

The Psychology of Short-Form Video Marketing on Consumer Behaviour

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Abstract

The emergence of short-form videos has changed the entire dynamics of marketing in digital media by changing the way brands interact with their customers. Video platforms like TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts have created whole new models of customer engagement using mechanisms like attention economy, parasocial relationships, emotional contagion, and algorithmic reinforcement. In this study, we explore the psychological aspects of marketing campaigns conducted through short-form videos and their tangible impacts on consumer behavior, such as purchase intentions, brand loyalty, information processing, and identity construction. We apply the theoretical concepts developed within cognitive psychology, behavioral learning theory, and behavioral economics to understand the relationship between the structure of short-form videos and human psychology that makes short-form videos so effective in marketing purposes. It becomes clear from our analysis that short-form video marketing relies not only on persuasion but also on priming, which poses an additional challenge to the field of ethics in marketing.

Keywords: short-form video, consumer behaviour, digital marketing psychology, TikTok, social media advertising, purchase intent, parasocial interaction, algorithmic influence

1. Introduction

Advancements in the development of smartphones and the internet have been instrumental in propelling an unparalleled shift in how people engage with media content. Short-form videos, which are videos that span anywhere from 15 to 90 seconds, have become one of the most prominent types of media content in contemporary digital

communications. According to Statista, TikTok has a user base of more than one billion monthly active users as of 2024, with Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts having tens of millions of daily users (Statista, 2024). While these applications have introduced innovative forms of entertainment, their impact is much more profound than just providing a platform for fun.

Market professionals have been quick to identify and take advantage of the distinctive psychological affordances offered by short-form video. In contrast to other forms of media where advertisements had to be sought out by consumers or ignored by them, short-form video places advertisements within entertainment feeds, thus making them much harder to consciously avoid. Psychological phenomena associated with this include attention capturing through visual stimulus, engagement through emotionally compelling story-telling, proof-through-social-engagement by means of quantified engagement metrics, and behavioral conditioning through algorithmic personalization.

In spite of the great importance of short-form video marketing in the commercial world, there is little academic knowledge available concerning psychological processes involved in it or consumer behavior outcomes related to it. Previous literature on short-form video has concentrated mainly on analytics or isolated psychological phenomena, but it has failed to integrate these findings into a general theoretical framework. It is therefore hoped that the present paper will fill this gap and provide a comprehensive psychological explanation of consumer behavior in the realm of short-form video marketing.

The structure of the paper is as follows. Section 2 deals with the theoretical background relevant to the current study. The attentional and cognitive aspects of short-form video usage are explored in Section 3. Emotion-based psychological mechanisms are studied in Section 4. The issue of algorithmic personalization is discussed in Section 5. Behavioral consequences are considered in Section 6.

2. Theoretical Foundations

2.1 The Elaboration Likelihood Model

The concept of persuasion within the context of short-form videos is best explained using the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) of Petty and Cacioppo (1986). The model states that there are two ways to change an individual's attitude toward something: one through the central route, where the individual carefully considers the arguments in the message, and the other through the peripheral route, whereby cues such as source credibility, consensus, and emotionality influence the person's attitudes. Short-form videos encourage people to use the latter more than the former due to their length. In a TikTok advertisement lasting only 15 seconds, the consumer is unlikely to analyze the message in terms of what is being said, but rather how it is said (Phua et al., 2017).

2.2 Social Learning Theory

Bandura's (1977) theory of social learning is another alternative that focuses more on the aspect of observational learning and modeling in behavioral development. Social learning is especially rich in short-form videos because content creators showcase how products can be used through realistic and aspirational behavior. For instance, when an influencer on Instagram Reels demonstrates the use of protein powder as part of their daily routine, the viewer learns more than just information about the product; they also witness a behavioral model whose way of life they aspire to replicate.

2.3 Behavioural Economics and Nudge Theory

The concept of nudges provided by Thaler and Sunstein (2008) provides additional insights into the working of short-form video marketing below the level of conscious thought. The autoplay facility that comes with most short-form video platforms is one such example of a nudge; those who do not consciously interfere will keep watching the video, which may also include advertisements. Scarcity and urgency are two such features that have been widely used by advertisers on short-form video platforms, utilizing behavioral tendencies like loss aversion and temporal discounting (Kahneman, 2011).

