

“Get ready with me for school”: Childhood and adolescence commercialization through branded beauty videos on TikTok

Purpose

This paper examines children’s and adolescents’ “Get Ready With Me” beauty videos on TikTok as a visibility-driven form of consumer socialization. Guided by four research questions, we analyze how promotional formats shape engagement, how performer profiles align with these formats, how adult participation structures brand display, and which themes organize their narratives. We show how creators strategically perform authenticity within algorithmic visibility regimes, where metrics recalibrate the boundaries between play, labor, and commerce in youth culture.

Design/methodology/approach

The study adopts a mixed-methods design integrating quantitative engagement analysis and qualitative interpretive inquiry. A corpus of 198 TikTok videos featuring children and adolescent creators was examined. Non-parametric statistical tests (Kolmogorov-Smirnov, Mann-Whitney U, and Friedman) were used to identify engagement disparities between branded and organic content, while grounded theory techniques guided the thematic construction of emergent narrative and socio-cultural patterns.

Findings

The results indicate that authentic or non-sponsored content elicits higher engagement than overtly commercial posts, demonstrating the performative premium for authenticity within algorithmic economies. Four principal dynamics were identified: the aesthetic codification of selfhood through beauty routines; the normalization of aspirational labor among minors; the transformation of parental mediation into a participatory promotional practice; and the rearticulation of childhood as a commercially productive social identity.

Originality/value

This study identifies two mechanisms linking platform capitalism to youth beauty culture: (1) a disclosure penalty, whereby overtly paid collaborations generate lower engagement than seemingly organic routines, and (2) parental promotional mediation,

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3 where adult presence correlates with increased product display. These dynamics show
4 how algorithmic visibility rewards commercially legible authenticity, positioning youth-
5 branded participation within regulatory grey zones. The findings support child-centered
6 platform governance and advertising frameworks that address not only explicit
7 sponsorships but also routine-based, family-mediated, quasi-organic promotional
8 practices.
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14 **Keywords:** TikTok; beauty culture; influencer culture; consumer socialization; self-
15 branding; algorithmic visibility; digital capitalism; parental mediation; children;
16 adolescent; aspirational labor; social media
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Introduction

TikTok has consolidated itself as a central arena for beauty-related content for children and adolescents (Bozzola et al., 2022). What many observers read as a playful wave, dubbed the “Sephora Kids” phenomenon (Criddle, 2024), in fact signals broader shifts in the political economy of platforms, where entertainment, advertising, and commerce converge in one algorithmically curated feed. TikTok’s affordance functions—expressive, connective, commercial, co-creative, meta-voicing, recommending, searching, and live-streaming (Vizcaíno-Verdú & Jaramillo-Dent, 2023)—do not merely host beauty culture; they actively shape it by rewarding visibility and converting everyday routines into marketable content. In this contest, young audiences receive promotional messages and author content that blurs the boundaries between play and commercial display (Virós-Martín et al., 2024).

These conditions invite scrutiny of persuasive discourses around self-care. Industry and creators frame product use as a route to autonomy, self-esteem, and well-being, while repositioning self-care as a storytelling narrative (Barquero-Cabrero et al., 2023) that requires sustained investment in one’s appearance from an early age. These framings strategically conceal the commercial intent of the content by embedding consumption within emotionally charged and identity-oriented narratives that align with the psychosocial dynamics of emerging audiences (Castillo-Abdul et al., 2020; Romero-Rodríguez & Castillo-Abdul, 2023).

Formats such as Get Ready With Me (GRWM) make these entanglements more visible. GRWM videos merge intimate, step-by-step routines with the staged presentation of brands, teaching users how to incorporate products into their daily lives and how to perform promotion as part of self-presentation (Stamatos, 2025). When children and adolescents adopt these scripts, they learn the consumption patterns and performative skills associated with influencer culture (Abidin, 2025). Scholars have

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2
3 described these dynamics as the hyper-commercialization of childhood (Fan et al.,
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5 2024), in which platforms accelerate the socialization of consumer identity
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7 (Buckingham, 2011; Cook, 2008).
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10 Adult involvement adds another layer. Research on parental mediation
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12 distinguishes between restrictive strategies, which limit access or formats, and active
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14 strategies, which involve co-use, discussion, and guidance (Livingstone & Helsper,
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16 2008). On TikTok, adult participation ranges from absence to active co-production,
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18 such as filming, scripting, or directly promoting products alongside children (Hardman-
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20 Taylor & Brisini, 2023).
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23 Scholarship has recently documented how TikTok beauty culture shapes
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25 childhood through learning cultures, playful creativity, and commercialized dynamics.
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27 Sudarmanto (2023) introduces how vertical video opens up new forms of interactive
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29 pedagogy for children, while Lee et al. (2025) foreground the entanglement of
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31 opportunity and risk in young people’s everyday engagement with the For You Page—
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33 FYP. Yoo et al. (2025) warn that pre-adolescents are increasingly exposed to active
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35 skincare routines promoted by influencers, with dermatological risks that extend beyond
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37 recommended practices. Jonser and Llop-Slomma (2025) add that the “Sephora Kids”
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39 trend exemplifies how beauty consumption is now integrated into childhood, reflecting
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41 how digital culture and aspirational labor converge in commercialized play.
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46 Thus, this study makes three contributions. First, it identifies engagement
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48 asymmetry between disclosed advertising and routine-based “organic” promotion,
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50 advancing the concept of a disclosure penalty to explain why commercially oriented
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52 content shifts toward less legible formats. Second, it shows how adult participation
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54 intensifies promotional product displays, which we conceptualize as parental
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56 promotional mediation. Third, by combining engagement metrics with grounded
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3 thematic analysis, it theorizes the political economy of visibility in youth beauty culture,
4 showing how algorithmic reward systems structure the legibility, value, and
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6 repeatability of childhood and adolescence.
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10 11 12 **Theoretical background**

