

Authenticity Expression in Captions and Hashtags of Beauty-Related TikTok Videos and Their Influence on User Engagement

Meiting Jing

Jiangxi Normal University Affiliated High School, Nanchang, China
verity090511@gmail.com

Abstract. Short-form video on platforms such as TikTok has become a key channel for online social communication, and the beauty industry heavily utilises this format to connect with audiences. Modern social-media users seek practical, trustworthy information online, which makes authenticity critical for building audience trust and driving user engagement. Plenty of existing research covers influencer authenticity, brand partnerships and consumer behaviour. Still, limited work explores how captions and hashtags create a sense of authenticity in TikTok beauty videos. This literature review draws on relevant social-media studies. It examines how personal experiences, emotional expression and transparent information shape perceived authenticity, and how these textual features may trigger user activities such as likes, comments and shares. Research findings indicate authentic content improves credibility and strengthens bonds between creators and followers to boost interaction. Even so, studies focusing specifically on TikTok beauty content and the authentic role of captions and hashtags remain scarce. This review highlights these research gaps and puts forward directions for future short-video-centred studies on authenticity and user engagement.

Keywords: Perceived authenticity, user engagement, beauty influencers, captions, hashtags

1. Introduction

In recent years, TikTok and other short-video platforms have grown extremely popular, reshaping how people communicate online and how brands carry out digital marketing. The beauty sector is one of the industries that has adapted most actively to this online change. Nowadays, most consumers turn to social media to gather useful guidance on skincare routines, makeup techniques and real cosmetic product feedback.

Compared with rigid, professionally produced traditional advertisements, beauty content creators offer something different. They share real product trials, personal feelings and unbiased user experiences directly with viewers, making online communication far more interactive and credible [1]. Beyond the visual footage shown in videos, written features such as captions and hashtags also play a key role in completing a full social media post. These text parts add extra details, clarify

video themes, express personal thoughts, and help creators build closer interaction with their audiences.

Content authenticity is widely regarded as a key factor that builds audience trust and encourages users to engage with posts. Highly edited, traditional advertising often feels artificial to modern viewers. In contrast, content that includes genuine experiences, honest opinions and transparent information tends to be better received across social platforms [2]. Real and sincere content helps beauty influencers develop stable emotional bonds with their followers.

Even so, existing academic research still has clear limitations. Most past studies focus heavily on influencer branding, commercial collaboration strategies, content credibility and consumers' purchase intentions [3]. Very little existing work specifically analyses how captions and hashtags convey authenticity in TikTok beauty videos, or how these textual features relate to audience engagement behaviours.

Based on the above research gaps, this study reviews relevant academic literature. It aims to explore how authentic expression is presented through text in beauty-related TikTok posts, analyse its relationship with user interaction, and summarise unresolved research problems to provide feasible directions for future academic exploration.

2. Literature review

Various scholars have interpreted authenticity from diverse standpoints. Audrezet et al. pointed out that authenticity is more than simple factual accuracy; it also includes passionate attitudes and transparent behaviour. Within brand-sponsored partnerships, content creators ought to retain genuine self-expression when disclosing their ties with cooperating brands [4]. Van Driel and Dumitrica further argued that authenticity is not an innate, fixed personal trait. Instead, it gets continuously shaped through social-media activities and commercial collaborations [5].

Later research has indicated that influencer-related authenticity is connected with consistency, individuality, and the way creators convey their personal traits [6]. Such outcomes imply that authenticity is not merely an in-built personal characteristic, but can be built through ongoing communication with audiences.

Commercial partnership represents a key theme within studies on influencer authenticity. Once creators cooperate with brands, audiences often cast doubt over whether their recommendations come from real personal views. Even so, open disclosure and appropriate communication strategies can mitigate such scepticism. Steils et al. discovered that the approaches influencers use to state sponsor partnerships can shape audience-perceived authenticity and interaction levels [7]. This demonstrates that authenticity depends not only on what creators say, but also on how they communicate with their viewers.

This viewpoint offers valuable insights for analysing beauty-themed TikTok videos. Authenticity should not be judged purely based on video footage or creators' public images. Text components carry considerable weight as well. Captions and hashtags allow creators to share personal viewpoints, real-world usage stories and inner feelings. A casual, personal writing style can shorten the psychological distance between influencers and their followers [2]. Accordingly, captions and hashtags serve as another channel for creators to display genuine personal sides.

Prior work has also proven that authenticity can drive audience behavioural responses. Walsh et al. carried out targeted research focusing on sponsored user-generated posts on TikTok. Their results showed that sponsored labels may alter perceived authenticity, whilst influencer popularity and brand scale also exert influences on audience interaction [8]. Their work supplies direct empirical proof linking authenticity to user engagement on the TikTok platform.

