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Advertising Literacy in the Age of TikTok: Recognition of Commercial Content among Generation Z

ABSTRACT

This study explores advertising literacy among Generation Z on the social media platform TikTok, and focuses on their ability to recognise persuasive (commercial) content in short video formats. As entertaining and commercial messages increasingly merge on social media platforms, the ability to identify advertising has become a key aspect of media and advertising literacy among young audiences. The research is based on a quantitative survey conducted with 399 respondents aged 18 to 25. The study examined their ability to recognise various forms of advertising on TikTok, including branded content and native advertising formats resembling organic user-generated videos. The results revealed significant deficiencies in respondents' ability to recognise advertising on TikTok. Participants had difficulty distinguishing between entertainment and persuasive communication, particularly when advertising messages were seamlessly integrated into engaging and authentic-looking content. No significant relationship was found between their time spent on social media and their advertising literacy. These findings suggest that even digitally native users demonstrate limited advertising literacy when confronted with hybrid content formats typical of TikTok.

KEY WORDS

Advertising Literacy. Commercial Communication. Content on TikTok. Generation Z. TikTok.

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1 Advertising Literacy in Social Media and Short-Form Video Platforms

In recent years, we have observed much greater interest in exploring the topic of advertising literacy. It is the subject of various disciplines, including psychology, sociology, education and communication. From a communication perspective, researchers are primarily investigating how advertising employs various strategies and techniques to persuade and capture consumers' attention, and conversely, how consumers are able to defend themselves against them (Rozendaal et al., 2022; Čábyová & Hudáková, 2022; Čábyová et al., 2023a; Feijoo & Sádaba, 2022). Among the most common reasons for interest in this topic are, in particular, the transformation of the media landscape, the growing commercialisation of digital platforms and the consequent blurring of boundaries between entertainment and commerce. Furthermore, one must not overlook the immense popularity of digital platforms across all generations. Social media, digital games and streaming platforms are becoming part of everyday life, and not just for younger generations. In traditional media, advertising is clearly recognisable and labelled as such; it is grouped into ad breaks and distinguishable visually or audibly. In digital media, it is far more difficult to recognise and identify. Digital media often use formats that blend in with the content (e.g. product placement, influencer marketing, native advertising, sponsored content); there are far more advertising stimuli, and so the demands on the ability to navigate the commercial media environment are also increasing.

Rozendaal et al. (2011) distinguish three types of integration of commercial content into editorial text. The first type is format integration. This involves an advertising format that visually and stylistically mimics standard media content and is therefore less recognisable to the audience. Examples include advertorials in magazines and on websites, and advertisements read in the same voice and tone as the rest of the text in podcasts. We can also include native advertising here; format-based advertising is also used in influencer marketing. The second type is thematic integration, which involves thematic or content-based alignment. The advertisement is placed within an environment that feels natural to the consumer and is therefore less intrusive. Examples include an advert for a Barbie doll in a Barbie magazine, an advert for sportswear during a sports broadcast, an advert for a travel agency in a travel programme, or an advert for organic food in a cooking programme. The third type is narrative integration, in which the advertising message is embedded directly into the story. Examples include children's animated programmes or series created for a specific brand (e.g. My Little Pony, Transformers, Pokémon, Barbie, Lego, etc.). Although Rozendaal et al. (2011) identified these three types of integration as early as 2010, and whilst this classification remains valid, the environment and forms in which this integration manifests itself today have changed. Social or influencer integration is coming to the fore, where the advertising message is part of the content creator's personal communication, as well as algorithmic or personalised integration, where advertising content is tailored to the user's individual preferences based on the platform's data and algorithms.

In general, we can understand advertising literacy as the ability to identify advertising, recognise the advertising message and the sales intent. However, Rozendaal et al. (2011) expanded this definition and identified three fundamental dimensions of advertising literacy: 1) conceptual advertising literacy, which we understand as the aforementioned ability to recognise and understand advertising, 2) recognition of advertising literacy, which we understand as a critical attitude towards advertising, 3) performance of advertising literacy, which requires the application of knowledge about advertising. Rozendaal et al. (2011) emphasise that simply recognising advertising is no longer sufficient. An advertising-literate individual is also capable of thinking critically and responding appropriately to advertising. A TikTok viewer serves as an example to illustrate the differences across the various dimensions of advertising literacy. An individual with low advertising literacy perceives the content of a video in which an influencer

promotes a product merely as their authentic personal recommendation. An advertising-literate user, however, can recognise that this is paid sponsored content backed by a specific advertiser who is paying for the advertisement. An individual with a higher level of advertising literacy is also able to critically assess the influencer's behaviour and their claims about the product. The final dimension of advertising literacy is particularly evident in the fact that a follower of an influencer on TikTok will seek out further information about the product, compare it with other products, and, in the event of doubt or lack of interest, will pay no attention to the advertising video at all.

