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THE IMPACT OF SHORT-FORM VIDEO CONTENT ON CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT AND PURCHASE INTENT

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Abstract : *The rapid adoption of short-form video platforms has transformed digital content consumption and marketing communication. This study examines the relationship between short-form video content characteristics and consumer engagement across major platforms, including TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts. Using an observational research design, the study analyzes aggregated engagement metrics such as likes, comments, and shares across different content types, including entertainment, informational, and promotional videos. Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis are used to identify engagement patterns and compare performance across platforms and content categories. The findings indicate that entertainment-oriented content consistently generates higher engagement rates than informational and promotional content, while platform-specific differences in engagement intensity are also observed. TikTok demonstrates the highest average engagement rates, followed by YouTube Shorts and Instagram Reels. The study further discusses how engagement metrics serve as proxy indicators of purchase-related interest, while acknowledging limitations related to causality and behavioral inference. The results contribute to understanding how short-form video strategies influence consumer engagement and provide practical insights for marketers seeking to optimize content performance in digital environments.*

IndexTerms *- short-form video content, consumer engagement, digital marketing, social media platforms, purchase-related interest*

1. INTRODUCTION

Short-form video content, commonly defined as video lasting under 60 seconds, has become a central feature of contemporary digital marketing (Statista, 2024; Firework, 2023). Platforms such as TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts have driven this shift by aligning with changing consumer media consumption habits that favor speed, accessibility, and mobile-first behavior (Backlinko, 2024; Statista, 2024). TikTok exceeded one billion monthly active users by 2024, reflecting the widespread adoption of short-form video in everyday digital activity (Backlinko, 2024). As a result, marketers have increasingly integrated short-form video into their content strategies. Industry data indicate that approximately 30 percent of marketing teams actively use short-form video, and 21 percent identify it as delivering the highest return on investment among content formats (HubSpot, 2025).

The rapid adoption of short-form video is closely linked to its ability to generate consumer engagement at scale. Short-form videos consistently outperform longer formats in engagement rates across major platforms (Yaguara, 2025; The Graygency, 2024). Engagement on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts is commonly measured through views, likes, comments, shares, and watch duration (Statista, 2024; eMarketer, 2024). Prior research demonstrates that such engagement behaviors reflect consumer interaction with branded content and signal cognitive and emotional involvement (Kabadayi and Price, 2014; De Vries and Carlson, 2014). These engagement signals also play a role in platform algorithms, influencing content visibility and reach (eMarketer, 2024; Nature Portfolio, 2023).

From a consumer perspective, short-form video reduces friction in the information and evaluation process. Users are exposed to product demonstrations, brand narratives, and social proof within seconds, without leaving the platform (Firework, 2023; McKinsey and Company, 2021). This immediacy supports rapid impression formation and aligns with contemporary expectations for efficient, personalized digital experiences (McKinsey and Company, 2021). As shown in Figure 1, short-form video outperforms other formats such as static images, live-streamed video, and podcasts in perceived ROI, reinforcing its strategic importance in contemporary digital marketing.