13 14 15 *Childhood, adolescence, and beauty logic on TikTok*

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17 TikTok embeds children's and adolescents' everyday beauty routines within
18 influencer culture through its short-form format, algorithmic curation, and visibility
19 metrics (Parikh & Lipner, 2024). Likes, comments, favorites, and shares create a
20 feedback loop that incentivizes continuous self-display and transforms ordinary
21 practices into marketable content (Bhandari & Bimo, 2022). While media scholars have
22 long linked mediated experiences to entertainment, identity formation, and social
23 connection (Katz et al., 1974), TikTok intensifies these gratifications by anchoring them
24 to quantifiable measures of popularity and social value.
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36 In this context, engagement exceeds the interaction counts. It functions as a
37 relational and economically consequential signal that indexes credibility, trust, and
38 value in influencer-mediated communications (Waltenrath, 2024). Advertising formats
39 and disclosure regimes recalibrate these dynamics by activating persuasion knowledge
40 and reshaping source credibility, generating divergent engagement trajectories across
41 sponsored and non-sponsored contents (Sun et al., 2023). Disclosure configurations and
42 endorsement styles further shape whether engagement remains episodic or develops into
43 sustained interaction and commercial response in emerging influencer commerce
44 environments (Al-Hasan, 2024).
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56 Performer characteristics simultaneously condition both the intensity and quality
57 of the engagement. Popularity, visibility, authenticity cues, and brand context interact to
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3 determine whether attention accumulates as a superficial interaction or consolidates into
4 relational and economic value (Walsh et al., 2024). Variations in prescriber types and
5 narrative configurations also produce distinct interaction patterns, highlighting the
6 interdependence of engagement, advertising form, and performer profile in platform-
7 mediated marketing communication (Barquero-Cabrero et al., 2023).
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14 Engagement with beauty trends on the platform operates as early training in
15 aspirational labor, where young users invest affective and creative efforts in pursuit of
16 visibility, affiliation, or future monetization (Duffy, 2017). At the same time, they
17 develop self-branding as a core digital literacy, learning to curate themselves as
18 commercially legible personas for publics and potential brand collaborators (Abidin,
19 2025). Practices such as product hauls and GRWM tutorials function as sites of identity
20 performance and mechanisms of market-oriented socialization (Yoo et al., 2025).
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34 *Consumer socialization of childhood*

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36 Research in youth studies and consumer culture have shown that brands mediate
37 identity formation, peer belonging, and status negotiation from an early age
38 (Buckingham, 2011). Social media platforms accelerate these processes through specific
39 affordances (Vizcaino-Verdú & Jaramillo-Dent, 2023) that blur the lines between
40 leisure, peer recommendation, and covert advertising (Martínez-Navarro & Bigné,
41 2021). On TikTok, these affordances encourage children to learn preferences for
42 particular products and show products on camera, narrate their use, and convert them
43 into symbolic capital—likes, shares, and follower growth, as those of “Sephora Kids”
44 phenomenon (Jonser & Llop-Slomma, 2025).
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57 This normalization of commercial content within online interaction makes it
58 difficult for younger audiences to separate organic sharing from promotional messaging.
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3 In this regard, TikTok participates in the hyper-commercialization of childhood (Cook,
4 2008), in which consumption becomes a central script for sociality and self-making.
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6 Particularly, the GRWM format functions as affective labor and consumer training,
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8 blending authenticity with persuasion (Stamatos, 2025). The creator's vulnerability—
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10 casual speech and anecdotes—builds trust legitimizing promotion (Hendry et al., 2022).
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12 This “brand pedagogy” turns viewing into participatory emulation: adopting featured
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14 products or routines performs belonging within creator's aesthetic framework (Hendry
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16 et al., 2022).
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21 According to Dallolio et al. (2025), adolescents develop consumption
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23 competencies on social media and mobilize brands as resources of symbolic power to
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25 negotiate status and peer belonging. In the specific context of TikTok, Divon et al.
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27 (2025) show that *kidfluencers* engage in monetization processes characterized by
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29 opacity, in which the commodification of childhood is concealed through narratives of
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31 intimacy, play, and the everyday. This makes it methodologically relevant to identify
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33 the brands and themes that are normalized in this type of content.
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37 From a promotional communication and public relations perspective, Archer and
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39 Delmo (2025) emphasize that the participation of minors in commercial influence
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41 practices has a direct impact on children's rights, reinforcing the need to empirically
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43 examine the brand repertoires and discursive frameworks that structure such practices.
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47 Complementarily, Lyroni and Spais (2024) demonstrate that, in the contexts of
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49 platform-mediated consumption, relationships with brands associated with aspiration
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51 and status are linked to the affective and symbolic dimensions of consumer well-being.
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53 In the same vein, Loureiro et al. (2023) conceptualized human brands as objects of
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55 relational attachment, showing that repeated exposure and the construction of affective
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57 bonds strengthen loyalty toward person-brands in digital communication environments.
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Parental mediation in children and adolescents' branded media practices

Traditionally, parental mediation distinguishes between restrictive strategies and active forms that emphasize co-viewing, dialogue, and critical reflection (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008). Platformed sociality, however, has destabilized this binary. Research on YouTube shows that parents increasingly script, film, and curate kidfluencer content, staging product displays, and managing children's on-screen authenticity for brands and audiences (van den Abeele et al., 2024). Content analyses have documented frequent product placements embedded in everyday routines, normalizing brand presence, and amplifying persuasive effects, particularly under conditions of implicit exposure or unclear disclosure (Alruwaily et al., 2020; Choi, 2023). Family vlogs further demonstrate how parents engineer intimate domestic scenes that render brand integration organic to family narratives (Vizcaíno-Verdú et al., 2022). Recent work argues that such practices foster familial parasociality, potentially undermining children's agency and sense of protection (Brown, 2025; Wilson et al., 2025).

This literature frames adult participation on TikTok as a dual practice that combines supervision with the choreography of promotional displays (Lee et al., 2025), raising questions about parental commercial interests and the assessment of product relevance and safety within fast-paced recursive recommendation environments (Qin et al., 2023).

Methodology

To examine the interplay between commercial logic, parental mediation, and thematic trends in TikTok beauty videos featuring children and adolescents, we adopted

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3 an exploratory mixed-methods design structured around the following research
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5 questions:

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8 • (RQ1) How do different advertising formats relate to engagement metrics in
9 TikTok beauty videos featuring children and adolescents?
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12 • (RQ2) Which performer profiles are most frequently associated with these
13 advertising formats?
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16 • (RQ3) In what ways does adult participation shape the display of brands and
17 products in TikTok beauty videos featuring child and adolescent performers?
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20 • (RQ4) Which brands and themes emerge in TikTok beauty videos?
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26 Research on beauty content for children and adolescents on TikTok has
27 expanded alongside growing interest in mixed-methods approaches in digital youth
28 studies (Martínez-Navarro & Bigné, 2021). Prior scholarship has largely centered on
29 YouTube and Instagram (Cook, 2008; Duffy, 2017). Building on this trajectory, we
30 employed a convergent mixed-methods design that integrated statistical and thematic
31 analyses to examine engagement and narrative dynamics.
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39 40 41 *Research design and codebook*

