International Journal of Education, Vocational and Social Science
https://e-journal.citakonsulindo.or.id/index.php/IJEVSS
E-ISSN : 2963 4954
IJEVSS

The Role Of User-Generated Content In Tecno's Brand Communication On Tiktok: A Participatory Culture Perspective

Gregorius Satrio Adi Arto Pambudi
Master of Communication Science Program, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences Universitas Pembangunan Nasional "Veteran" Surabaya, Jawa Timur, Indonesia
Dr. A. Zamzamy, S.Sos., M.Med.Kom
Universitas Pembangunan Nasional "Veteran" Surabaya, Jawa Timur, Indonesia
Ade Kusuma, S.Sos., M.Med.Kom
Universitas Pembangunan Nasional "Veteran" Surabaya, Jawa Timur, Indonesia

Corresponding Author : Gregoriussatrioadi@gmail.com | Mobile: +62-81333112675,
ahmadzamzamy83@gmail.com| Mobile: +62 856-4826-8504,
ade_kusuma.ilkom@upnjatim.ac.id | Mobile: +62 813-3042-4258

Abstract

The development of social media has shifted the brand communication paradigm from a one-way model to a more interactive, collaborative, and participatory one. This shift is increasingly evident with the emergence of algorithm-driven platforms like TikTok, which allow users not only to consume information but also to produce, distribute, and construct meaning from communication messages through User-Generated Content (UGC). This study aims to analyze the role of UGC in Tecno's brand communication on the TikTok platform through the perspective of participatory culture. Tecno was selected as the research object based on its growth as an emerging smartphone brand in the Indonesian market and its active utilization of TikTok as a digital communication medium to reach the youth segment, which exhibits a high level of participation in digital content production. This research employed a qualitative approach with a constructivist paradigm and a case study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, digital observation, and documentation involving Tecno's digital communication managers, members of the Key Opinion Consumer (KOC) community, and active TikTok users who produce content about Tecno. Data analysis was conducted using the interactive analysis model by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, complemented by thematic analysis. The results indicate that UGC functions not merely as a promotional medium but has become an integral part of the brand

Copyright at authors some right reserved this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International License

communication strategy that fosters a collaborative relationship between the company and its audience. UGC plays a crucial role in increasing brand awareness, strengthening the authenticity and credibility of information, expanding message dissemination through TikTok's algorithm, and shaping a participatory culture that positions the audience as co-communicators in the brand communication process. This study provides a conceptual contribution by positioning UGC as an integral component of participatory culture-based brand communication, rather than merely a factor influencing consumer behavior post-communication.

Keywords: User-Generated Content, brand communication, TikTok, participatory culture, Tecno.

INTRODUCTION

The transformation of digital technology has fundamentally altered communication practices across various sectors, including organizational and marketing communication. The advent of the internet and social media has not only broadened public access to information but also transformed the interaction patterns between companies and their consumers. While in the traditional media era companies acted as the center of both production and message dissemination, the development of digital media has introduced a more open, interactive, and participatory communication space. Under these conditions, audiences are no longer positioned as passive receivers of messages (*passive audience*) but rather as actors capable of independently producing, modifying, and distributing information (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kietzmann et al., 2011).

This transformation indicates a paradigm shift from a linear communication model to a participatory communication model. Through social media, every individual has an equal opportunity to create content, form opinions, and influence public perception regarding an issue or a brand. Consequently, companies are no longer the sole authority in shaping the communication surrounding their products. Instead, brand communication has evolved into a process involving multiple actors, including consumers who actively produce and disseminate information about their experiences using a product.

This phenomenon aligns with the concept of Participatory Culture proposed by Jenkins & Deuze (2006). Jenkins explains that the development of digital technology has given rise to a participatory culture characterized by low barriers to entry for individuals to contribute to content production, mutual support among users within digital communities, and the emergence of

Copyright at authors some right reserved this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International License

collaborative practices in creating and sharing information. In a participatory culture, society no longer acts merely as media consumers (*consumer*) but also as media producers (*producer*), or *prosumers*. Thus, the communication process is no longer unidirectional but is constructed through collective interactions among members of digital communities.

The development of participatory culture is further strengthened by the presence of algorithm-driven social media platforms, notably TikTok. Unlike conventional social media platforms that prioritize friendship networks or follower counts, TikTok employs an algorithm-based recommendation system through its *For You Page* (FYP) feature. This allows any content to achieve broad dissemination opportunities without relying on the creator's account popularity (Zulli & Zulli, 2022). Such characteristics provide equal opportunities for every user to generate potentially viral content, thereby encouraging increased user participation in producing various forms of digital content.