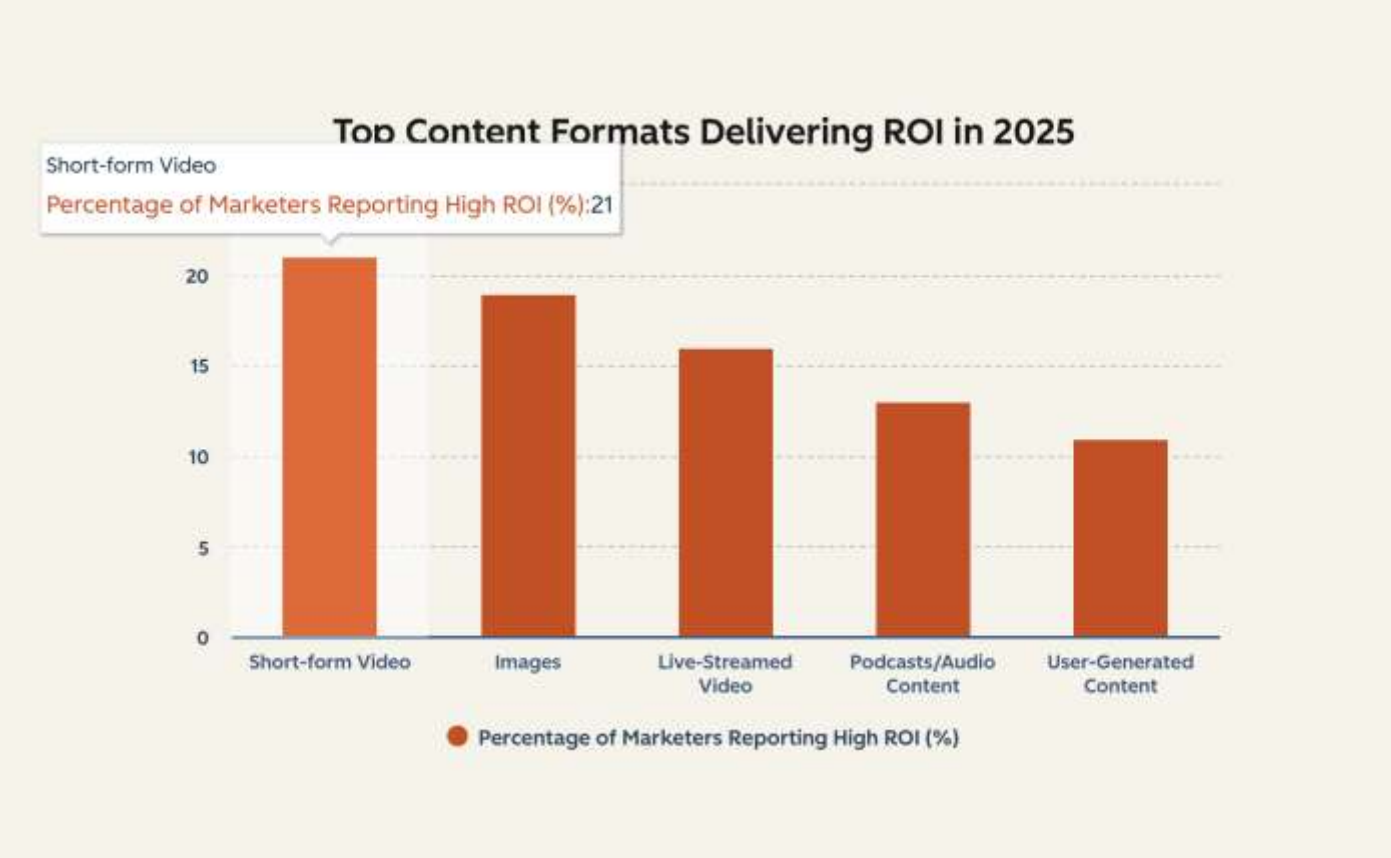


figure 1. percentage of marketers reporting short form video as the highest roi content.

However, high levels of engagement do not inherently translate into consumer purchase intent. Engagement metrics capture attention and interaction, but they do not directly indicate buying motivation (Saboo et al., 2016; De Vries and Carlson, 2014). While video marketing has been shown to influence purchasing decisions, with a substantial proportion of consumers reporting that brand videos affect their buying behavior (Wyzowl, 2024), much of the existing literature examines video marketing as a broad category. This approach often overlooks the structural and contextual differences of short-form video, including brevity, creative constraints, and algorithmic amplification (Firework, 2023; Statista, 2024).

To address this gap, this study examines the relationship between engagement with short-form video content and consumer purchase intent. Prior empirical research has shown that short-form video engagement, trust signals, and content characteristics significantly influence purchase intentions (Luo et al., 2025; Meng et al., 2024; Wahyudi et al., 2025). Building on this work, the study evaluates whether engagement metrics serve as early indicators of purchase-related intent, compares short-form video with other content formats, and identifies which content characteristics are most strongly associated with engagement and purchase intention outcomes.

1.1 Research Questions

1. To what extent do consumer engagement metrics on short-form videos, including views, likes, comments, shares, and watch time, correlate with indicators of consumer purchase intent for the featured products or brands?

2. How does exposure to short-form video content compare with other content formats, such as long-form video or static imagery, in terms of its ability to stimulate purchase consideration and engagement-based indicators of intent?

3. Which characteristics of short-form video content, including content style, video length, and platform, are most strongly associated with higher engagement levels and increased signals of purchase-related interest?

