

# Research on the Impact of Short Video Platform Features on Brand Engagement among Generation Z

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**Abstract:** The rapid development of mobile internet has made short video platforms (e.g., Douyin, Kuaishou, TikTok) an indispensable medium in the daily lives of Generation Z (those born between 1995 and 2009). As "digital natives," Generation Z exhibits unique consumer behaviors and brand perception patterns, garnering significant attention from both academia and industry. This study focuses on the core functional features of short video platforms, including personalized content recommendation, interactive functions (likes, comments, shares), and user-generated content (UGC), to explore their impact on brand engagement among Generation Z. Using in-depth interviews, the study captures Generation Z users' subjective experiences and employs three-level coding for qualitative analysis. The findings reveal that the content recommendation mechanism of short video platforms enhances the relevance and resonance between users and brand content, significantly improving brand awareness and emotional connection. The multi-dimensional interactive functions of these platforms provide Generation Z users with convenient and frequent channels for participation, fostering brand communities and facilitating information sharing among users, thereby increasing brand engagement. In brand communication processes, UGC transforms users from mere consumers into co-creators of brand content, strengthening brand-user stickiness and loyalty. The study provides practical guidance for companies in developing brand marketing strategies in the era of short video platforms and offers theoretical insights for brand research in the context of Generation Z.

**Keywords:** Short video platform features, Generation Z, Brand engagement, User-generated content, Interactive functions.

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## 1. Introduction

The widespread adoption of smartphones and mobile internet has provided the foundational conditions for the rapid rise of short video platforms, which have emerged as a new form of social media. Against this backdrop, Generation Z, often regarded as "digital natives," has grown to become the most representative digital generation, exhibiting a higher dependency on digital media than any other generation. Compared with traditional consumers, Generation Z's demand for consumer experience is more personalized, diversified, and immediate. Short video platforms are not only a way for them to obtain information and entertainment, but also a medium for them to interact, express their views and create content [1]. By liking, commenting, reposting and even creating their own content, Generation Z is gradually transforming from passive brand takers to important players in brand communication and value co-creation. This two-way interactive mode breaks through the limitation of one-way communication of "brand-consumer" in traditional marketing, and enables users to play a more active role in the process of brand communication [2].

Most of the existing relevant studies focus on how short video platforms affect users' purchase decisions and brand exposure, but there is still a lack of systematic discussion on the internal relationship between platform functions and brand engagement [3, 4]. Brand engagement can be understood as the user's comprehensive investment in the brand at the three levels of cognition, emotion, and behavior, which directly affects the building of brand image and the long-term improvement of brand loyalty. In the context of digital marketing, clarifying how the core functions of short video platforms (personalized recommendations, interactive mechanisms, user-generated content) affect the brand

engagement of Generation Z users will help enrich relevant theoretical research and provide a more practical reference for enterprises' digital marketing strategies.

This study aims to fill the gap in this research field. Through in-depth interviews and qualitative analysis, this paper focuses on the impact of short video platform functions on the participation behavior in brand engagement among Generation Z and explores the mediating role of users' sense of immersion and participation in this process. The core question of the study is: How does the function of the short video platform shape the brand engagement behavior of Generation Z? What mechanistic roles do immersion and engagement play in this process?

The research results not only provide empirical support for the formulation of brand marketing strategies, but also provide a theoretical reference for the academic community to gain a deeper understanding of the brand participation behavior of Generation Z and its influencing factors.

## 2. Literature Review

The short video platform relies on both short and long video formats to meet the needs of users for fragmented information and entertainment, and brings a fast and convenient content consumption experience. Existing research points out that the core functions of such platforms are mainly focused on personalized recommendations, interactive functions, and user-generated content (UGC) creation. Personalized recommendation can accurately identify user interests and preferences through algorithms, to improve degree of matching between brand information and users, which not only improves the efficiency of information dissemination, but also enhances user stickiness to the content. The interactive function provides users with a variety of ways

to participate, such as liking, commenting and forwarding, establishing a more direct communication channel between users and brands, and promoting two-way interaction between brands and users. At the same time, with the emergence of UGC, users are no longer limited to the role of passively receiving information, but further become content creators and brand value co-builders, and this process has injected more diversified perspectives and possibilities for brand communication.

