

The Impact of User-Generated Content (UGC) in the Cosmetics Industry on Consumer Purchase Intention

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Abstract: The objectives of this research were 1) to investigate the characteristics of cosmetic review user-generated content (UGC), including entertainment value, utility, authenticity, interactivity, and completeness, along with consumer purchase intention, and 2) to examine the influence of these UGC characteristics on consumer purchase intention. This study employed a quantitative research approach. Data were collected from a sample of 327 consumers who had experience browsing cosmetic review UGC on Chinese social e-commerce platforms, selected through purposive sampling. A structured five-point Likert-scale questionnaire served as the research instrument. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, reliability and validity analysis, Pearson correlation analysis, and multiple linear regression analysis. The research findings revealed that: 1) consumers generally demonstrated positive perceptions of cosmetic review UGC and purchase intention. Among the five UGC characteristics, authenticity received the strongest consumer recognition, indicating that consumers particularly valued content reflecting genuine product usage and experiences, while utility and interactivity showed greater potential for improvement; and 2) all five UGC characteristics positively influenced consumer purchase intention. Utility was the most influential factor, followed by entertainment value, completeness, authenticity, and interactivity. These findings indicate that practical and useful information plays the most important role in strengthening purchase intention, while entertaining and comprehensive content further supports consumer decision-making. Authenticity and interactivity also contribute positively by enhancing the credibility of UGC and consumer engagement.

Keywords: user-generated content, consumer purchase intention, entertainment value, utility, authenticity

1. Background

With the popularity of mobile internet and smartphones, social e-commerce in China has developed rapidly. Platforms such as Xiaohongshu, Douyin and Taobao Live integrate content consumption with online shopping, gradually forming a business ecosystem with distinctive local characteristics. Different from the one-way marketing model of traditional brand advertising, domestic social e-commerce relies on social relationship networks for product promotion. Consumers no longer obtain product information solely from official advertisements; instead, they learn about product details increasingly through UGC content such as authentic experiences, image-and-text reviews and usage reflections posted by ordinary users. Cosmetic review UGC produced by ordinary users is grounded in real usage scenarios, and is more likely to evoke emotional resonance and a sense of trust among consumers. Compared with official brand promotion, such user-generated content carries stronger persuasiveness and reference value, profoundly influences consumers' purchase intention, and even directly affects their final consumption choices.

Data show that cosmetics are a consumer category highly influenced by UGC, and social media has become a new "beauty counter". As of August 2025, the average daily views of beauty-related videos on Douyin exceeded 2.5 billion^[6]. Against this backdrop, based on the scenario of Chinese social e-commerce platforms, exploring the extent to which various features of cosmetic review UGC affect consumers' purchase intention and quantifying the magnitude of the effects of different content features carries strong practical research significance. This study adopts a multiple linear regression model and focuses on the content features and communication characteristics of cosmetic review UGC for empirical analysis.

2. Theoretical Basis and Research Hypotheses

2.1 User-Generated Content (UGC)

The concept of user-generated content (UGC) was first proposed in 2001, yet systematic academic research on it did not commence until 2006.

Regarding the core definition and feature expansion of UGC, scholars have put forward diverse core viewpoints and judgment criteria. Among them, Wunsch-Vincent and Vickery proposed three key criteria for defining UGC^[17]: first, public publication requirement: content must be publicly released on communication media, and unpublished content is not regarded as UGC; second, originality requirement: the work should contain the creator's own innovative contributions rather than simple duplication; third, non-commercial nature: creation shall not take economic returns as the primary objective, and commercial motives should be excluded.

On this basis, domestic scholars have also offered their own definitions and understandings. Fan Zhe, Zhu Qinghua and Zhao Yuxiang stated that UGC refers to web-based, publicly released content in various forms including texts, images, audios and videos^[7]. Zhao Yuxiang et al. further extended UGC into a dynamic behavioral pattern of user creation, arguing that it represents an interactive form jointly formed by user groups, social networks, communication channels and online virtual communities^[18]. With the rapid development of social e-commerce, how UGC affects consumer purchase intention has gradually become a research hotspot in this field.

2.2 Characteristics of UGC

In the field of social e-commerce, when exploring the impacts of user-generated content on consumer purchase intention, researchers usually extract UGC characteristics to conduct more refined analysis. Multiple content characteristics of UGC can be identified from different research

perspectives. Combined with the real scenario of beauty UGC on domestic social platforms, this study extracts five core dimensions: entertainment value, Utility, authenticity, interactivity and completeness.