2. METHODOLOGY AND DATA SOURCES

2.1 Research Design

This study employs a quantitative, observational research design to investigate how short-form video content relates to consumer engagement and purchase intent. No experimental manipulation was involved; instead, the analysis focused on naturally occurring social media data across multiple platforms. Observational designs are widely used in social media research to examine engagement behaviors and consumer responses in real-world settings (De Vries and Carlson, 2014; Saboo et al., 2016). By relying on publicly available posts, the study maintains high ecological validity, although only correlational, rather than causal, relationships can be identified. The design is cross-sectional, examining a snapshot of recent short-form video posts from selected industries in late 2025. This approach emphasizes measurable engagement indicators, such as likes, comments, shares, and views, which have been shown to reflect consumer interaction and brand-related responses (Kabadayi and Price, 2014; Statista, 2024). Prior research suggests that social media engagement metrics are associated with consumer attitudes and purchase intentions, supporting the suitability of this design for exploring links between content characteristics, engagement, and inferred purchase interest (Beukeboom et al., 2015; Luo et al., 2025).

2.2 Data Collection Procedure

The study analyzed a sample of 45 short-form videos posted across TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts. These platforms were selected due to their dominance in short-form video usage and their provision of publicly visible engagement metrics (Backlinko, 2024; eMarketer, 2024). To ensure relevance and currency, only posts published in late 2025 were included. Data collection followed a structured process. First, official brand accounts and prominent influencer accounts were identified within three target industries: consumer goods, fashion, and technology. Only public accounts were used to ensure ethical access to content and metrics (Townsend and Wallace, 2016). Second, recent short-form videos were sampled from each account to capture current engagement patterns. Third, for each video, key variables were manually recorded in a structured dataset, including post URL, posting date, and engagement metrics such as views, likes, comments, and shares. Each video was also reviewed to determine content type and to note observable purchase-related cues, such as calls to action or product links. Manual data collection was employed to comply with platform terms of service and to allow contextual observation during coding (Townsend and Wallace, 2016). Engagement values were recorded at a fixed point in time to address metric volatility. The dataset was compiled into a structured format for analysis.

2.3 Sample Selection

A purposive sampling strategy was used to ensure representation across platforms and industries. The final sample consisted of 45 videos evenly distributed across consumer goods, fashion, and technology, with content drawn from TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts. Including multiple industries aligns with prior research showing that engagement patterns and content effectiveness can vary by market context (Firework, 2023; Yaguara, 2025). Within each industry, videos were sourced from multiple brands or influencers to capture variation in content style and audience interaction. All selected videos were publicly accessible and under approximately 60 seconds in length, consistent with established short-form video norms (Statista, 2024). Content unrelated to consumer behavior or brand interaction was excluded to maintain relevance. This structured sampling approach produced a balanced dataset that supports cross-platform and cross-industry comparison of engagement and inferred purchase intent.

2.4 Variables and Measures

All variables in this study were derived from publicly observable information on sampled social media posts. The independent variables focused on content characteristics of each short-form video, while the dependent variables captured user engagement and inferred purchase interest. All data were collected directly from platform-displayed metrics, ensuring consistency and replicability (Statista, 2024; Townsend and Wallace, 2016).

Each video was manually classified into one of three content-type categories commonly used in short-form marketing research. The first category, Entertainment, included humorous skits, viral challenges, or lifestyle-oriented content designed primarily to amuse or engage viewers without an explicit sales message. The second category, Informational or Demonstration, comprised tutorials, how-to videos, product demonstrations, or reviews that provided functional or explanatory value. The third category, Promotional, included explicit advertisements, sales announcements, product showcases with direct calls to action, or clearly sponsored influencer content. This categorical variable enabled comparisons of engagement patterns across content styles. Prior research indicates that overtly promotional social media content often generates lower engagement than entertaining or informative formats, suggesting potential differences across these categories (De Vries and Carlson, 2014; Kabadayi and Price, 2014).