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43 We developed a codebook to ensure a systematic and replicable analysis.
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45 Quantitative codes captured engagement and adult participation, while qualitative codes
46 addressed thematic narratives and brand references. The design underwent iterative
47 refinement and pilot testing using 25 videos. Intercoder reliability, assessed using
48 Fleiss' Kappa—January 2025, showed substantial agreement across categories ($K=.825$,
49 $p=.019$). Reliability was perfect for comments, favorites, and shares ($K=1$, $p=.001$) and
50 strong for product displays ($K=.661$, $p=.001$) and performers ($K=.613$, $p=.001$).
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3 Although the type of ad code demonstrated low intercoder reliability ($K=.242$,
4 $p=.225$), the results highlighted the inherent complexities of distinguishing organic from
5 paid advertising on TikTok. Platform content often blurs these categories through
6 minimal or ambiguous disclosures, such as casual mentions, subtle placements, or
7 hashtags such as “#ad” or “#sponsor” (Ren, 2023; TikTok Monetization and
8 Advertising Policies, n.d.). To address this, two coders refined the codebook by adding
9 “when to apply” guidelines. Explicit cues—e.g., hashtags—were coded as paid, whereas
10 product use without such markers was coded as organic (Table 1).
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25 *Sample*

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27 The dataset comprised 198 videos featuring children and adolescents engaging
28 with beauty-related content on TikTok. We adopted a purposeful sampling strategy,
29 which is the deliberate selection of information-rich cases that illuminate the
30 phenomenon under study (Patton, 2002). In line with this approach, we selected videos
31 based on their thematic relevance to the research questions and their capacity to provide
32 insights into branded beauty practices, influencer culture, and parental mediation on the
33 platform, according to: (1) their explicit engagement with beauty practices involving
34 young creators, (2) the presence of identifiable beauty products or brands, and (3) the
35 availability of visible engagement metrics (e.g., likes, comments, favorites and shares).
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48 We conducted an initial pilot study of 25 videos between September and
49 October 2024 to refine the codebook and the analytical categories. These videos were
50 not included in the final dataset. We subsequently collected and analyzed the main
51 sample of 198 videos between November 2024 and January 2025.
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57 We manually collected the data using a newly created TikTok account without a
58 prior interaction history to reduce the influence of algorithmic personalization. Videos
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3 were identified through systematic hashtag-based searches. The process began with a
4 predefined set of keywords and hashtags, such as “#skincareforkids”, “#sephorakids”,
5 and “#childskincare”, informed by exploratory searches and existing research on
6 TikTok beauty content (Arefin et al., 2025). As we identified videos meeting these
7 criteria, TikTok’s recommendation system suggested related hashtags, enabling the
8 dynamic inclusion of additional keywords such as “#kidsgrwm”, “#childmakeup”, and
9 “#grwmforschool”. We did not perform any interactions (e.g., likes, follows, or
10 comments) during the collection process to avoid training the platform’s
11 recommendation system and minimize algorithmic personalization that could bias
12 content visibility and selection.
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26 In this study, we used the terms “children” and “adolescents” as descriptive
27 categories rather than strictly age-defined variables. Given the qualitative and
28 exploratory nature of the research, we did not consider the creators’ chronological age
29 as a determining factor for inclusion. Instead, we inferred age inductively through
30 contextual cues within the videos, including (1) explicit self-declarations, (2) references
31 to school grades or educational stages, and (3) the visible presence or verbal
32 identification of accompanying adults such as parents or caregivers.
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42 We excluded videos that were deleted, privatized, or otherwise restricted during
43 the analysis period (November 2024-January 2025). From an initial pool of 205 videos,
44 we excluded seven videos for these reasons, resulting in a final sample of 198 videos.
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49 We continued sampling until reaching thematic saturation.
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52 *Data analysis*

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54 We analyzed the dataset using a mixed analytical approach aligned with the
55 specific focus of each research question and grounded in the predefined codebook,
56 combining descriptive and interpretive dimensions.
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3 Quantitative analysis addressed RQ1, which examined the relationship between
4 advertising format and engagement. For this purpose, we analyzed engagement metrics
5 (likes, comments, favorites, and shares) in relation to the type of advertising in each
6 video (paid advertising versus organic promotion). RQ2 focused on performer profiles
7 and examined how different configurations of on-screen presence (children/adolescents
8 appearing alone or alongside adults) relate to advertising formats. RQ3 analyzed the
9 role of adult participation in shaping branded content by scrutinize the associations
10 between forms of family involvement (e.g., supervision, encouragement, collaboration,
11 or absence) and types of product displays (e.g., usage demonstrations,
12 recommendations, product placements, or reviews).

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14 We conducted quantitative analyses using SPSS v.25. We applied the
15 Kolmogorov-Smirnov test to assess normality and employed non-parametric tests
16 (Mann-Whitney U and Friedman) to observe differences and associations across
17 engagement indicators, performer configurations, advertisement types, and forms of
18 adult participation. This analytical layer focused exclusively on the observable and
19 countable features of the videos.

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21 In the second stage, the qualitative analysis addressed RQ4 and focused on the
22 discussion of the video content. Drawing on the grounded theory technique and iterative
23 coding in Atlas.ti 24, we explored how beauty routines, brand references, and family
24 interactions were narratively framed and articulated in the content. Following Strauss
25 and Corbin (1997), we applied (1) open coding to identify recurring routines,
26 communicative styles, and discursive motifs; (2) axial coding to relate these categories
27 to broader analytical dimensions such as aspirational labor, parental mediation, and
28 commercial visibility; and (3) selective coding to integrate these relationships into the
29 core themes reported in the findings section.
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3 Although all variables were organized within a single codebook, quantitative
4 and qualitative coding served different functions. Quantitative codes captured the
5 structural and impact-related characteristics of the videos, whereas qualitative coding
6 addressed the narrative and discursive articulation of these elements. We applied both
7 analytical layers independently and integrated them only at the interpretive stage,
8 thereby avoiding conceptual overlap between the measurement-oriented analysis and
9 discourse-oriented exploration.
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20 *Ethical considerations*

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22 Given the sensitivity of studying children's and adolescents' online dynamics,
23 we prioritized ethical considerations throughout the study. The analysis adhered to
24 TikTok's terms of service, which permits the use of publicly available content for
25 academic purposes (TikTok Terms of Service, 2021). Moreover, this study followed the
26 principles outlined in the European Union's Digital Services Act (DSA) (Regulation
27 (EU) 2022/2065), which emphasizes the importance of safeguarding children's data and
28 privacy in digital environments.
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38 To safeguard the identities and privacy of children, adolescents, and other
39 individuals featured in TikTok videos, we employed a "data fabrication" strategy
40 (Markham, 2012), balancing confidentiality and authenticity in digital research with
41 children and adolescents (Leaver, 2021). We anonymized all figures while retaining the
42 original brand references and scripts. We produced visual materials using OpenAI's
43 DALL·E, a text-to-image model based on video descriptions, and refined them using
44 Adobe Illustrator and Photoshop.
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57 **Findings and discussion**