TikTok's massive influence is also reflected in its user growth. According to a report by We Are Social (2024), Indonesia is one of the countries with the largest number of TikTok users globally, boasting over 125 million active users. The majority of these users belong to the productive age group of 18–34 years, who exhibit high intensity in both consuming and producing digital content. This condition elevates TikTok from a mere entertainment medium to an influential communication space that shapes public opinion, consumer behavior, and corporate communication strategies.

In this context, the phenomenon of User-Generated Content (UGC) emerges as a manifestation of participatory culture on social media. UGC refers to content voluntarily created, published, and disseminated by internet users based on their experiences, opinions, or creativity regarding an issue, product, or brand. The presence of UGC demonstrates that users do not merely consume messages produced by companies; they also participate in shaping, modifying, and sharing these messages with a broader audience.

In the practice of brand communication, UGC holds an increasingly strategic position. Various studies indicate that consumers tend to place greater trust in information originating from fellow users compared to promotional messages delivered directly by companies (Filieri, 2015; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). UGC is perceived to possess a higher degree of authenticity as it stems from real user experiences. Furthermore, UGC serves as a form of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) capable of expanding information dissemination organically while simultaneously influencing perceptions, trust, and emotional connections between consumers and a brand.

This phenomenon becomes exceptionally relevant in the highly competitive smartphone

Copyright at authors some right reserved this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International License

industry. Companies can no longer solely rely on advertising or conventional promotions to build brand awareness; they must create communication that actively engages their consumers. One company exemplifying this characteristic is Tecno. As part of Transsion Holdings, Tecno has experienced significant growth in the global smartphone market. A 2024 report by the International Data Corporation (IDC) revealed that the Transsion Group successfully entered the top five global smartphone vendors based on device shipments, demonstrating robust growth in various developing countries, including Indonesia. This growth compels Tecno to develop a digital communication strategy capable of increasing brand awareness, strengthening brand image, and cultivating closer relationships with its consumers.

The utilization of TikTok constitutes a key digital communication strategy developed by Tecno. This platform was selected because its user demographics align seamlessly with Tecno's target market, which is predominantly composed of the younger generation. In addition to managing its official corporate account, Tecno actively builds user communities, hosts various challenges, develops Key Opinion Consumer (KOC) programs, leverages affiliate marketing, and encourages the creation of diverse forms of UGC as part of its brand communication strategy. This approach demonstrates that brand communication is no longer solely constructed through corporate activities but also through the active participation of users who voluntarily produce and disseminate content about their experiences with Tecno products.

Although studies on UGC have grown rapidly, the majority of prior research has predominantly focused on the impact of UGC on purchasing decisions, consumer loyalty, trust, or consumer engagement. Research that specifically positions UGC as an integral part of the brand communication process remains relatively limited, particularly within the context of algorithm-driven social media like TikTok. Additionally, most previous studies have employed quantitative approaches, which have yet to comprehensively explain how the user participation process shapes brand communication.

These conditions indicate a research gap: there is a scarcity of studies examining UGC as a communication practice from the perspective of participatory culture. However, TikTok's characteristics enable brand communication to evolve through collaboration among companies, creators, communities, and audiences who collectively shape, disseminate, and interpret messages regarding a brand. Therefore, this study seeks to bridge this gap by analyzing the role of UGC in Tecno's brand communication on the TikTok platform through the lens of Participatory Culture.

This study is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of digital

Copyright at authors some right reserved this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International License

communication, brand communication, and participatory culture literature by demonstrating that UGC is not merely the outcome of user participation, but rather a primary mechanism in constructing brand communication within algorithm-driven social media ecosystems. Furthermore, this research is anticipated to offer practical contributions for companies in designing more collaborative digital communication strategies through the active involvement of audiences in the brand communication process.

Literature Review

The development of digital technology has shifted the brand communication paradigm from a one-way communication approach to a more dialogic, interactive, and participatory one. In the conventional media era, companies had full control over the message delivery process through mass media, positioning consumers merely as information receivers. However, the advent of social media transformed this relationship by providing a space for consumers to participate in the communication process. Consequently, brand communication is no longer constructed solely by companies but is also influenced by the activities and interactions of social media users (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). According to Duncan (2002), brand communication is the process of delivering integrated messages designed to build brand awareness, image, trust, and consumer loyalty. Keller (2013) further emphasizes that effective brand communication focuses not only on delivering product information but also on building emotional connections through relevant and consistent experiences. In the digital environment, this communication increasingly relies on audience engagement, evolving into a collaborative process where the company and the audience collectively construct the meaning of a brand, marking a shift from company-centered to user-centered communication.