User engagement was measured using four publicly available metrics for each video: views, likes, comments, and shares. Each metric represented the total number of users who performed the corresponding action and was treated as a continuous variable (Saboo et al., 2016). To account for differences in audience reach, an overall engagement rate was calculated for each video by dividing total interactions (likes plus comments plus shares) by total views. This normalized measure allowed engagement to be compared across videos with varying exposure levels and is consistent with established social media engagement measurement practices (Statista, 2024; eMarketer, 2024). For YouTube Shorts, which do not publicly display share counts, engagement rate was calculated using likes and comments only.

In addition to content type, two contextual descriptors were recorded for each video: industry sector (consumer goods, fashion, or technology) and platform (TikTok, Instagram Reels, or YouTube Shorts). Including these variables allowed for basic segmentation to assess whether observed engagement patterns were platform- or industry-specific (Firework, 2023; Yaguara, 2025).

As a proxy for purchase intent, comment volume was used to represent deeper consumer interest. Commenting typically reflects higher cognitive and emotional involvement than passive actions such as viewing or liking, and comments frequently contain questions, evaluations, or expressions of intent (Beukeboom et al., 2015; Luo et al., 2025). While comment count is an indirect indicator and does not equate to actual purchasing behavior, it provides a quantifiable signal of potential purchase-related interest in the absence of transactional data (Wahyudi et al., 2025).

All variables were compiled into a structured dataset with one row per video and columns for each metric and descriptor. Basic data cleaning ensured numerical consistency, with zero values recorded where applicable. Overall, the measures captured both content attributes and audience responses, supporting analysis of how short-form video characteristics relate to engagement and inferred purchase intent.

3. ETHICS CONSIDERATION

This research was conducted with careful attention to ethical guidelines governing the use of public online data. All information analyzed was drawn exclusively from posts on public social media accounts that were openly accessible to any user. No private, restricted, or personally identifiable data were accessed or collected. As the study involved no direct interaction with individuals and relied solely on observational analysis of publicly available content, it would be considered exempt from Institutional Review Board oversight under U.S. federal research guidelines.

Despite this exemption, several measures were implemented to ensure ethical integrity. User privacy and anonymity were strictly respected. No usernames, account handles, or personal identifiers of content creators

or commenters were disclosed in the reporting of results. When examples of viewer responses were discussed, comments were paraphrased rather than quoted verbatim, preventing traceability to individual users. This approach aligns with established ethical recommendations for social media research, which emphasize anonymization even when data are sourced from public platforms (Townsend and Wallace, 2016).

The analysis focused on aggregate patterns of engagement and inferred purchase interest, such as total comment volume or engagement rates, rather than individual-level behavior. This aggregation further minimized privacy risks for users included in the dataset. In addition, platform consent and terms of service were respected throughout the data collection process. Only standard user access was used to observe content, and no automated scraping or prohibited data extraction methods were employed. Content itself, including videos and comments, was not reproduced or redistributed, with findings reported solely in summarized and analytical form.

Potential risks associated with the research were assessed and determined to be minimal. The study did not interfere with platform activity, user behavior, or content visibility. Care was taken to avoid negatively exposing specific brands, creators, or accounts, with results discussed at the level of content types, industries, or platforms rather than individual entities. Raw data were stored securely and not shared publicly.

Overall, by relying exclusively on public data, anonymizing user information, respecting platform policies, and avoiding any form of intervention or deception, this study adhered to accepted ethical standards for internet-based research.

4. ANALYSIS METHOD

Data analysis combined descriptive statistics with correlational techniques to identify patterns in engagement and inferred purchase intent. This approach aligns with established quantitative analyses of social media engagement and performance metrics (Saboo et al., 2016; De Vries and Carlson, 2014). The analysis followed three stages.

First, descriptive statistics summarized the key variables. Mean, median, and range were calculated for each engagement metric: views, likes, comments, and shares. These statistics were produced for the full sample and for subgroups defined by platform, content type, and industry. Descriptive summaries of engagement metrics are commonly used to establish baseline patterns and variability in social media research (Statista, 2024; eMarketer, 2024). This process provided an overview of typical engagement levels and highlighted variation across categories, such as which content types tended to receive higher average comment counts. To adjust for differences in reach, an engagement rate was calculated for each video, defined as total interactions divided by total views. Normalized engagement measures are widely used to enable fair comparison across posts with differing exposure levels (Saboo et al., 2016; Yaguara, 2025). While raw engagement counts provided context on absolute performance, engagement rate served as the primary comparative metric.

