Research Article

TikTok-Driven Buying Patterns: A Study of Consumer Behavior among University Students in the Philippines

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ABSTRACT

TikTok has transformed Generation Z's consumer behavior through algorithm-driven content, viral trends, and influencer impact. This study examined TikTok's influence on 345 university students in Cebu City, assessing exposure (time spent, frequency, user-generated content influence, engagement) and consumer behavior (purchase frequency, intention, brand loyalty, impulse buying). Due to significant non-normality confirmed by Shapiro-Wilk tests, Spearman's rho was used to analyze relationships. Results revealed a significant positive correlation between TikTok exposure and buying behavior (ρ = 0.480, p < .001), with user-generated content exerting the strongest effect (ρ = 0.517). Impulse buying was notably influenced (ρ = 0.458), especially in fashion and personal care. Findings suggest marketers should leverage authentic peer content and influencer partnerships to engage Gen Z and build brand loyalty, while educators should promote digital literacy to help students critically assess content and control impulse purchases. TikTok serves as both an entertainment platform and a powerful marketing tool, highlighting the need for ethical marketing and informed consumer awareness.

Keywords: *TikTok exposure, Consumer buying behavior, Purchase frequency, Impulse buying, Brand loyalty, Social media marketing, University students*

Background

E-commerce continues to reshape the retail landscape, offering consumers unparalleled convenience and access to a wide range of goods and services (Suryanarayana, 2023). This digital evolution has significantly

transformed consumer buying behavior—the cognitive and emotional processes individuals undertake when selecting, purchasing, and using products or services (Hwang, 2024). Traditionally influenced by psychological, social, and cultural factors, buying behavior is now increasingly shaped by the rise of digital platforms, particularly social media. Among these, TikTok has emerged as a dominant force, leveraging short-form videos, algorithm-driven personalization, and influencer marketing to guide consumer decision-making (Valeza & Soriano, 2024).

Globally, TikTok has become a strategic platform for brands, especially in industries like fast beauty, where trends and visual content heavily influence consumer behavior. TikTok's algorithm, powered by artificial intelligence, creates personalized content that significantly increases product exposure and purchase interest among digital generations such as Gen Z and Millennials. Content strategies involving storytelling, trends, and collaborations with micro-influencers further strengthen consumer engagement and drive purchase decisions worldwide (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2025)

In the United States, TikTok is among the fastest-growing social media platforms, with a substantial portion of users regularly engaging with content that influences their psychological well-being and behavior. Research shows that immersive experiences on TikTok, such as "flow states," can lead to problematic social media behaviors including addiction and increased anxiety. Despite these risks, TikTok's ability to captivate users contributes to its powerful role in shaping consumer habits and purchase intentions locally. Additionally, TikTok serves as a significant news source for younger adults in the U.S., with over half of TikTok users regularly obtaining news from the platform. This highlights TikTok's growing influence not only in entertainment and marketing but also as a key channel for information dissemination, further embedding it in users' daily lives and decision-making processes (Smart Insights, 2025).

Understanding the relationship between TikTok exposure and consumer buying behavior is critical for marketers and researchers alike. TikTok's immersive features and tailored content delivery heighten purchase intention, influence brand perception, and promote impulse buying (Tandon et al., 2023; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2022; Jing & Nguyen, 2024). Exposure can take multiple forms—passive browsing, active engagement, and targeted advertisements—all of which play distinct roles in shaping consumer outcomes such as purchase frequency, brand loyalty, and spontaneous purchases (Zeng et al., 2023; Naem & Okafor, 2022; Huang & Su, 2022). Selezneva (2024) further highlights the power of user-generated content in stimulating unplanned purchases, particularly when content resonates with users' preferences. Collectively, these findings confirm TikTok's role not only as an entertainment platform but also as a powerful marketing channel embedded in the digital consumer landscape.

Recent literature underscores the strategic role of TikTok in shaping contemporary consumer behavior. Ahmad et al. (2024) and Meng et al. (2024) highlighted the effectiveness of short-form video content, emotional resonance, and influencer collaborations in fostering authentic consumer-brand relationships and driving purchase behavior. Complementing these insights, Lin and Nuangjamnong (2022) found that TikTok's live shopping features enhance consumer trust and significantly increase purchase intentions. Similarly, Ab Hamid and Adnan (2022) demonstrated that viral content on TikTok exerts a strong influence on adolescent purchasing behavior, particularly through emotionally engaging and socially validated content. Tartaraj et al. (2024) further substantiated these findings through econometric modeling, revealing a significant correlation between influencer activity and brand recognition. Despite these contributions, much of the existing research centers on generalized populations or broad marketing outcomes, with limited attention to long-term behavioral effects or demographic-specific responses—highlighting a gap for future inquiry.

While previous studies have highlighted the marketing potential of TikTok, several aspects of its influence on consumer behavior remain underexplored. Although research has acknowledged the roles of emotional resonance, parasocial connections, and social proof

in shaping online engagement (Ahmad et al., 2024; Jiang et al., 2024), few have empirically examined how these psychological mechanisms operate within the TikTok environment. Additionally, localized studies focusing on highly engaged populations—such as university students in Cebu City—have been scarce, despite the demographic's high social media usage and purchasing potential (Maravillas, 2024). Moreover, there is a notable lack of research specifically addressing TikTok's influence on consumer buying behavior within the Philippine context beyond Cebu City, leaving a gap in understanding how regional cultural, economic, and social factors may uniquely shape these dynamics across the country. This study addressed these gaps by examining TikTok exposure and its relationship to key dimensions of consumer buying behavior, including purchase intention, frequency, brand loyalty, and online impulse buying.