One prominent form of this user participation is User-Generated Content (UGC). International Data Corporation (2024) defines UGC as various forms of content created, published, and disseminated voluntarily by internet users through digital platforms. In the context of brand communication, UGC plays an increasingly critical role as it is perceived as more authentic information compared to official corporate content. Filieri (2015) explains that UGC's credibility is built upon real user experiences, making the resulting information seem more honest, objective, and trustworthy. Similarly, Hennig-Thurau et al (2004) describe UGC as a form of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) capable of influencing consumer perceptions, attitudes, and decisions. Unlike corporate communication, which is strategically designed for marketing, UGC stems from individual experiences and is not entirely controlled by the company. As social media evolves, UGC

Copyright at authors some right reserved this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International License

has transformed from a mere form of individual expression into an integral part of brand communication strategies capable of increasing brand awareness, expanding reach, and fostering closer relationships between companies and their consumers.

The dissemination and impact of UGC are significantly amplified by algorithm-driven platforms, with TikTok emerging as a prime example. Unlike traditional platforms, TikTok employs a content distribution system through its *For You Page* (FYP), allowing content to achieve a broad reach without relying on the creator's follower count (Zulli & Zulli, 2022). This algorithmic characteristic creates greater opportunities for users to produce potentially viral content through interactive features like duets, stitches, and trending hashtags. Wang (2024) explains that TikTok's algorithm accelerates UGC dissemination by prioritizing engagement rates—such as comments, watch time, and shares—over account popularity. Consequently, brand communication on this platform evolves through collective user activities, enabling companies to build communication in a highly participatory manner by encouraging users to create brand-related content.

To comprehend this phenomenon theoretically, this study utilizes the concept of Participatory Culture developed by Jenkins & Deuze (2006). Jenkins posits that a participatory culture occurs when the public has broad opportunities to contribute to the production, distribution, and exchange of information, characterized by low barriers to participation and strong community support. In this culture, audiences are no longer positioned merely as information receivers (*consumers*) but evolve into *prosumers*—individuals who simultaneously produce and consume information. This blurs the boundary between media producers and consumers. Digital technology has thus altered the relationship between organizations and society; companies are no longer the sole source of information, and brand communication becomes a collaborative process. This perspective is vital as it explains how UGC is not just an outcome of user activity, but the very mechanism that collectively shapes brand communication on algorithmic platforms.

Over the past decade, scientific debates and studies on UGC have grown rapidly, covering various thematic focuses. Smith et al. (2017) demonstrated that UGC can strengthen emotional bonds between brands and communities through active social media engagement. Chen and Lin (2019) found that self-expression and social interaction are the primary motivations for generating UGC, while Kamboj (2019) highlighted UGC as a form of *value co-creation* between companies and consumers. Regarding authenticity, Filieri (2001) and Lim (2020) confirmed that consumers trust user-generated content over official communications due to its perceived objectivity as e-WOM. Specifically concerning TikTok, Ismagilova et al. (2024) noted that its short-video format drives

Copyright at authors some right reserved this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International License

high user engagement, and Zulli & Zulli (2022), alongside Wang (2024), argued that TikTok's algorithmic culture facilitates widespread, organic content dissemination independent of official corporate channels.

Despite these advancements, a critical review of the existing literature reveals several significant research gaps. First, the majority of previous studies position UGC primarily as an independent variable that influences post-communication consumer behavior, such as trust, loyalty, or purchasing decisions. This approach fails to explain how UGC functions intrinsically as a communication process that actively shapes the relationship between the company and the audience. Second, previous research is heavily dominated by quantitative methodologies oriented toward testing predetermined variables, leaving the underlying meanings, lived experiences, and dynamic processes of user participation incompletely depicted. Third, in-depth qualitative studies regarding brand communication specifically on algorithm-driven platforms like TikTok remain relatively scarce, despite the fact that algorithmic curation fundamentally decentralizes brand control. Addressing these gaps, this study determines its research position by viewing UGC not merely as a promotional tool or a behavioral catalyst, but as an integral, dynamic component of the brand communication process shaped by participatory culture. The novelty of this research lies in its conceptual proposition: within algorithm-driven ecosystems, audiences have fundamentally transformed into *co-communicators* who play a continuous, active role in creating, disseminating, and interpreting brand narratives.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a constructivism paradigm to understand how User-Generated Content (UGC) plays a role in Tecno's brand communication on the TikTok platform. A qualitative approach was selected because this research focuses on the meaning, experiences, and interactions of the actors involved in the brand communication process, allowing the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study. The constructivism paradigm views social reality as something built through individual experiences, interactions, and interpretations of a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In the context of this study, brand communication is understood as a social construction shaped through interactions among the company, communities, content creators, and TikTok users.