Čábyová et al. (2025) extended this definition to include a media concept and state that advertising literacy represents a person's ability to confront (or deal with) advertising regardless of the media channel. This involves understanding advertising strategy and the objectives of advertising, as well as the ability to identify manipulative techniques in advertising. Several studies by Boerman et al. (2024), Čábyová and Hudáková (2022), and Čábyová et al. (2025) point out that users are not always aware of the advertising nature of content in online videos, as they often perceive these forms of communication as entertainment or informational content, rather than as commercial messages. The authors Oprea et al. (2026) note that influencer content on social media is highly commercialised and largely consists of brand promotion. According to them, analyses of influencer videos show that most such content presents product ownership as an important source of happiness, social status and success. The authors point out that influencers often present products as a natural part of their everyday lives, and the boundaries between entertaining content and commercial communication are frequently blurred; they consider it very important to highlight influencers' persuasive strategies and to focus on protecting younger users from uncritically accepting commercial messages.

One platform where this phenomenon is particularly pronounced is the social network TikTok. It represents a specific media environment in which entertainment content and commercial communication often overlap, with content presented primarily in the form of short videos. Its significance is underscored by current statistics: TikTok has over 1.9 billion monthly active users worldwide. The average user spends approximately 52 minutes a day on TikTok. 41% of the platform's users are young people aged 16-24 (Gen Z). The average engagement rate on TikTok is around 17%, which is significantly higher than on most other social media platforms. The app has been downloaded more than 3 billion times and is one of the most downloaded apps in the world (Kemp, 2025).

According to the 'Slovaks Online' survey (Kantar, 2023), young people from Generation Z are among the most active users of the TikTok platform. 32% of young people aged 16-24 use TikTok daily, with an even higher proportion seen among younger users; that is, 46% of children aged 11-15 say they watch TikTok every day. Half of Generation Z spends more than an hour a day watching short videos. The most common reasons for watching videos include a) for entertainment (watching silly stuff), b) to "kill" time when I've got nothing else to do, c) to find inspiration for my hobbies, d) to follow the lives of famous people.

TikTok can be considered user-friendly. According to Roberts and David (2025), TikTok is perceived as a platform which, compared to other platforms, requires less effort on the part of users to search for content, offers more engaging content, and often surprises users with new, unexpected content.

TikTok operates on the principle of short video formats, which are particularly popular with Generation Z. Short videos tend to quickly capture the audience's attention because they are usually concise and entertaining; for this reason, it is easy for users to share them with their friends (Wang & Chen, 2021). Most TikTok users view content via their mobile phones; short videos are highly suited to mobile use and, compared to longer formats, are also more cost-effective (Hu, 2024).

2 An Extended Model of Advertising Literacy for Digital Platforms (TikTok)

To better understand the significance of advertising literacy within the TikTok social media environment, we are expanding on the traditional model proposed by Rozendaal et al. (2011), which defined three basic dimensions: conceptual (identificational), critical (attitudinal) and behavioural (performance), by two further dimensions that are particularly characteristic of the digital environment in which social networks operate. The new digital-algorithmic dimension responds to the fact that commercial communication within the TikTok environment is highly personalised. The social dimension highlights the fact that commercial communication on social media is closely intertwined with influencer content.

At the conceptual level, advertising literacy is understood as the ability to recognise advertising content and understand the sales intent of commercial communication. In the TikTok environment, recognising advertising messages is more challenging because advertising is often natively integrated into short videos and may look visually similar to regular user-generated content. It is therefore necessary to recognise newer forms of commercial communication in particular, and to be able to identify native advertising, sponsored content, product placement and influencer marketing. A distinctive feature of this platform is that advertising content is distributed directly within the personalised “For You” feed, making it even less distinguishable from organic content. Typical indicators of paid collaboration include tags such as #ad and #collaboration. Simply mentioning a firm, company or brand is not sufficient. It is necessary to explicitly state that it is a paid collaboration or advertisement.