In terms of entertainment value, Shao listed “entertainment and enjoyment” as an important motivational driver for users to browse UGC, and pointed out that entertainment attributes constitute the core psychological need motivating users to passively consume content^[15]. From the perspective of platform ecosystem, Kaye, Chen and Zeng suggested that lighthearted, interesting and creative UGC serves as a critical content foundation supporting the rapid user growth of Douyin/TikTok^[9].

In this study, entertainment value means that cosmetic review UGC arouses consumers’ interest and pleasant feelings through presentation forms and expressive methods. For instance, humorous statements, creative plots and innovative content formats in review texts deliver satisfying browsing experiences to consumers. Such positive emotional experiences encourage consumers to form favorable product evaluations and thereby raise purchase intention. Accordingly, the hypothesis is proposed:

H1: The entertainment value of UGC positively affects consumer purchase intention.

In research related to the Utility of UGC, Cheung, Lee and Rabjohn verified that perceived information Utility is a crucial factor for users to adopt online reviews and make consumption judgments^[2]. Through empirical analysis, Mudambi and Schuff investigated the effects of review depth, extremity and product type on UGC Utility^[11]. In addition, existing studies have shown that the identity characteristics of UGC publishers also significantly influence audiences’ perception of content Utility^[8].

Within the context of this study, Utility indicates that cosmetic review UGC can provide practically referable information for consumers in product selection and usage, embodied by skin type matching suggestions and hands-on product experience. Such practical information reduces uncertainty in consumers’ purchasing process, relieves decision-making concerns and facilitates the formation of purchase tendency. Accordingly, the hypothesis is proposed:

H2: The Utility of UGC positively affects consumer purchase intention.

Research on UGC authenticity mostly centers on whether creators produce content based on real usage experience. Metzger, Flanagin and Medders argued that UGC authenticity requires comprehensive evaluation of multiple factors, including content information, publisher identity, platform environment and social evaluations^[10]. In the social media environment, UGC authenticity can be interfered by the commercialization level of content^[1] and whether content expression conforms to ordinary users’ real experience^[5].

In this study, authenticity requires cosmetic review content to be grounded in users’ real usage experience and objectively reflect the actual product performance. Specifically, reviews shall display unover-beautified facial application effects, publish unfiltered original footage, objectively disclose product drawbacks, truthfully report potential problems such as irritating odor and mild skin discomfort, and reject false promotion and exaggerated efficacy for commercial benefits. Objective and credible review content helps build consumer trust and thus promotes purchase intention. Accordingly, the hypothesis is proposed:

H3: The authenticity of UGC positively affects consumer purchase intention.

The demand for social interaction acts as an important internal motivation for users to engage in UGC creation^[3], which can turn audiences from mere content receivers into participants and co-creators^[12].

Interactivity in this study refers to the interaction level among consumers, review creators and review content. High interactivity manifests as a large number of likes, comments and shares received by reviews and an active discussion atmosphere in comment sections: consumers' questions about product usage can be promptly replied by creators or other users; creators take initiative to respond to comments, build positive communication atmosphere and strengthen users' sense of participation and identity. Favorable interactive experience further enhances consumers' purchase tendency. Accordingly, the hypothesis is proposed:

H4: The interactivity of UGC positively affects consumer purchase intention.

Completeness is an important dimension for evaluating UGC content quality^{[4] [13]}.

In this study, completeness refers to the comprehensiveness of product information described in cosmetic review UGC. Reviews with high completeness cover core product efficacy, applicable scenarios, suitable skin types and target groups, and also provide reference information such as comparisons with similar products and alternative options. Comprehensive information lowers consumers' information search cost, reduces purchasing uncertainty and strengthens consumer purchase intention. Accordingly, the hypothesis is proposed:

H5: The completeness of UGC positively affects consumer purchase intention.

This study constructs a conceptual framework for the impact of cosmetic review UGC on consumer purchase intention, as shown in Figure 1.