The type of research used is a descriptive case study. A case study was chosen because the research seeks to examine the phenomenon of Tecno's brand communication in-depth within a specific context, namely the TikTok platform. (Nguyen, 2024) explains that a case study is used

Copyright at authors some right reserved this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International License

when a researcher wants to understand a contemporary phenomenon comprehensively within a real-life context. Through this approach, the research not only describes the communication activities carried out by the company but also analyzes how UGC is formed, develops, and contributes to brand communication.

The research data consists of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with informants directly involved in Tecno's brand communication. The research informants include Tecno Indonesia's digital communication managers, namely the Retail Marketing Area for Sulawesi and Maluku (Informant 1) and the Fan and Community Engagement Specialist (Informant 2), as well as community members and Tecno Key Opinion Consumers (KOCs) who actively produce content about Tecno on TikTok, namely Informants 3, 4, 5, and 6. The informants were determined using a purposive sampling technique, which involves selecting individuals deemed to possess direct knowledge, experience, and involvement in the researched phenomenon (Patton et al., 2015). Meanwhile, secondary data were obtained through documentation in the form of Tecno Indonesia's TikTok posts, users' UGC, corporate reports, and various scientific literature relevant to the research topic.

The main instrument in this research is the researcher themselves (*human instrument*). As the primary instrument, the researcher is responsible for designing the research, conducting observations, carrying out interviews, collecting data, interpreting findings, and drawing conclusions (Lincoln, 1985). To support the data collection process, the research also utilized semi-structured interview guidelines, field notes, a voice recording device, and digital documentation in the form of screenshots of TikTok content, user comments, and Tecno community activities.

Data collection techniques were conducted in three ways. First, in-depth interviews with all informants to explore their experiences, perspectives, and interpretations regarding the role of UGC in Tecno's brand communication. Second, digital observation of Tecno's brand communication activities on the TikTok platform, including content published by the official account, user-generated content, interaction patterns, the use of TikTok features, and community activities related to the brand. Third, documentation, which involves collecting various supporting documents such as social media posts, photos of community activities, corporate reports, and other documents relevant to the research.

This research utilizes the Participatory Culture Theory proposed by Jenkins & Deuze (2006) as the primary theoretical framework. This theory is used to explain how social media users no longer act as mere consumers of information but have become active participants who create, distribute, and interpret digital content. Additionally, the research employs the concept of Brand

Copyright at authors some right reserved this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International License

Communication (Duncan, 2002; Keller, 2013) to understand how brand communication is built through interactions between the company and the audience, as well as the concept of electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004) to explain the dissemination of information through UGC on digital platforms. These three perspectives are used complementarily to analyze the role of UGC in shaping Tecno's brand communication on TikTok.

Data analysis was conducted using the Interactive Analysis Model by Miles et al. (2020) , which consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. In the data reduction stage, the researcher selected, simplified, and categorized the data based on the research focus. Subsequently, the data were displayed in the form of descriptive narratives and thematic matrices so that the relationships between categories could be systematically understood. The final stage was carried out by drawing conclusions, which were continuously verified throughout the research process to produce interpretations consistent with the empirical data.

In addition to the interactive analysis, this research also applied thematic analysis as proposed by (Clarke & Braun, 2017). The thematic analysis was conducted to identify patterns of meaning emerging from the interviews and observations. The analysis process included familiarization with the data, coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and producing the narrative report of the findings. Through this approach, the research successfully identified five main themes that formed the basis of the discussion: (1) UGC as a brand communication strategy, (2) audience participation in shaping brand communication, (3) the community's role as a bridge between the brand and the audience, (4) the authenticity and credibility of UGC in brand communication, and (5) UGC as a participatory culture on the TikTok platform.