In the theory of Brand communication, Brand Engagement is regarded as a key concept to measure the degree of consumer engagement, which is a comprehensive performance of users in three dimensions of cognition, emotion and behavior [5]. From the perspective of cognition, brand engagement refers to users' attention and understanding of brand information; The emotional level reflects the user's attitude and emotional dependence on the brand. In terms of behavior, brand engagement is reflected in users' sharing of brand-related information, interaction and purchasing decisions [6]. The improvement of brand participation can not only help the brand to further shape its own image, but also consolidate the brand loyalty of users to a certain extent, and provide support for the sustainable and steady development of the brand in the fierce market competition.

It is worth noting that Generation Z, as the core user group of the current short video platform, grew up in the era of highly developed social media and mobile Internet, and showed a high preference for short video platform [7]. This group pays more attention to diversified content experience and personalized needs, tends to interact with brands, and seeks emotional resonance and value recognition in the interaction [8]. The research results show that Generation Z is more open in the way of receiving brand information on short video platforms, and their sense of immersion and participation will have a greater impact on brand participation behavior.

Although some studies have preliminarily discussed the role of short video platforms in brand communication, there are still limitations in the systematic analysis of the mechanism of platform function and its relationship with the engagement of Generation Z brands [9]. There is a lack of in-depth research on the synergistic effect of personalized recommendation, interactive function and user generated content (UGC). In addition, at present, in terms of qualitative research, the discussion on the subjective experience of Generation Z is insufficient, and it is difficult to fully reveal the internal logic of the formation of brand engagement. Therefore, this study focuses on the combination of the function of short video platform and the psychological mechanism of Generation Z. By conducting in-depth interviews and qualitative analysis, the corresponding theoretical framework is constructed to provide useful theoretical reference for the expansion of brand engagement research and practical application.

### **3. Theoretical Framework and Research Hypotheses**

Based on the media availability theory and brand engagement theory, this study builds a research framework to explore the impact of personalized recommendation function, interactive function and UGC creation on brand engagement of Generation Z users. This study takes the immersion and

participation of Generation Z users as the mediating variables to investigate their strengthening role in the relationship between platform functions and brand engagement. The technical route is illustrated in Figure 1.

The functional characteristics of short video platforms play a critical role in enhancing users' sense of immersion and participation, thereby influencing the level of interaction between users and brands. Through accurate analysis of users' interests and preferences, personalized recommendation algorithm can effectively match users' preferred content and further improve the frequency and relevance of users' contact with brand information. This content push mechanism strengthens the user's cognition of the brand to a certain extent, but also promotes the emotional investment more deeply. Based on this background, this study proposes the following hypothesis: H1: Content personalized recommendation has a positive impact on brand engagement among Generation Z groups.

The functions of "like", "comment", "forward" and "live interaction" provided by the short video platform provide diversified paths for users to participate in brand activities. These interactive mechanisms can effectively increase the frequency of communication between users and brands, and gradually deepen the connection between the two sides in the process of communication. Through these interactive ways, users gradually find emotional identification and belonging in the brand community, to more actively participate in brand-related activities and show higher participation. Based on the above analysis, this study proposes hypothesis H2: the improvement and diversification of interactive functions can have a positive impact on the brand engagement of Generation Z users.

User-generated content (UGC) empowers users with initiative in the brand communication process, making them no longer passive recipients of information, but co-creators of branded content. This shift in roles gives users a sense of accomplishment in content creation and a deeper emotional connection with the brand. This interactive experience helps to increase user engagement with the brand and further promote brand loyalty. Based on this, this study proposes the hypothesis H3: UGC creation has a significant positive impact on brand engagement of Generation Z users.

The impact of platform functions on brand engagement depends on the user's sense of immersion and participation in the use process, which constitute the key psychological mechanisms. The sense of immersion refers to the user's continuous attention to the brand content, while the sense of engagement is expressed in the active interaction and content creation. When the platform functions effectively stimulate these two psychological experiences of users, users are more likely to establish a deep connection with the brand and show a higher level of brand engagement. Based on this, hypothesis H4 is proposed in this study: immersion and engagement play a mediating role between short video platform functions and brand engagement.

Based on the above hypothesis system, this study explores the mechanism of how the core functions of short video platforms affect the participation of Generation Z brands through psychological mechanisms. Through such systematic analysis, the research aims to provide theoretical support for the formulation of brand marketing strategy and provide reference guidance for practical operation.



Figure 1. Technical Route

## 4. Research Design

This study aims to explore how short video platform functions affect brand engagement among Generation Z users through immersion and engagement. In order to achieve this goal, the research adopts the qualitative research method of in-depth interview combined with third-level coding to dig deeply into the subjective experience and internal mechanism of Generation Z users.