Rather than dissecting the effects of distinct exposure types (e.g., passive vs. active use), the study measured frequency, content engagement, and perceived influence of user-generated content as proxies to understand behavioral patterns. Although algorithmic changes and long-term brand loyalty were not the primary focus, the findings offered initial insights into how regular TikTok use relates to sustained consumer engagement. This aligns with recent literature suggesting that TikTok's evolving algorithm significantly shapes product visibility and consumer decision-making (Melgarejo-Espinoza et al., 2024). By centering the analysis on a specific, digitally active population, this study contributes contextualized evidence to the broader discourse on social media-driven consumerism, while laying the groundwork for future investigations into platform mechanics and behavioral nuance.

This study seeks to address this gap by examining TikTok exposure and its relationship to consumer buying behavior among university students in Cebu City. The specific objectives are to: (1) assess the dimensions of TikTok exposure, including time spent on the platform, frequency of use, user-generated content influence, and content engagement; (2) determine the overall level of TikTok exposure among participants; (3) evaluate consumer buying behavior through purchase frequency, purchase intention, brand loyalty, and online impulse buying; (4) identify product category preferences influenced by TikTok; and (5) investigate whether a statistically significant relationship exists between TikTok exposure and consumer buying behavior.

In line with these objectives, the study tests the following hypotheses: Null Hypothesis (H_0): There is no significant relationship between TikTok exposure and consumer buying behavior among Cebu City university students.

By focusing on a digitally active and socially engaged demographic, this study contributes localized insights into TikTok's dual role as an entertainment platform and a marketing channel, providing valuable implications for marketers and educators in the Philippine context.

Methods

This study will adopt a quantitative research approach, utilizing a correlational design to examine the statistical relationship between TikTok exposure and consumer buying behavior among university students in Cebu City. Correlational research, a non-experimental method, allows for the assessment of naturally occurring associations without manipulating variables, making it well-suited for addressing the study's objectives (Devi et al., 2022).

The target population comprises TikTok-using university students aged 18 and above. Convenience sampling was employed to select participants based on accessibility and willingness to participate. Inclusion criteria required respondents to be currently enrolled university students in Cebu City, aged 18 years or older, and active TikTok users. This ensured the relevance of the sample to the study's focus on digitally engaged youth (Golzar et al., 2022).

This study utilizes a quantitative approach by collecting primary data from university students in Cebu City through a structured online survey administered via Google Forms. The instrument, adapted from previous peer-reviewed studies (Chu et al., 2022), consists of 20 items divided into three sections: the informed consent form, TikTok exposure, and consumer buying behavior. Both main constructs are measured using a 5-point Likert Scale ranging

from (1) Strongly Disagree to (5) Strongly Agree, a format suitable for capturing attitudes and statistically analyzing responses (Nilsson, 2023). To ensure clarity in interpretation, the mean scores will be analyzed using the verbal scale developed by Bringula et al. (2012), facilitating a consistent understanding of participant responses across the study.

Table 1. Interpretation of the 5-Point Likert Scale

Scale Point	Mean Range	Verbal Interpretation
5	4.51 – 5.00	Strongly Agree
4	3.51 – 4.50	Agree
3	2.51 – 3.50	Neutral
2	1.51 – 2.50	Disagree
1	1.00 – 1.50	Strongly Disagree

To establish the validity and reliability of the survey instrument, content validity was ensured through expert review by academic professionals familiar with social media research. A pilot test was conducted to assess clarity and relevance of the items. Internal consistency reliability was measured using Cronbach's alpha, with values exceeding the acceptable threshold of 0.70 for both TikTok exposure and consumer buying behavior scales, confirming the instrument's reliability.

This study aims to determine whether there is a significant relationship between TikTok exposure and consumer buying behavior among university students in Cebu City. To gather data, the researchers created a 20-item online questionnaire using validated questions from previous studies (Chu et al., 2022), with both key variables measured using a 5-point Likert Scale. The survey included a data privacy consent form, questions on TikTok usage, and items on consumer buying behavior. It was distributed via Google Forms to students aged 18 and above who actively use TikTok, using convenience sampling to reach at least 100 participants (Golzar et al., 2022). Ethical standards, including voluntary participation and confidentiality, were observed following the Data Privacy Act of 2012 and guidelines from BERA (2024). Participants were informed about the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights, including the option to withdraw at any time. Anonymity was maintained by not collecting personally identifiable information.

After collection, the responses will be coded and analyzed using statistical software. Descriptive statistics will summarize the data, while Spearman's correlation will assess the relationship between the two variables (Nilsson, 2023). While self-reported data can pose limitations, the use of standardized questions and secure data handling aims to minimize bias and maintain research integrity.

Once the survey data is collected, it will be analyzed using statistical software. The researchers will calculate the frequency, percentage, and average scores of TikTok exposure and consumer buying behavior to understand participants' overall responses. Because the data is measured on a 5-point

Likert scale, it is considered ordinal—where 1 means low and 5 means high. To examine the relationship between the two variables, Spearman's correlation will be used. This method ranks the data and compares the differences to see how strongly and in what direction the variables are related. A result close to 1 indicates a strong positive relationship, while a result near -1 shows a strong negative relationship. A value around 0 means there is no clear association (Nilsson, 2023). If the correlation is statistically significant—meaning the p-value is less than 0.05—the study will reject the null hypothesis and conclude that a meaningful relationship exists between TikTok exposure and consumer buying behavior.

To ensure ethical integrity, this study adheres to principles outlined by Bell and Bryman (2007) and BERA (2024), emphasizing participant protection, transparency, and responsible data handling. Before participation, respondents will be informed about the study's purpose, procedures, privacy safeguards under the Data Privacy Act of 2012 and NPC Circular No.

