

Persuasive communication on TikTok: analysis of the 'Sephora Kids' viral trend among Generation Alpha

Comunicación persuasiva en TikTok: análisis de la
tendencia viral de 'Sephora Kids' en la Generación Alfa

Comunicação persuasiva no TikTok: análise da
tendência viral «Sephora Kids» entre a Geração Alpha

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to determine the scope of messages spread on TikTok about the trend known as Sephora Kids, a movement that encourages children to use adult cosmetics. This trend, present on various social networks, shows how young girls consume and promote cosmetic and personal care products that are not appropriate for their age. **Methodology:** The methodology used is inductive, materialised in a content analysis sheet. A total of 500 videos were analysed using this tool. **Results:** The results show that 63.8% of prosumers are in favour of the trend and that 61.2% use a humorous tone when discussing it. Critical content accounts for only 10.1%, which shows a mostly positive perception and a lack of warning messages. TikTok is becoming a space for amplifying and normalising this practice among young audiences, driven by user-generated content and influencer marketing. **Conclusions:** The findings highlight the need to promote digital literacy to encourage more critical and responsible consumption among girls. The recommendation is to expand the sample to other platforms and consider the perceptions of families and educators be considered to better understand its psychosocial effects.

Keywords

TikTok, Sephora Kids, Persuasive communication, User-generated content, Social media, Digital literacy.

Resumen

Propósito: El propósito de este estudio es conocer el alcance de los mensajes difundidos en TikTok sobre la tendencia conocida como “Sephora Kids”, un movimiento que anima a las niñas a utilizar cosmética adulta. Esta moda, presente en diversas redes sociales, muestra cómo niñas consumen y promocionan productos cosméticos y de cuidado personal no adecuados para su edad. **Metodología:** La metodología usada es inductiva, materializada en una ficha de análisis de contenido. Con este instrumento se analiza un total de 500 vídeos. **Resultados:** Los resultados reflejan que el 63,8 % de los prosumidores se muestra a favor de la tendencia y que

el 61,2 % utiliza un tono humorístico al tratarla. Los contenidos críticos apenas representan el 10,1 %, lo que evidencia una percepción mayoritariamente positiva y una escasa presencia de mensajes de advertencia. TikTok se consolida como un espacio de amplificación y normalización de esta práctica entre audiencias jóvenes, impulsada por el contenido generado por usuarios y el marketing de influencia. **Conclusiones:** Se subraya la necesidad de fomentar la alfabetización digital para promover un consumo más crítico y responsable entre las niñas. Se recomienda ampliar la muestra a otras plataformas y considerar la percepción de familias y educadores para comprender mejor sus efectos psicosociales.

Palabras clave

TikTok, Sephora Kids, Comunicación persuasiva, Contenido generado por usuarios, Redes sociales, Alfabetización digital.

Resumo

O **objetivo** deste estudo é determinar o alcance das mensagens divulgadas no TikTok sobre a tendência conhecida como «Sephora Kids», um movimento que incentiva crianças menores a usar cosméticos para adultos. Essa tendência, presente em várias redes sociais, mostra como meninas jovens consomem e promovem produtos cosméticos e de higiene pessoal que não são adequados para a sua. **Metodologia:** A metodologia utilizada é indutiva, materializada numa ficha de análise de conteúdo. Um total de 500 vídeos foi analisado utilizando esta ferramenta. **Resultados:** Os resultados mostram que 63,8 % dos prosumidores são a favor da tendência e que 61,2 % utilizam um tom humorístico ao discuti-la. O conteúdo crítico representa apenas 10,1 %, o que mostra uma percepção maioritariamente positiva e uma falta de mensagens de alerta. O TikTok está a tornar-se um espaço para amplificar e normalizar esta prática entre o público jovem, impulsionado pelo conteúdo gerado pelos utilizadores e pelo marketing de influência. **Conclusões:** É destacada a necessidade de promover a literacia digital para incentivar um consumo mais crítico e responsável entre as raparigas. Recomenda-se que a amostra seja alargada a outras plataformas e que as percepções das famílias e dos educadores sejam consideradas para compreender melhor os seus efeitos psicossociais.