A critical dimension is a higher level of advertising literacy, where the user is able to critically reflect on advertising messages and recognise their persuasive nature. The user realises that content and viral trends on TikTok may be **staged or strategically orchestrated and created** to appear natural. A TikTok user understands that an influencer has a paid partnership and that their comments about the product may not be sincere or authentic. They view the influencer’s recommendations and credibility critically, as they realise that the influencer’s aim is to sell the product and profit from it.

In the behavioural dimension, the user applies their knowledge of advertising and knows how to use it when responding to advertising messages. We draw on the definition by Wang et al. (2023), that advertising literacy is not merely an individual’s ability to read, understand and critically evaluate, but also to respond appropriately to advertising messages. It is a practical response that a person applies when encountering an advertisement (Aydoğan & Ayhan, 2022). In the digital environment, the user seeks further information about the product on other profiles, compares information, and verifies the credibility and truthfulness of the information. The user is able to resist impulsive behaviour and maintain a sense of detachment when watching short videos that use various emotional appeals to persuade them in their purchasing decisions.

The digital-algorithmic dimension is a new element in the model that did not exist in the original concept by Rozendaal et al. (2011), and responds to the need to recognise the role of algorithms in the distribution of content on digital platforms. It is particularly important in an era of intensive use of generative artificial intelligence, which can stimulate deeper fragmentation of the information environment (users do not follow the same news and the same videos). In the TikTok environment, it is necessary to recognise the principles of algorithmic content personalisation; it is a space where personalised micro-worlds are created thanks to algorithms. An advertising-literate individual realises that the display of adverts is not random but is based on an analysis of data about their digital behaviour. They are exposed to highly precise ad targeting, which is often integrated into entertaining content.

The final social (influencer) dimension highlights the importance of influencer marketing and social influence within the TikTok environment. We understand this as the ability to recognise commercial content in influencers' recommendations and to be aware of the social mechanisms of this influence. On TikTok, users are often exposed to **social pressure, as they frequently feel that everyone is using the product**. A strong bond with an influencer and one-sided attachment guarantee sales success and trigger desirable purchasing behaviour (Feijoo & Sádaba, 2022). In this case, **a critical view of the influencer's social influence and their commercial motivations** is important. An advertising-literate user can identify situations where an influencer is promoting a product as part of a paid partnership, whilst also understanding that such a recommendation may be motivated by a financial collaboration with the brand.

Dimension of advertising literacy	Rozendaal et al. (2011)	Advertising literacy in the TikTok environment (as proposed by Javořík & Čábyová)	Example from the TikTok environment
Identification / conceptual dimension	The ability to recognise advertising and understand its persuasive intent.	The ability to identify sponsored or native content in short videos and influencer marketing.	The user recognises that a video contains advertising based on the tags #ad, #collaboration or the influencer's presentation of the product.
Critical dimension (attitudinal literacy)	A critical attitude towards advertising and an awareness of its persuasive techniques.	The ability to critically evaluate authentic recommendations from influencers and recognise brands' marketing strategies.	The user realises that the influencer is promoting the product as part of a commercial collaboration and that their recommendation may not be entirely objective. They reflect on the influencer's authenticity.
Behavioural dimension (performance literacy)	The ability to apply knowledge of advertising when responding to advertising messages.	The ability to regulate one's own behaviour towards advertising in the digital environment.	Before making a purchase, the user looks for further reviews or compares the product with competing brands.
Digital-algorithmic dimension (model extension)	Not present in the original model.	Understanding that both content and adverts are personalised by the platform's algorithms.	The user understands that the adverts in their 'For You' feed are displayed based on their previous interactions and interests.
Social / influencer dimension (model extension)	Not present in the original model.	Ability to recognise the commercial nature of influencers' recommendations	The user is aware of the influencer's social influence and that they are promoting the product due to a financial partnership with the brand.