Second, correlational analysis examined relationships between quantitative variables. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were calculated to assess associations between engagement metrics, such as views and likes or shares and comments. Correlational methods are commonly applied in observational social media studies to identify relationships between engagement behaviors and outcomes (De Vries and Carlson, 2014). Crucially, correlations were also calculated between each engagement metric, as well as the composite engagement rate, and the purchase-intent proxy represented by comment volume. Prior research suggests that deeper engagement behaviors, such as commenting, are associated with stronger consumer interest and evaluative processing (Beukeboom et al., 2015; Luo et al., 2025). Statistical significance was evaluated at the $p < 0.05$ level to identify reliable relationships, though emphasis was placed on the magnitude and direction of correlations rather than formal hypothesis testing. This approach is appropriate for an observational design

and does not imply causation (Saboo et al., 2016). Figure 2 visualizes the relationship between engagement rate and comment volume, including the fitted trend line.

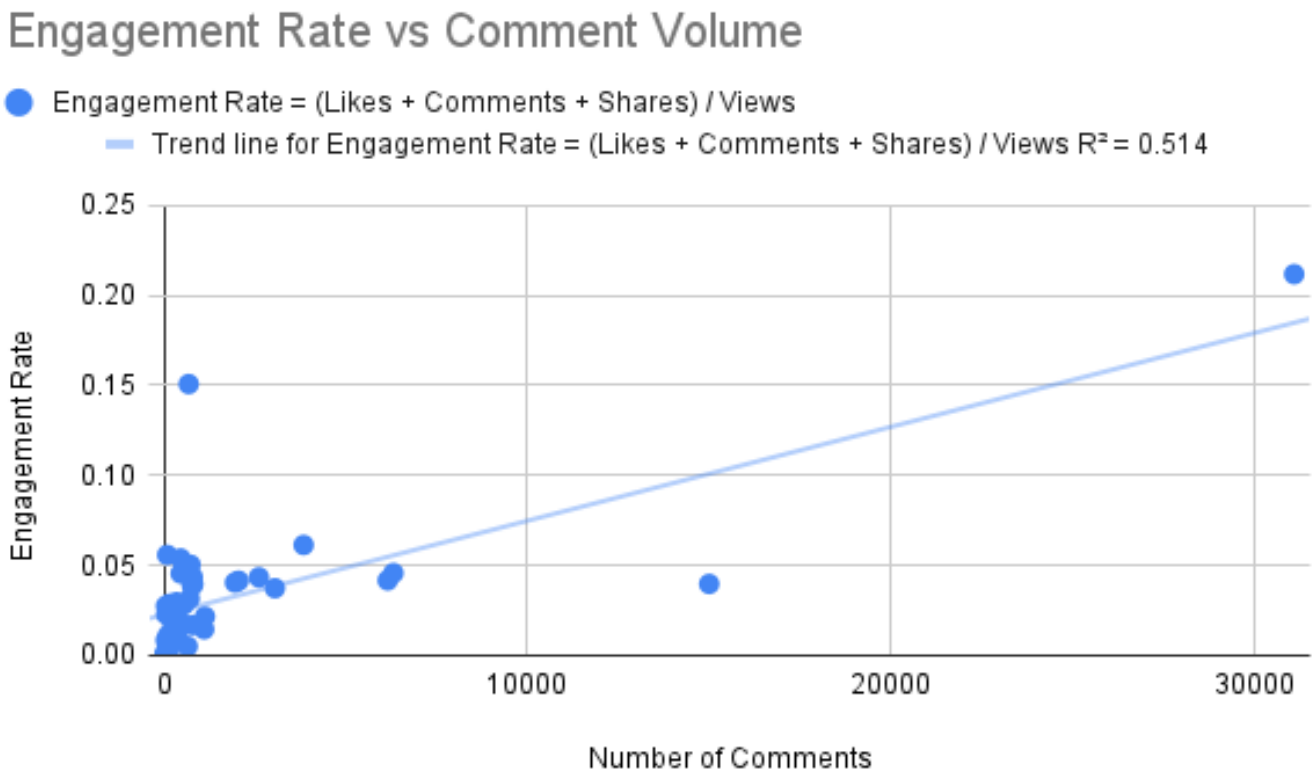
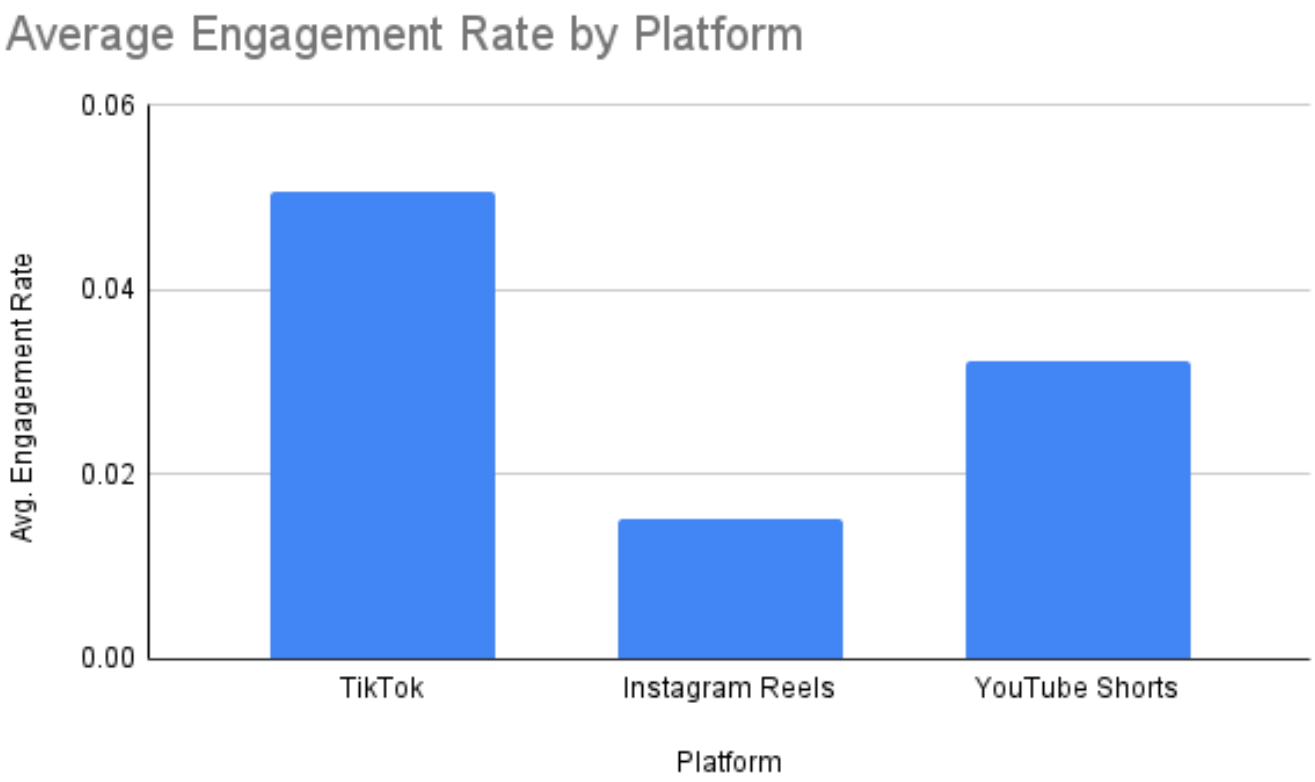