Palavras-chave

TikTok, Sephora Kids, Comunicação persuasiva, Conteúdo gerado pelo utilizador, Redes sociais, Alfabetização digital.

1. Introduction

The concept of the “video child”, introduced by Sartori (2012) in his famous work *Homo Videns: The Television-Driven Society*, acquires particular significance in the age of social media. A generation of children is growing up under the immense allure of screens, fostering new learning conditions that lead to a noticeable decline in critical thinking, a drastic reduction in concentration, and a transformation in prevailing attitudes and values (Panjeti-Madan & Ranganathan, 2023; Rojas-Estapé, 2024).

This mass culture produces homogeneous behaviours among its members, limiting individual thought and facilitating the acceptance of ideas (Le-Bon, 2018). Social media platforms symbolise and materialise this power through the audiovisual representations of users. These platforms enable information to spread quickly and broadly, enabling collective participation on a global scale (Jenkins et al., 2015; Blanco-Martínez & González-Sanmamed, 2021). The platforms themselves establish control within the ecosystem, setting rules of conduct to guide prosumers’ behaviours, while influencers shape users’ opinions and legitimise current trends (Martín-Ramallal & Ruiz-Mondaza, 2022).

This landscape is clearly driven by edited short-form videos, characterised by a strong visual component, which overstimulate audiences and draw them into their screens. These codes constitute the dominant language of the current social media paradigm, initially driven by TikTok (Meneses-Vázquez, 2023; Martín-Neira et al., 2023).

Audiences are fragmented. From their mobile devices, they spend hours scrolling, consuming content that provides a multitude of visual and auditory stimuli based on positivity. Social media platforms represent spaces of homogenisation, isolating people with specific concerns and distancing them from reality (Pariser, 2017; Han, 2022). This has led the European Parliament (Parlamento Europeo, 2024) to propose regulations to limit addictive techniques such as infinite scrolling, in an effort to combat the addiction these platforms create in users.

1.1. Young People on TikTok: A Mirror to Look Into

The addiction of young people to social media platforms such as TikTok has become a top-priority issue (Wang & Guo, 2023), particularly given the high prevalence of mental health problems (Jiménez-Marín et al., 2020), which contribute to academic failure (Valencia-Ortiz et al., 2021), among other concerns.

Pre-adolescents and teenagers are the most active on short-video social media platforms, especially the former, who use these platforms to gain social recognition and achieve fame (Bossen & Kottasz, 2020). Experts note that intensive use of these spaces during early adolescence has repercussions for socio-emotional development, especially among girls (Booker et al., 2018). Girls and pre-adolescents are the highest consumers of TikTok (Marin-Trejos et al., 2025), and they do so passively, engaging in viewing and sharing content (Bossen & Kottasz, 2020), although they also contribute to creating videos that reflect stylistic issues (Wang, 2020). This phenomenon, known as user-generated content, involves users producing content aligned with their interests, which can yield more positive effects in marketing terms than those achieved through traditional advertising campaigns (Rodríguez-Ardura, 2018; Müller & Christandl, 2019).

TikTok has become a mirror for young people to look into. Since the platform is filled with stereotypical images of beauty and gender (Khattab, 2019), it is dangerous at this moment of high vulnerability. In this scenario of infodemic and content oversaturation, it is easy to find new behaviours or trends related to health, such as young people's dissatisfaction with their body image (Ibn-Auf et al., 2023), the promotion of weight loss, the ideal of slimness, and the standardisation of eating disorders (Davis et al., 2023); minimisation of the seriousness of mental health disorders (Leiva-Castillo et al., 2023); the romanticisation of toxic love (Civila et al., 2023); as well as the exaggerated stimulation of purchasing intentions, fostering irresponsible consumption (Maghraoui & Khrouf, 2024).

