up of trendy, casual, and interactive elements. On the other hand, the Millennials were the main audience for more reflective, curated, and informative storytelling on Instagram, as they paid attention to visuals, credibility, and storytelling flow. The brands changed their tactics according to the channels they were using, showing that they used adaptive storytelling, that they were aligning their semiotic style with generational expectations while keeping the overall brand coherence.

## **5.2 CONCLUSIONS**

This research shows that User-Generated Content (UGC) and Influencer Content are the major players in digital brand storytelling. Social media interaction is not a straight line but a complex relational and iterative process that involves emotions, thoughts, and actions. Showing realness, co-creation, and symbolic identity are the major ways in which brands communicate their meaning today. The result not only backs but also broadens Sociocultural Theory, as it shows that meaning is built through the joint practices of influencers, consumers, and brands. Social Learning Theory is additionally validated, since the audiences adopt the behaviors that are demonstrated by the influencers and become accustomed to the norms of the narrative. Consumer Engagement Theory is, thus, affirmed as engagement is recognized as a multidimensional process that includes emotional connection, cognitive evaluation, and participation. The research depicts that effective

brand storytelling is the outcome of the convergence of these theoretical dimensions in ways that are authentic, participatory, and sensitive to the platform.

Moreover, the differences between generations emphasize how necessary it is to adapt to the context. The companies are not allowed to have a one-size-fits-all strategy; they have to adjust their content in such a way that it is suitable for the smooth and trendy TikTok fun with Gen Z, while maintaining aesthetic consistency and informational richness on Instagram with Millennials. The proof is that the combination of generational culture, platform characteristics, and content authenticity is a key factor in building trust and achieving long-term engagement.

## **5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Projected by the UGC, influencer activity, and brand storytelling on Instagram and TikTok, the research results recommend the following to practitioners, academics, and future researchers.

### **5.3.1 Practical Recommendations for Brands**

- Leverage Co-Creation Through UGC and Influencers

Veritably, the brands should stimulate, in an active manner, the consumers to take part in the storytelling by producing the content and sharing it. Mixing influencer-generated content with user submissions should be the main focus of the campaigns. Moreover, it should be done in a manner that emphasizes the demonstration and experiential proof rather than the scripted persuasion, which is the way of letting the audience co-author the brand narrative. Participants' evidence indicated that authenticity is the driving force of trust and engagement between the brand and the user.

- Adapt Storytelling to Generational Preferences and Platform Affordances

The research has noticed a significant contrast between Gen Z and Millennials in regard to audience preferences. For Gen Z, TikTok's short, playful, trend-driven content is an excellent way to attract and keep their participation as well as to create a viral effect. Meanwhile, for the Millennials, Instagram's reflective, curated, and informational content is the best way to gain their trust and attract engagement that is not only casual but also thoughtful. Therefore, brands have to be very clever in aligning their tone, format, and messaging not only with the expectations of the respective generation and platform but also with the actual consumer and platform dynamics.

- Put Authenticity and Credibility First in Partnerships

Trust was revealed to be the main intermediary connecting emotional appeal, cognitive evaluation, and acting out. It is advisable for brands to partner with influencers who are actually using their products and do not allow for excessive and very direct endorsements. Such a strategy reinforces credibility in the relationship and, at the same time, makes the audiences think that the content is trustworthy and, hence, the audience is active.

- Establish Continuous Feedback and Engagement Loops

The brands need to keep track of the audience's reactions, remix the user-generated content that the audience loves the most, and tell the stories that are successful. This not only closes the co-creation loop—wherein influencers generate the ideas, audiences modify them, and brands push the content that has been validated—but also keeps the engagement going and the brand's cultural relevance on a strong level.

#### **5.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND FUTURE RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study presents a number of limitations that indicate pathways for future investigations. The investigation's concentration on Instagram and TikTok impedes comprehension of co-created brand storytelling on other sites. It is suggested that subsequent research analyses, at least, the already mentioned platforms and possibly others, like X and up-and-coming social media, to find out if the same engagement patterns occur. Additionally, the research did not take into account the role of the platform's algorithms in terms of visibility, remixability, and amplification of content. Scholars should investigate how such factors come into play regarding participation and co-creation. Lastly, the research did not monitor engagement repeatedly over time. The matter of whether repeated participation results in brand loyalty, advocacy, or cultural impact needs to be settled through longitudinal studies.

