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Scroll, Buy, Reflect: Building a Communication Framework for Sustainable Beauty on TikTok

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ABSTRACT

TikTok is reshaping beauty consumption among Gen Z, driving impulsive purchasing patterns that often lead to regret, waste, and short-lived product use. In Indonesia, this dynamic is intensified by algorithmic targeting, influencer-driven credibility, and the accelerating cycle of viral aesthetics. A survey of 240 Gen Z TikTok users found that 82.09% regretted purchasing trending beauty products, and 78.61% reported owning viral items that were ultimately unused or discarded. These findings expose a persistent gap between consumers' growing sustainability awareness and their actual purchasing behavior, suggesting that emotional reactivity continues to override rational decision-making in digital beauty consumption. To examine the drivers behind this gap, the study applies the Socio-Ecological Model (SEM) and integrates quantitative survey data with insights from eight in-depth interviews involving marketers, influencers, scholars, and Gen Z users. The analysis identifies regret as a pivotal emotional trigger that can facilitate behavioral change when appropriately addressed through communication. Based on these insights, the study proposes a strategic communication framework targeting all five SEM levels to encourage reflection, reduce overconsumption, and foster responsible digital habits. The paper argues that communication functions not only as a corrective mechanism but also as a catalyst for sustainable consumption aligned with SDG 12.

INTRODUCTION

The global beauty and personal care (BPC) industry continues to expand at a remarkable pace. In 2025, global revenue is projected to reach USD 677.19 billion, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 3.37% from 2025 to 2030 (Statista, 2025). Indonesia plays an increasingly important role in this global growth, with its BPC market expected to generate USD 9.74 billion in 2025 and an annual growth rate of 4.33% (Statista, 2024). These figures reflect the scale and momentum of beauty consumption, but they also highlight sustainability concerns. According to the Zero Waste Beauty Report 2025, an alarming 95% of cosmetic packaging is discarded after use, with beauty products valued at USD 4.8 billion discarded annually. Overproduction and inefficient supply chains further worsen this issue, with more than 10% of products wasted before reaching consumers. Packaging alone accounts for 70% of the industry's total waste (The Upcycled

Beauty Company, 2025). Such challenges directly contradict the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 12 on responsible consumption and production, which urges countries to reduce waste through prevention, reduction, recycling, and reuse.

Previous studies have shown how digital platforms are reshaping this industry. Online sales are projected to account for 50% of Indonesia's BPC market by 2025 (Statista, 2025). TikTok, inparticular, has transformed beauty consumption by merging short-form content with direct e-commerce via TikTok Shop, launched in April 2021 (Febriandika et al., 2023). Its algorithm curates personalized feeds by analyzing user behavior and engagement (Khairani et al., 2024), thereby ensuring that beauty-interested users are continually exposed to relevant content. Influencers further accelerate this cycle by embedding beauty product promotions within tutorials, reviews, or viral challenges (Yang et al., 2024). Research shows that influencers perceived as relatable and knowledgeable enhance brand recall and credibility, thereby significantly shaping consumer decisions (Astita & Azhar, 2025). While existing studies have convincingly demonstrated how TikTok-driven exposure, influencer credibility, and FoMO stimulate impulsive beauty purchases, this body of literature largely concentrates on pre-purchase motivations and immediate transactional outcomes. Less attention has been paid to emotional responses following the purchase decision. However, most existing studies still conceptualize consumer responses on TikTok primarily in terms of purchase intention or transactional outcomes, rather than examining engagement as a broader, multidimensional process shaped by content, commerce features, and social interaction within the platform.