Table 1: Advertising literacy in the TikTok environment – an extended model

Source: own processing, 2026

3 Research Methodology

The subject of this primary research is the analysis and identification of advertising literacy among Generation Z respondents, with a focus on the critical evaluation and processing of advertising content on TikTok. The aim of the research is to identify the level of advertising literacy among respondents with regard to advertising formats specific to this social network, whilst

also verifying whether the intensity of time spent on this platform, in light of current research into Generation Z's media behaviour, is related to their level of advertising literacy, or whether there is a statistically significant relationship between these two variables.

We proceed under the assumption that if a user is increasingly exposed to media content and formats whilst using a given platform, their advertising literacy should increase, as they are in contact with these formats more than other respondents. At the same time, however, we emphasise that advertising literacy as such is not determined solely by the extent of media use, but represents a complex system based on the synergy of multiple dimensions, including components of dispositional as well as situational advertising literacy, which manifests itself in specific situations and to a different degree in each individual (Lampert et al., 2021). For this reason, our primary research does not focus on determining a causal relationship between the level of media use and the level of advertising literacy, but rather on examining a statistically significant correlation between these variables. The aim is therefore to verify the extent to which these two components are interrelated.

To obtain statistically valid results, we adopted a quantitative approach in our research. Data collection took place over a period of 30 calendar days, with the chosen method being a survey using the CAWI technique. This technique is effective for collecting large amounts of quantitative data at low cost (Sowa et al., 2015). We conducted the online survey using the Survio platform, which allows for the creation of questionnaires within a user-friendly environment, with the additional capability of data analysis and visualisation.

Our focus was primarily on those types of advertising that are typical and specific to the TikTok social network, or rather, formats not used on other social networks. Within the research material, we can therefore identify two types of formats. In the first, respondents viewed two videos in which two profiles recommended a skin cream; one of the posts was from an ordinary user, i.e. a review in the form of UGC content¹, whilst the second post was also created by an influencer but was a properly labelled sponsored post. In this study, we therefore also focus on the social (influencer) aspect of advertising literacy by observing how respondents' approach two posts which, although identical in format and content, are posted by a popular influencer in one case and an unknown TikTok user profile in the other. The second format is advertising via the TikTok Branded Hashtag Challenge², in which respondents were shown a total of four videos in succession and asked to identify their purpose, or rather how the brand sought to utilise this advertising format to its own advantage. In our case, it was a dance challenge using not only a unifying hashtag but also a sound. This type of advertising is extremely popular, as it increases the potential for sharing amongst friends and thus helps saturate the algorithm with content that stimulates the brand's commercial communication.

We used a simple principle to determine advertising literacy. Given that respondents could select one of several answers in the questionnaire, whilst there was always only one correct answer per question, they received a point if they selected the correct one. As we tested only two advertising formats, they could earn a total of 2 points. If they scored both, they achieved a high level of advertising literacy (in the context of our survey – i.e. this is not generally applicable to all aspects of literacy or to different types of media); if they scored one correct answer, this was considered medium level. If the respondent did not correctly select either option, they were classified as having low advertising literacy. This methodology has been used in several studies of advertising literacy (see Petranová, 2014).

¹ Authors' note: UGC content, or user-generated content, is a type of content created by individual users that has the potential to drive engagement and is not produced by brands themselves (see Barbosa dos Santos, 2022).

² Authors' note: This type of ad format allows a brand to create a new hashtag challenge and then calls upon app users to create their own video. It is highly interactive and based on the principles of virality, participation and user-generated content. TikTok users themselves become co-creators of an ad campaign (TikTok, n.d.).

Based on the stated objective and the selected materials, we formulated the following pair of hypotheses:

H0: There is no statistically significant relationship between the time spent on TikTok and the respondents' level of advertising literacy.

H1: There is a statistically significant relationship between the time spent on TikTok and the respondents' level of advertising literacy.