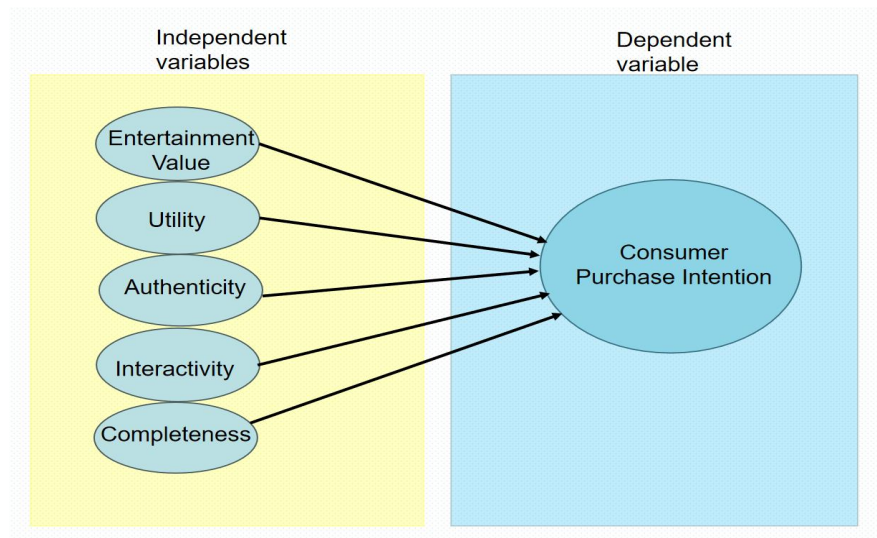


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Based on the MLR model, this study takes the five characteristics of UGC as independent variables, with consumer purchase intention as the dependent variable.

2.3 Theoretical Foundations

The core tenet of the trust transfer theory is that consumers' trust in an information source can be transferred to a target product or brand through cognitive or emotional associations^[16]. In the context of cosmetic UGC, consumers initially develop trust in UGC content itself and its publishers, and such trust stems from various characteristics of UGC. Entertainment value and interactivity evoke positive emotions by creating a relaxed atmosphere and building social connections, realizing trust transfer via the emotional route; Utility and completeness reduce information search costs and

provide clear decision-making grounds to accomplish trust transfer through the cognitive route. Authenticity serves as the shared foundation for both emotional and cognitive routes. Only content based on real usage experience can genuinely arouse consumer trust. Once consumers establish trust in UGC content, this trust will be transferred to product brands recommended on platforms, thereby enhancing consumer purchase intention, which offers theoretical support for Hypotheses H1–H5 in this study.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) posits that individuals process information through two routes: the central route and the peripheral route^[14]. The central route emphasizes rational deliberation over information logic and objective evidence, corresponding to Utility and completeness in this study. The peripheral route relies on external cues such as emotional resonance, authentic user perspectives, and a sense of community engagement to form judgments rapidly, corresponding to entertainment value, authenticity and interactivity. In the high perceived-risk context of cosmetics, both information processing routes function simultaneously. All five UGC characteristics can act as persuasive cues to jointly and positively boost consumer purchase intention. This theoretical perspective provides a conceptual basis for examining the relationships between the five UGC characteristics and consumer purchase intention.

3. Research Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative research method, with questionnaire surveys as the primary data collection instrument. The research subjects are consumers who have browsed cosmetic review UGC on social platforms. Questionnaire distribution and data collection were conducted online via Wenjuanxing. A convenience-sampling approach was adopted for participant recruitment. Questionnaires were disseminated through social-media groups and personal contacts to reach target respondents who had browsing experience of cosmetic-review UGC. The questionnaire consists of two parts: respondents' basic demographic information and measurement scales for core variables. All items adopt a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 denotes "strongly disagree" and 5 denotes "strongly agree". A higher score indicates a stronger level of respondent agreement with the statement. This study aims to explore the extent to which each dimension of cosmetic review UGC affects consumer purchase intention. A multiple linear regression model is employed to test the research hypotheses. A quantitative model is constructed to analyze the effects of key UGC characteristics on consumer purchase intention and clarify the magnitude of influence of each variable. The questionnaire consists of seven sections. The first section collects respondents' demographic background information. The remaining six sections correspond to the six research constructs (entertainment value, utility, authenticity, interactivity, completeness, and consumer purchase intention), with four measurement items developed for each construct.

4. Data Analysis

A total of 365 questionnaires were distributed. After excluding 38 invalid responses from respondents with no experience browsing cosmetic UGC, repetitive answers and overly short completion time, 327 valid samples were retained, with an effective response rate of 89.59%.

4.1 Descriptive Analysis

In terms of respondents' demographic characteristics, females accounted for 56.90%, a higher proportion than males. Respondents aged between 26 and 40 constituted the main consumer group for cosmetics, accounting for 62.40% of the total sample. In terms of educational background,

participants with junior-college education and above represented the largest share of respondents. A total of 88.1% of respondents frequently browse cosmetic-related UGC content with high frequency.