2023-06, and researcher contact details. Questions will be designed to minimize discomfort, and theoretical context will support comprehension. Participation is voluntary and anonymous. Transparency will be upheld by clearly communicating objectives and methods, offering access to raw data upon request, and applying rigorous statistical analysis to maintain accuracy and avoid misrepresentation.

Results and Discussions

The following tables and figure summarize the key dimensions of TikTok exposure and consumer buying behavior among the participants, providing a clear overview of usage patterns, behavioral tendencies, and product preferences. Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the four dimensions of TikTok exposure examined in the study: time spent on the platform, frequency of use, user-generated content influence, and content engagement. It includes measures of central tendency, variability, distribution shape, and normality, offering an overview of participant responses across each variable.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics for TikTok Exposure Dimensions

Statistic	Time Spent	Frequency Usage	User-Generated Content	Content Engagement
N	345	345	345	345
Missing	0	0	0	0
Mean (M)	2.46	3.56	3.11	3.17
Median (Mdn)	2	4	3	3
Standard Deviation (SD)	1.21	1.26	0.903	1.21
Minimum	1	1	1	1
Maximum	5	5	5	5
Skewness	0.358	−0.540	−0.296	−0.144
SE Skewness	0.131	0.131	0.131	0.131
Shapiro-Wilk W	0.885	0.875	0.856	0.912
Shapiro-Wilk p	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001

Note. All Shapiro-Wilk p-values are below .001, indicating that the distributions of the variables deviate significantly from normality. This supports the use of non-parametric statistical methods, such as Spearman's correlation, for analyzing the relationships among TikTok exposure dimensions.

Table 2 presents data from a complete sample of 345 participants, each responding to all four dimensions of TikTok exposure, resulting in no missing values. Among these dimensions, User-Generated Content Influence yielded the highest mean score (M = 3.56), suggesting a comparatively stronger impact of TikTok content on participants' attitudes and behaviors. In contrast, Time Spent on TikTok registered the lowest mean (M = 2.46), indicating that while participants frequently access the app, their individual usage sessions are relatively brief. Standard deviations ranged from 0.903 to 1.26, reflecting moderate variability in responses. The lowest variability was observed for Content Engagement (SD = 1.21), while User-Generated Content Influence exhibited the highest (SD = 0.903). Skewness values indicated slight asymmetries in the distributions, and Shapiro–Wilk test results (p < .001 for all variables) confirmed significant deviations from normality.

These findings suggest a usage pattern characterized by frequent yet time-efficient engagement with the platform. Participants reported habitual interactions with TikTok—such as liking, sharing, and commenting—despite spending limited time per session. The pronounced influence of user-generated content underscores the persuasive power of authentic, peer-driven media, echoing previous findings that such content significantly affects consumers' brand perceptions and behavioral intentions (Backstad & Lindquist, 2024). Overall, the results highlight TikTok's role as an influential social platform that fosters habitual

engagement and shapes user behavior through relatable and community-generated content.

The distribution of participants' self-reported time spent on TikTok is detailed in Table 3, highlighting the prevalence of brief but frequent usage sessions. This presents the frequency distribution of respondents based on the amount of time they reported spending on TikTok. The table includes five categories of usage intensity, along with the corresponding counts, percentage of the total sample, and cumulative percentages for each category.

Table 3. Distribution of Respondents According to Time Spent on TikTok

Time Spent on TikTok	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Very Low	100	29.0 %	29.0 %
Low	77	22.3 %	51.3 %
Moderate	99	28.7 %	80.0 %
High	48	13.9 %	93.9 %
Very High	21	6.1 %	100.0 %

Note. Percentages may not sum to exactly 100% due to rounding. Categories for time spent on TikTok were based on participants' self-reported usage levels, grouped into five predefined intervals.

Table 3 presents the distribution of participants based on their reported time spent on TikTok. The majority of respondents fell within the very low (29.0%) and moderate (28.7%) categories, collectively accounting for 57.7% of the sample. This suggests that while TikTok is frequently accessed, most users do not engage in extended viewing sessions. An additional 22.3% reported low usage, whereas only a minority indicated high (13.9%) or very high (6.1%) time spent on the platform. Cumulative percentages indicate that 80% of participants spend a moderate amount of time or less on TikTok.

These findings align with existing literature describing TikTok as a platform that encourages brief, habitual interactions. Omar and Dequan (2020) observed that younger users typically engage in quick scrolling sessions due to the short-form nature of the content. Similarly, Montag, Yang, and Elhai (2021) emphasized that TikTok's algorithmic design fosters repeated engagement through short bursts of attention rather than prolonged use. Taken together, these studies support the current findings, underscoring the platform's design as conducive to high-frequency but time-efficient usage patterns.

Table 4 further breaks down the frequency of TikTok use, showing that a majority of students engage with the platform multiple times daily. This presents the frequency distribution of respondents based on how often they reported using TikTok. The table includes usage categories along with their corresponding counts, percentages of the total sample, and cumulative percentages.

Table 4. Distribution of Respondents According to Frequency of TikTok Use.

TikTok Frequency Usage	Count	% of Total	Cumulative %
Very Low	28	8.1%	8.1%
Low	49	14.2%	22.3%
Moderate	67	19.4%	41.7%
High	103	29.9%	71.6%
Very High	98	28.4%	100.0%

Note. Percentages may not sum to exactly 100% due to rounding. Frequency categories were based on self-reported usage levels.

Table 4 presents the frequency distribution of participants based on their reported TikTok usage. The data indicate that a majority of respondents demonstrate high engagement with

the platform, with 29.9% classified as high-frequency users and 28.4% as very high-frequency users—together comprising 58.3% of the sample. This suggests that more than half of the participants regularly and intensively use TikTok. Moderate users accounted for 19.4%, while low and very low users represented smaller proportions at 14.2% and 8.1%, respectively. The cumulative percentages reflect a strong concentration of participants in the higher usage categories, indicating that TikTok has become a deeply embedded aspect of many users' daily routines.