### 4.1. Research Methods and Participants

This study combines the strengths of in-depth interviews and three-level coding analysis. In-depth interviews, as a qualitative research method, effectively capture respondents' subjective experiences and personal insights, making them well-suited to the exploratory nature of this research, which demands detailed and nuanced data. The three-level coding method systematically organizes, synthesizes, and refines large volumes of interview data to identify core themes and patterns, facilitating the derivation of meaningful and generalizable conclusions. The combination of the two helps to fully present the mechanism of short video platform functions on brand engagement.

In terms of sample selection, the study adopts purposive sampling, mainly targeting users who meet the definition of Generation Z. Specifically, the sample selection criteria include those who were born between 1995 and 2009 and are high-frequency users of short video platforms, such as Douyin, Kuaishou, TikTok, etc., to ensure that respondents have a full understanding of the platform functions and

experience. At the same time, the research focuses on college students and new employees, this part of the group is more sensitive to brand marketing information, and brand participation is relatively active. In order to ensure the diversity and representativeness of the samples, the researcher took gender, region and educational background into consideration when selecting the interviewees, and finally selected 20 Generation Z users from Guangzhou, Shantou and Zhuhai as the interviewees.

### 4.2. Interview Implementation and Data Collection

The design of the interview outline is based on the previous literature research and research hypothesis, and the content covers three core levels. First, we focused on respondents' subjective experience and evaluation of personalized recommendations, interactive functions and UGC functions, aiming to obtain their deep understanding of short video platform functions. Secondly, the immersion and participation motivation of respondents when they contact and interact with brand information are deeply explored, and how these factors affect their behavioral responses is analyzed. Finally, the changes of brand cognition, attitude and loyalty after brand interaction were investigated to reveal the persistence and deep mechanism of the interaction effect.

The choice of interview form is mainly based on the actual convenience of the interviewees, and the way of face-to-face or online in-depth interview is adopted. Each interview lasts approximately 30 to 45 minutes, ensuring that interviewees have ample time to express their personal views and

experiences. During the interview, the researchers used open-ended questions to guide the interviewees and encourage them to describe their feelings and experiences in detail. With the consent of the interviewees, the entire interview process was recorded, and the recorded content was accurately transcribed after the interview to provide a reliable basis for subsequent data analysis.

In the data collection stage, the researchers conducted preliminary screening of the recorded and transcribed texts to eliminate irrelevant or low-quality content to ensure the validity of the selected data and the scientific analysis. At the same time, in order to ensure the security of data and the privacy of respondents, all data are securely stored in encrypted electronic means and strictly abide by the confidentiality principle.

### 4.3. Coding Analysis

In the open coding phase, the research labels the raw data around the research topic and strives to identify the core concepts and keywords related to the topic. This process helps to initially comb through the data content and uncover potential patterns in it. For example, keywords such as "algorithm recommendation", "creative desire", "sense of belonging" and "emotional identification" all reflect the multidimensional experience of users in the use of short video platforms.

Entering the axial coding stage, researchers further classify and integrate the concepts extracted in the open coding stage to form a higher-level theme or category. At this stage, the correlation between concepts becomes clear, for example, "algorithm recommendation" and "interest matching" are classified as "immersive experience brought by personalized recommendation", while interactive behaviors such as "likes", "comments" and "forwarding" are classified as "engagement enhancement promoted by interactive functions".

In the selection coding stage, the research further integrates the theme of the axis coding stage, gradually builds the theoretical framework, and clears out the logical relationship between the themes. The core of this process is to form a theoretical model by sorting out how short video platform functions affect brand engagement through users' sense of immersion and participation. Specifically, personalized recommendations, interactive features, and UGC creation enhance user immersion and engagement while helping users build deeper connections with the brand, thereby enhancing brand engagement.

Coding analysis runs through the whole process of the study, and researchers continue to compare and verify to ensure the accuracy and consistency of coding results, and finally form a stable and systematic theoretical framework. On this basis, combined with the media availability theory and brand participation theory, the research results are supported and explained theoretically to ensure that the theoretical framework is scientific and reasonable.

## 5. Research Findings

The results of this study indicate that personalized recommendation features effectively enhance users' brand awareness and immersive experiences. Interview data reveal that when users are exposed to brand content aligned with their personal interests and preferences, they tend to exhibit a stronger willingness to maintain sustained attention. In the process, the sense of immersion gradually increases, and users' viewing attitude towards the brand content is also more

positive. One respondent said, "The brand videos I see are almost always the type I like, which makes it easy for me to get involved." This result fully verifies the rationality of H1 hypothesis.