We will test the correlation, or significance, between the selected variables and verify the hypotheses overall using Pearson's Chi-squared test. This test compares the observed (i.e. measured) and expected frequencies of occurrence of the variables in a contingency table. The essence of the test lies in verifying whether differences in the distribution of responses are not merely coincidental but indicate a genuine relationship between the variables (Shen et al., 2022). In our case, we use it to determine whether the level of advertising literacy differs according to the time spent on the social media platform TikTok. We calculated the chi-square test using the established formula, where x^2 represents the chi-square statistic, O_i is the observed frequency (the data obtained) and E_i is the expected frequency

$$x^2 = \sum \frac{(O_i - E_i)^2}{E_i}$$

Whilst the chi-square test reveals whether or not a relationship exists between variables, we applied Cramer's V test to determine the strength of this relationship (Telford et al., 2020). This combination thus provides a comprehensive picture of the relationship between the variables, as well as its practical significance. We calculated Cramer's V using the established formula, where x^2 represents the chi-square value, n is the total sample size, r represents the number of rows and c represents the number of columns

$$V = \sqrt{\frac{x^2}{n \cdot (\min(r, c) - 1)}}$$

Our sample (n) consisted of a total of 399 respondents aged between 18 and 25, of whom 241 (60.4%) were female, 157 (39.3%) were male, and one respondent (0.3%) declined to state their gender.

4 Generation Z's Media Behaviour on Social Media and Their Ability to Recognise Advertising on TikTok

The media behaviour of Generation Z is a frequently studied topic, with most studies agreeing on the identification of a clear preference for using social media via mobile phones as the main source of entertainment, as well as for obtaining information and interacting with other users. Almost 73% use social media on a daily basis, with active use of up to 2 hours a day being the most typical. The most popular platforms are considered to be those offering short, dynamic and audiovisual content, such as TikTok and Instagram (Elkatmış, 2024; Panagiotou et al., 2022). Furthermore, findings by Čábyová et al. (2023b) indicate that social media use among this generation cannot be understood as a continuous block of time; on the contrary, it accompanies people throughout the day: during school breaks, whilst travelling from place to place, whilst relaxing at home, and when falling asleep and waking up. It is thus an almost continuous pattern spread throughout the day, within which social media are integrated into almost every activity.

This is a very important finding, as it provides contextual information for our own research into social media usage.

As part of our primary research, we asked respondents how much time they actively spend on social media each day, with activities that redirect respondents away from the apps not included in the total time. The largest group, comprising 156 respondents (39.1%), stated that they spend more than 4 hours a day on social media in this way. 118 respondents (29.6% of the total) spend more than 3 hours on social media, whilst 17 fewer respondents stated that they spend more than 2 hours (25.3% of respondents). A group of respondents who stated they actively use social media for one hour a day finished a considerable distance behind the top three options, with only 19 such respondents (4.8%). Only three respondents spend less than an hour on social media, and two respondents stated that they do not use social media at all. The results of these descriptive statistics more or less reflect the general understanding that social media is a primary and multi-purpose medium for Generation Z. However, within our study, a slightly higher proportion of respondents who spend more time on social media than the average (2 hours) can be observed.

Instagram remains the most widely used social media platform for respondents, with as many as 265 respondents (66.4% in total) identifying it as the platform on which they spend the most time. TikTok follows far behind in popularity, with 84 respondents (21.1%). Other platforms achieved marginal, even negligible results, with, for example, only 9 respondents (2.3% in total) mentioning Facebook in their answers. These results indicate the dominance of platforms with dynamic, short and audiovisual content. Although TikTok represents a significant platform in terms of media consumption in this case, Instagram remains the most popular among respondents. However, the results clearly demonstrate the decline of older social networks (such as Facebook) to a peripheral position in media behaviour. Whilst the results may suggest that Instagram is more relevant than TikTok, it is important to note that these results do not concern which social network respondents prefer, but rather which one they use most frequently during the day. From the supplementary questions in the questionnaire, it can be observed that respondents use TikTok intensively, but it is not necessarily their main social network at present.