These findings may be attributed to the platform's algorithm-driven content delivery and interactive features, which promote habitual and sustained engagement. Smith and Anderson (2018) observed that younger social media users tend to exhibit frequent checking behaviors, often engaging with platforms like TikTok multiple times per day. Similarly,

Baumann et al. (2025) demonstrated that TikTok's recommendation system rapidly reinforces user interests through personalized content streams, fostering persistent engagement and narrowing content diversity. The high frequency of usage observed in this study aligns with these prior findings, underscoring the platform's capacity to sustain user attention through algorithmic amplification.

Table 5 illustrates the varying degrees of influence that user-generated content exerts on participants, underscoring its role as a key driver of behavior. This presents the frequency distribution of user-generated content influence, categorized across five levels: Very Low, Low, Moderate, High, and Very High. The table includes the number of responses (Counts), the percentage each category represents of the total (% of Total), and the cumulative percentage (Cumulative %) progressing through the distribution.

Table 5 Frequencies of User-Generated Content Influence

Level of Influence	Count	Percentage (%)	Cumulative Percentage (%)
Very Low	23	6.7	6.7
Low	34	9.9	16.5
Moderate	189	54.8	71.3
High	79	22.9	94.2
Very High	20	5.8	100.0

Table 5 presents the distribution of participants based on their reported level of user-generated content (UGC) influence on TikTok usage. A majority of respondents (54.8%) indicated a moderate level of influence, suggesting that UGC plays a meaningful but not overwhelming role in shaping user behavior. An additional 22.9% reported a high level of influence, while smaller proportions indicated low (9.9%) and very low (6.7%) influence. Only 5.8% of participants reported experiencing a very high influence from UGC. Cumulatively, 71.3% of participants experienced a moderate or lower degree of influence, while 94.2% reported influence levels up to high, indicating that UGC is a broadly impactful—though variably experienced—component of TikTok engagement.

These findings are consistent with prior research emphasizing the persuasive yet differentiated impact of UGC on social media behavior. The pronounced influence of user-generated content on consumer buying behavior aligns with Social Proof Theory, which posits that individuals look to the behaviors and opinions of others to guide their own decisions, especially in uncertain situations (Cialdini, 2009). On TikTok, authentic peer-driven content serves as a powerful form of social proof, encouraging users to emulate purchasing behaviors endorsed by their community (Zhao, Wang, & Chen, 2022). This dynamic explains the strong correlation between user-generated content influence and consumer buying behavior observed in this study. Similar trends have been observed in the Philippine context, where TikTok's authentic peer content significantly shapes Gen Z consumers' attitudes and purchase decisions (De Guzman & Reyes, 2022). Moreover, Stamenković and Mitrović

(2023) found that TikTok users are often motivated by the authentic and personally relevant nature of user-generated content, which fosters routine engagement. Similarly, Lyu and Kim (2020) highlighted that UGC can shape users' attitudes, behaviors, and even purchasing decisions, particularly when the content is perceived as authentic and personally relevant. These studies reinforce the present findings,

underscoring UGC's role as a dynamic and influential driver of user interaction on TikTok.

Table 6 displays the distribution of content engagement levels among respondents. The data are organized into five ordinal categories—Very Low to Very High—and include corresponding frequencies, percentages of the total, and cumulative percentages.

Table 6 Frequencies of Content Engagement

Level of Engagement	Count	Percentage (%)	Cumulative Percentage (%)
Very Low	34	9.9	9.9
Low	73	21.2	31.0
Moderate	91	26.4	57.4
High	94	27.2	84.6
Very High	53	15.4	100.0

Table 6 presents the distribution of participants based on their reported level of content engagement on TikTok. A substantial portion of respondents reported high (27.2%) and moderate (26.4%) engagement levels, together comprising 53.6% of the total sample. Additionally, 15.4% indicated a very high level of engagement, suggesting that a notable segment of users is highly involved with platform content. In contrast, low (21.2%) and very low (9.9%) engagement levels were reported by a smaller proportion of participants. Cumulatively, 84.6% of respondents demonstrated at least a moderate level of content engagement, underscoring the platform's capacity to foster widespread user interaction.

These findings are consistent with prior research emphasizing TikTok's algorithmic design and content structure as key drivers of engagement. Wang (2022) highlighted that TikTok's recommendation algorithm plays a pivotal role in shaping user behavior by delivering

highly personalized content streams based on prior interactions and preferences. This algorithmic precision fosters habitual usage and deepens user involvement. Likewise, Klug et al. (2021) found that TikTok's short-form, emotionally resonant videos—combined with interactive features like likes, shares, and comments—encourage sustained engagement and frequent platform return. These insights align with the present study's results, underscoring the role of algorithmic personalization and content variety in shaping user engagement patterns.

Table 7 summarizes the overall exposure levels to TikTok content, indicating that most participants maintain moderate engagement with the platform. This outlines the distribution of participants' levels of exposure to TikTok content. The responses are classified into five categories—Very Low to Very High—accompanied by their corresponding frequencies, percentages, and cumulative percentages.

Table 7. Frequencies of TikTok Exposure

Level of Exposure	Count	Percentage (%)	Cumulative Percentage (%)
Very Low	36	10.4	10.4
Low	100	29.0	39.4
Moderate	146	42.3	81.7
High	57	16.5	98.3
Very High	6	1.7	100.0

The data indicate that most participants reported a moderate level of TikTok exposure (42.3%), followed by low exposure (29.0%), while only a small proportion reported very high exposure (1.7%), suggesting that excessive use is relatively uncommon within the sample. These findings align with prior research indicating that although TikTok is widely popular, most users engage with it in a balanced manner rather than excessively (Kircaburun & Griffiths, 2019). The minimal percentage of very high exposure supports the conclusion of Boursier et al. (2021) that problematic usage patterns are limited to a minority of users, often shaped by individual psychological traits.