At the consumer level, TikTok also fosters a Fear of Missing Out (FoMO). FoMO is defined as "the sensation of missing out on knowledge, occasions, experiences, or life choices that may improve one's life" (Doan & Lee, 2023). Studies confirm that FoMO drives impulsive beauty purchases as consumers seek instant gratification and social belonging (Schouten et al., 2021). This is particularly evident among Gen Z, born between 1997 and 2012, whose digital fluency makes them highly responsive to algorithmic exposure and peer influence. They prefer raw, authentic content over polished brand messaging, and are more likely to make spontaneous purchases (Teo et al., 2023). Research further shows that Indonesian Gen Z consumers often participate in viral challenges and follow peer recommendations, leading to impulsive purchases, quick experimentation, and regret (Erwin et al., 2023). As a result, the emotional aftermath of impulsive buying, particularly post-purchase regret, remains underexplored despite its potential to shape future consumption behavior. Regret is often treated as a secondary outcome rather than a meaningful moment of reflection that could interrupt repetitive, algorithm-driven consumption cycles.

In Indonesia's BPC market, brands accelerate this cycle by rapidly launching products. Some top brands introduced up to nine SKUs within six months, while a newcomer sold over 5.2 million units in Q1 2025 alone. Platforms such as TikTok Shop amplify the urgency, relying on influencer-driven promotions and viral hype to push consumers toward rapid, repetitive purchases.

Table 1. Beauty Brands' Performance in the Indonesian Market

Brand Name	Year of Establishment	New Products (Last 6 Months)	Total Sales in 2024 (Rp)	Units Sold in Q1 2025 (pcs)
Brand A	2021	6	Rp 2.3 Trillion	645,063 units
Brand B	2019	5	Rp 813 Million	582,322 units
Brand C	1995	9	Rp 455 Million	1.9 Million units
Brand D	2017	3	Rp 205 Million	783,022 units
Brand E	**2022**	**5**	Rp 600 Million	5.2 Million units

Source: Fastmoss, 2025

Table 1 summarizes key indicators of this intense growth: recent product launches, 2024 sales volume, and Q1 2025 unit sales. Despite variations in product counts or brand maturity, all five brands in the dataset exhibit a consistent pattern: constant product expansion, high transaction velocity, and strategic dominance on algorithm-driven platforms. This reflects an industry trained to respond instantly to shifting aesthetics, monetizing trends before they fade, regardless of long-term sustainability impacts. These patterns suggest that consumer engagement in this context cannot be understood solely as individual purchasing behavior, but as an outcome of continuous exposure to persuasive content, platform-enabled commerce, and socially reinforced consumption norms.

Such a high frequency of launches contributes to purchase pressure and intensifies impulsive buying cycles, defined as unplanned purchases made suddenly in response to external stimuli, with limited deliberation (Redine et al., 2023). The cycle is vicious: exposure to aspirational content, emotional pressure to keep up, sudden purchase, and waste.

Sustainable consumption, by contrast, emphasizes the responsible use of resources by prioritizing essential needs while minimizing ecological harm (Quoquab & Mohammad, 2020). In the beauty sector, this includes ethical sourcing, waste reduction, and consideration of product life cycles. However, these principles often conflict with fast beauty logics that rely on short product cycles, instant gratification, and fleeting attention spans, particularly on platforms such as TikTok (Buzzo & Abreu, 2018). While sustainability offers long-term value creation and reduced ecological harm (Schaltegger, et al., 2012), shifting consumer behavior remains difficult due to low awareness, ingrained habits, and limited policy enforcement (Mont & Plepys, 2007).
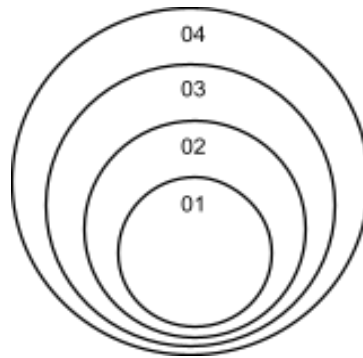
Recent studies indicate that sustainability messages can positively influence consumers' purchase intentions (Aulia & Putra, 2024). However, in practice, these messages are often overshadowed by viral promotions driven by TikTok's algorithm and

influencer endorsements. TikTok encourages impulsive buying by combining algorithmic exposure, peer validation, and seamless e-commerce features, creating consumption patterns that are particularly strong among Gen Z users. This process is further intensified by fear of missing out (FoMO), which motivates users to respond quickly to trends, while repeated algorithmic exposure continuously reinforces the visibility of promoted products.