3. Attentional and Cognitive Mechanisms

3.1 Attention Capture and the First-Three-Second Rule

Cognitive psychology research has repeatedly shown that human attention is limited and selective (Kahneman, 1973). Short-form videos have been designed in such a way that they grab and maintain attention within an extremely short time frame. According to industry statistics, videos which do not succeed in capturing viewers' attention within the first three seconds have higher than usual drop-off rates; hence, video makers and marketers prioritize the presentation of their most captivating audio or visual cues at the beginning (Locowise, 2023). The strategy is consistent with theoretical models of attentional capture, according to which salient, novel, and emotionally charged stimuli automatically monopolize cognitive resources prior to conscious processing (Yantis & Jonides, 1984).

The ramifications for marketing campaigns are noteworthy. Through content design aimed at hijacking the involuntary processes of attention, marketers can guarantee the delivery of their messages to consumers who are ostensibly unfocused. In doing so, marketers open up several critical issues regarding how much exposure counts as informed consent for persuasive communication.

3.2 Cognitive Load and Processing Fluency

Moreover, the short form of video content utilizes the concepts of cognitive load theory (Sweller, 1988) and processing fluency (Reber et al., 2004). Since short videos require less cognitive effort than their long counterparts or text messages, they are processed effortlessly. Hence, consumers usually perceive short videos as credible without realizing the cognitive effort required for viewing them. In other words, repeated exposure to brand videos creates

familiarity-based trust among consumers. According to Zajonc (1968), familiarity-based trust arises out of the mere exposure effect.

Moreover, the combination of different modalities in the short form of video marketing allows information processing to occur along multiple pathways. Therefore, the chances of successful encoding and future retrieval increase. Dual coding theory by Paivio (1991) suggests that information coded in two different ways (such as text and images) can be remembered better than when it is coded in one modality.

4. Emotional and Social Psychological Processes

4.1 Emotional Contagion and Affective Responses

Emotion constitutes a key factor involved in consumer decision making, and short-form videos are particularly powerful mediums for evoking emotions. Emotional contagion theory proposed by Hatfield et al., (1993) explains that people tend to automatically imitate the emotions of those around them resulting in convergence of their emotional states. Given the face-to-face depiction created by close-up shots in videos posted on TikTok and Instagram Reels, the medium is highly conducive for emotional contagion – people observe authentic emotion of joy, amazement or humour from the creators who share their screen.

Empirical studies conducted by Berger & Milkman, (2012) reveal that positive emotions elicited by short-form videos correlate positively with attitudes towards brands and purchase intentions. Importantly, emotions can be evoked without cognitive processing of product features, which means that even without knowing the details of what they viewed, people may engage in purchasing products featured on such videos.

4.2 Parasocial Relationships and Influencer Marketing

Parasocial Interaction (PSI) is a concept introduced by Horton & Wohl (1956) where media consumers form one-sided relationships with public personalities. The rise of digital communication platforms has further accentuated parasocial dynamics by eroding the psychological distance between content producers and audiences. Short-form video content producers frequently engage in direct addressing of their audiences, sharing personal stories, and interacting with feedback comments, thus simulating a real-life interactive relationship experience. Studies have shown that the strength of parasocial relationships positively predicts consumer responses such as endorsement credibility, purchase intention, and brand loyalty (Lee & Watkins, 2016).

Influencer marketing, a strategy that takes advantage of parasocial interactions, has emerged as one of the leading approaches to short-form video promotions. Unlike celebrity endorsements, influencer marketing utilizes content producers who are viewed as relatable peers rather than inspirational role models, hence diminishing consumers' persuasion knowledge and skepticism (Freberg et al., 2011). Additionally, the authenticity heuristic – the assumption

that content producers genuinely endorse products based on their experience rather than business deal – is very influential in enhancing consumer trust, even when the commercial aspect of the relationship is acknowledged.

4.3 Social Proof and Normative Influence

Engagement metrics like likes, views, shares, and comments, which are frequently highlighted on short-form video apps, serve as social proof indicators (Cialdini, 2009). People employ these indicators as substitutes for quality and social acceptance, especially under uncertain conditions. The effectiveness of social proof in influencing consumer behavior is exemplified by viral products that have been identified through the 'TikTok made me buy it' effect, where the purchase behavior is driven by the normative pressure exerted by millions of users endorsing a product.

Identity-driven consumption behavior is another reason why marketers should leverage short-form video apps. These apps categorize users into taste communities based on their aesthetic sensibilities, values, and consumption practices. The purchase of goods that are representative of one's platform community is more than just a business transaction; rather, it serves as an affirmation of group membership and self-identity (Belk, 1988). Marketers that can effectively associate their products with prominent platform subcultures will be able to harness the powerful motivation that drives identity-expressive consumption behavior.