In this regard, at an advertising level, these spaces become ideal places to make a mark on users (Feijoo et al., 2023), as seen in the recent phenomenon of 'Sephora Kids', which threatens to become a new chapter in the history of social media. Hundreds of young girls, influenced by the high content of fashion and

beauty they consume on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, are purchasing treatments and cosmetic products at retail spaces like Sephora that are, in many cases, not suitable for their age. Products for skincare, haircare, bodycare, and makeup tools and accessories are being massively popularised through the work of influencers, who, through digital platforms, drive their circulation and adoption among younger audiences (Fernández-García, 2024; Albrizio, 2024). Additionally, there are smaller accounts that replicate the behaviours of their favourite content creators (Lajnef, 2023; Shetu, 2023).

The social interest of this study lies in analysing how the phenomenon of ‘Sephora Kids’ is constructed, who promotes it, and from which perspectives. The aim is to understand how this discourse has been shaped on the platform, which could lead to mental health problems among young people—a topic of great relevance to parents, children, educators and, more broadly, society as a whole (Digital Future Society, 2023).

This research applies a gender perspective, considering that the fight for equality is a global goal in which different social, political and institutional actors participate, focusing particularly on childhood. This challenging journey will not end until discrimination against women across social strata ceases (World Economic Forum, 2023; OECD, 2023). It is relevant that, in a time of maximum advocacy for gender equality, we are seeing initiatives that may objectify young girls, as reported in various studies analysing the impact of certain internet trends on self-image and emotional well-being (Papageorgiou et al., 2022; Colak et al., 2023).

2. Objectives and Research Questions

This article pursues a general objective: to analyse the messages circulating on TikTok about the phenomenon of ‘Sephora Kids’. Based on this central aim, five specific objectives have been established to guide the research:

- S01. To identify content creators on the social network, paying attention to their typology, language and audience reach, to determine the level of responsibility and participation of the different actors involved.

- S02. To identify how often these posts are created and whether their frequency has gradually increased, or if, on the contrary, it is a stagnant phenomenon.
- S03. To investigate the information treatment given to these messages, focusing on the tone and approach of these videos.
- S04. To assess the effects of this trend and the potential impact it may have on the health of the community.
- S05. To determine the level of responsibility of the different actors involved in this process.

To address these objectives, the following research questions are proposed:

- RQ1: How is the trend presented in the messages posted by TikTok users, and what is the predominant approach (positive or negative)?
- RQ2: Is there a critical discourse about mental health on TikTok?
- RQ3: Who are the instigators and those responsible for this trend affecting minors?

The results and conclusions derived from this study are linked to the following Sustainable Development Goals that shape the 2030 Agenda: Gender Equality (SDG 5) and Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10). The aim is to contribute to strengthening these transformations, as the United Nations Global Sustainable Development Report (2023) suggests. The goal is to generate knowledge on a subject that may perpetuate existing inequalities between men and women. Therefore, its significance from both an academic and scientific perspective is paramount.

3. Methodology

This research presents a mixed-methods study combining quantitative and qualitative approaches, conducted through content analysis. The study explores TikTok content on the phenomenon known as 'Sephora Kids', examining the approaches and stance various content creators adopt in relation to this topic.

The research is approached inductively. It starts with the study of specific areas to develop a general theory of the observed realities. The dissertation is documentary

and descriptive (Bernal-Torres, 2016). Firstly, a search for information in specialised sources on 'Sephora Kids' is conducted to create a theoretical framework that situates the object of study in a meaningful context. Secondly, the discourse surrounding 'Sephora Kids' on TikTok is reflected. These aspects are formed through a dual quantitative and qualitative study using a self-developed measurement instrument. This methodological device constitutes an epistemological core with a mixed foundation, accepted for the study of social objects (Muñoz-Rocha, 2016).