Descriptive statistics of the scales show that the mean values of all measurement items ranged from 3.28 to 3.45, all above the midpoint of 3. This indicates that respondents generally held positive attitudes toward the entertainment value, Utility, authenticity, completeness, interactivity of beauty UGC as well as their own purchase intention. Among the five UGC dimensions, authenticity recorded the highest mean score, indicating that respondents generally perceived cosmetics UGC as reflecting genuine product- use experiences. By contrast, entertainment value recorded the lowest mean score, suggesting that the entertainment- related characteristics of cosmetics UGC may warrant further improvement.

The standard deviations of all items fell within the range of 1.111 to 1.244, with an overall high degree of dispersion. This suggests substantial individual differences in respondents' perceptions of beauty UGC. The completeness dimension had the largest standard deviation, meaning users exhibited the most prominent divergence in their perceptions of the comprehensiveness of review content. By contrast, items reflecting that UGC reduces information cost for product selection had concentrated scores with the smallest individual differences.

Results of normality test show that the skewness values of all items ranged from -0.274 to 0.026 and kurtosis values ranged from -1.262 to -0.948. The data meet the criteria for approximate normal distribution in social science research (absolute value of skewness < 3, absolute value of kurtosis < 10). Most items were slightly left- skewed while only a few items showed mild right skewness. The overall data distribution was slightly left- skewed and flat. In summary, the sample data from this survey are of good quality with stable distribution, satisfying the empirical prerequisites for reliability test, correlation analysis and multiple linear regression analysis.

Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of Survey Samples (N=327)

Variable	Category	Number of Samples	Proportion (%)
Gender	Male	141	43.1
	Female	186	56.9
Age	18 years old and below	23	7
	19–25 years old	46	14.1
	26–30 years old	103	31.5
	31–40 years old	101	30.9
	41 years old and above	54	16.5
	High school or below	42	12.8
Education Level	Junior college	100	30.6
	Bachelor's degree	156	47.7
	Master's degree or above	29	8.9
Frequency of browsing UGC	Occasionally (1–2 times)	39	11.9
	Frequently (3–5 times)	190	58.1
	Very frequently (over 5 times)	98	30

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics Results of Measurement Items of Cosmetics UGC Scale

Measurement Items	Mean	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Entertainment Value1	3.31	1.123	-0.037	-0.955
Entertainment Value2	3.28	1.143	-0.047	-0.948
Entertainment Value3	3.29	1.185	-0.04	-1.171
Entertainment Value4	3.35	1.176	-0.039	-1.26
Utility1	3.31	1.159	-0.005	-1.153
Utility2	3.28	1.111	-0.027	-0.976
Utility3	3.34	1.156	-0.078	-1.064
Utility4	3.35	1.13	-0.07	-1.128
Authenticity1	3.32	1.161	-0.057	-1.095
Authenticity2	3.4	1.144	-0.219	-0.997
Authenticity3	3.43	1.219	-0.173	-1.183
Authenticity4	3.45	1.197	-0.274	-1.036
Interactivity1	3.35	1.148	-0.082	-1.117
Interactivity2	3.35	1.154	-0.065	-1.169
Interactivity3	3.33	1.155	-0.156	-1.06
Interactivity4	3.39	1.17	-0.206	-1.063
Completeness1	3.33	1.244	-0.089	-1.253
Completeness2	3.3	1.179	-0.052	-1.066
Completeness3	3.38	1.186	-0.063	-1.165
Completeness4	3.28	1.162	0.026	-1.135
Consumer Purchase Intention1	3.28	1.193	-0.028	-1.174
Consumer Purchase Intention2	3.34	1.192	-0.04	-1.177
Consumer Purchase Intention3	3.41	1.21	-0.113	-1.262
Consumer Purchase Intention4	3.28	1.2	-0.015	-1.083

4.2 Reliability Analysis

This study employed SPSS 27.0 to test the internal consistency of each construct. As shown in Table 3, the Cronbach's α of each sub-dimension scale ranged from 0.850 to 0.875, all exceeding the threshold value of 0.8, which indicated good internal consistency for each sub-scale. The Cronbach's α after item deletion for each construct was lower than the corresponding dimension-level Cronbach's α , which meant that removing any single item would not substantially improve the reliability of the construct. Therefore, all measurement items were retained without deletion.