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59 *RQ1: Advertising, engagement patterns, and organic contents driving interactions*
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3 For the first research question, which examined the relationship between the
4 type of advertising and the engagement level of TikTok beauty videos featuring
5 children, we used the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test to assess the normality of the
6 dependent variable, total engagement. This test was selected because of its robustness in
7 handling large sample sizes ($n > 50$). The results for videos categorized as organic
8 promotions revealed a significant deviation from normality ($p = .001$). Similarly, videos
9 classified as paid advertising demonstrated a non-normal distribution ($p = .042$). Based
10 on these findings, we selected a non-parametric approach to analyze the differences
11 between the groups.
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24 We defined total engagement as the sum of all user interactions with a video,
25 including likes, comments, favorites, and shares. The code type of ad included two
26 levels: (1) paid advertising, referring to disclosed collaborations with brands, and (2)
27 organic promotion, referring to spontaneous product placement. Therefore, we
28 employed the Mann-Whitney U test to assess the differences in total engagement
29 between the two groups. The analysis yielded a statistically significant result ($U = 855.5$,
30 $Z = -2.468$, $p = .014$). This aligns with platform logics that reward content framed as
31 “everyday” and native to influencer culture (Abidin, 2018; Martínez-Navarro & Bigné,
32 2021). The mean ranks indicated higher total engagement for videos featuring organic
33 promotions (mean rank = 102.33) than for those featuring paid advertising (mean
34 rank = 65.03).
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49 This pattern exceeds a descriptive “authenticity premium” and has theoretical
50 and regulatory implications. When visibility rewards promotion is embedded in
51 everyday routines, platform economies incentivize commercially useful authenticity that
52 performs ordinariness while remaining promotional. The resulting disclosure penalty
53 clarifies a core tension in influencer regulation: disclosure regimes target explicit
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3 sponsorships, yet the most effective promotional practices often resist being classified
4 as advertising. This mechanism-based account of visibility shows how engagement
5 metrics discipline promotional forms, steering creators and brands toward quasi-organic
6 formats that young audiences and guardians struggle to recognize as marketing tools.
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12 We examined the prominence of individual engagement types (likes, comments,
13 favorites, and shares) within videos categorized as organic promotions. The
14 Kolmogorov-Smirnov test assessed the normality of each engagement type, and the
15 results indicated significant deviations from normality for all four variables ($p=.001$).
16 Given these results, we proceeded with the Friedman test, a non-parametric method
17 suitable for comparing related samples when the normality assumption is not met.
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26 The Friedman test indicated significant differences across engagement types
27 ($\chi^2=386.727$, $df=3$, $p<.001$). Mean ranks revealed a clear hierarchy: likes (3.74) ranked
28 highest, followed by favorites (2.52), shares (1.90), and comments (1.84). The
29 prominence of likes suggests their role as low-effort visibility cues within algorithmic
30 reward systems that sustain continuous self-presentation (Bhandari & Bimo, 2022).
31 Engagement tends to decline when children appear on screen, as risk-aware audiences
32 limit interaction, even though algorithms continue to reward surface-level visibility (Lee
33 et al., 2025; Livingstone & Helsper, 2008).
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48 *RQ2: Performer profiles in TikTok beauty ads and adolescent prominence in paid*
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52 The second research question examined how different performer configurations
53 were associated with paid and organic advertising in TikTok beauty video content.
54 Overall, organic promotions dominated the dataset, accounting for 92.4% of all cases,
55 whereas paid advertisements accounted for 7.6% (Table 2).
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[Insert Table 2 here]

As shown in Table 2, young creators appearing alone predominantly engaged in organic advertising formats, with paid promotions being comparatively infrequent. This distribution reflects prior research on routine-based influencer performances, where commercial elements often appear without explicit sponsorship markers (Abidin, 2018). Adolescents appearing alone represented the most common configuration (39.4% of cases). Although organic formats dominated this group, adolescents accounted for a substantial share of the paid advertisements, consistent with their established visibility within influencer economies (Duffy, 2017).

Videos featuring young creators alongside adults constituted the largest performance configuration (47.5% of the dataset) and were primarily associated with organic advertising formats. This pattern aligns with research showing that intergenerational appearances often emerge in non-explicitly branded, family-oriented digital contexts (Vizcaíno-Verdú et al., 2022). In contrast, videos featuring young creators alongside young adults appeared infrequently and exclusively in organic formats, reinforcing the overall predominance of routine-based promotional content in the sample.

RQ3: Product displays in young audiences' beauty TikTok videos

The third research question explored how adults' participation in TikTok beauty videos influences the types of product displays. Among the videos, the involvement of adults varied significantly in terms of both frequency and role (Table 3).

[Insert Table 3 here]

Nearly half of the videos (47.5%) showed no adult participation in any capacity, according to the analytical categories applied in Table 1, highlighting the prevalence of