3.1. Sample Selection

TikTok is still in the expansion phase. For the fourth consecutive year, it continues to gain followers. Its visit frequency and view volume have increased. It has become the most widely used network across generations, especially among younger users (ages 12-17 and 18-24). The time spent on the platform has slightly increased compared to the previous year, standing at one hour and twenty-six minutes (only surpassed by Spotify) (IAB, 2024; IAB, 2025). Furthermore, TikTok's algorithm is a key factor for the platform, as it enables messages to reach large audiences and trends to go viral quickly (Becerra-Chauca & Taype-Rondan, 2020). These factors have been crucial in selecting this ecosystem as a source of information, which is also the most influential vertical video network.

Having chosen TikTok as the social network, the time frame for the study was set from September 2023, when the phenomenon first emerged, to August 2024, when data collection was completed. The videos were analysed by performing vertical scrolling, following TikTok's viewing structure. Only content that had a significant impact on the platform, such as high numbers of views, likes, comments and saves, was included in the study to identify the dominant voices and trends that have shaped the conversation around the phenomenon. These videos were located through the hashtag #sephorakids, which has over 10,000 posts.

The sample consists of 500 videos, totalling 13 hours and 19 minutes of audiovisual content analysed. In qualitative terms, theoretical saturation has been achieved (Rodríguez-Dorta & Borges, 2016), as no new relevant information was obtained after analysing the data that would alter the patterns identified beyond the 200-video threshold. Additionally, the volume of content analysed enables the

selected variables to accurately reflect the platform's predominant trends, as only the dominant voices were examined.

3.2. Methodological Procedure

The first step involves conducting qualitative content analysis. In line with the established objectives, it is necessary to understand the approach taken in the videos addressing the 'Sephora Kids' phenomenon. This interpretative analysis represents reality through a systematic, uniform observation method (Hernández-Sampieri et al., 2018), reflecting the perspective of a part of the TikTok community on this matter. Therefore, this analysis has a quantitative aspect, which facilitates the measurement and understanding of this element empirically and verifiably.

In qualitative studies, researchers must formulate their own method, as the reality they are observing is complex, changing and can be analysed from multiple perspectives (Eiroa-San-Francisco & Barranquero-Carretero, 2017; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

According to Krippendorff (1990), it is imperative to understand the essence and terminology of the material recorded before posing the relevant variables. Consequently, 200 videos were viewed from the platform. This allowed for the ad hoc establishment of the categories shown in Table 1.

The first section consists of 12 significant variables:

- Size: the number of followers registered for the TikTok user who uploaded the video. Here, there are four options: Micro (between 0 and 50K followers), Small (50K to 250K), Medium (250K to 1M) and Large (1M to 5M followers).
- Channel: this classifies the type of account that published the content. The options are: a) Individual: individual users without affiliation, b) Institutional: representatives of a public or private entity, c) Fashion and/or beauty: channels dedicated to this topic, d) Health: accounts related to wellbeing, e) Influencers: users with a considerable audience who influence trends, f) Media: accounts of journalists or media outlets, g) Brands: company accounts.
- Audience: this identifies the people whom the content could impact. The possibilities are: man, woman, boy or girl.

Table 1. Coding sheet

a) Formal Data	
- Size	- Micro (0 - 50K followers) - Small (50K - 250K followers) - Medium (250K - 1M followers) - Large (1M - 5M followers)
- Channel	- Individual - Institutional - Fashion and/or Beauty - Health - Influencers - Media - Brands
- Audience	- Man - Woman - Boy - Girl
- Treatment	- Positive - Negative - Neutral
- Duration	- 00:00
- Views	- Total
- Likes	- Total
- Comments	- Total
- Saved	- Total
- Date	- 00/00/00
- Language	- Spanish - English
- Link	- URL
b) Approach and Positioning	
- Approach	- Positive - Negative - Neutral
- Tone	- Humorous - Serious - Dramatic - Emotional

b) Approach and Positioning	
- Video Type	- Opinion - Makeup - Shopping - Recommendation - Parody
- Responsible	- Family (parents) - Brands - Government or Educational Institutions - Social networks
c) Mental Health Impact	
- Health	- Self-esteem - Negative body perception - Social pressure - Promotion of gender stereotypes - Skin problems - Skin benefits

Source: Authors’ own work.