figure 2. relationship between engagement rate and comment volume

Third, engagement patterns were explored descriptively across groups. Data were aggregated by platform, TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts, and by content type, Entertainment, Informational, and Promotional. Mean engagement rates were compared across these categories to identify notable differences or trends. Platform-level and content-type comparisons are frequently used to contextualize engagement differences in short-form video research (Firework, 2023; The Graygency, 2024). These comparisons were treated as contextual insights rather than definitive statistical conclusions. Formal inferential tests, such as ANOVA, were not conducted due to limited subgroup sizes and known differences in how platforms define and display engagement metrics (Statista, 2024). Instead, observed patterns were used to complement the correlational results. Figures 3 and 4 illustrate the average engagement rate across figure 3. average engagement rate by platform



TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts and the average engagement rate across Entertainment, Informational and Promotional content

All analyses were conducted using standard descriptive and correlational techniques. Overall, the analytic approach prioritized clarity, transparency, and practical interpretation. Engagement rate functioned as a standardized metric for fair comparison across videos, and emphasis was placed on understanding the substantive implications of observed statistical patterns rather than on complex modeling techniques.

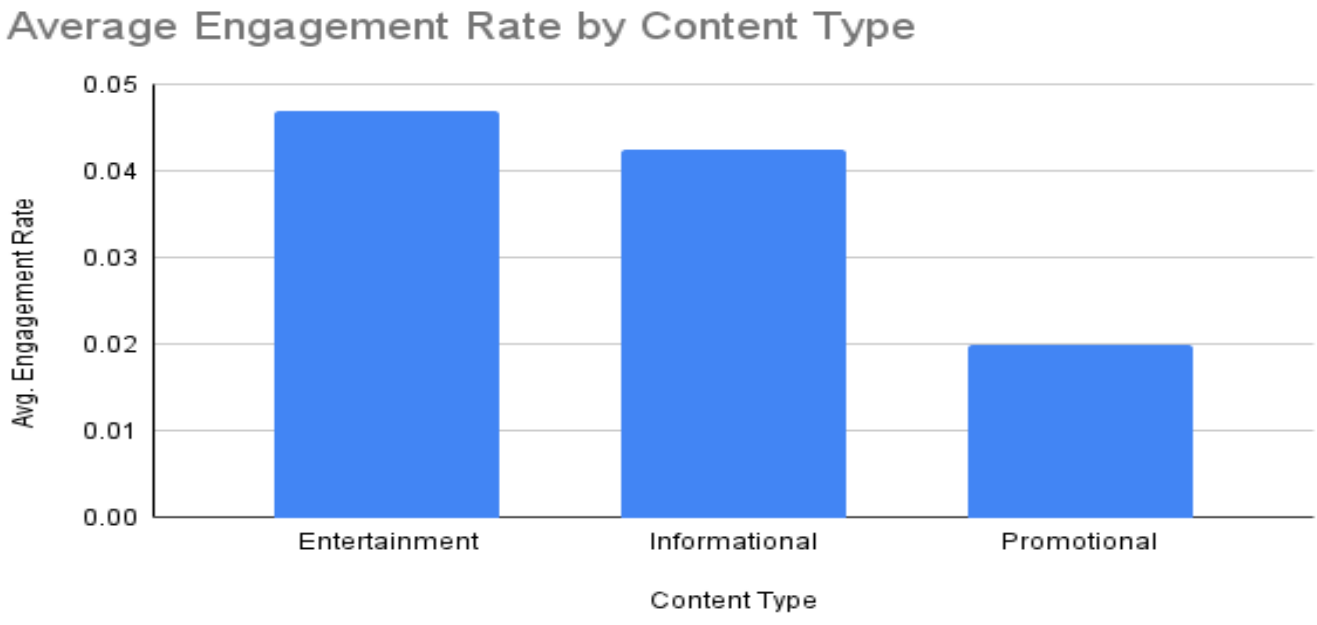


figure 4. average engagement rate by content type

5. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The insights from this research offer several practical implications for marketers looking to leverage short-form video content

Platform selection should match engagement goals: Given TikTok's substantially higher engagement rates, brands seeking to maximize interaction and early-stage consumer interest should prioritize TikTok as a primary channel. Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts can still be valuable, but they may be better used as supplementary platforms focused on reach and brand awareness rather than driving intensive engagement. Marketers might use Reels and Shorts for broad exposure and then funnel the most engaging content to TikTok for deeper interaction.

Emphasize entertainment and value in content strategy: The superior performance of entertainment and informational content indicates that short-form videos should center on engaging storytelling, demonstrations, or other value-driven content, rather than overt promotional messages. Brands are advised to embed products within fun or useful content. For example, showing a product in use via a creative skit or tutorial, instead of relying on direct calls-to-action. By doing so, marketers can capture viewers 'attention and trust, which ultimately makes any subsequent promotional message more effective.

Treat engagement metrics as strategic signals: The strong correlation we observed between engagement rates and comment-based interest suggests that metrics such as likes, shares, and comments can provide early insight into consumer interest and potential conversion outcomes. Rather than dismissing these as vanity metrics, marketers should monitor engagement trends to identify high-performing content formats. Videos that spur exceptional engagement likely indicate messaging or creative approaches that resonate with the target audience. Those insights can inform budget allocation (boosting or repurposing content that generates interest) and guide real-time adjustments in campaign strategy.