Within this context, post-purchase regret emerges as a critical but underexplored intervention point. Regret occurs when a product fails to meet prior expectations (Pieters & Zeelenberg, 2007) and has been shown to reduce future impulsive buying behavior (Tata et al., 2020). This emotional response is particularly relevant when influencer-endorsed beauty products fail to deliver promised outcomes, leading to declining trust in influencers and brands (Matarazzo et al., 2021). Despite this potential, existing studies tend to examine TikTok influence, FoMO, or sustainability communication separately. There remains a limited understanding of how platform dynamics, consumer emotions, and sustainability messages interact within TikTok Live environments, where persuasive content, embedded commerce, and community interaction operate simultaneously. This gap highlights the need for an integrative communication perspective that not only explains impulsive buying on TikTok but also explores how emotional responses, such as regret, can be leveraged to promote more responsible beauty consumption. Applying the Socio-Ecological Model (SEM) allows these individual, social, and platform-level factors to be analyzed as interconnected rather than isolated influences.

To address this gap, the present study offers a communication framework that integrates theoretical insights and practical tools for sustainable beauty, grounded in the Socio-Ecological Model (SEM) and aligned with SDG 12. The objective is to analyze how algorithmic exposure, influencer credibility, and emotional triggers such as post-purchase regret shape Gen Z beauty consumption, and to identify communication entry points that encourage more mindful behavior. Using qualitative methods, including interviews with Gen Z consumers and sustainability influencers, this study aims to demonstrate how communication can act not only as a promotional tool but also as a strategic intervention for sustainability in the fast-paced digital environment. By applying an integrated content–commerce–community framework, this study advances existing research by conceptualizing consumer engagement as a multidimensional outcome that captures emotional, social, and behavioral responses within TikTok Live environments.

The Socio-Ecological Model (SEM) provides a framework for understanding how individual behavior is shaped not only by personal choices but also by broader social and structural environments. According to Hu et al. (2021), behavior is influenced by five interconnected levels: (1) intrapersonal factors, (2) interpersonal processes, (3) organizational factors, (4) community factors, and (5) public policy. This perspective shifts the focus from viewing behavior as the result of individual decisions alone to recognizing how social, cultural, and institutional systems interact to influence human actions. Because of this, SEM is often used to design interventions and communication strategies that are sustainable in the long term.

Figure 1. Bronfenbrenner's Socio-Ecological Model

Source: Bronfenbrenner, 1989

Bronfenbrenner's version of the model is often depicted as a set of concentric circles, with the individual at the center and surrounding systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). At the microsystem level (1) in Figure 1, personal factors such as knowledge, emotions, and motivations shape impulsive purchases, particularly when viral content triggers urgency or social comparison. The mesosystem level (2) emphasizes the influence of peers, comment sections, and influencers who serve as trusted figures. Through tutorials, reviews, and value-based narratives, influencers can encourage either fast beauty consumption or more mindful alternatives, while digital communities validate or challenge these practices. The exosystem level (3) reflects external structures such as TikTok's algorithm, marketing strategies, and trending formats, such as Get Ready With Me or unboxing videos, that affect which content gains visibility and how frequently users encounter product promotions. The macrosystem level (4) encompasses cultural and societal factors, including sustainability movements, beauty standards, ethics, and regulations that guide both brand practices and consumer awareness. Together, these interconnected layers reveal that scrolling, purchasing, and post-purchase reflection are not merely individual acts but part of a broader system of influence.

Within media and communication studies, the Socio-Ecological Model (SEM) has been widely applied to the development of campaigns that address behavioral issues across multiple levels of influence. Brennan et al. (2016) illustrate this by applying a behavioral ecological approach to alcohol misuse, arguing that communication efforts often fail when they focus solely on individual responsibility while neglecting media, policy, and social norms. Similarly, Herari et al. (2024) applied SEM in designing a diabetes prevention campaign in Jakarta that integrated mass media, social media, and community engagement, alongside institutional and policy involvement, to achieve long-term effectiveness. These studies underline the value of SEM in supporting collaborative and scalable communication strategies that extend beyond individual-level interventions. Building on this perspective, the present study employs SEM as a framework to develop reflective communication strategies that address multiple levels of influence, ranging from individual awareness to influencer responsibility and platform

transparency, to guide Gen Z consumers toward more mindful and sustainable beauty practices on TikTok.