## REFERENCES

- Adams, W. C. (2015). "Conducting semi-structured interviews." In *Handbook of Practical Program Evaluation* (4th ed., pp. 492–505).
- Alcántara-Pilar, J. M., Rodríguez-López, M. E., Kalinić, Z., & Liébana-Cabanillas, F. (2024). From likes to loyalty: Exploring the impact of influencer credibility on purchase intentions in TikTok. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 78, 103709.
- Alcántara-Pilar, J. M., Rodríguez-López, M. E., Kalinić, Z., & Liébana-Cabanillas, F. (2024). From likes to loyalty: Exploring the impact of influencer credibility on purchase intentions in TikTok. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 78, 103709.
- Azman, F. A. M., & Mustaffa, N. (2023). The impact of user generated content on food purchase intention through Tiktok platform. *Al-i'lam-Journal of Contemporary Islamic Communication and Media*, 3(2).
- Azman, F. A. M., & Mustaffa, N. (2023). The impact of user generated content on food purchase intention through Tiktok platform. *Al-i'lam-Journal of Contemporary Islamic Communication and Media*, 3(2).
- Babbie, E. (2020). *The practice of social research* (15th ed.). Cengage Learning.
- Bowden, J. L. H., Conduit, J., Hollebeek, L. D., Luoma-aho, V., & Solem, B. A. A. (2018). The role of social capital in shaping consumer engagement within online brand communities. *The handbook of communication engagement*, 491-504.
- Bowden, J. L. H., Conduit, J., Hollebeek, L. D., Luoma-aho, V., & Solem, B. A. A. (2018). The role of social capital in shaping consumer engagement within online brand communities. *The handbook of communication engagement*, 491-504.
- Braun & Clarke (2021) – SAGE catalog listing (Oct 2021 publication date): SAGE Publications Ltd.

- Bryman, A. (2016). *Social research methods* (5th ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Creswell & Creswell (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2016). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- DataReportal. (2025, January). *Digital 2025: Ghana*. DataReportal. <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-ghana>
- Etikan, I., Musa, S. A., & Alkassim, R. S. (2016). Comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*, 5(1), 1–4.
- Global South Live. (2025, March 6). *YouTube and Facebook lead in user engagement in Ghana for 2025*. Global South Live. <https://globalsouth.live/2025/03/06/youtube-and-facebook-lead-in-user-engagement-in-ghana-for-2025>
- Graneheim, U. H., & Lundman, B. (2004). *Qualitative content analysis in nursing research: Concepts, procedures and measures to achieve trustworthiness*. *Nurse Education Today*, 24(2), 105–112. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2003.10.001>
- Graneheim, U. H., & Lundman, B. (2004). *Qualitative content analysis in nursing research: Concepts, procedures and measures to achieve trustworthiness*. *Nurse Education Today*, 24(2), 105–112. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2003.10.001>
- HAYAT, M. A., HERMAWAN, A., & NURYADIN, A. (2022). The Influence of Social Media Marketing and User-Generated Content (UGC) on Luxcrime Product Purchase Decisions