In terms of TikTok usage, a total of 93 respondents (23.3%) stated that they do not use TikTok at all. The majority of respondents (306; or 76.7%) stated that they use TikTok on a daily basis. Our research findings are thus consistent with the results of other studies (see Karataş & Karakoç, 2024), confirming the relatively high rate of daily TikTok usage among Generation Z. The analysis shows that the largest proportion of respondents report exposure to the platform's content for between 1 and 3 hours: a total of 169 respondents (42.4%). As many as 80 respondents (20.1%) spend more than 3 hours a day actively watching TikTok, which points to the presence of a user group with above-average exposure to the content. It is assumed that this group is not only more engaged with the content but also more exposed to advertising stimuli, as they are exposed to a greater flow of media (and thus commercial) content. From the perspective of advertising literacy, however, a higher level of exposure to advertising content does not automatically imply a greater ability to recognise and critically evaluate it. Conversely, 57 respondents (14.3%) reported using TikTok for only up to one hour a day. These results thus point to relatively significant differences in the intensity of use of this platform, though this is by no means out of the ordinary. In this case too, it is worth bearing in mind that this does not involve continuous viewing of the platform, but rather fragmented viewing of snippets of content throughout the day (see Čábyová et al., 2023b). From the perspective of interpreting advertising literacy, we wish to emphasise that, based solely on this data, we cannot unequivocally state whether the high level of usage of this medium, as well as the associated variability in time spent on this platform, creates the conditions for differing levels of advertising literacy. For this reason, too, this study focuses on examining the relationship between these two variables at the level of correlation analyses, as intensity of use may represent a relevant, but not the sole, factor influencing their ability to recognise advertising content.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, in our study, respondents were exposed to two types of advertising formats on TikTok, with the research material consisting specifically of videos taken directly from this platform. We thus did not examine hypothetical situations based on self-assessment, but instead confronted respondents with a direct practical situation, thereby focusing in parallel on both the dispositional and situational components of advertising literacy.

The first format was product recommendations via reviews (in a short video format). Respondents were shown two videos without any context provided: they saw only a standard TikTok feed without any modifications. One of the videos was of an advertising nature, as the video description included information about the video being sponsored. Respondents were then asked to identify which (if any) of these videos was an advertisement. In total, only 136 respondents (34.1%) correctly identified that the video featuring the influencer was sponsored. However, most respondents considered both videos to be advertisements (a total of 178 respondents, 44.6%). The first video, i.e. the UGC video, was identified as an advertisement by 57 respondents (14.3%), whilst a further 28 respondents (7%) did not consider either video to be an advertisement. In conclusion, it can be stated that there is a relatively limited ability to identify advertising content directly within a native environment. The fact that only 34.1% of respondents correctly identified the advertisement suggests a low level of cognitive advertising literacy and its dispositional component. At the same time, however, it is also important to note that the majority of respondents considered content of an organic nature to be advertising, which in turn points to a tendency towards over-attribution of advertising characteristics rather than precise differentiation. From the above, it can be deduced that respondents not only have a relatively low ability to recognise advertising but also have an inconsistent and inaccurate understanding of what advertising actually is in the social media environment.

If we examine the results more closely in relation to respondents' answers regarding the time spent on the TikTok social network, the group with the most intensive use of TikTok performs best in terms of the proportion of correct answers (38.75% overall accuracy). At the same time, however, the middle group (one to two hours) achieved an accuracy of 36.09%, indicating only a slightly lower success rate in recognising advertising content. This is therefore not a very significant or fundamental effect that could be identified at the level of descriptive interpretation. This result may suggest that whilst contact with the platform likely increases familiarity with its content and advertising formats, the ability to accurately identify advertising remains dependent on other factors.

The second format was the TikTok Branded Hashtag Challenge, in which we showed respondents a series of videos that used the same hashtag and audio track created by a specific brand (a mobile phone company) to promote its product, with the first such video, which launched the entire challenge, being overtly promotional. The series of videos thus combined UGC content with advertising content. After watching a compilation of several videos, respondents were asked to identify the intention behind the video. In this case, however, as many as 166 respondents (41.6%) correctly identified the mobile operator's promotional effort. A total of 77 respondents (19.3%) saw the aim of the video as an attempt to start a new dance trend, whilst a further 46 respondents (11.5%) stated that the company wanted to blend in with existing videos, i.e. to use an already established trend to its advantage. Although the respondents in this group understood the purpose of the challenge, they failed to correctly identify that it was the advertiser who had launched it. A total of 24 respondents (6%) and 22 respondents (5.5%) incorrectly stated that the aim was to promote the song's artist and the influencers themselves, respectively. As many as 64 respondents (16%) stated that they did not know how to answer the question. This result suggests that respondents were slightly more successful in interpreting the advertising intent of this format than with the previous one, yet even in this case, the level of understanding is not unequivocally high. A significant proportion of respondents did recognise that this involved a coordinated communication activity but were unable to correctly identify its sponsor or commercial objective. From the respondents' answers, it can be deduced that whilst

the majority recognised the mechanics of viral content sharing, they were unable to pinpoint its advertising context. Respondents were therefore able to describe how the format works but were less precise in identifying why and for whose benefit it works.