- **Treatment:** this describes how it is perceived by the audience in the videos. The options are: positive (if it promotes a favourable perception), negative (if it criticises or spreads a negative image), or neutral (when no clear stance is adopted).
- **Duration:** the exact length of each video in minutes and seconds.
- **Views:** the total number of times the video has been viewed.
- **Likes:** the total number of “likes” received by each video.
- **Comments:** the total number of comments generated.
- **Saved:** the number of times users have saved the video to watch later.
- **Publication date:** the month in which the video was uploaded.
- **Language:** the language in which the content is published.
- **Link:** the specific URL leading to the video analysed.

Approach and positioning includes:

- **Approach:** this indicates the general attitude of the video towards the ‘Sephora Kids’ phenomenon. The alternatives are: Positive (promotes or supports the

trend), Negative (criticises or rejects it), and Neutral (does not show a defined position).

- Tone: this describes the predominant style or emotion. There are four options: Humorous (comic or fun tone), Serious (formal treatment), Dramatic (presents the content exaggeratedly or intensely), and Emotional (aims to generate an emotional reaction).
- Video type: this classifies the purpose of the video. The options are: Opinion (the creator expresses their viewpoint), Makeup (content related to make-up application), Shopping (videos focused on product purchases in stores), Recommendation (suggestions about products), and Parody (videos that parody or mock the phenomenon).
- Responsible: this identifies the actors considered responsible for the trend. The list includes: Family (mainly parents), Brands (companies promoting the trend), Government or Educational Institutions (public or educational bodies), and Social Networks (platforms that contribute to the spread of the trend).

The final section discusses the impact these contents may have on health, according to the perspective of TikTok content creators. The categories are: self-esteem deterioration, negative body perception, social pressure, promotion of gender stereotypes and skin problems or benefits.

The study data were entered into a spreadsheet. This task was coordinated among the authors of this manuscript in accordance with the previously outlined criteria.

3.3. Expert Validation

The analysis form was evaluated by three academics with PhDs in communication, each with extensive, proven experience in developing qualitative and quantitative research. After a thorough review of the instrument, they recommended making some adjustments to improve its accuracy. They suggested including a category to analyse the types of interaction between users and creators (comments, shares) and expanding the health section to consider aspects related to self-esteem and social comparison. Additionally, they advised clarifying the differentiation between types of creators to achieve a more precise segmentation.

The evaluators received a questionnaire composed of three sections: formal data, approach and health, which they scored using a Likert scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is very poor and 5 is excellent. All items received a score of 4 or 5, except those related to the previously mentioned aspects, which received a score of 3. After implementing these suggestions, 100% of the reviewers considered the analysis form suitable for achieving its goals, thus validating its effectiveness.

To assess internal consistency, Cohen's Kappa coefficient (McHugh, 2012) was used in the coding process of this study. This measure is ideal when working with two coders, as in this research. Cohen's Kappa quantifies the degree of agreement between evaluators, adjusting for agreement that could occur by chance, allowing for a more accurate and objective estimate of the process reliability. For this, the two coders viewed and catalogued a random sample of approximately 6% ($n = 30$) to determine inter-coder reliability, which was 0.89. Specifically, the reliability of the coding for the 'approach' dimension was 0.86, and for 'health' it was 0.92. This result is satisfactory and indicates an acceptable level of agreement.

The study began in March 2024 and concluded at the end of October. Data collection and analysis were carried out between June and September.