In terms of interactive function, research shows that it has a significant effect on the formation of brand community and the improvement of user participation. Several respondents pointed out that through interactive behaviors such as likes, comments and reposts, they can not only establish direct contact with the brand, but also carry out in-depth communication with other users in the comment section, and gradually create a unique brand community atmosphere. This interactive experience encourages users to more actively participate in the discussion in the comment section or interact with the brand topic, and the emotional engagement and brand attention are enhanced, thus further supporting the H2 hypothesis.

The creation process of user generated content (UGC) provides more active participation opportunities for users and has shown significant promotion effects in terms of brand co-creation and user loyalty. Research has shown that when users create brand-related UGC videos, they are able to more fully understand the values conveyed by the brand, product features, and brand connotations. In this process, the virtuous circle of "creation - feedback - re-creation" gradually formed, and the identity of users gradually changed from the receiver of the brand to the co-creator of brand communication, and at the same time, they also gained emotional satisfaction and brand identity in the creation. One interviewee mentioned that when shooting short videos related to a brand, he felt a sense of being one with the brand story. This deep emotional engagement creates stronger stickiness and loyalty to the brand, further validating H3's view.

Further analysis of the interview data reveals that immersion and engagement play a mediating role in the interaction between users and brands. When the platform functions can effectively meet users' personalized entertainment needs and interactive preferences, users are more likely to enter a state of immersion, such as watching brand content for a long time and continuously tracking brand-related dynamics. The sense of engagement is reflected in the process of users actively interacting with the brand, such as commenting, sharing or creating UGC. The emergence of these two psychological states gives full play to the advantages of platform functions, and successfully translates into users' emotional connection and behavioral investment in the brand. This process not only increased the brand's user engagement, but also provided strong support for H4's hypothesis.

## 6. Discussion and Implications

The results of this study are consistent with the existing discussions on the advantages of short video platforms in brand communication and sales promotion, and provide a new theoretical perspective for further understanding the formation mechanism of platform functions on the participation of Generation Z brands. The research shows that under the combined effect of personalized content recommendation, interactive function design and UGC incentive model, users gradually break through the traditional role of passive recipient, rebuild the relationship with the brand through deep immersion and active participation, and show a more innovative brand interaction model.

These findings provide practical reference for enterprises'

brand communication strategies. Enterprises should pay more attention to the optimization of platform functions to accurately meet the needs of generation Z users. Through in-depth cooperation with short video platforms, we can improve the algorithm recommendation mechanism, improve the fit between brand content and target users, and then promote users' continuous attention to the brand. In the design of interactive functions, enterprises need to focus on creating a positive community atmosphere, providing convenient communication and sharing space, and stimulating users' willingness to interact and express enthusiasm. In addition, at the UGC creation level, enterprises can give users the right to brand narrative through official responses, works display and other ways, encourage users to express their own understanding in a variety of ways, and gradually establish a deeper brand emotional connection and participation consciousness.

## 7. Conclusion and Future Directions

In the context of the rapid development of short video, Generation Z's brand recognition and acceptance is no longer limited to passive reception, but through continuous interaction and content creation to achieve a deeper level of participation and co-creation. Based on qualitative research, this paper reveals the impact mechanism of short video platform functions on the brand engagement of Generation Z, and finds that personalized content recommendation, interactive function design and UGC creation play a key role in enhancing user immersion and participation, and the improvement of psychological experience further promotes the growth of brand engagement.

From a theoretical point of view, the contribution of this study is to build a logical chain of "platform function-psychological mediation (immersion, participation) -brand engagement" around platform functions, which provides a new perspective and empirical support for brand marketing theories. In terms of practical application, the research results have certain reference value for enterprises' brand operation strategies on short video platforms, and help brands attract Generation Z users more accurately, retain users effectively, and stimulate their brand participation willingness by optimizing content production methods and interaction mechanisms.

Due to the qualitative research method adopted in this study,

there are certain limitations. In the future, quantitative methods such as large-scale questionnaire survey or experimental study can be used to further verify the research conclusions. In addition, cross-cultural comparative analysis can be combined to explore the possible differentiated impact of platform features in different types of brands, such as luxury goods, consumer goods, and cultural brands or non-profit organization brands.

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