To ensure research quality, the data credibility test was conducted through source triangulation and methodological triangulation (Lincoln, 1985). Source triangulation was carried out by comparing information obtained from the brand managers, community members, and content creators to gain a comprehensive understanding of the researched phenomenon. Meanwhile, methodological triangulation was conducted by comparing the results of the interviews, digital observations, and documentation. Furthermore, the researcher also performed member checking with several informants to ensure that the interpretations aligned with the experiences and views they shared. Through these procedures, the research findings are expected to have a high level of credibility, consistency, and validity.

Copyright at authors some right reserved this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International License

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research findings indicate that Tecno's brand communication on the TikTok platform is no longer built exclusively by the company. Instead, it evolves through the active participation of users in producing, distributing, and interpreting information about the brand. Based on a thematic analysis of in-depth interviews, digital observations, and documentation, five main themes were identified that explain the role of User-Generated Content (UGC) in Tecno's brand communication.

UGC as a Brand Communication Strategy

The findings reveal that Tecno positions User-Generated Content (UGC) as an integral part of its brand communication strategy on TikTok. UGC is not understood merely as content created by users, but as a communication mechanism that enables the company to build closer relationships with its audience through active user engagement. This strategy demonstrates a shift from a one-way communication model to a collaborative communication approach that involves consumers as part of the message delivery process.

Informant 1 explained that one of the primary reasons Tecno utilizes UGC is its ability to expand communication reach organically. According to them, the more users create content about Tecno, the greater the chances the brand's message will reach a broader audience without relying entirely on official corporate accounts. Informant 2 added that UGC also generates an *electronic word-of-mouth* effect, as one piece of content frequently triggers the creation of new content by other users, causing communication to expand in a chain reaction.

The study's findings also show that this UGC strategy is executed through various communication activities designed to boost user participation. Tecno builds a Key Opinion Consumer (KOC) community, hosts challenges, utilizes Call to Action (CTA) prompts in every post, develops affiliate programs, and engages regional accounts to strengthen local-level communication. This strategy aims not only to increase brand visibility but also to encourage users to voluntarily generate content based on their experiences using Tecno products.

Community members confirmed that their involvement in content creation is not solely driven by corporate incentives. Informants 3, 5, and 6 explained that their primary motivation stems from positive experiences with Tecno products and the desire to share information with other users. Meanwhile, Informant 4 noted that the opportunity to earn commissions through the affiliate program acts as an additional factor driving consistency in content production. This finding demonstrates that Tecno's communication strategy successfully merges users' intrinsic

Copyright at authors some right reserved this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International License

motivations with corporate support, creating a mutually beneficial relationship.

Analyzed through the lens of Brand Communication theory, this strategy illustrates that brand communication no longer relies solely on messages delivered by the company but evolves through interactions that position consumers as communication partners. Duncan (2002) explains that brand communication aims to build long-term relationships through integrated messaging, while Keller (2013) asserts that effective brand communication must create relevant and meaningful experiences for consumers. In this study, these experiences are realized through user involvement in producing UGC, making the relationship between the company and the audience highly participatory.

These results align with Kamboj (2019), who posited that UGC is a form of co-creation between companies and consumers. However, this study offers broader findings. While previous research largely viewed UGC as a collaborative activity in creating value (*value co-creation*), this study demonstrates that UGC has become a communication strategy integrating communities, creators, platform algorithms, and the company into a single digital communication ecosystem.

This finding simultaneously addresses the research gap. Previous studies generally positioned UGC as a factor influencing consumer behavior, such as engagement, loyalty, or purchasing decisions. Conversely, this research proves that UGC is a foundational part of the brand communication process itself. Thus, the conceptual contribution of this study lies in the understanding that UGC functions as a strategic communication tool connecting companies and audiences through active user participation.

Audience Participation in Shaping Brand Communication

The research findings demonstrate that Tecno's brand communication is not constructed solely through corporate activities but is heavily shaped by active audience participation. This participation manifests through comments, shares, discussions, feedback, new content production, and interactions occurring off-platform via communities and WhatsApp groups. Consequently, audiences no longer merely receive information but actively determine how brand communication evolves.

Informant 1 explained that every piece of content published by Tecno is accompanied by a Call to Action (CTA) aimed at encouraging audiences to comment or share their experiences. This activity not only boosts engagement but also increases the content's chances of achieving wider distribution via TikTok's algorithm. This indicates that the company consciously designs communication that drives user involvement as a core digital strategy.

Copyright at authors some right reserved this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International License

This participation is also evident in user experiences. Informant 4 explained that they actively comment on and share Tecno content with friends as a form of recommendation. Meanwhile, Informants 3, 5, and 6 revealed that the comments they receive frequently serve as inspiration for their next content. This creator-audience interaction highlights a reciprocal communication process where users do not merely respond but actively influence content production.