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3 content centered entirely on children and adolescents. Although adults were absent from
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5 the recorded interactions, guidance may persist through algorithmic curation, which
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7 continues to shape performance and discovery (Lee et al., 2025). Adults actively
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9 encouraged or facilitated the activity in 33.8% of the videos, often by directing beauty
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11 routines or highlighting branded products. More direct involvement appeared less
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13 frequently, with 7.6% of adults supervising recordings and 11.6% participating in
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15 content creation. These more engaged roles suggest a shift toward hands-on mediation,
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17 wherein adults shape both the narrative and execution. When critical framing is absent,
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19 such mediation may reinforce commercial logic (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008; Qin,
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21 Zeng & Wang, 2023).
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26 Product displays reflected the narrative logics through which creators integrated
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28 the branded products into each video (Table 3). Usage demonstrations dominated the
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30 sample (70.7%), typically through GRWM narratives that framed product use within the
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32 temporal flow of preparing for an event. These videos emphasized casual interaction
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34 and situational progression rather than technical explanations, positioning beauty
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36 products as part of an ongoing social performance.
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40 Promotional displays accounted for 23.2% of the dataset and were centered on
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42 direct recommendations and product placement. Unlike GRWM narratives, these videos
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44 foregrounded deliberate showcasing, with creators already styled and focusing on
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46 specific products—often recent purchases or brand gifts—outside routine-based use.
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48 Other displays represented a smaller share (8.5%) and included reviews and brand
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50 comparisons, which prioritized evaluative commentary and personal consumption
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52 experiences without relying on preparation narratives or explicit promotional framing.
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56 To strengthen the statistical analysis, variables were recategorized to mitigate
57
58 low-frequency issues in certain categories. Adult participation was reorganized into
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3 three measures: (1) active involvement, including adult supervision or collaboration in
4 video creation; (2) promotion or encouragement of the activity; and (3) absence of
5 adults. Likewise, the initial six categories of product displays were condensed into three
6 balanced groups: (1) usage demonstrations—such as GRWM routines and beauty
7 tutorials—remained a single category; (2) promotional displays merged product
8 recommendations and placements because of their shared emphasis on endorsement;
9 and (3) other displays combined with reviews, experiences with branded products, and
10 comparisons, all involving evaluative brand engagement. These adjustments ensured
11 compliance with the chi-squared test assumptions and improved analytical reliability.
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24 The chi-square test revealed a statistically significant association between adult
25 participation and product display type ($\chi^2(4)=13.440$, $p=.009$). This relationship showed
26 a moderate effect size, with Cramer's $V=.184$. Adult involvement in these videos varied
27 across product display types, revealing patterns linked to the degree of participation.
28 Videos featuring adults showed more promotional displays than expected, indicating a
29 link between adult presence and product showcasing. On YouTube, parents curate
30 kidfluencer content to stage promotional scenes and craft perceived authenticity (van-
31 den-Abeele et al., 2024). These practices integrate product placements into family
32 routines (Alruwaily et al., 2020), while disclosure remains limited to young audiences
33 (Choi, 2023).
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46 This finding reframes parental mediation in platformed commercial contexts.
47 Rather than functioning primarily as protection, adult presence often operates as
48 promotional infrastructure that organizes pacing, framing, and brand legibility. The
49 concept of parental promotional mediation extends mediation theory by showing how
50 active involvement can align with market logics when visibility metrics reward
51 commercially legible performances. This challenges a core assumption in child online-
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3 safety debates—that adult co-presence ensures protection—by showing how it can
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5 increase the likelihood that routines become structured promotional displays, with direct
6
7 implications for advertising literacy and child-protection policy.
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10 Conversely, videos without adult figures disproportionately featured usage
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12 demonstrations, aligning closely with the GRWM genre as a form of “brand pedagogy”
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14 that ritualizes step-by-step product familiarization through intimate, narrative-driven
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16 content (Stamatos, 2025). This display type appeared more frequently than anticipated,
17
18 suggesting a preference for practical, instructional formats over overt endorsements in
19
20 youth-centered content. In contrast, videos that included adults, either promoting or
21
22 encouraging the activity, exhibited a more balanced distribution across display types.
23
24 While usage demonstrations and promotional displays largely matched the expected
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26 frequencies, the analysis revealed a moderate surplus in the “other displays” category,
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28 reflecting a greater-than-expected presence of evaluative and experiential product
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30 content in videos involving adult participation.
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35 These findings illustrate how the presence or absence of adults in these TikTok
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37 beauty videos significantly influences the style of the product presentation. Videos with
38
39 active adult involvement align strongly with promotional displays, indicating a
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41 structured approach that is likely driven by brand collaboration. Adults in these roles
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43 may facilitate more formalized product endorsements, shaping content to meet
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45 advertising objectives. Conversely, videos without adult participation featured usage
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47 demonstrations, emphasizing children’s and adolescents’ practical engagement with
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49 beauty products as natural integration within everyday routines.
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56 *RQ4: Dominant brands and themes: identity, aspirational labor, family mediation, and*
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58 *negotiation of childhood and adolescence*
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The last research question allowed us to comprehend the predominant brands and thematic narratives in the TikTok beauty content featuring children and adolescents. Employing a grounded theory approach, the analysis revealed interconnected dynamics of personal care rituals, aspirational labor, family mediation, and childhood and adolescence negotiation narratives (Figure 1).

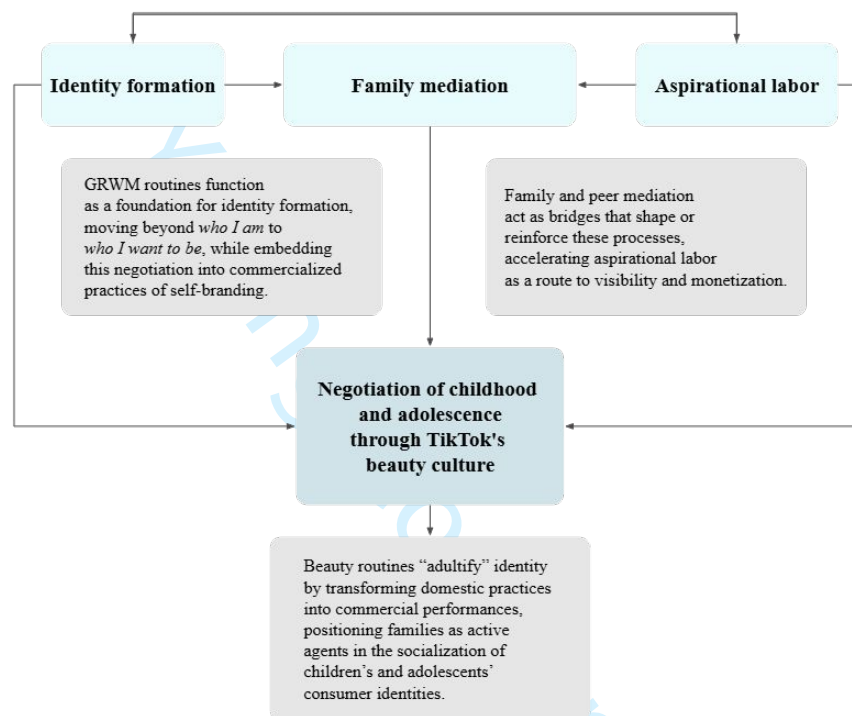


Figure 1. Conceptual map of childhood and adolescence negotiation in TikTok's beauty culture. Created by the authors.

The role of personal care rituals in identity formation

Personal care rituals, particularly those embedded within the GRWM trend, form the thematic core of these videos. Far from being mere demonstrations of skincare or makeup, these routines act as performances of self-expression. This aligns with prior research showing how brands shape identity and belonging in early childhood (Abidin, 2025; Buckingham, 2011).

Children and adolescents narrated these routines with detailed attention to products and applications, weaving personal reflections into the flow. For example, adolescents preparing for their first day of high school combined expressions of excitement with brand recommendations for Rare Beauty and elf (Figure 2). This convergence of personal storytelling and product engagement positions GRWM as a multifaceted cultural practice that merges utility and performative identity.



Script: Hi! Get ready with me to go to school. I'm super excited, okay? I couldn't sleep almost all night because of the excitement. I don't know why, but the first day always makes me so excited, and I literally couldn't sleep. I woke up at 5:20 AM, and now it's 6:13 because I took a shower, had my hair straightened, got dressed, and did all that stuff. But before all that, I was talking to a friend while we were getting ready, and now here I am. I'm so happy to go back to school because I love it; I feel like I'm doing a lot of things and doing what I enjoy. And I feel amazing, okay?

I'm going to put on my Renight cream with Berry branches wraps for a moment, and guys, I'm going to do my makeup. But just a little, okay? My idea is to put on some concealer because look at these huge dark circles. I mean, I know... it's my fault for staying up so late. I barely slept all night; I literally couldn't fall asleep, but I eventually did. Like, I really wanted to sleep, and now I still want to sleep—literally.