- on Generation Z on Tiktok. *Journal of Information Systems, Digitization and Business*, 1(1), 23-33.
- HAYAT, M. A., HERMAWAN, A., & NURYADIN, A. (2022). The Influence of Social Media Marketing and User-Generated Content (UGC) on Luxcrime Product Purchase Decisions on Generation Z on Tiktok. *Journal of Information Systems, Digitization and Business*, 1(1), 23-33.
- Hu, G., Bhargava, P., Fuhrmann, S., Ellinger, S., & Spasojevic, N. (2017, November). Analyzing users' sentiment towards popular consumer industries and brands on twitter. In *2017 IEEE International conference on Data mining workshops (ICDMW)* (pp. 381-388). IEEE.
- Hu, G., Bhargava, P., Fuhrmann, S., Ellinger, S., & Spasojevic, N. (2017, November). Analyzing users' sentiment towards popular consumer industries and brands on twitter. In *2017 IEEE International conference on Data mining workshops (ICDMW)* (pp. 381-388). IEEE.
- Hudon, C., Chouinard, M.-C., Bisson, M., Danish, A., Karam, M., Girard, A., Bossé, P.-L., & Lambert, M. (2021). Case study with a participatory approach: Rethinking pragmatics of stakeholder engagement for implementation research. *Annals of Family Medicine*, 19(6), 540–546. <https://doi.org/10.1370/afm.2717>
- Israel, G. D. (1992). *Determining sample size*. University of Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agriculture Sciences, EDIS.
- Kallio, H., Pietilä, A.-M., Johnson, M., & Kangasniemi, M. (2016). Systematic methodological review: developing a framework for a qualitative semi-structured interview guide. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 72(12), 2954–2965. <https://doi.org/10.1111/JAN.13031>
- Kamkankaew, P., Thongyoy, P., & Phonracharnon, Y. (2024). Assessing the Impact of Digital Celebrities and Content Marketing on TikTok's Impulse Purchases in Lampang, Thailand. *International Journal of Sociologies and Anthropologies Science Reviews*, 4(3), 259-276.

- Kamkankaew, P., Thongyoy, P., & Phonracharnon, Y. (2024). Assessing the Impact of Digital Celebrities and Content Marketing on TikTok's Impulse Purchases in Lampang, Thailand. *International Journal of Sociologies and Anthropologies Science Reviews*, 4(3), 259-276.
- Katz, E., Blumler, J. G., & Gurevitch, M. (1973). Uses and gratifications research. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 37(4), 509–523. <https://doi.org/10.1086/268109>
- Korstjens, I., & Moser, A. (2018). Practical guidance to qualitative research. Part 4: Trustworthiness and publishing. *European Journal of General Practice*, 24(1), 120–124. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13814788.2017.1375092>
- Kumar, R. (2019). *Research methodology: A step-by-step guide for beginners* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Maxwell, J. A. (2013). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Minh, N. H., Hai, L. S., Phi, N. A., Duyen, L. B. T., & Giang, L. T. Q. (2024). The impact of TikTok UGC videos on online purchase intention: Mediating role of cognitive states. *Pacific Asia Journal of the Association for Information Systems*, 16(1), 7.
- Minh, N. H., Hai, L. S., Phi, N. A., Duyen, L. B. T., & Giang, L. T. Q. (2024). The impact of TikTok UGC videos on online purchase intention: Mediating role of cognitive states. *Pacific Asia Journal of the Association for Information Systems*, 16(1), 7.
- National Courrier. (2025, March 6). *YouTube and Facebook dominate social media presence in Ghana in 2025*. National Courrier. <https://nationalcourrier.com/2025/03/06/youtube-and-facebook-dominate-social-media-presence-in-ghana-in-2025>
- Neuman, W. L. (2014). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (7th ed.). Pearson.

- Nowell, L., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria. *The International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16(1), 160940691773384. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847>
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Polit, D. F., & Beck, C. T. (2012).** *Nursing research: Generating and assessing evidence for nursing practice* (9th ed.). Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.
- Pramesti, K. D., & Alversia, Y. (2023, September). The Influence of Attitude Toward User Generated Content (UGC) in TikTok on Purchase Intention. In *7th Global Conference on Business, Management, and Entrepreneurship (GCBME 2022)* (pp. 630-639). Atlantis Press.
- Pramesti, K. D., & Alversia, Y. (2023, September). The Influence of Attitude Toward User Generated Content (UGC) in TikTok on Purchase Intention. In *7th Global Conference on Business, Management, and Entrepreneurship (GCBME 2022)* (pp. 630-639). Atlantis Press.
- Ramos, E. C., & Ramos, C. M. (2025). User-Generated Content and Its Impact on Purchase Intent for Tourism Products: A Comparative Analysis of Millennials and Centennials on TikTok. *Future Internet*, 17(3), 105.
- Ramos, E. C., & Ramos, C. M. (2025). User-Generated Content and Its Impact on Purchase Intent for Tourism Products: A Comparative Analysis of Millennials and Centennials on TikTok. *Future Internet*, 17(3), 105.
- Robson, C., & McCartan, K. (2016). *Real world research* (4th ed.). Wiley.
- Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (2012). *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications. [https://methods.sagepub.com/book/mono/preview/qualitative-interviewing.pdf?utm\\_](https://methods.sagepub.com/book/mono/preview/qualitative-interviewing.pdf?utm_)