Notably, the 16.6% of participants who reported high exposure is consistent with Sun and Zhang's (2021) observation that entertainment-driven motivations can lead to increased usage. Compared to earlier studies on platforms like Facebook and Instagram—where high usage was more prevalent among youth (Keles, McCrae, & Grealish, 2020)—the present findings suggest a more moderated pattern of TikTok engagement, potentially due to its short-form content design. Although Auxier and Anderson (2021) documented elevated screen time among teens during the pandemic, the moderate exposure observed in this study may reflect a post-pandemic recalibration. Overall, the results suggest that while TikTok is a widely used platform, participants generally demonstrate effective self-regulation in their usage patterns.

Table 8 summarizes the descriptive statistics for four key consumer behavior variables: Purchase Frequency, Purchase Intention, Brand Loyalty, and Online Impulse Buying Behavior. The table provides information on sample size, missing values, central tendency, variability, distribution shape, and normality indicators.

Table 8 Descriptive Statistics for Consumer Behavior Variables

Statistic	Purchase Frequency	Purchase Intention	Brand Loyalty	Online Impulse Buying Behavior
N	345	345	345	345
Missing	0	0	0	0
Mean	3.65	3.54	3.44	2.99
Median	3.80	3.60	3.40	3.00
Standard Deviation	0.887	0.867	0.884	1.02
Minimum	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Maximum	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
Skewness	-0.637	-0.554	-0.348	-0.035
Std. Error Skewness	0.131	0.131	0.131	0.131
Shapiro-Wilk W	0.953	0.957	0.966	0.968
Shapiro-Wilk p	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001

Table 8 reveals that most participants reported moderate to high levels of purchase intention, while only a small proportion indicated very low willingness to purchase. This suggests that a significant portion of the student population is receptive to buying products encountered online, particularly through platforms like TikTok. The distribution pattern, supported by a negative skewness value (−0.554), further indicates that participants generally leaned toward higher purchasing intentions.

The investigation into consumer buying behavior included an analysis of four key dimensions: purchase frequency, purchase intention, brand loyalty, and online impulse buying behavior. Descriptive statistics presented in Table 8 provide a foundational overview of these variables. Among them, purchase frequency recorded the highest mean, suggesting that students tend to make purchases on a regular basis. In contrast, online impulse buying behavior yielded the lowest average, indicating a more

measured or restrained approach to spontaneous online purchases.

These findings are consistent with prior research emphasizing the role of credible influencers and authentic content in shaping consumer behavior. Lim et al. (2022) highlighted that influencer credibility and high-quality content significantly enhance purchase intention and brand loyalty, particularly on platforms like TikTok where authenticity fosters trust. Rather than prompting immediate impulsive actions, TikTok's user-generated content often encourages sustained engagement. Similarly, Jamil et al. (2024) found that influencer characteristics—such as argument quality and kindness—positively affect consumer well-being and purchase intention, reinforcing the idea that TikTok supports deliberate, trust-based consumer interactions. Collectively, these insights suggest that TikTok serves as a platform for intentional and loyalty-driven consumer behavior, especially among Gen Z users.

The frequency distribution of purchase frequency among participants is shown in Table 9, reflecting regular buying habits. This presents the frequency distribution of participants' self-reported purchase frequency levels. The data are grouped into five categories—Very Low through Very High—and include the number of responses, percentage of the total, and cumulative percentage for each level.

Table 9 Frequencies of Purchase Frequency

Level of Purchase Frequency	Count	Percentage (%)	Cumulative Percentage (%)
Very Low	13	3.8	3.8
Low	37	10.7	14.5
Moderate	139	40.3	54.8
High	125	36.2	91.0
Very High	31	9.0	100.0

Table 9 reveals a clear pattern in the purchasing behaviors of the surveyed university students, with a substantial proportion reporting moderate to high-frequency purchasing. This suggests that regular online shopping is a common and normalized practice within this demographic. The relatively low percentages at the extremes—very low and very high purchase activity—indicate a general tendency toward balanced consumption habits. While frequent purchasing is prevalent, the data do not suggest widespread impulsive or excessive buying, pointing instead to a more regulated and intentional approach to online shopping.

These findings are consistent with prior research on the development of digital purchasing behaviors. Efendioğlu (2024) emphasized that digital consumers increasingly rely on personalized content and peer-generated reviews to build familiarity and trust, which gradually shape habitual purchasing patterns. Similarly, Mehmood et al. (2025) demonstrated that influencer traits such as credibility, likeability, and relatability significantly influence purchase intentions, particularly when users perceive influencers as authentic and trustworthy. In the context of TikTok, the interplay between algorithmic exposure and social validation appears to encourage frequent yet deliberate engagement with shopping-related content. The observed purchase frequency among Cebu City University students reflects this dynamic, suggesting that their buying decisions are guided more by perceived value and trust than by impulsivity—underscoring the platform's role in promoting mindful consumption among Gen Z users.

Table 10 details participants' purchase intentions, highlighting their receptiveness to buying products encountered on TikTok. This presents the frequency distribution of participants' self-reported levels of purchase intention. The data are categorized into five ordinal levels—Very Low through Very High—and include corresponding frequencies, percentages of the total sample, and cumulative percentages to illustrate the distribution across the scale.