Furthermore, audience participation extends beyond the platform. Through communities and WhatsApp groups, users engage in product discussions, share user experiences, provide feedback to the company, and participate in Tecno-hosted events. These activities show that brand communication occurs continuously through social relationships built between the company and its user community.

These findings support Jenkins & Deuze (2006) Participatory Culture concept, which argues that digital society no longer merely consumes information but participates in producing and distributing content. In this context, Tecno users have transformed into *prosumers* who not only receive messages but actively construct brand meaning through various digital interactions.

While Cheung & Lee (2012) stated that users' primary motivation for creating UGC is the need for interaction and self-expression, and Smith et al. (2017) showed community participation strengthens emotional bonds, this study finds that audience participation serves a much broader function. User participation operates as the primary mechanism for collectively shaping brand communication.

This study's contribution lies in affirming that brand communication on algorithm-driven platforms is the direct outcome of company-user interaction. It expands upon previous studies by demonstrating that the audience is not just a communication target, but an active actor in building, expanding, and interpreting brand narratives.

The Role of Community as a Bridge Between the Brand and Audience

The findings reveal that the community holds a strategic position as a bridge connecting Tecno and its audience. The community serves not just as a gathering space for users, but as a collaborative arena where corporate interests meet consumer experiences. Through the community, communication becomes more intensive, personal, and sustainable compared to relying solely on official social media accounts.

Informant 2 explained that Tecno actively recruits users who frequently produce product content to join the Key Opinion Consumer (KOC) community. This space allows members to

Copyright at authors some right reserved this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International License

discuss products, attend new device launches, collaborate on content, and provide direct feedback to the company. Informants 3 and 6 expressed that their community involvement makes them feel closer to the company and more motivated to continue producing Tecno-related content.

Beyond the KOC community, the company also established WhatsApp groups for more personalized communication. Informant 1 noted that these groups are used to share information, host sharing sessions, issue challenges, and gather member feedback. These activities prove the community functions not just as an information distribution channel, but as a space for shared learning and experience exchange.

The community's existence generates a mutually beneficial reciprocal relationship. The company gains insights into user needs and perceptions, while members gain information access, collaborative opportunities, and recognition within the Tecno ecosystem. Thus, the community acts as a mediator connecting formal corporate communication with authentic user experiences.

These findings support the Brand Community concept, illustrating how communities strengthen emotional company-consumer bonds. While Smith et al. (2017) showed communities build brand loyalty and Kamboj (2019) emphasized their role in co-creation, this study expands on both by demonstrating that the community functions as the actual communication infrastructure enabling UGC to thrive sustainably.

This also addresses the research gap regarding the community's role in UGC-based brand communication. Traditionally positioned as marketing support groups, this study proves communities are the primary "communication bridge" allowing continuous interaction among companies, creators, and audiences. Therefore, the community is an essential element maintaining the brand communication ecosystem on digital platforms.

Authenticity and Credibility of UGC in Brand Communication

The research shows that a primary factor making UGC effective in Tecno's brand communication is its perceived authenticity and credibility. Unlike official corporate content, UGC is viewed as a representation of real user experiences, making it highly trusted. The core value of UGC lies not in its visual production quality, but in the perception that the information is personal, honest, and not purely promotional.

Informant 1 noted that UGC generates higher reach and engagement because it feels more natural than official content. Despite the professional quality of corporate posts, users are drawn to content showcasing genuine product usage. Informant 2 added that Tecno prioritizes Key

Copyright at authors some right reserved this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International License

Opinion Consumers (KOCs) over Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) because KOCs are actual users providing firsthand reviews, whereas KOLs often act merely as paid endorsers.

Community members echoed this. Informants 3, 5, and 6 base their content on daily experiences with Tecno smartphones, highlighting features, performance, and actual usage conditions rather than just product strengths. Informant 4 stated they trust peer reviews over corporate ads because fellow users objectively outline both pros and cons. This confirms that trust in UGC is built through lived experience, not corporate authority.

The findings also reveal that Tecno does not attempt to control the entire UGC narrative. Informant 2 explained that the company grants community members the freedom to share their experiences, provided the information is not manipulative. Even when product critiques arise, the company uses them for evaluation rather than suppressing the content. This approach proves UGC's credibility is maintained through the users' freedom to express authentic experiences.