From this broader SEM perspective, it is also essential to examine the psychological and social dynamics that directly shape individual behavior. On TikTok, two interrelated forces, Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) and social pressure, play a particularly significant role in influencing how Gen Z users engage with beauty content and make purchasing decisions. Social media platforms create an environment of continuous exposure to others' activities, preferences, and consumption practices, often at an accelerated pace. This condition intensifies FoMO, defined as the anxiety associated with the fear of being excluded from rewarding experiences or falling behind rapidly changing trends (Przybylski et al., 2013). In the beauty context, FoMO frequently manifests as an urge to purchase trending products in order to remain visible, relevant, and connected within TikTok's beauty discourse.

A recent study by Doan and Lee (2023) who identify a strong relationship between FoMO and impulsive buying behavior, particularly within social commerce environments. The constant circulation of short-form videos featuring product transformations, "holy grails," and limited-edition launches encourages emotionally driven, unplanned purchases. Closely linked to FoMO is social pressure, rooted in the desire for social validation. Drawing on Deutsch and Gerard's (1955) theory of social influence, individuals conform due to normative influence, reflecting the need for acceptance, and informational influence, which involves relying on others' cues when facing uncertainty.

On TikTok, these two forms of influence operate simultaneously. Repeated exposure to peer and influencer endorsements leads users to perceive certain beauty products as both socially desirable and credible sources of information. For Gen Z users, who are still forming their consumer identities, these signals carry substantial persuasive power. This effect is further reinforced by TikTok's algorithmic design and participatory culture, which repeatedly surfaces content aligned with users' previous interactions. Kapitan and Silvera (2015) argue that sustained exposure to peer-endorsed consumption contributes to the internalization of consumption norms. As these norms become embedded within users' digital environments, they strengthen social pressure and legitimize specific beauty choices as appropriate or desirable. Consequently, the combined influence of FoMO and social pressure encourages reactive, trend-driven purchasing behaviors, reinforcing cycles of overconsumption. By applying the Socio-Ecological Model (SEM), this study demonstrates how multiple levels of influence collectively shape scrolling behavior, purchasing decisions, and post-purchase reflection among Gen Z TikTok users.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative methodology situated within the interpretive paradigm to address the research question: How do Gen Z consumers experience impulsive buying,

post-purchase regret, and sustainable awareness regarding TikTok beauty content? This section outlines the research design, participant selection, data collection, and analysis strategies used to understand these experiences in depth.

A qualitative descriptive approach was chosen to capture the nuanced perspectives of individuals engaging with TikTok beauty content. This approach aligns with the interpretive paradigm, which emphasizes understanding subjective experiences and social contexts rather than generalizing findings. The study uses both primary and secondary data to examine how exposure to digital beauty content translates into real-world consumer behavior.

Participants were purposively sampled to include Generation Z members who frequently engage with beauty-related content on TikTok. The inclusion criteria required participants to have made at least one beauty-related purchase influenced by TikTok content within the past five months. This criterion ensured that participants had direct, lived experience relevant to the study objectives. A total of 158 respondents met the criteria after filtering from 240 questionnaire responses based on age and daily TikTok activity.