Table 10 Frequencies of Self-Reported Purchase Intention

Level of Purchase Intention	Count	Percentage (%)	Cumulative Percentage (%)
Very Low	12	3.5	3.5
Low	49	14.2	17.7
Moderate	156	45.2	62.9
High	101	29.3	92.2
Very High	27	7.8	100.0

These findings align with prior research highlighting the persuasive power of short-form, visually engaging content in driving consumer behavior. Ngo (2022) found that entertaining and emotionally resonant TikTok videos significantly enhance purchase intention among Gen Z users by fostering trust and relatability. Similarly, Ling et al. (2024) demonstrated that interpersonal interaction and psychological closeness—often cultivated through community-driven content—play a mediating role in enhancing consumer purchase intent. Together, these insights affirm TikTok's capacity not only to capture attention but also to shape deliberate consumer decision-making when content design and credibility resonate with user values.

Brand loyalty levels are presented in Table 11, indicating moderate to high loyalty with some flexibility among students. This table presents the frequency distribution of participants' levels of brand loyalty. Responses were categorized into five ordinal levels—from Very Low to Very High—and include corresponding counts, percentages of the total, and cumulative percentages. This breakdown provides insight into how strongly respondents identify with or consistently purchase from particular brands.

Table 11 Frequencies of Self-Reported Brand Loyalty

Level of Brand Loyalty	Count	Percentage (%)	Cumulative Percentage (%)
Very Low	17	4.9	4.9
Low	58	16.8	21.7
Moderate	158	45.8	67.5
High	89	25.8	93.3
Very High	23	6.7	100.0

Table 11 indicates that brand loyalty among participants is predominantly moderate to high, with only a small proportion reporting very low or very high levels of loyalty. This suggests that while many students express a preference for specific brands, they generally remain open to exploring alternatives. Such patterns reflect a form of situational brand commitment, wherein loyalty is shaped by contextual factors rather than long-term allegiance.

This flexible loyalty aligns with emerging research on Gen Z consumer behavior. Eastman et al. (2021) observed that younger consumers often base brand support on current relevance, social values, or trend alignment, rather than enduring brand attachment. Similarly, Ladhari et al. (2020) found that social media platforms foster fluid brand preferences by exposing users to competing options and peer-driven content, which continually reshape brand perceptions. Within the dynamic environment of TikTok—where trends shift rapidly and algorithmic feeds refresh constantly—brand loyalty appears contingent on sustained relevance and perceived authenticity. These findings suggest that while brand loyalty exists among students, it is adaptive and responsive, underscoring the importance of consistent engagement and values-based marketing for long-term brand retention.

Table 12 displays the distribution of online impulse buying behavior, revealing moderate levels of impulsivity tempered by restraint.

This table displays the distribution of participants' self-reported levels of online impulse buying behavior. The data are categorized into five ordinal levels—Very Low through Very High—and include absolute frequencies, percentages of the total sample, and cumulative percentages to illustrate response trends.

Table 12 Frequencies of Self-Reported Online Impulse Buying Behavior

Level of Online Impulse Buying Behavior	Count	Percentage (%)	Cumulative Percentage (%)
Very Low	52	15.1	15.1
Low	82	23.8	38.8
Moderate	137	39.7	78.6
High	55	15.9	94.5
Very High	19	5.5	100.0

Table 12 reveals a central tendency toward moderate levels of online impulse buying among the study population, with fewer participants reporting either minimal or excessive engagement in such behavior. This distribution suggests that while unplanned purchases are not uncommon, students generally exhibit a degree of restraint in their online purchasing decisions.

This pattern aligns with recent research on impulse buying in digital environments, particularly on platforms like TikTok. Philippine studies also report that social media marketing influences impulse buying behavior among college students, moderated by cultural and financial awareness factors (Santos & Villanueva, 2020). While emotionally engaging content and algorithmic personalization can encourage spontaneous purchases, students' financial awareness and critical thinking often temper these impulses. Shamim and Azam (2025) emphasized the mediating role of trust, showing that influencer content characteristics—such as emotional resonance and informational value—can heighten impulsive buying tendencies. Similarly, Zhang et al. (2022) found that scarcity-driven content and fear of missing out significantly influence impulse purchases, especially when trust and social cues are present. These findings suggest that although TikTok fosters an environment conducive to impulsive behavior, users in this study appear to engage with a degree of intentionality, reflecting selective and value-driven consumption patterns.

Cultural values and generational characteristics play a significant role in shaping impulse buying and brand loyalty behaviors among university students. In the Filipino cultural context, which emphasizes community and social harmony, consumers tend to exhibit more cautious spending habits, which can moderate impulse buying tendencies. At the same time, younger generations like Gen Z, who are highly engaged with digital platforms such as TikTok, are more susceptible to impulse purchases driven by fast-paced, trend-based content. However, this generation also values authenticity and social responsibility, which fosters selective brand loyalty toward brands that align with their personal and cultural values. This interplay between cultural prudence and generational digital engagement helps explain the balanced levels of impulse buying and brand loyalty observed in the study.