- Salkind, N. J. (Ed.). (2010).** *Encyclopedia of research design* (Vols. 1–3). SAGE Publications.  
<https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/encyclopedia-of-research-design/book232149>
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2016). *Research methods for business students* (7th ed.). Pearson Education.
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2019).** *Research Methods for Business Students* (8th ed.). Pearson.
- Schreier, M. (2012). *Qualitative Content Analysis in Practice*. SAGE Publications.
- Schreier, M. (2012). *Qualitative Content Analysis in Practice*. SAGE Publications.
- Schwandt, T. A. (2015).** *The SAGE Dictionary of Qualitative Inquiry* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Stets, J. E., & Burke, P. J. (2000). Identity theory and social identity theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 63(3), 224–237. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2695870>
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33–47). Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole.
- Teddlie, C. and Tashakkori, A. (2009). *Foundations of Mixed Methods Research: Integrating Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches in the Social and Behavioral Sciences*. Sage, London.
- Teddlie, C., & Yu, F. (2007). Mixed methods sampling: A typology with examples. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 1(1), 77–100.
- Trochim, W. M., Donnelly, J. P., & Arora, K. (2016). *Research methods: The essential knowledge base* (2nd ed.). Cengage Learning.
- Walliman, N. (2017). *Research methods: The basics* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

- Whiting, A., & Williams, D. (2013). Why people use social media: A uses and gratifications approach. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 16(4), 362–369. <https://doi.org/10.1108/QMR-06-2013-0041>
- Yin, R. K. (2018).** *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications. <https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/case-study-research-and-applications/book250150>
- Yin, R.K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Zahrah, N., Ruzain, M. F., Sengorou, J. A., & Mat Salleh, N. S. (2024). The impact of usergenerated content and electronic word-of-mouth on consumer purchase intention: Consumer engagement as a mediator. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 14(7), 2159-2174.
- Zahrah, N., Ruzain, M. F., Sengorou, J. A., & Mat Salleh, N. S. (2024). The impact of usergenerated content and electronic word-of-mouth on consumer purchase intention: Consumer engagement as a mediator. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 14(7), 2159-2174.
- Zhang, W., Zhang, W., & Daim, T. U. (2023). Investigating consumer purchase intention in online social media marketing: A case study of Tiktok. *Technology in Society*, 74, 102289.
- Zhang, W., Zhang, W., & Daim, T. U. (2023). Investigating consumer purchase intention in online social media marketing: A case study of Tiktok. *Technology in Society*, 74, 102289.
- Zhao, H., & Wagner, C. (2024). Factors influencing TikTok-based user purchase intention: comparison between potential customers and repeat customers. *Internet Research*, 34(6), 1901-1931.

Zhao, H., & Wagner, C. (2024). Factors influencing TikTok-based user purchase intention: comparison between potential customers and repeat customers. *Internet Research*, 34(6), 1901-1931.

# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### INTERVIEW GUIDE: CONSUMERS/USERS (10 PARTICIPANTS)

#### Introductory Script

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study on “**Analysing the Role of Social Media in Shaping Brand Narratives and Consumer Engagement.**” This interview aims to explore your experiences with brand-related content on Instagram and TikTok. There are no right or wrong answers; we only want your honest views.

Your responses will remain confidential and will be used solely for academic purposes. The interview should take about 45–60 minutes. With your consent, the conversation will be audio-recorded for accuracy.

#### Do you consent to proceed?

#### Section A: Background Information

1. Could you tell me a little about yourself (e.g., age group, occupation, education, daily media usage)?
2. Which social media platform(s) do you use most often (Instagram, TikTok, others)? Why?
3. On average, how much time do you spend daily on Instagram and/or TikTok?
4. Can you briefly describe your usual activities on these platforms (e.g., viewing content, posting, following brands, engaging with influencers)?