Table 2. Age Distribution of Questionnaire Respondents

Age Group	Percentage (%)
21–24	40.80%
25–28	31.34%
17–20	17.91%
Under 17	9.95%

Source: Data Processed by Author, 2025

Data were collected using two complementary methods: (a) an Online Questionnaire, a descriptive survey was distributed through social media platforms, including WhatsApp Groups, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and TikTok. The questionnaire explored participants' usage patterns, exposure to beauty content, purchasing behavior, emotional responses (including regret), and awareness of sustainability concepts such as "sustainable beauty" and "fast beauty." This instrument served as an exploratory tool to support qualitative insights and was not designed for statistical hypothesis testing; (b) Semi-structured Interviews, seven in-depth interviews were conducted with purposefully selected informants representing diverse roles such as digital marketing experts, sustainability consumption experts, Gen Z consumers, and influencers. This format afforded participants the flexibility to express their experiences freely while enabling the researcher to probe emergent themes. Table 3 presents the interviewee profiles and their relevance to the study.

Table 3. Table of Informant's Interview Profile

Code	Role	Relevance
R1	Digital Marketing Expert	Provides insights into how TikTok's algorithm works, how marketing content is crafted, and how users respond to it in digital marketing communication.
R2	Sustainability Consumption Expert	Helps the research by explaining the basics of sustainability and how to communicate it effectively within the trend of sustainable beauty.
R3	Gen Z TikTok Impulsive Consumer	A user who can provide insights into impulsive buying behavior and explain the emotions felt after making a purchase.
R4	Sustainability Lifestyle Influencer	Shares the perspective of a lifestyle influencer who actively promotes sustainability across content categories, including beauty, fashion, and daily living.
R5	Media and Communication Scholar	Provides insights into how media narratives, platforms, and communication strategies influence consumer behavior and identity formation.
R6	Gen Z Micro Beauty Influencer	Offering dual insight as both creator and impulsive consumer, highlighting trends, follower influence, and brand pressure.
R7	Sustainability Lifestyle Influencer & Conscious Brand Owner	Combines insights as a conscious influencer and brand owner to reveal how sustainability values are applied in content creation and brand strategy.

Source: Data Processed by Author, 2025

Seven interview informants were selected using purposive criteria to represent different perspectives relevant to the study objectives. This included Gen Z beauty consumers who actively engage with TikTok content and have experienced spontaneous beauty purchases, as well as individuals with professional or advocacy experience in sustainable beauty communication. The number of informants was determined during the data collection process, as similar viewpoints and patterns began to recur across interviews, suggesting that further interviews would provide limited additional analytical value.

Interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify and interpret recurring patterns and themes related to impulsive buying, regret, and sustainable awareness. The analysis began with a close reading of questionnaire responses and interview transcripts. Notes and preliminary labels were assigned to data segments that

reflected participants' motivations, emotional reactions, and reflections on their purchasing decisions, particularly those related to impulsivity and sustainability considerations. The qualitative descriptive data from questionnaires supplemented the thematic insights, providing a broad behavioral context. The combined data informed the development of a multilevel communication framework based on the Socio-Ecological Model (SEM), which captures psychological, social, and environmental factors influencing consumer behavior. These preliminary labels were then compared across participants to identify recurring patterns and contrasts. Related labels were grouped and reorganized until a set of themes was formed that consistently represented the data. To reduce individual interpretation bias, the emerging themes were discussed with a peer researcher, allowing for critical feedback and refinement before finalization.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To further understand the dynamics of beauty consumption on TikTok, a survey was conducted among Gen Z users. The survey aimed to capture their exposure to beauty content, purchasing motivations, and reflections on consumption.

Exposure to Beauty Content and Impulsive Purchasing on TikTok

The survey results indicate that Gen Z users are highly exposed to beauty-related content on TikTok. As shown in Table 4, 93.53% of respondents reported encountering beauty content regularly on the platform. This high exposure is accompanied by a strong tendency toward influencer-driven purchasing: 89.05% of respondents reported purchasing viral beauty products based on influencer endorsements. These findings suggest that beauty content is deeply embedded in the everyday digital experiences of Gen Z users and plays a significant role in shaping their purchasing behavior.