In terms of the accuracy of responses across groups in relation to the declared time spent on the TikTok social network, almost identical figures can be observed as in the case of the previous format. In the group that reported the most intensive daily use of the platform, the accuracy of answers reached 42.5%, whilst in the middle group it was 40.23%. Also of interest is the accuracy of answers in the group that does not use TikTok daily. In this group, the accuracy of answers stands at 41.93%. This result suggests that time spent on TikTok does not appear to be a clear distinguishing factor for answer accuracy, even with this format. Although the most intensive users of the platform achieved the highest accuracy, the difference compared to the moderate group is only very slight. However, the group that does not use TikTok achieved almost the same level as the most active users, which again suggests that the ability to identify the intent of an advertisement may not be directly linked solely to daily exposure to the platform. This finding largely undermines the assumption that the more time a user spends on TikTok, the better they understand advertising on that platform. Rather, it confirms the view that a wide range of factors influence the overall ability to identify advertising. In order to apply statistical methods, we first had to quantify and determine the respondents' advertising literacy based on the procedure set out in the second chapter. The exact results can be seen in Table 2, below.

Advertising literacy level	Number of respondents
High	70
Medium	162
Low	167

Table 2: Advertising literacy level of respondents

Source: own processing, 2026

Based on the results, it can be concluded that within the sample examined, a high level of advertising literacy does not predominate, but rather a medium to lower level. From the figures above, it can be stated that only around one in six respondents correctly completed both tasks, whilst more than four-fifths of respondents failed at least one or both. Although the respondents' advertising literacy in relation to advertising on TikTok is not at a high level, this is not a particularly unfavourable result, as the study focused on two specific formats typical of this platform, rather than on the respondents' advertising literacy in its entirety. Nevertheless, this clearly supports the thesis that Generation Z does not automatically understand advertising content in a native format, even though they are in daily contact with this platform.

To test the two hypotheses, we divided the respondents in the table according to their declared daily time spent on TikTok and their level of advertising literacy, with the exact results shown in Table 3.

Declared daily time spent on TikTok	Level of Advertising Literacy			
	Low	Medium	High	Total
Less than an hour	22	28	7	57
One to two hours	74	61	34	169
Three or more hours	31	33	16	80
Don't use TikTok	40	40	13	93
Total	167	162	70	399

Table 3: Advertising literacy level compared to declared time spent on TikTok

Source: own processing, 2026

This table also serves as the input data for the chi-square test of independence. Based on this, the expected frequencies were subsequently calculated using the formula

$$E = \frac{\text{Row Total} \times \text{Column Total}}{\text{Grand Total}}$$

After creating the table of expected frequencies, a p -value of 0.54 was calculated in MS Excel using the `chisq.test` function. As this value exceeds the significance level $\alpha = 0.05$, the null hypothesis could not be rejected. In the chi-squared test, we also used the formula given in the second chapter, substituting the frequency values to give $\chi^2 = 5.00$, which corresponds to a p -value of 0.543. Since we do not reject the null hypothesis, we can conclude that no statistically significant relationship was found between the declared daily time spent on TikTok and the respondents' level of advertising literacy.

To verify the strength of the relationship, we used Cramer's V , substituting the values obtained from the data into the formula

$$V = \sqrt{\frac{5.00}{399 \cdot (\min(4, 3) - 1)}}$$

After substitution and subsequent calculation, the value of Cramer's V can be expressed as $V = 0.08$, which indicates a very weak relationship between the variables. It follows from the above that not only was statistical significance not demonstrated, but the magnitude of the effect itself is also very low.

5 Discussion

Currently, the social network TikTok represents one of the most relevant digital and online platforms for members of Generation Z. Its popularity lies in its ease of use and overall user-friendly interface, as well as the wide range of opportunities for global networking, variety of content, and the chance to acquire new interpersonal skills (Jain & Arrakal, 2022). The dynamics of TikTok present a rapidly changing, dynamic, algorithmically driven and personalised environment, within which advertising content can become increasingly less conspicuous. Advertising on TikTok therefore does not function primarily as a disruptive external element, but as part of a natural content flow, which fundamentally alters the conditions under which it is recognised (Tersikh & Plyusnina, 2022). We currently consider it important within the framework of research, to focus specifically on these formats, as they have long proven effective in overcoming consumers' ability to resist their potential adverse effects.