5. Algorithmic Personalisation and Behavioural Reinforcement

Certainly, one of the most psychologically impactful characteristics of short-form video applications lies in the fact that they employ advanced recommendation algorithms. The For You Page algorithm in TikTok, for instance, takes into account a wide range of behavioral indicators including watching times, video replay, interaction habits, user's phone, and geographic location to create an extremely personal content stream aimed at maximizing engagement (Stokel-Walker, 2022). As far as psychology is concerned, it can be said that such a system is similar to the variable ratio reinforcement schedule described by Skinner (1938) in his work.

The consumer scrolling through such algorithms faces a stream of material personalized according to his own psychological profile, including his vulnerability to specific emotions, his preferences for different product types, and his consumption ambitions. Personalization to this extent can greatly enhance the relevancy—and thus the persuasiveness—of the advertisement. The findings of Choi & Rifon (2012) show that advertising relevancy plays an important role in eliciting positive reactions to advertisements, especially if the personalization comes across as true to oneself and not mere surveillance.

This is further exacerbated by the filter bubble phenomenon (Pariser, 2011), which means that consumers whose algorithms find there is an economic interest in promoting the category of goods being produced will receive more content that gradually makes their consumption normal, thus affecting their views on what is considered acceptable

consumer behavior. The normalization process is subconscious and is therefore hard to fight against even when consciously analyzing the content.

6. Behavioural Outcomes and Marketing Implications

6.1 Purchase Intent and Conversion

Overall, the net result of all the psychological processes outlined here is a sizable increase in both purchase intent and conversion rate on the part of consumers. In studies focused on the correlation between viewing short-form videos and purchasing behavior, researchers have discovered a strong positive correlation in the former. For example, GlobalWebIndex reports that users of TikTok have been found to make impulsive purchases much more often than those who use other social media platforms (GlobalWebIndex, 2023). By embedding elements of social commerce into short-form videos, such as the ability to buy directly from the app, the distance between persuading the audience and converting purchases has become minimal.

6.2 Brand Awareness and Recall

Aside from its immediate impact on purchases, short-form video advertising has been shown to exhibit strong brand recall and recognition effects. The repetitive, multimodal, and emotionally stimulating characteristics of short-form videos help establish favorable environments for the establishment of brand memory. In studies involving neuroimaging techniques, emotional cues have been found to stimulate the amygdala such that they aid in the hippocampus's encoding process, leading to better memory retention than neutral or complex cognitive stimuli (McGaugh, 2004).

6.3 Ethical Considerations and Consumer Vulnerability

The psychological impact of short-form video advertising poses serious ethical issues, especially when considering vulnerable groups. Teenagers and young adults, who are disproportionately represented in short-form videos, have a lesser developed prefrontal regulation mechanism, greater susceptibility to social reinforcements, and enhanced identity formation that make them more prone to conformist effects and aspiration-based advertising tactics (Steinberg, 2008). Studies have established links between frequent social media usage and higher materialism levels, negative body image, and excessive spending habits among young users (Dittmar et al., 2007).

Marketing experts, technology companies, and policy makers share the obligation of ensuring that the psychological factors that drive short-form video marketing are not functioning in a way that continuously erodes consumer freedom and well-being. Such obligations may be met through increased transparency in sponsored videos, limits on the types of personal advertisements aimed at minors, and more efforts toward consumer digital literacy so that they can protect themselves from persuasion techniques driven by algorithms.

7. Conclusion

In this study, we have focused on understanding the processes by which short-form video marketing affects consumer behavior. These have been explained based on concepts related to attention capture, cognitive processing, emotional contagion, parasocial interaction, social proof, and algorithmic reinforcement. It has been found that short-form videos can be considered one of the most powerful mediums for marketing because they are able to activate more than one psychological system in consumers.

The ramifications for marketing practice are profound. Marketers who comprehend the nature of these psychological tactics and use them effectively are likely to gain a competitive edge in terms of consumer engagement, brand recognition, and conversion rates. Nonetheless, the ethical considerations involved in this process should not be overlooked. With the advent of new features such as augmented reality and generative AI in short-form video apps, marketers' understanding of psychology will always remain ahead of the average consumer's critical faculties.

Future research will need to examine the longitudinal impact of short-form video marketing campaigns, cultural differences in vulnerability to particular psychological persuasion techniques, and evidence-based models of ethically sound short-form video marketing strategies. Furthermore, there is a need for more research on the compounding effects of algorithmically constructed commercialized digital environments on consumer agency and well-being.

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