Table 4. Survey Responses on Beauty Consumption Behavior Among Gen Z TikTok Users

Questions	Yes	No
Do you encounter beauty content on TikTok regularly?	93.53%	6.47%
Have you purchased viral beauty products based on influencer endorsements?	89.05%	10.95%
Have you ever experienced regret after purchasing a viral beauty product?	82.09%	17.91%
Have you owned a viral beauty product that ended up unused or wasted?	78.61%	21.39%

(Source: Data Processed by Author, 2025)

Interview data further illustrate how repeated exposure to transformation videos, tutorials, and trending formats fosters emotional engagement and a sense of urgency. One

participant (R3) explained that she was particularly drawn to content that visually demonstrated rapid product effectiveness:

"Usually, what I really want to try is the kind that shows progress, like day one, day two, all the way to day seven…" (Informant R3). This type of content encouraged spontaneous purchasing decisions, often without prior evaluation of product suitability.

Post-Purchase Regret and Product Waste

A significant finding from the survey is the prevalence of post-purchase regret among respondents. More than 82.09% of participants reported experiencing regret after purchasing viral beauty products, while 78.61% reported owning products that ultimately remained unused or were discarded. These findings point to a recurring cycle of impulsive consumption, dissatisfaction, and waste.

This pattern is echoed in interview narratives. R3 described her disappointment after purchasing a moisturizer that did not match her expectations:

"When I tried it, it turned out to be a bit greasy… I only used it 2–3 times and then stopped right away." (Informant R3). She further explained that unused products were often neglected or disposed of: *"So I just left it… I don't even know where it is now, maybe it got thrown away…"* (Informant R3).

These accounts highlight that impulsive purchases frequently lead to underutilization and unnecessary consumption.

Emotional Responses and Behavioral Adjustment After Regret

Despite its negative connotation, regret emerged as a catalyst for behavioral change among several participants. Interviewees reported becoming more cautious and reflective after experiencing repeated dissatisfaction with viral products. R3 noted a shift toward more deliberate purchasing strategies:

"Just being more aware and not too easily swayed by ads… if I still want it, I'll buy the smaller version first… or try it out at the offline store." (Informant R3)

Similarly, R6, a Gen Z beauty enthusiast and micro-influencer, described how regret led her to question the credibility of viral endorsements: *"Some products turned out not to suit me. In the end, it made me think more, like, is this really good or just hyped up?"* (Informant R6)

In some cases, regret was also associated with financial stress. R6 admitted that influencer-driven persuasion had pushed her to exceed her spending limits: *"I got so influenced by the ads that I even used Shopee PayLater… but it turned out it didn't work for me."* (Informant R6). These findings suggest that regret functions not only as an emotional outcome but also as a trigger for increased self-regulation.

Influence of Social Pressure and FoMO

Interview data indicate that fear of missing out (FoMO) and social pressure play central roles in impulsive beauty consumption. Participants described feeling compelled to keep up with trends in order to remain socially relevant. R4, a sustainability-focused content creator, acknowledged her own vulnerability to trend pressure:

"I used to be like that too… my drawer was already full, but I kept buying, just because I was afraid of being left behind." (Informant R4)

This pressure was reinforced by the repetitive appearance of similar products across multiple creators and formats, contributing to the perception that certain items were universally desirable.

Algorithmic Exposure and Commercial Intensity

Participants consistently highlighted TikTok's algorithm as a key factor shaping their consumption behavior. R5, a communication scholar, emphasized that the platform actively constructs desire rather than merely reflecting it:

"The problem is that nowadays needs can be created by constructing the very concept of beauty itself… The media constructs a sense of need." (Informant R5)

R1, a digital marketing expert, further explained how algorithmic repetition and commercial saturation intensify impulsive buying: *"That's how the whole game works… short-term games, as long as they can sell and flash out first."* (Informant R1)

He noted that influencers often promote products rapidly to maintain visibility, sometimes at the expense of credibility: *"They end up becoming victims of the algorithm… because what they're really selling is their credibility."* (Informant R1)

Emerging Awareness of Sustainability and Waste Reduction Practices

Although impulsive buying was common, several participants demonstrated growing awareness of sustainability issues following negative consumption experiences. R4 described how learning about the environmental impact of discarded beauty products reshaped her perspective: *"I once felt regret… when I first found out that expired skincare liquids also have high carbon emissions…"* (Informant R4)

This awareness influenced post-purchase behavior, such as gifting or reselling unused products: *"Now I prefer giving it to someone else or selling it as pre-loved."* (Informant R3)

Similarly, R7 adopted creative strategies to embed sustainability critiques into viral formats: *"Sometimes I like to make content that feels like a 'cheat'… an unboxing, but the box is empty."* (Informant R7). These findings indicate that sustainability awareness often emerges after cycles of overconsumption and regret, rather than preceding purchasing decisions.