Use promotional content judiciously and in sequence: Since promotional videos showed the lowest engagement, they should not dominate a brand's short-form content mix. Instead, consider sequencing – e.g. first deploying entertaining or informative videos to build viewer engagement, then following up with promotional clips once the audience is primed. Our findings suggest promotional messaging is more effective when preceded by engaging content that has established familiarity and goodwill. Marketers should therefore balance their short-form video portfolios, ensuring that pure ads are supported by a surrounding context of high-engagement content.

Implementing these practices can help businesses capitalize on the strengths of short-form video while mitigating its challenges. By choosing the right platform, crafting the right content, and listening to engagement signals, marketers can enhance both the reach and the impact of their short-form video campaigns.

. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

While this study offers insight into the relationship between short-form video engagement and purchase-related interest, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the sample size was relatively small, consisting of 45 videos across three platforms and a limited set of industries. With only 15 videos per platform, the dataset may not fully represent the diversity of short-form video content or audience behavior, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Engagement patterns observed for TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts may differ with a larger or more heterogeneous sample.

Second, engagement metrics are not perfectly standardized across platforms. Although engagement rate was calculated consistently as interactions relative to views, platforms differ in how views and interactions are defined and promoted. TikTok's discovery-driven algorithm may inherently encourage higher interaction, while Instagram Reels 'network-based exposure may suppress engagement, meaning platform effects may partly reflect structural differences rather than content performance alone.

Third, content classification into Entertainment, Informational, and Promotional categories was broad and manually coded. Some videos likely overlapped categories, introducing subjectivity that may have blurred distinctions between content types. A more granular or automated classification approach could improve precision. Fourth, comment volume was used as a proxy for purchase intent, which is an indirect measure. Not all comments reflect buying interest, and many interested consumers may not comment at all. The absence of direct conversion or sales data limits conclusions about actual purchasing behavior.

Finally, the study employed a correlational, cross-sectional design. Observed relationships do not establish causality, and the data represent a single point in time. Changes in platform algorithms or user behavior may alter engagement dynamics over time.

These limitations suggest several directions for future research. Subsequent studies should analyze larger datasets across additional industries and platforms, including Facebook Reels, Snapchat Spotlight, or regional variants such as Douyin, to test the robustness of observed patterns. Longitudinal designs could capture temporal effects and algorithm changes. Future work should also link engagement metrics to actual conversion data, such as click-throughs or sales, to directly assess purchase behavior. Finally, deeper analysis of creative elements, including video length, editing style, captions, music, and influencer presence, as well as qualitative or sentiment analysis of comments, would provide richer insight into how and why short-form videos influence consumer decision-making.

7. CONCLUSION

Short-form video content proved to be highly effective at driving consumer engagement across platforms in this study. Notably, TikTok videos generated markedly higher interaction rates than similar content on YouTube Shorts or Instagram Reels, underscoring how platform-specific algorithms and user cultures shape audience responsiveness. Content type likewise played a critical role: videos offering entertainment or informational value prompted far more engagement than overtly promotional clips. Taken together, these results highlight the strategic value of short-form videos as marketing tools when optimized for each platform's strengths and filled with engaging, value-rich content. Crucially, we observed a strong positive correlation between engagement levels and comment volume. In practice, posts that attracted more likes and shares also tended to spark more viewer discussion – a signal of heightened interest or tentative purchase intent among consumers. However, our analysis was based on observational social media metrics from a limited sample, and we used comment activity only as a proxy for purchase intent without tracking actual sales conversions. As a result, no causal claims can be made, the link between engagement and eventual purchasing remains suggestive rather than definitive. Still, these findings are consistent with prior research associating online engagement with greater purchase propensity. This lends credibility to the idea that fostering robust engagement through short-form videos can nurture consumer interest and potentially influence buying behavior. In sum, short-form videos clearly galvanize audience engagement and may nudge consumers toward purchasing by building brand affinity and trust. As the social media landscape continues to evolve, marketers who create compelling short-form content and strategically integrate it into their digital strategies are likely to reap significant benefits in customer engagement and, ultimately, conversion.

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