These results support the electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM) concept (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004), confirming peer-to-peer information holds greater influence than commercial messaging due to a perceived lack of direct economic interest. Furthermore, it reinforces Filieri (2015), showing that credibility hinges on perceived expertise, honesty, and real-world experience. Authenticity, therefore, is the foundational pillar in building brand communication credibility through UGC.

Unlike previous studies (Filieri, 2001; Lim, 2020) that positioned authenticity merely as a driver of purchase decisions or consumer trust, this study finds that authenticity actively shapes the communication process itself. The conceptual contribution here is the understanding that brand communication credibility on social media is forged through authentically communicated user experiences, with the company acting as a facilitator rather than a controller.

UGC as a Participatory Culture

Synthesizing the overall findings, UGC in Tecno's brand communication can no longer be viewed simply as a digital promotional strategy. UGC has evolved into a form of participatory culture that fundamentally alters the relationship between the company and its audience. The company is no longer the sole message producer; it shares this role with users who actively produce, distribute, and interpret brand information.

Tecno consciously builds spaces for participation—via KOC communities, challenges, CTAs, affiliate programs, and TikTok features—to foster user engagement. This proves the company acts to create a communicative environment empowering users to generate content based on

Copyright at authors some right reserved this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International License

personal experiences.

This participation extends beyond content production to active commenting, sharing, WhatsApp group discussions, event attendance, and providing feedback. Brand communication thus evolves as a continuous social process driven by company-community interaction.

Crucially, the company grants users narrative freedom. Informants 3, 5, and 6 noted their content stems from personal experience without controlling corporate directives. This freedom generates diverse perspectives on the Tecno brand, positioning the company as a communication facilitator rather than a dictator.

This participatory culture is heavily amplified by TikTok's algorithm via the *For You Page* (FYP). Highly engaged content is organically recommended to others, meaning communication dissemination no longer relies on official accounts. Every user has an equal opportunity to become a brand communication source.

These findings strongly support Jenkins' (2006) Participatory Culture and Convergence Culture concepts. The boundaries between media producers and consumers have blurred. While the company initiates communication via official campaigns, its evolution is dictated by user interpretations converted into UGC.

While Zulli & Zulli (2022) and Wang (2024) noted algorithmic platforms accelerate organic UGC spread, this study goes further. Previous research viewed participatory culture as a platform characteristic; this study proves it is the very foundation of modern brand communication. Tecno does not merely utilize participatory culture—its brand communication is built and sustained by it.

In conclusion, this study addresses the research gap by demonstrating that UGC is not just a variable affecting consumer behavior. Instead, it is the primary mechanism shaping brand communication through the collaboration of the company, community, users, and platform algorithms. The ultimate conceptual contribution is that within algorithm-driven ecosystems, audiences have transformed into *co-communicators* who collectively build, disseminate, and interpret brand narratives alongside the company.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to analyze the role of User-Generated Content (UGC) in Tecno's brand communication on the TikTok platform through the perspective of Participatory Culture. Based on the findings, UGC functions not merely as a digital promotional medium but has become an integral part of the brand communication strategy that enables collaboration between the

Copyright at authors some right reserved this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International License

company and the audience in constructing, disseminating, and interpreting brand messages.

The research results indicate that Tecno actively utilizes various communication strategies to encourage the creation of UGC. These include establishing a Key Opinion Consumer (KOC) community, hosting challenges, utilizing Call to Action (CTA) prompts, developing affiliate programs, managing regional accounts, and leveraging TikTok's interactive features. These strategies successfully create participatory spaces that empower users to act as communicators who convey brand information based on their actual product usage experiences.

This study also found that audience participation is a core element in Tecno's brand communication. Audiences no longer merely receive messages from the company; they actively generate content, leave comments, share information, engage in community discussions, provide feedback, and build user-to-user conversations. This process demonstrates that brand communication on algorithm-driven social media platforms occurs collaboratively and is no longer entirely controlled by the company.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that authenticity and credibility are the primary factors making UGC more trusted than official corporate content. Genuine user experiences yield information that is perceived as highly objective, thereby building trust, increasing brand awareness, strengthening brand image, and driving the organic spread of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM). Additionally, TikTok's algorithm plays a crucial role in expanding UGC distribution through the *For You Page* (FYP) mechanism, granting every user an equal opportunity to become part of the brand communication process without relying on official corporate accounts.