In this study, we worked on the hypothesis that a higher level of engagement with and use of the platform may also lead to a greater ability to identify advertising formats. We could therefore formulate this as the consideration that respondents who spend more time on TikTok will have more experience with the platform's content and advertising formats and will therefore be more successful in distinguishing advertising content from organic content. However, referring to the results of our own research, we must conclude that there is no statistically significant relationship between the reported time spent on TikTok and the level of advertising literacy. This means that the intensity of platform usage alone has not been shown to be a factor that reliably increases the ability to recognise advertising.

These results thus may challenge the apparent assumption that greater interaction with the medium must automatically lead to a better understanding of its content mechanisms. The research findings suggest that frequent use of the TikTok social network does not in itself mean

that the user can reliably identify native commercial content. On the contrary, it appears that prolonged exposure to the platform's environment may lead to a kind of desensitisation, and to the normalisation of hybrid forms of content, a point also highlighted by the results from the group that does not use the platform. We believe that whilst using the app, people do familiarise themselves with the platform's language, interface, visual dynamics and communication formats, this does not mean that they simultaneously develop the ability to critically evaluate the content found there.

The findings of our research therefore clearly point to the fact that advertising literacy cannot be understood merely as an automatic by-product of media exposure, but rather as a complex set of knowledge, skills and competencies that are not developed through passive exposure to content. These results therefore also support the concept of advertising literacy as a multidimensional construct involving a large number of factors. Based on these findings, broader implications for the field of media education and training can also be identified. If advertising literacy does not arise automatically through exposure to content and format, then it cannot be assumed that the most active social media users will also be the most competent at recognising advertising. The results therefore support the need to specifically develop advertising literacy as a distinct competence, particularly in relation to platforms where commercial content is highly native and formally inconspicuous. Generation Z should therefore not be perceived as digitally literate simply because they have mastered the technical and technological aspects of a given medium, when they do not sufficiently understand the content itself.

From the above results, it can be concluded that high exposure to advertising formats within the social media environment does not have a protective effect; on the contrary, in the case of native formats, content blends in regardless of the time spent on the app. In the case of TikTok, it is important to note that this platform often bases advertising on participation, trends, music, influencers and the formal similarity of UGC content.

The research findings thus highlight a significant discrepancy between the intensity of platform use and the ability to critically engage with its advertising content. This insight is important not only for the theoretical understanding of advertising literacy, but also for the design of future research and educational approaches.

6 Conclusion

The subject of the study was the issue of advertising literacy on the social media platform TikTok. As part of the investigation, we focused on the ability of Generation Z users to identify native advertising formats within the digital environment of this platform. The aim was to investigate whether there is a relationship between the intensity of use of this platform and the level of advertising literacy achieved by the respondents.

To achieve this objective, we conducted quantitative research on a sample of 399 respondents aged between 18 and 25, in which participants were exposed to specific selected advertising and organic formats from the TikTok environment, with the respondents themselves subsequently assessing whether the content was an advertisement and what the intention of each video was. Based on the accuracy of their answers, we assigned respondents a level of advertising literacy, and we subsequently analysed the results in relation to their declared time spent on the platform, specifically using a Chi-square test. We then supplemented the strength of the relationship with an assessment using Cramer's V.

Based on the results obtained, it can be concluded that there is no statistically significant relationship between the time spent on social media and the level of advertising literacy; on the contrary, the strength of the relationship between these variables is very weak. The results thus challenge the assumption that a higher level of exposure to advertising content automatically leads to a greater ability to identify it.

However, the study's authors also work with certain limitations. One of the variables in the test is self-reported data on time spent on the platform, which may be distorted by respondents' subjective perceptions. Furthermore, it is necessary to consider the fact that the measurement of advertising literacy was based on a limited number of stimuli, which may influence the overall results. The specific generational cohort of respondents may also be a limiting factor.

In terms of expanding the research, an opportunity lies in extending the investigation to other dimensions of advertising literacy (in relation to influencers, for example, its moral and ethical dimension) whilst also applying other methods of evaluating the results. It is also possible to extend the research in the future to include other advertising formats, or social media platforms themselves.

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