Oops, I forgot my morning routine because I literally forgot everything. I even forgot what time I need to leave for school. I can't tell if I'm running late or early. Oh no, my beauty blender!

As I was saying, I'm really excited because every new stage excites me. I know I'm going to put in a lot of effort, and I like setting goals and pushing myself even harder. Now I'm putting on a bit of concealer to cover up the fact that I didn't sleep much. And now I'm going to set my brows because otherwise, they look super sparse. Now I'm adding a subtle glow and blending it out. Have fun at school!

Figure 2. A child preparing for her first day of school while narrating her morning routine. Created by the authors.

Among children, GRWM routines centered on basic hygiene and skincare, emphasizing cleansing, moisturizing, and sunscreen as accessible and age-appropriate practices. Brands such as Bubble, Evereden, and CeraVe dominated these routines, valued for perceived gentleness and safety (Yoo et al., 2025). These brands functioned as gateways to personal care, prioritizing utility over aesthetics. Parents and caregivers frequently mediated these practices, framing skincare as educational, health-oriented,

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3 and carefully regulated, often through guided routines that emphasized bonding and
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5 habit formation.
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8 Among adolescents, GRWM routines reflected more advanced and expressive
9
10 engagement with beauty. Creators showcased serums, exfoliants, and makeup from
11
12 brands such as The Ordinary, Glow Recipe, and Drunk Elephant, signaling a shift from
13
14 basic care to aesthetic expertise and trendiness. Adolescents narrated these routines with
15
16 authority, detailing the ingredients, benefits, and techniques, and positioned product
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18 mastery as central to self-branding and aspirational labor (Abidin, 2025; Duffy, 2017).
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20 By curating and sharing these routines, adolescents aligned their online identities with
21
22 the aspirational logics of the beauty industry.
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28 *Aspirational labor and the symbolism of brands*

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30 Children and adolescents on TikTok additionally demonstrated a sense of
31
32 aspirational labor in their beauty-related content, with their narratives reflecting the
33
34 influence of beauty online celebrities. These narratives often imitate influencers'
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36 storytelling strategies, emphasizing curated personas, disciplined routines, and strategic
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38 product acquisition as pathways to achieve the aspirational goal of becoming content
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40 creators.
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45 Central to these narratives was the portrayal of the effort and intentionality in
46
47 creating and maintaining beauty routines. For example, adolescents shared stories of
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49 saving money over time to purchase specific products, framing these acquisitions as
50
51 achievements rather than mere transactions. One video showed an adolescent
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53 showcasing a Sephora haul while narrating how they strategically budgeted for weeks to
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55 acquire items from brands such as Drunk Elephant, Rare Beauty, and Glow Recipe,
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57 alongside more affordable alternatives, such as Bubble and CeraVe (Figure 3).
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Script: Get ready with me while I tell you all the products I use. We're starting my routine with the Mario Badescu Orange Mist, which you can find at Druni, Sephora, and Primor—so many places! Then I apply the Byoma mist, which I absolutely love. You can get it at Cool Beauty. Next, I use the Essence stick contour, which you can find at Primor and Druni, and it's super affordable. After that, I apply the Fenty Beauty product, which is a bit more expensive, but honestly, it's amazing. You can find it at Sephora, of course. Then, I apply The Ordinary hyaluronic acid serum, which I absolutely love. You can get it at Sephora, Druni, and Primor—tons of places. It's truly amazing! After that, I use the Essence watermelon serum, which I really enjoy. Now, for the product you ask me about the most: the Drunk Elephant moisturizer. It's really good but quite pricey. You can get it at Sephora, and I honestly love it—I'm obsessed! Next, I apply Isdin sunscreen, which I have in a mini size because I also have the full size, but I want to finish the mini one first. Seriously, it's the best sunscreen I've tried, and you can find it at pharmacies and other places. For my brows, I'm using the Sheglam product that just arrived today, and I already love it! Finally, I put on a bit of the Sol de Janeiro body mist in pistachio and caramel scent, and I love it so much. And that's it! Bye!

Figure 3. A child showcasing all the skincare products he has purchased, mentioning brands and stores. Created by the authors.

The integration of luxury and affordable brands in these narratives reflected a dual aspiration: on the one hand, aligning with high-status symbols of success within the beauty industry and on the other, ensuring accessibility and relatability for their audience. The deliberate inclusion of affordable options alongside luxury items demonstrated an awareness of diverse audience demographics while maintaining aspirational tone.

A key recurring format in these videos was the “haul”, where children and adolescents detailed their product research, purchasing strategies, and plans for incorporation into their routines. This format highlighted their engagement with beauty products and reinforced the concept of aspirational labor by showcasing the ambition behind their choices. In other words, labor extends beyond the physical use of products

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3 to include the strategic and symbolic processes of curation, acquisition, and presentation
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5 (Duffy, 2017; Jonser & Llop-Slomma, 2025).
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10 *Family mediation and intergenerational beauty-bonds*

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12 Family participation has emerged as a critical dynamic, adding an
13
14 intergenerational layer to the consumption and presentation of younger care rituals.
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16 Adults declared that they often acted as guides, collaborators, and gatekeepers, shaping
17
18 narratives on product usage and age-appropriate routines.
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21 In videos featuring younger children, parents guide or assist with product
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23 application, framing the activity as both a care work and informal education. This form
24
25 of active mediation fosters digital and consumer literacy and reinforces the legitimacy
26
27 of brand presence in domestic contexts (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008; Qin et al., 2023).
28
29 For instance, a mother accompanying her eight-year-old daughter to Sephora selectively
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31 chose age-appropriate brands, such as Bubble and Evereden.
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35 Conversely, videos featuring adolescents often show a shift in their family
36
37 dynamics. Older siblings or parents may adopt observational or comedic roles,
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39 providing commentary or reacting to adolescents' choices. For example, a father
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41 humorously shows his daughter's extensive Bubble collection, highlighting the
42
43 negotiation of autonomy and parental oversight in these contexts (Figure 4).
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Script: My daughter loves skincare and we made a video where she went on a skincare shopping spree. So, today we decided to share her collection with you.

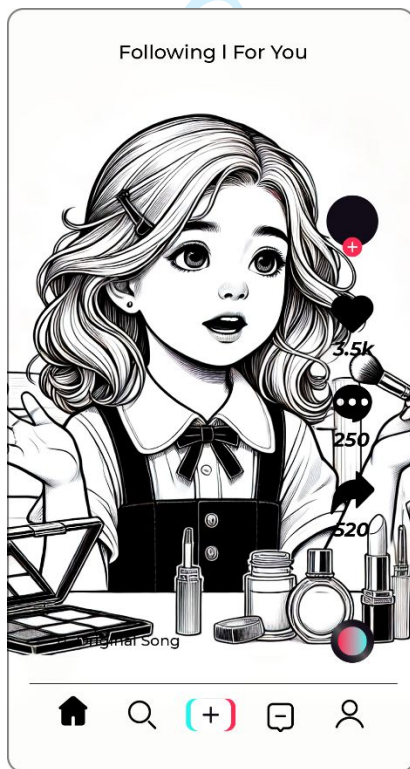
Figure 4. A father humorously critiques his daughter's extensive collection of Bubble skincare products. Created by the authors.