Multicollinearity diagnostics demonstrated that the variance inflation factors (VIF) for all independent variables ranged from 1 to 3, which were well below the critical threshold value of 10. Hence, no serious multicollinearity existed in this research model.

Table 3 Questionnaire Reliability Analysis

Variable Category	Measurement Items	Cronbach's α After Item Deletion	Dimension Cronbach's α
X1 entertainment value	I find the cosmetics UGC content on various platforms very interesting.	0.816	0.859
	I find the interactive content of cosmetics UGC on various platforms very interesting.	0.827	
	Entertainment value is the main reason why I follow cosmetic UGC.	0.823	
	I am willing to actively browse cosmetics UGC content that is entertaining.	0.814	
	I can obtain practical information such as product ingredients and usage methods from cosmetics UGC.	0.804	
X2 Utility	Browsing cosmetics UGC helps me verify the actual effects of products.	0.817	0.850
	Browsing cosmetics UGC reduces my search costs.	0.807	
	Paying attention to cosmetics UGC helps me grasp real-time information.	0.811	
	I believe that most cosmetics UGC does not deliberately fabricate or conceal the true situation of products.	0.850	
	I believe that most cosmetics UGC content is created based on real usage experiences.	0.840	
X3 authenticity	I believe that the cosmetics product information shared by contributors is accurate and credible.	0.839	0.875
	I believe that the information shared in cosmetics UGC is basically consistent with the actual situation of the products.	0.830	
	I think I can communicate with other users on the platform about cosmetic experiences.	0.821	
	I feel that my cosmetic comments posted receive timely responses.	0.822	
	I believe cosmetic UGC creators respond actively to users' questions and comments.	0.812	
X4 interactivity	I am willing to continuously follow the interactive discussions in the cosmetics UGC comment section.	0.843	0.863
	Cosmetics UGC covers my needs.	0.812	
	Cosmetics UGC includes all the necessary values.	0.818	
	Cosmetics UGC basically meets my needs.	0.818	
	The comments in cosmetics UGC have sufficient breadth and depth	0.815	
X5 completeness	When browsing cosmetics UGC, I am willing to consider purchasing the recommended products.	0.838	0.855
	When I have a need to buy cosmetics, I often refer to UGC content to make purchase-related judgements.	0.833	
	Among similar cosmetics, I am more inclined to choose brands/products recommended by UGC content.	0.830	
	I am willing to recommend products mentioned in cosmetics UGC to my friends.	0.830	
Y consumer purchase intention			0.869

4.3 Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation coefficients were used to examine the inter-variable relationships among the five dimensions of cosmetic-review UGC. The findings showed significant positive correlations among entertainment value, utility, authenticity, interactivity and completeness. All Pearson correlation coefficients were higher than 0.3, suggesting moderate correlation levels between these variables. The correlation results provided preliminary support for the subsequent multiple linear regression test.

Table 4 Correlation Coefficient Matrix of Independent Variables(indicates $p < 0.01$)**

Item	X1	X2	X3	X4	X5
X1 Entertainment Value	1				
X2 Utility	0.399**	1			
X3 Authenticity	0.349**	0.398**	1		
X4 Interactivity	0.336**	0.388**	0.422**	1	
X5 Completeness	0.425**	0.398**	0.486**	0.448**	1

4.4 Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

On the basis of correlation analysis, multiple linear regression analysis was further performed. Five UGC characteristics were set as independent variables and consumer purchase intention was taken as the dependent variable for hypothesis testing, as illustrated in Table 5. Entertainment value, utility, authenticity, interactivity and completeness all exerted significant positive influences on consumer purchase intention ($p < 0.05$). Accordingly, Hypotheses H1, H2, H3, H4 and H5 were fully supported.

The regression model yielded an adjusted R-square of 0.334, $F=33.694$, $p<0.001$, indicating the overall statistical significance of the regression model.

According to the standardized beta- coefficient outputs, utility obtained the highest influence weight. This result corresponds to the high - perceived - risk nature of cosmetics; practical information can effectively help consumers reduce decision- making risks during product selection. Entertainment value ranked second and served as a traffic entry for attracting user attention. Completeness occupied the third position. However, widespread fragmentation of UGC content on social platforms restrains its conversion effect. Authenticity came in fourth. It does not mean that authenticity is unimportant for consumers. Instead, most audiences of beauty- related UGC possess certain discriminating ability, and authenticity functions more like an access threshold. Interactivity had the lowest regression coefficient, which was consistent with descriptive statistical results. It reflected the shortage of substantive communications in comment sections of current beauty platforms. Interactivity can only produce limited promotion effects on purchase intention, which should be prioritized for optimization by platforms and brands in future practice.