Other studies have also identified correlations among authenticity, perceived credibility and audience feedback. Wang and Weng reported that influencer authenticity shapes followers' credibility judgements and willingness to spread positive comments [9]. Lou and Yuan held that message value and source credibility help strengthen audience trust towards content creators [3]. Ki and Kim illustrated that online influencers can exert impacts on consumers via psychological mechanisms and follower-creator relationships [10].

Parasocial interaction offers another reasonable explanation for such correlations. Sokolova and Kefi found that influencer credibility and one-sided emotional bonds with audiences can change how users respond to online posts [11]. Reinikainen et al. also observed connections between creator credibility, parasocial ties and audience comment behaviours [12]. These findings suggest authenticity rarely generates user interaction directly. More commonly, it builds trust and credibility, improves creator-audience relations, and these intermediate factors then encourage users to interact with videos.

Studies focusing on the beauty sector support such logical connections. Garg and Bakshi noted that beauty vloggers' credibility, parasocial bonds and audience trust jointly determine consumer responses [1]. Ünalmiş et al. stated that influencer-produced content can shift perceived authenticity in beauty and personal-care markets, alongside followers' trust and overall attitudes [13]. This means authenticity and its associated variables carry particular importance for beauty-focused social-media content.

Mu et al. provided recent empirical evidence based on Weibo data. Their research revealed that mismatches between self-posted content and third-party information can change user engagement, and such effects vary depending on creator fan scale [14]. This indicates audience authenticity perceptions do shape social-media reactions, though platform differences and content categories will modify this relationship.

Despite existing studies covering authenticity and user participation, noticeable research gaps still exist. To begin with, numerous papers target platforms such as Instagram, YouTube and Weibo, while TikTok-oriented investigations remain comparatively scarce. Walsh et al. delivered useful findings regarding authenticity on TikTok [8]; nevertheless, more research is required to understand how authenticity functions across varied TikTok content categories, especially beauty-related materials.

Moreover, existing literature largely concentrates on influencer identity, popularity, credibility, brand deals and video-level content [4-7]. Comparatively speaking, less attention has been paid to text elements including captions and hashtags. These textual parts enable creators to share personal experiences and exchange ideas with followers. Still, their specific functions in constructing perceived authenticity have not been fully explored.

Additionally, plenty of past research selects dependent variables such as purchase intention, trust, word-of-mouth and brand attitudes [3, 9, 11, 13]. By contrast, concrete user interaction metrics — likes, comments, shares and saves — receive far less discussion. This gap deserves attention, since these observable behaviours reflect real-world audience reactions to short-video content. Therefore, further research is needed to explore whether different authenticity expression patterns correspond to distinct forms of user engagement.

Considering these research gaps, this literature review puts forward three research questions: (1) How does existing literature define and interpret authenticity conveyed through captions and hashtags within TikTok beauty videos? (2) According to previous findings, in what ways do authentic textual expressions in captions and hashtags influence user engagement? (3) What are the major shortcomings of current studies, and which directions can future research pursue?

3. Discussion

Past scholarly work suggests authenticity is not an in-born, fixed quality owned by influencers. On the contrary, it develops gradually out of constant exchanges between content producers and their online followers. Multiple factors shape how authentic an influencer appears to the public, for instance consistent behaviour, distinct personal characteristics, individual expressive habits and communication patterns [4-7]. When evaluating TikTok beauty videos, authenticity should not be judged merely by video visuals or the overall public image built by creators. Text posted together with video clips also plays a substantial part in forming an authentic creator image.

Captions and hashtags offer considerable room for creators to voice personal viewpoints, practical product-using experiences and true feelings. This form of text-based communication allows influencers to connect with followers in a more intimate, relaxed manner. Informal writing and personal self-disclosure can shorten psychological distance between creators and viewers and foster stronger feelings of closeness [2]. It is reasonable to argue that loose, personal text writing helps influencers project more authentic qualities via captions and hashtags. Nevertheless, most relevant conclusions come from general social-media research, and few projects specifically examine textual features within TikTok.

Brand partnership constitutes another major factor that shapes audience perceptions of authenticity. Many existing papers point out that commercial deals often create difficulties for influencers hoping to maintain genuine online identities [4, 5]. Meanwhile, clear disclosure of sponsored material exerts notable effects on how audiences perceive authenticity and further changes how users interact with posts [7]. This phenomenon is especially obvious within beauty content creation, since most beauty influencers frequently cooperate with skincare and cosmetic brands. Under such circumstances, captions become highly important when creators introduce goods, share real-world product feedback or state their commercial partnerships.

Authentic content does not trigger audience interaction in a direct way. Instead of bringing about immediate user responses, genuine-seeming posts reshape audiences' judgements of creators and their output. If viewers regard content creators as sincere, relatable and trustworthy, they tend to build trust and emotional attachment. Such positive impressions motivate users to take interactive actions such as liking, commenting, sharing and saving short videos.