This intergenerational interaction is particularly evident in videos in which parents collaborate directly with children and adolescents. A mother-daughter duo demonstrating their respective nighttime skincare routines, featuring products such as Evereden and Drunk Elephant, illustrates how family bonds are reinforced through shared rituals.

Additionally, parents often provide emotional support in videos in which children or adolescents use beauty routines as a platform for storytelling. A mother combing her daughter's hair while the child applied Glow Recipe's toner and chatted about her school day exemplifies this dynamic. The parents' presence, even in a background role, served as a reassuring anchor, demonstrating how beauty routines could function as moments of connection and reflection within the family unit.

The negotiation of childhood and adolescence behind the lens of beauty culture

The narratives embedded in the TikTok beauty videos revealed complex negotiations surrounding childhood, maturity, and consumer culture. One particularly emblematic motif was the recurring reference to “Sephora Kids”, which encapsulates the tensions surrounding youthful engagement with beauty culture (Stamatos, 2025). This phenomenon serves as a pointed critique of precocious consumerism and an ironic celebration of children’s growing participation in beauty trends.



Script: I thought y'all were kidding when you said these nine-year-olds at Sephora are out of control. Let me tell you what happened. I went to my local Sephora to get my Baccarat, but guess what? It was completely sold out because an entire birthday party of fourth graders bought it all with their parents' credit cards. I don't know about y'all, but I work hard for my stuff. It took me a whole week to earn this Baccarat. At first, I thought the Sephora employees were joking when they said a bunch of fourth graders wiped out the stock. But nope—there was a full-on mob of kids. And when I say mob, I mean mob. Then I actually ran into them and saw every single one of them holding the polypeptide cream, unboxing it right there in the store. And guys, the shelves were completely empty. The craziest part? The birthday girl was holding a Dyson Airwrap in one hand and a Dyson Hair Dryer in the other. Like, when I was nine, I got a boombox and a soccer ball. I don't know about y'all. Listen, I'm not trying to hate on these kids at Sephora—let them do their thing. But let me tell you, when I have kids, they will not be going to a Sephora-themed birthday party unless they're at least 16.

Figure 5. Pre-adolescent expressing frustration over nine-year-olds buying out Sephora’s stock. Created by the authors.

Some videos featuring pre-adolescents revealed this tension: while performing advanced beauty routines, they criticized younger children for engaging in similar practices (Figure 5)—exposing an early internalization of aesthetic norms despite the potential health risks (Madhumita & Ponnarasu, 2024; Yoo et al., 2025).

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3 Labeling children’s beauty products as “safe” or “playful” obscures the cultural
4 implications of fostering consumer engagement at an early age. These practices extend
5 beyond marketing, contributing to a redefinition of childhood, in which consumption
6 shapes identity formation. Framed as self-expression and empowerment, as Brown
7 (2025) observes, these routines often enact false empowerment, embedding consumerist
8 logic into children’s developing sense of self.
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11 During adolescence, the dynamics shift. On TikTok, adolescents present
12 themselves as autonomous actors who construct narratives of expertise and
13 independence. However, platform research on algorithmic identity and circulation
14 logics (Bhandari & Bimo, 2022) complicates the appearance of agency. Adolescents
15 emphasize skill, product literacy, and self-care as signs of control, but this framing often
16 obscures the market forces that structure their participation. What appears to be an
17 individual choice is driven by the economies of attention and commercial socialization.
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35 **Conclusion**

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37 This study shows that TikTok beauty content featuring children and adolescents
38 cannot be reduced to hyper-commercialization narratives or health-risk framings.
39 Instead, it reveals an emergent aesthetic regime produced through the entanglement of
40 algorithmic visibility, parental mediation and brand strategies. Within this regime,
41 childhood and adolescence are progressively aestheticized—formatted for visibility,
42 performative availability, and alignment with market imperatives.
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51 Beauty culture on TikTok thrives precisely where overt promotion recedes.
52 Routine-based and seemingly intimate practices consistently outperform explicit
53 advertising, as algorithmic reward systems privilege performances that choreograph
54 credibility and ordinariness. The disclosure penalty captures this dynamic, showing how
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3 commercial influence becomes most effective when it remains least legible as
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5 advertising and instead embeds itself in everyday rituals and domestic scenes.
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8 By advancing the concept of parental promotional mediation, this study extends
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10 traditional mediation theory and complicates a foundational assumption in child online-
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12 safety debates: that adult co-presence functions primarily as protection. Our findings
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14 show that adult “active” involvement often operates as promotional infrastructure,
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16 organizing affect, pacing, and brand legibility when visibility metrics reward brand-
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18 forward storytelling. In this context, growing up digitally increasingly involves learning
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20 to narrate oneself as a visible, market-aligned asset.
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26 **Limitations**

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28 This analysis carries several methodological limitations. Although the dataset
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30 was systematically constructed, it included only publicly accessible content collected
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32 within a defined three-month window. Deleted, privatized, ephemeral, or
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34 algorithmically obscured videos remain outside the scope of this analysis, limiting
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36 insight into less visible or transient practices.
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40 Moreover, the persistent ambiguity between organic and sponsored content—
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42 even with a refined codebook—reflects a structural constraint in platform research.
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44 Platform opacity and the porousness of promotional formats complicate empirical
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46 classification and restrict the analytical clarity required for definitive claims about
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48 commercial intent.
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52 Finally, while content analysis enables the mapping of aesthetic and discursive
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54 patterns, it cannot capture how children, adolescents, families, or audiences interpret,
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56 negotiate, resist, or reconfigure these practices. Therefore, the findings address the
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58 platformed structures of visibility rather than lived experiences.
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Future implications and directions

This approach carries implications for family mediation, education, commercial practice, platform governance, and digitally mediated childhood. We show that on TikTok, commercial intent diffuses through care routines, family intimacy, and everyday beauty performances, where it acquires the cultural texture of ordinariness and makes childhood available for market capture.

For parents and educators, the central challenge lies in the ordinary texture of this persuasion. GRWM videos do not rely on the visual grammar of conventional advertising; instead, they derive their persuasive force from their proximity to care, play, routine, and family life. Therefore, we need literacy frameworks that move beyond the simple identification of sponsorship and cultivate stronger interpretive capacities regarding how commercial cues circulate through intimacy and affective familiarity. Such an approach would help children, adolescents, and caregivers recognize how beauty routines attach product use to desirable narratives of competence, maturity, confidence, and a sense of belonging.