Theoretical Implications

Theoretically, this research reinforces the concept of Participatory Culture (Jenkins & Deuze, 2006) by demonstrating that brand communication on algorithm-driven social media is built through continuous collaboration between the company and its user community. This study also expands upon Brand Communication literature by positioning UGC not just as a promotional tool or a post-communication variable influencing consumer behavior, but as the communication process itself. Thus, this study offers the conceptual contribution that within algorithm-driven social media ecosystems, audiences have transformed into *co-communicators* who collectively build, disseminate, and interpret brand communication alongside the company.

Copyright at authors some right reserved this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International License

Practical Implications

Practically, the research findings imply that the success of brand communication in the modern digital era is determined not only by the quality of a company's official content but also by its ability to build participatory spaces that encourage users to voluntarily generate UGC. Therefore, community management, user empowerment, and the strategic utilization of platform algorithms are essential components of an effective digital brand communication strategy.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has limitations as it focuses solely on a single research object, the Tecno brand, and employs a qualitative approach with a limited number of informants. Consequently, the findings are not intended to be generalized across all brands or social media platforms. Future research is recommended to conduct comparative studies on UGC-based communication strategies across various brands or other digital platforms. Additionally, utilizing a mixed-methods approach could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the complex relationship between UGC, social media algorithms, and overall brand communication effectiveness.

REFERENCES

Cheung, C. M. K., & Lee, M. K. O. (2012). What drives consumers to spread electronic word of mouth in online consumer-opinion platforms. *Decision Support Systems*, *53*(1), 218–225. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dss.2012.01.015

Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2017). Thematic analysis. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, *12*(3), 297–298. https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2016.1262613

Duncan, Tom. (2002). *IMC : using advertising and promotion to build brands*. McGraw-Hill.

Filieri, R. (2001). User-generated content and consumer trust in digital environments. *Journal of Business Research*, *129*, 299–311.

Filieri, R. (2015). What makes online reviews helpful? A diagnosticity-adoption framework to explain informational and normative influences in e-WOM. *Journal of Business Research*, *68*(6), 1261–1270. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2014.11.006

Hennig-Thurau, T., Gwinner, K. P., Walsh, G., & Gremler, D. D. (2004). Electronic word-of-mouth via consumer-opinion platforms: What motivates consumers to articulate themselves on the Internet? *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, *18*(1), 38–52. https://doi.org/10.1002/dir.10073

International Data Corporation. (2024). *Worldwide Quarterly Mobile Phone Tracker*. IDC.

Copyright at authors some right reserved this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International License

Ismagilova, E., Dwivedi, Y. K., Slade, E., & Williams, M. D. (2024). *Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) in the Marketing Context: A State-of-the-Art Analysis and Future Directions*. Springer.

Jenkins, H., & Deuze, M. (2006). Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide. In *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* (Vol. 14, Number 1). New York University Press. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856507084415

Kamboj, S. (2019). User participation and brand co-creation in social media. *Journal of Business Research*, *96*, 127–138.

Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. *Business Horizons*, *53*(1), 59–68.

Keller, K. L. (2013). *Strategic brand management: Building, measuring, and managing brand equity* (4th ed.). Pearson.

Kietzmann, J. H., Hermkens, K., McCarthy, I. P., & Silvestre, B. S. (2011). Social media? Get serious! Understanding the functional building blocks of social media. *Business Horizons*, *54*(3), 241–251. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2011.01.005

Lim, X. J. (2020). User-generated content and trust in digital marketing. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, *53*, 101742.

Lincoln, Y. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry* (Vol. 75). SAGE.

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & & Saldaña, J. (2020). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (4th ed.). SAGE.

Nguyen, T. H. (2024). User-generated content and consumer behavior in social commerce: A systematic literature review. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, *76*, 103638.

Patton, C., Sawicki, D., & Clark, J. (2015). *Basic Methods of Policy Analysis and Planning -- Pearson eText*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315664736

Smith, A. C. T., Stavros, C., & Westberg, K. (2017). Unlimited Users: The Rise of Consumer-Generated Content. In *Brand Fans* (pp. 57–87). Springer International Publishing.

Wang, Y. (2024). Algorithmic promotion of user-generated content on TikTok. *New Media & Society*, *26*(2), 455–473.

We Are Social, & M. (2024). *Digital 2024: Indonesia*. Https://Datareportal.Com.

Zulli, D., & Zulli, D. J. (2022). Extending the Internet meme: Conceptualizing technological mimesis and imitation publics on the TikTok platform. *New Media & Society*, *24*(8), 1872–1890. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820983603

Copyright at authors some right reserved this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International License