Plenty of empirical studies support this logical relationship. Lou and Yuan illustrated that high-quality, trustworthy content helps build audience trust towards online creators [3]. Another study conducted by Wang and Weng found that authentic creator personas improve content credibility and encourage followers to generate positive reviews and recommendations [9]. Ki and Kim argued that audience responses largely originate from emotional bonds and ongoing interactions between creators and their audiences [10]. Research completed by Sokolova and Kefi, as well as Reinikainen's team, also highlighted the importance of credibility and parasocial relationships in shaping audience reactions [11, 12]. Taken together, these studies show authenticity boosts user engagement by reinforcing trust and emotional connections across creator-audience groups.

These research outcomes are also applicable to TikTok's short-video environment. Walsh and co-authors explored how sponsored user-generated posts on TikTok change authenticity perceptions and audience participation [8]. Their findings indicated brand sponsorship tends to lower perceived authenticity, while influencer popularity and brand scale also affect interaction levels. This means authenticity acts as an important driver of user activity on TikTok, yet it never works in isolation. A

mixture of elements including creator influence, brand size, content reliability and video categories jointly shape audience behaviour [8, 9].

Research carried out by Mu and colleagues using Weibo data provides further supporting evidence. Their analysis revealed that inconsistent information between official creator posts and user-generated content significantly influences engagement indicators, and such impacts differ according to the number of a creator's followers [14]. These findings not only confirm the association between perceived authenticity and user participation, but also prove this mechanism varies across platforms and individual creator attributes.

Even though existing scholarship has generated rich results regarding authenticity and user engagement, several obvious research gaps remain. Firstly, research centred on TikTok is still less comprehensive compared with work covering Instagram and YouTube, despite rising academic interest in authenticity mechanisms on this platform [8]. There is a lack of targeted research exploring authenticity presentation across various TikTok content categories, particularly beauty-related material. Secondly, most available literature takes a broad research perspective and focuses on influencer identity, popularity, credibility, brand cooperation and video visual performance [4-7]. Only a small number of studies treat captions and hashtags as independent tools for constructing authenticity. This angle carries research value, because textual content can deliver personal stories, subjective thoughts and casual daily expressions which visual footage cannot fully capture. Follow-up research may further investigate diverse authenticity-oriented textual strategies within TikTok beauty videos. Thirdly, most previous studies prioritise commercial-oriented variables such as purchase intention, brand loyalty, word-of-mouth spread and overall brand impression [3, 9, 11, 13]. By comparison, less attention has been paid to basic, concrete interactive behaviours including likes, comments, shares and saves. These straightforward actions reflect genuine audience feedback and deserve thorough academic analysis. Future research could explore how different authentic textual styles correspond to different types and intensities of user engagement.

In summary, existing literature demonstrates authenticity develops from continuous online communication and can be conveyed both visually and through text. Captions and hashtags represent key channels for creators to share personal experiences, subjective opinions and inner thoughts. Such textual output strengthens audience trust and emotional attachment, which in turn promotes user engagement. Even so, targeted research on TikTok beauty content, especially the textual function of captions and hashtags in building authenticity, remains insufficient. Future research ought to pay more attention to diverse textual authenticity expressions and their specific correlations with TikTok-based user engagement.

4. Conclusion

This literature review explores authentic expression within the captions and hashtags of TikTok beauty videos, alongside the practical connection between such textual authenticity and audience interactive behaviour. Academic consensus no longer views authenticity as an innate, unchanging trait belonging to content creators alone. Instead, this perceived genuineness grows gradually through continuous interactive exchanges between creators and their online viewers. Individualised self-expression, consistent content style, transparent information disclosure and casual conversational tone all shape how audiences judge a creator's authenticity on social platforms. As flexible textual tools attached to video posts, captions and hashtags offer creators extra space to document real-life experiences, share personal viewpoints and convey sincere emotions. These text-based features therefore assist creators in building a more down-to-earth and genuine public persona for their followers.

Current academic findings also verify that authentic content shapes user engagement by improving perceived credibility, building trust and strengthening emotional bonds between both sides. When audiences find creators sincere, approachable and trustworthy, they are more inclined to interact with posts through liking, commenting, sharing and bookmarking. It is worth noting that authenticity does not drive user interaction in a direct manner. It firstly reshapes users' overall judgement of both the content and the creator, which further determines their willingness to engage with the video. Most prior scholarship centres on influencer personal branding, visual video content, commercial brand collaboration, audience trust and consumer purchase decisions. Far less academic focus has fallen on beauty-themed TikTok content, particularly the unique function of captions and hashtags in conveying authenticity.

This review ultimately emphasises the research value of textual authenticity in short-video beauty content. Text attachments such as captions and hashtags serve as vital channels for creators to deliver personal, authentic information beyond video footage. Subsequent academic work can classify diverse authentic writing styles in textual content and analyse their correlation with different audience engagement behaviours. Further research can also conduct comparative analysis among different beauty creators, exploring whether the influence of textual authenticity varies based on content category, creator personal traits and brand cooperative situations.

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