Discussion

This study demonstrates that impulsive consumption of beauty products among Gen Z TikTok users cannot be adequately explained by individual choice or self-control alone. Instead, the findings reveal a complex interaction of emotional, social, technological, and structural forces that collectively shape consumption behavior. By applying the Socio-Ecological Model (SEM), this research situates impulsive buying, post-purchase regret, and emerging sustainability awareness within a multi-level system of influence, offering a more comprehensive understanding of digital beauty consumption.

At the microsystem level, the findings highlight the central role of emotions,

particularly excitement, curiosity, and regret, in driving and reshaping consumption behavior. Impulsive purchases were largely motivated by affective responses to visually persuasive content, such as transformation videos and influencer narratives. However, post-purchase regret emerged as a critical turning point rather than a mere negative outcome. Consistent with prior research on regret and consumer learning, the findings suggest that regret can foster reflection, skepticism toward persuasive content, and increased self-regulation. This positions regret as a transformative emotional mechanism that opens space for behavioral adjustment, rather than as a failure of rational decision-making.

Moving to the mesosystem level, the study underscores the powerful influence of social relationships and community validation on TikTok. Influencers, peers, and comment sections jointly construct norms of desirability and credibility, reinforcing impulsive consumption through both normative and informational social influence. Importantly, even participants who were critically aware of overconsumption, such as sustainability advocates and micro-influencers, acknowledged their vulnerability to FoMO and social pressure. This ambivalence reflects the tension between awareness and action, suggesting that social belonging and visibility often outweigh sustainability considerations in fast-paced digital environments. The findings thus challenge assumptions that awareness alone is sufficient to drive responsible consumption.

At the exosystem level, platform design and commercial infrastructures play a decisive role in amplifying impulsive behavior. TikTok's algorithmic repetition, live commerce features, and influencer saturation create a high-intensity consumption environment that prioritizes immediacy over reflection. The platform not only responds to user preferences but actively trains them by continuously reinforcing specific beauty standards and consumption cues. This supports arguments that digital platforms function as active agents in shaping desire, rather than neutral intermediaries. From this perspective, impulsive buying appears less as an individual flaw and more as an adaptive response to an environment engineered for constant engagement and monetization.

The macrosystem level further contextualizes these behaviors within broader cultural, economic, and policy frameworks. Sustainability discourse, while increasingly visible, remains constrained by structural inequalities, weak regulatory support, and market-driven logics. Participants' critiques of "cosmetic sustainability" and greenwashing highlight the gap between sustainability as a branding strategy and sustainability as systemic accountability. Moreover, the perception of sustainable beauty as expensive or exclusive risks reinforcing inequalities and limiting access. These findings align with broader critiques that place responsibility not only on consumers but also on industries, platforms, and policymakers to create enabling conditions for sustainable practices.

Across all SEM levels, regret emerges as a connective thread linking impulsive consumption to the possibility of change. Rather than positioning regret as an endpoint, this study conceptualizes it as a communicative entry point, a moment when consumers become more receptive to counter-narratives, media literacy, and sustainability

messaging. This insight contributes to communication scholarship by suggesting that interventions aimed at promoting sustainable consumption may be more effective when they engage with lived emotional experiences, such as disappointment, waste awareness, or financial stress, rather than relying solely on moral appeals or rational information.