Figure 1 reveals that fashion and apparel are the most influenced product categories, with 71.6% of participants indicating preference. This dominance likely reflects TikTok's highly visual format, which effectively showcases clothing styles, outfit ideas, and trend-driven content that resonates strongly with Gen Z users. Similarly, beauty and personal care rank second (62.3%), supported by a vibrant community of beauty influencers, tutorials, and product demonstrations that foster trust and engagement. The moderate interest in electronics (34.2%) may be driven by popular unboxing videos and tech reviews that appeal to students' curiosity and desire for the latest gadgets. In contrast, categories such as furniture and décor (15.4%) and food and beverages (22.0%) show lower influence, possibly

due to less frequent or less engaging content in these areas on TikTok. These patterns underscore TikTok's strength in promoting visually appealing, trend-sensitive, and lifestyle-oriented products, aligning with the platform's algorithmic emphasis on entertainment and peer influence. There was a total of 345 responses in the product category preference survey. This preference pattern highlights TikTok's effectiveness in shaping consumer interests toward visually engaging and trend-sensitive products, particularly those that align with Gen Z's lifestyle and identity expression.
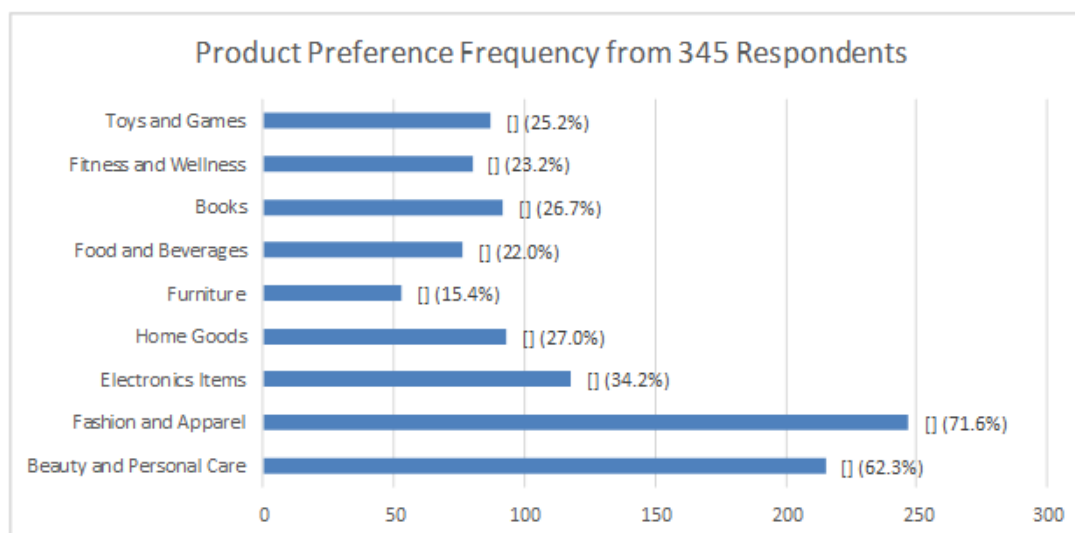
Figure 1 Distribution of Participants' Product Category Preferences

Table 13 summarizes the overall consumer buying behavior levels, showing that most students exhibit moderate purchasing influenced by TikTok exposure. This table displays the frequency distribution of overall consumer buying behavior among participants. Responses were grouped into five ordinal categories, ranging from Very Low to Very High, and are presented with corresponding frequencies, percentages, and cumulative percentages. This breakdown provides an overview of the general purchasing tendencies within the sample.

Table 13 Frequencies of Self-Reported Consumer Buying Behavior

Level of Consumer Buying Behavior	Count	Percentage (%)	Cumulative Percentage (%)
Very Low	14	4.1	4.1
Low	57	16.5	20.6
Moderate	200	58.0	78.6
High	61	17.7	96.2
Very High	13	3.8	100.0

Table 13 provides a detailed summary of consumer buying behavior levels among study participants. A majority of respondents (200 individuals, 58.0%) exhibited a moderate level of buying behavior influenced by TikTok exposure, indicating that while the platform does affect purchasing decisions, most students maintain balanced and controlled consumption patterns. This suggests that TikTok may shape consumer tendencies without necessarily leading to excessive or impulsive purchasing.

The second largest group reported high consumer buying behavior (60 individuals, 17.8%), closely followed by those with low buying behavior (57 individuals, 16.9%). Only a small fraction of participants fell into the very high (13 individuals, 3.8%) and very low (14 individuals, 4.1%) categories. Cumulative

analysis reveals that 78.4% of the sample demonstrates moderate or lower buying behavior, while only 21.6% falls into the high or very high range. These findings suggest that although TikTok exposure contributes to increased consumer engagement, most students retain a degree of purchasing restraint, reflecting intentional rather than purely impulsive consumption.

Spearman's rho correlation coefficients in Table 14 reveal significant positive relationships between TikTok exposure variables and consumer buying behavior, with user-generated content influence showing the strongest effect. This table presents the Spearman's rho correlation coefficients examining the relationships between various TikTok-related variables and consumer buying behavior. This nonparametric analysis was employed due to the non-normal distribution of the data, as previously assessed. The table includes correlation values, degrees of freedom, and significance levels, offering insight into the strength and direction of associations among the variables.

Table 14 Spearman's Rho Correlations Between TikTok Exposure Variables and Consumer Buying Behavior

TikTok-Related Variable	Spearman's ρ	df	*p*-value
TikTok Exposure	0.480***	343	< .001
Time Spent on TikTok	0.237***	343	< .001
TikTok Frequency Usage	0.405***	343	< .001
User-Generated Content Influence	0.517***	343	< .001
Content Engagement	0.406***	343	< .001

*Note. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.*

The results in Table 14 reveal significant positive correlations between all TikTok-related variables and consumer buying behavior. Notably, user-generated content influence exhibited the strongest relationship ($\rho = 0.517$, $p < .001$), followed by TikTok exposure ($\rho = 0.480$, $p < .001$), indicating that authentic, peer-driven content and general platform exposure are key drivers of purchasing behavior. Other moderately strong correlations were found with content engagement ($\rho = 0.406$) and TikTok frequency usage ($\rho = 0.405$), highlighting the role of active platform interaction.

Meanwhile, time spent on TikTok showed a weaker yet still significant association ($\rho = 0.236$), suggesting that the quality or nature of interaction may be more influential than duration alone. Collectively, the data suggest that consumer buying behavior is more strongly influenced by participatory and content-based factors than by passive usage metrics.