Regression Equation:

$$Y = 0.512 + 0.173X_1 \text{ (Entertainment Value)} + 0.194X_2 \text{ (Utility)} + 0.155X_3 \text{ (Authenticity)} + 0.158X_4 \text{ (Interactivity)} + 0.163X_5 \text{ (Completeness)}$$

Table 5 Regression Coefficients and Collinearity Statistics

Variable	Unstandardized B	Std. Error	t-value	Standardized Beta	P-value	VIF
Constant	0.512	0.222	2.304	-	0.022	-
X1 Entertainment Value	0.173	0.055	3.149	0.166	0.002	1.353
X2 Utility	0.194	0.057	3.386	0.181	<0.001	1.393
X3 authenticity	0.155	0.055	2.791	0.153	0.006	1.479
X4 interactivity	0.158	0.056	2.809	0.151	0.005	1.413
X5 completeness	0.163	0.058	2.817	0.16	0.005	1.579

Table 6 Regression Model Summary and ANOVA Results

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F	Sig.
0.587	0.344	0.334	33.694	0.000

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

This paper is set in the context of domestic social-e-commerce platforms and explores the magnitude of the impact exerted by each characteristic of cosmetic-review UGC on consumer purchase intention. This study first identifies and sorts out five core characteristics of cosmetic-review UGC: entertainment value, utility, completeness, authenticity, and interactivity. Further empirical tests indicate that all five UGC content dimensions exert significant positive effects on consumer purchase intention, which is consistent with the internal logic of how UGC shapes consumers' consumption judgements.

The influence weights of the five dimensions on purchase intention are ranked in descending order: utility > entertainment value > completeness > authenticity > interactivity. The overall model achieves reasonable goodness-of-fit. The five beauty-UGC characteristics jointly explain 33.4 % of the variance in consumer purchase intention, and this fitness level meets the general standards for empirical research in the segmented field of consumer behaviour. Theoretically, this study incorporates completeness into the UGC analytical framework, constructs a five-dimensional measurement system adapted to the cosmetics industry, and supplements empirical evidence for the segmented beauty-industry scenario.

Based on the above-mentioned empirical findings, this paper puts forward practical optimization countermeasures targeting three stakeholders, namely beauty platforms, cosmetic brands and UGC creators, in combination with the empirical performance of each of the five UGC dimensions. Utility generates the strongest positive effect on consumer purchase intention. Platforms should allocate more traffic resources to review content with high practical value so as to fully unlock the conversion efficiency of utility-oriented content. They should diversify content presentation formats to enhance the entertainment attributes of content, improve content censorship and supervision mechanisms, strictly crack down on false reviews and exaggerated promotion to consolidate the trust foundation of platform content, launch interaction incentive initiatives, allow

objective negative reviews to be normally displayed and build a sound community interaction atmosphere. Moreover, platforms should issue beauty-content creation guidelines to guide creators to enrich review information and improve the completeness of content.

From the perspective of cosmetic-brand operation, brands shall optimise their new-media marketing cooperation strategies. Priority should be given to cooperating with creators who focus on in-depth product testing and produce comprehensive, substantial and informative content, so as to impress consumers via UGC with both utility and completeness. Meanwhile, brands shall appropriately arrange entertainment-oriented commercial promotion, grant traffic support to UGC that combines communication potential and high-quality content, and promote content to spread across different user circles. Official brand accounts shall actively engage in community interactions, respond promptly to user inquiries and initiate product-related topic discussions to remedy the deficiency of insufficient interaction in beauty-related content. In addition, regular ordinary-consumer trial campaigns can be carried out to accumulate authentic review word-of-mouth generated by mass users, build consumer trust and thereby boost consumer purchase intention.

For UGC creators, it is necessary to balance entertainment value and practical value when producing cosmetic-review content. On the premise of vivid and accessible expression, creators should proactively supplement objective information including product parameters, real-world on-skin effects as well as product strengths and weaknesses, and continuously enrich review details. They ought to reply to comments in a timely manner and strengthen interactions with users, so that content can better guide consumers' purchase-related decision-making. Creators shall adhere to objective and authentic creation principles, improve the reference value and credibility of review posts, and provide valid references for consumers' product-selection judgements.

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