Taken together, the findings reinforce the value of SEM as an integrative framework for understanding digital consumption practices. Impulsive beauty consumption on TikTok is not produced at a single level but emerges from the interaction of personal emotions, social validation, algorithmic design, and cultural norms. Addressing this issue, therefore, requires multi-level communication strategies that move beyond individual blame. Such strategies may include fostering emotional awareness and reflection at the individual level, promoting responsible influencer practices at the social level, increasing platform transparency at the structural level, and strengthening policy support for sustainable production and communication at the macro level.

By framing impulsive consumption of beauty products as a socio-ecological phenomenon, this study advances a more holistic understanding of Gen Z consumer behavior in digital environments. It also underscores the importance of viewing sustainability not merely as a consumer preference but as a collective responsibility shaped by communication systems, technological infrastructures, and institutional choices.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that TikTok functions as more than an entertainment platform; it operates as a dynamic social commerce environment where Gen Z in Indonesia actively negotiates their beauty choices. The continuous circulation of influencer reviews, viral trends, and discount-driven promotions intensifies impulsive purchasing behavior, while post-purchase regret frequently follows. Rather than positioning regret solely as a negative outcome, the findings suggest that it can serve as a moment of heightened self-awareness, prompting consumers to critically reflect on fast beauty culture and to reconsider more sustainable modes of engagement with beauty consumption.

When examined through Bronfenbrenner's Socio-Ecological Model (SEM), this negotiation process extends beyond individual decision-making and is shaped by multiple, interconnected layers of influence. Peer groups normalize trends, influencers construct aspirational beauty standards, digital platforms accelerate hype cycles, and broader cultural narratives link self-worth to constant novelty. Importantly, these same layers also offer opportunities for intervention. Peers may promote mindful consumption; influencers can model responsible beauty practices; platforms can adjust visibility mechanisms to support ethical brands; and cultural narratives can reframe beauty as enduring rather than disposable.

Although this study is situated within the context of TikTok Live beauty consumption, several insights are relevant beyond this setting. The mechanisms identified, such as algorithmic amplification, influencer persuasion, time-limited promotions, and the emotional cycle of impulse followed by regret, are also characteristic of other live-stream commerce environments, including platforms such as Shopee Live, Instagram Live, and other short video-based retail ecosystems. Similarly, industries beyond beauty, particularly fashion, lifestyle, and fast-moving consumer goods, exhibit comparable dynamics of trend acceleration and socially driven consumption. This suggests that the role of regret as a trigger for reflection and potential behavior change may be applicable across a broader range of digital commerce contexts.

At the same time, the findings are not entirely platform or industry-neutral. Beauty consumption is closely linked to identity formation, self-expression, and social visibility, making Gen Z particularly sensitive to social comparison and influencer endorsements within this category. TikTok's participatory culture and short-form video format further intensify these effects, indicating that the strength and immediacy of engagement observed in this study may be amplified within the TikTok Live beauty context compared to other platforms or product categories. Therefore, while the underlying socio-ecological dynamics may be transferable, their manifestation is shaped by platform-specific features and industry characteristics.

The survey and interview data thus reveal a dual reality. On one hand, Gen Z consumers are highly exposed to the pressures of fast beauty, rendering them vulnerable to impulsive consumption. On the other hand, they demonstrate agency by transforming regret into reflection and, in some cases, more conscious purchasing decisions. This tension underscores that sustainability in beauty extends beyond product attributes such as eco-friendly packaging or "green" labels. Instead, it involves reshaping values, everyday practices, and communication strategies so that beauty consumption aligns with long-term responsibility rather than short-term gratification.

For brands, influencers, and policymakers, these findings highlight the importance of communication in making sustainability both accessible and aspirational across digital commerce environments. This extends beyond promotional messaging to encompass education, transparency, and structural change, including reducing overproduction, supporting circular beauty models, and increasing supply chain visibility. Ultimately, while the speed of trends may continue to define digital platforms, the future of beauty and potentially other consumer industries will depend on how sustainability is integrated into daily choices, platform design, and cultural storytelling. If regret can be reframed as a shared moment of reflection, Gen Z holds the potential not only to resist fast beauty cycles but also to influence broader movements toward more meaningful and sustainable consumption cultures.

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