For businesses, including brands, agencies, and creator-economy intermediaries, our findings expose a commercial logic whose effectiveness depends on reducing the recognizability of persuasive strategies. This logic may improve engagement metrics; however, it also deepens ethical risks when minors become vehicles of brand visibility. We should not treat high engagement as a neutral sign of relevance when commercial performance relies on children's relational credibility, domestic proximity, or aesthetic authority in ordinary life. A more defensible industry response requires standards that exceed procedural compliance: (a) stricter thresholds for age-appropriate collaborations, (b) clearer rules for family-mediated branded content, (c) closer scrutiny of product

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3 suitability, and (d) explicit limits on strategies that naturalize advertising through
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5 familiar intimacy.

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7 For policy-makers and regulators, the findings suggest that disclosure-centered
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9 frameworks do not adequately capture the commercial dynamics that structure minors'
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11 branded beauty content. Much of the persuasive activity we have documented circulates
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13 through recurring product presence, routine-based performances, and family-mediated
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15 scenes, whose promotional force remains strong precisely because their formal status
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17 remains ambiguous. Regulation must move beyond the narrow question of whether
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19 sponsorship appears explicitly and confront the broader infrastructure that renders
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21 childhood commercially valuable. We need governance models that address (a)
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23 cumulative brand exposure, (b) monetization pathways involving minors, (c) the
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25 promotional salience introduced by adult participation, and (d) algorithmic systems that
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27 amplify commercially intelligible performances of youth.
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33 What might appear as an innocent “GRWM” video unfolds as a scripted rite
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35 through which children and adolescents learn to navigate identity, desire, and relevance
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37 through consumer aesthetics. The intertwining of beauty routines and self-care
38
39 narratives produces conditions in which growing up digitally increasingly entails
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41 learning to see and present oneself as a brandable asset. TikTok does not merely host
42
43 youth beauty culture; its affordances codify a beauty grammar through which young
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45 people articulate their presence in the world. The question, then, is no longer whether
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47 young people will grow up online but under which commercial they will do so—and
48
49 who benefits and bears responsibility for choreographing that growth.
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Table 1. Codebook for TikTok beauty content analysis

Code	Definition	Measurement	When to apply	References
Engagement	User interaction with video content.	1. Likes. 2. Comments. 3. Favorites. 4. Shares.	1. Total <i>likes</i> on the video. 2. Total number of <i>comments</i> on the video. 3. Number of times the users <i>saved</i> the video on their TikTok platform profile. 4. The number of times the video was <i>shared</i> across TikTok or external platforms.	Bhandari & Bimo (2022) and Vizcaíno-Verdú & Jaramillo-Dent (2023)
Type of ad	Classification of promotional content.	1. Paid advertising. 2. Organic advertising.	1. Hashtags (e.g., #ad or similar) or verbal acknowledgements indicate a brand partnership. 2. When products are showcased without explicit sponsorship or collaboration acknowledgement.	Abidin (2018), Evans et al. (2017) and Martínez-Navarro & Bigné (2021)
Performers	Identification of participants.	1. Children. 2. Adolescent(s). 3. Children/adolescent(s) and adult(s). 4. Children/adolescent(s) and young adult(s).	1. Videos featuring children aged 3-12 years approximately. 2. Videos featuring adolescents aged 13-17 years approximately. 3. Videos featuring intergenerational participation between children/adolescents and adults over 30 years old. 4. Videos featuring intergenerational participation with younger adults (18-29 years approximately) and children/adolescents.	Abidin (2025), Duffy (2017) and Khamis et al. (2017)
Adult participation	Categorization of adult roles in video production and activity.	1. Adult(s) supervise the video. 2. Adult(s) collaborate in the video. 3. Adult(s) promote/encouraging video activity. 4. There are no adult(s).	1. Adults monitor the content creation (appearing and watching the video without participating). 2. Adults participating alongside children/adolescents. 3. Adults directing or encouraging the activity (e.g., starting the video by asking the child to explain which products they have chosen at Sephora). 4. Adults were entirely absent from the video content.	Alruwaily et al. (2020), Van den Abeele et al. (20214) and Vizcaíno-Verdú et al. (2022)
Product displays	Classification and purpose of product placement in videos.	1. Usage demonstrations. 2. Product recommendations. 3. Product reviews. 4. Experience with brands. 5. Product comparisons. 6. Product placement.	1. Showcasing how to use a product (GRWM). 2. Endorsing products for use. 3. Assessing a product's quality or utility. 4. Highlighting engagement with branded content. 5. Contrasting characteristics of multiple products/brands. 6. Featuring products as part of the setting without explicit focus.	Jonser & Llop-Slomma (2025), Stamatos (2025) and Tsou & Rodgers (2024)
Brand mentions	Identification of brands.	To be completed qualitatively.	Brands are mentioned verbally, they are visually displayed or tagged in the video.	Inductive analysis without references.
Thematic narrative	Description of overarching themes and storylines.	To be completed qualitatively.	The video contains discourses or beauty activities driving its content (i.e., children/adolescents/adults speaking or embedding descriptive text about beauty themes).	

Source: Created by the authors based on the referenced authors.

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Table 2. Youth performance and advertising type in TikTok beauty videos (RQ2)

Performer configuration	Organic advertising (%)	Paid advertising (%)	Total (%)
Children appearing alone	90.0	10.0	—
Adolescents appearing alone	91.0	9.0	39.4
Children/adolescents with adults	93.6	6.4	47.5
Children/adolescents with young adults	100.0	0.0	3.0
Total	92.4	7.6	100

Note: Percentages refer to the distribution of advertising type within each performer category. Totals indicate the proportion of each performer configuration in the full sample (N=198).

Young Consumers

Table 3. Adult participation and product display types in TikTok beauty videos (RQ3)

Adult participation	Other displays (product reviews + experience with brands + product comparisons) <i>n</i> (%)	Promotional displays (product recommendations + product placement) <i>n</i> (%)	Usage demonstrations (GRWM) <i>n</i> (%)	Total (%)
Adults actively involved (supervision/collaboration)	1 (2.6)	11 (28.9)	26 (68.4)	38 (19.2)
Adults encourage/promote activity	7 (10.4)	22 (32.8)	38 (56.7)	67 (33.8)
No adults present	4 (4.3)	13 (14.0)	76 (81.7)	93 (47.5)
Total	12 (6.1)	46 (23.2)	140 (70.7)	198 (100)

Note: Percentages are calculated by row. Product display categories were recoded to ensure sufficient expected frequencies for the chi-square test.

Young Consumers