#### Section B: User-Generated Content (UGC) and Brand Narratives

5. From your perspective, how do users contribute to brand storytelling on Instagram and TikTok?
6. Can you describe any experience where you or someone you know created content (Posts, reels, TikToks) related to a brand? What motivated it?
7. How do you think influencers and regular users (peers) work together, directly or indirectly, in shaping a brand’s story?
8. In your opinion, which type of content (brand official posts, influencer content, or user-generated content) feels more authentic and why?

#### Section C: Consumer Engagement – Cognitive and Emotional Responses

9. When you come across brand-related posts from influencers or peers, what usually catches your attention first?
10. Can you describe how you typically react (emotionally or cognitively) when you see a brand story online? For example, do you feel inspired, sceptical, entertained, or indifferent?
11. Could you share an example of a post that influenced your opinion or decision about a brand?

12. In what ways do you engage with brand-related content (liking, commenting, sharing, creating content, following links, or making a purchase)?
13. What role does trust play in your decision to engage with influencer or UGC brand content?

**Section D: Generational Differences in Brand Narrative Interpretation**

14. Do you think people in your age group (Gen Z or Millennials) engage differently with brand stories compared to other generations? Could you give an example?
15. How do you think Gen Z and Millennials differ in interpreting influencer posts and user-generated content on TikTok versus Instagram?
16. Which platform (TikTok or Instagram) do you believe is more effective in creating meaningful brand narratives for your generation? Why?

**Section E: Closing Reflections**

17. In your opinion, what makes a brand story on TikTok or Instagram successful?
18. What suggestions would you give brands seeking to improve consumer engagement through social media?
19. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences with social media brand content?

## APPENDIX B

### INTERVIEW GUIDE B: BRAND COMMUNICATION/MARKETING STAFF

#### Introductory Script

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study on “**Analysing the Role of Social Media in Shaping Brand Narratives and Consumer Engagement.**” This interview seeks to understand how brands use Instagram and TikTok to shape stories and engage consumers. There are no right or wrong answers; your professional experiences and views are what matter.

Your responses will remain confidential and will be used solely for academic purposes. The interview should take about 45–60 minutes. With your consent, the conversation will be audio-recorded for accuracy.

#### Do you consent to proceed?

#### Section A: Background Information

1. Could you tell me a little about your role in the brand/organization?
2. How long have you worked in brand communication or digital marketing?
3. Which social media platform(s) does your brand focus on most (Instagram, TikTok, others)? Why?

#### Section B: Brand Narratives and Storytelling Strategies

4. How does your brand use TikTok and Instagram to shape narratives and engage consumers?
5. To what extent do you rely on influencers or user-generated content to drive brand Storytelling?
6. How do you decide which type of content (official posts, influencer content, or UGC) to prioritize in your campaigns?
7. Can you share an example of a campaign where UGC or influencer partnerships shaped your brand narrative effectively?

#### Section C: Consumer Engagement – Observations and Strategies

8. From your professional perspective, what kinds of consumer responses (emotional or cognitive) do you usually observe when they engage with brand-related content?
9. How does your team encourage interaction (likes, comments, shares, user content creation) on social media platforms?
10. What role does authenticity and trust play in building engagement through influencers and UGC?

#### **Section D: Generational Engagement Differences**

11. In your experience, how do Gen Z and Millennials differ in engaging with your brand's content on Instagram and TikTok?
12. Which platform (TikTok or Instagram) do you find more effective in connecting with Gen Z versus Millennials, and why?
13. How do you adapt your brand narrative strategies to suit different generational cohorts?

#### **Section E: Challenges and Reflections**

14. What challenges do you face in co-creating narratives with influencers and users?
15. How do you measure consumer cognitive and emotional engagement with your brand's social media content?
16. In your opinion, what makes a brand story on TikTok or Instagram successful?
17. What suggestions would you give for improving consumer engagement with brand narratives on social media?

#### **Section F: Closing**

18. Is there anything else you would like to share about your brand's use of social media for storytelling and engagement?