The correlation coefficients indicate varying effect sizes based on conventional benchmarks: the relationship between user-generated content influence and consumer buying behavior ($\rho = 0.517$) represents a large effect size, highlighting a strong practical association.

Other variables such as TikTok frequency usage ($\rho = 0.405$) and content engagement ($\rho = 0.406$) show moderate effect sizes, while time spent on TikTok ($\rho = 0.237$) reflects a small to moderate effect. These effect sizes underscore the importance of participatory and content-driven interactions over mere duration of use in influencing buying behavior.

The findings related to purchase intention, brand loyalty, and impulse buying behavior can be interpreted through the lens of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which suggests that behavioral intentions are influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991).

Table 15 presents correlations between consumer buying behavior and its components, confirming that purchase intention, brand loyalty, and impulse buying are all positively associated with overall buying behavior. This table presents Spearman's rho correlation coefficients examining the associations between consumer buying behavior and its key behavioral components—purchase frequency, purchase intention, brand loyalty, and online impulse buying behavior—alongside general TikTok exposure. This nonparametric approach was

used due to the data's non-normal distribution. Each coefficient is reported with its corresponding degrees of freedom and significance level.

Table 15 Spearman's Rho Correlations Between Consumer Buying Behavior and Related Constructs

Variable	Spearman's ρ	df	*p*-value
TikTok Exposure	0.503***	343	< .001
Purchase Frequency	0.388***	343	< .001
Purchase Intention	0.466***	343	< .001
Brand Loyalty	0.429***	343	< .001
Online Impulse Buying Behavior	0.458***	343	< .001

*Note. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.*

The results in Table 15 demonstrate statistically significant positive correlations between consumer buying behavior and all five related constructs. TikTok exposure showed a moderate association (ρ = 0.503, p < .001), reinforcing its influence on purchasing patterns. Among the behavioral components, online impulse buying behavior (ρ = 0.458), purchase intention (ρ = 0.466), and brand loyalty (ρ = 0.429) all displayed moderate relationships, suggesting that consumer buying behavior tends to increase alongside rising levels of intention, loyalty, and impulsivity.

Purchase frequency also showed a meaningful, albeit slightly weaker, correlation (ρ = 0.388, p < .001), indicating that regular purchasing habits align moderately with overall consumer buying tendencies. These findings suggest that consumer buying behavior, as a holistic construct, is shaped by a combination of exposure to persuasive content and behavioral dispositions, with particularly strong links to intention, loyalty, and impulse-driven decisions.

Similarly, the correlations between consumer buying behavior and its components reveal moderate to large effect sizes. Purchase intention (ρ = 0.466) and online impulse buying behavior (ρ = 0.458) exhibit moderate effects, indicating meaningful contributions to overall buying behavior. Brand loyalty (ρ = 0.429) also shows a moderate effect size, while purchase frequency (ρ = 0.388) reflects a small to moderate effect. These findings suggest that intention, loyalty, and impulsivity are significant behavioral drivers within the TikTok-influenced consumer context.

Together, these tables and figure provide a comprehensive and clear depiction of how Tik-Tok exposure shapes consumer behavior among university students, highlighting the platform's role as both an entertainment and marketing tool.

This study examined TikTok exposure and consumer buying behavior among university students in Cebu City. These findings align with prior Philippine-based research highlighting the growing impact of social media platforms on Filipino youth's consumer behavior (Llorin & Dela Cruz, 2021; De Guzman & Reyes, 2022). These reveal that TikTok has become an embedded part of participants' daily routines, characterized by frequent but relatively brief usage sessions. Among the exposure dimensions, TikTok Frequency Usage registered the highest mean, indicating that students engage with the platform multiple times a day, even if each interaction is short. Participants also reported a moderate level of influence from user-generated content, suggesting that while Tik-Tok shapes perceptions and behaviors, users maintain a degree of critical discernment. Moreover, the prevalence of active engagement behaviors—such as liking, sharing, and commenting—underscores the interactive and participatory nature of TikTok usage.

In terms of consumer buying behavior, participants generally exhibited moderate levels of purchase frequency, purchase intention, brand loyalty, and online impulse buying. This pattern suggests that while TikTok effectively drives consumer engagement—particularly through viral content and peer endorsements—most students demonstrate a balanced and intentional approach to consumption. Furthermore,

the analysis of product category preferences revealed alignment with popular TikTok-driven trends, especially in fashion, technology, beauty, and lifestyle-related items. These results position TikTok not only as a source of entertainment but also as a dynamic influence on purchasing behavior and decision-making among university students in Cebu City.

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the use of self-reported data may introduce response biases, such as social desirability or inaccurate recall. Second, the sample was limited to university students in Cebu City, which may restrict the generalizability of the results to other populations or regions. Third, the cross-sectional design captures a snapshot in time and does not account for changes in TikTok usage or consumer behavior over time. Future research employing longitudinal designs and more diverse samples would provide a deeper understanding of TikTok's influence on consumer behavior.

Conclusion

This study found a moderate positive relationship between TikTok exposure and consumer buying behavior among Cebu City university students, with user-generated content having the strongest influence. Online impulse buying was notably affected, especially in product categories like fashion and beauty.

For marketers, these results highlight the effectiveness of authentic peer content and influencer collaborations in driving purchases, particularly among Gen Z. Leveraging TikTok's visual and algorithm-driven features can enhance brand engagement and loyalty. For educators, the findings emphasize the importance of promoting digital literacy and consumer awareness to help students recognize persuasive tactics and manage impulse buying responsibly.

While insightful, the study's focus on a specific demographic and reliance on self-reported data limit generalizability. Future research should explore broader populations and longitudinal effects to deepen understanding of TikTok's impact on consumer behavior.

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