4. Results

The content creators on TikTok, the dissemination channels, their reach and the language used are analysed to critically determine the level of responsibility and participation of the different actors involved. We found that 62.2% of the videos come from micro accounts (0 - 50K followers), 18.8% from small accounts (50K - 250K), 11% from medium accounts (250K - 1M), and 8% from large accounts (1M - 5M).

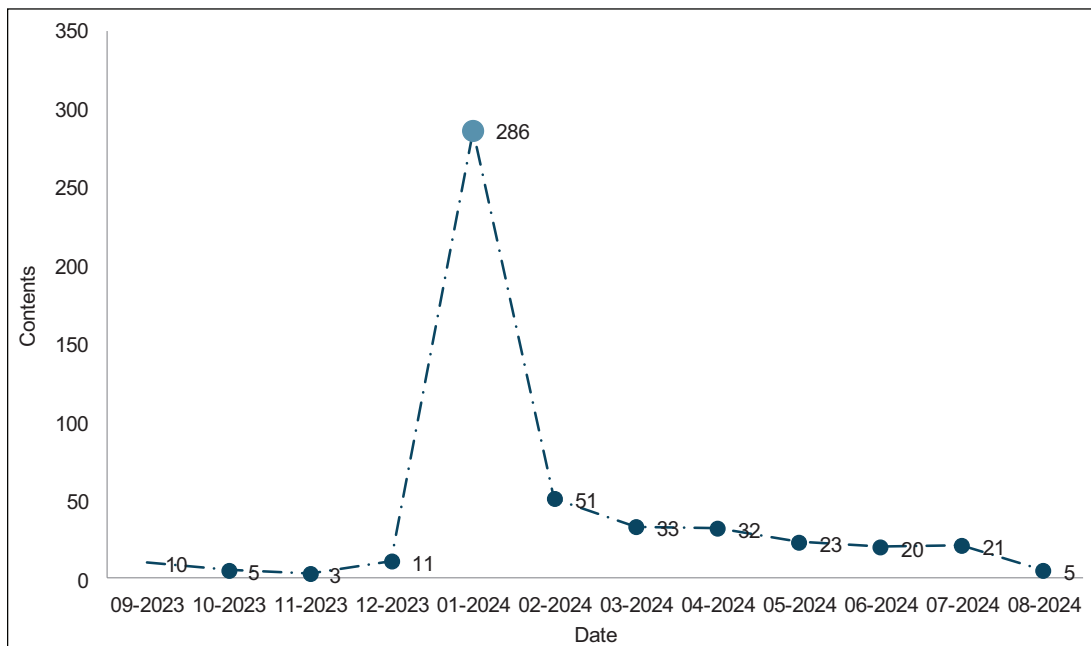
Large channels receive a higher average number of views than the rest of the profiles. 75.8% of the content examined comes from individual users with few followers, even though their posts have reached some level of relevance. Among these channels, 18.4% focus on posting fashion and beauty content.

The role of influencers stands out, accounting for 16% of the content. Channels focused on health (4.4%), education (2%) and brands promoting the sale of cosmetic products (1.8%) have seen lower engagement. The presence of public or private institutions, as well as educational agents, has been non-existent.

Regarding the language of origin, 62% of the videos are in English and 38% are in Spanish. The average duration of these videos is 1.59 seconds. Most videos are shorter than 2 minutes: 63.2% are less than 1 minute and 21% are less than 2 minutes. There are audiovisual creations of less than 3 minutes (9.6%), 4 minutes (2.8%), 5 minutes (2%), 8 minutes (1%) and 10 minutes (0.4%).

To identify the frequency at which these posts are created and whether their rate has increased gradually, Figure 1 presents the evolution of the phenomenon over time. The findings show an exponential increase in January, when 286 TikToks were identified under the hashtag 'Sephora Kids', representing 57.2% of the total sample.

Figure 1. *Evolution of content publication over time*



Source: Authors' own work.

To investigate the treatment of information in these messages, we analyse the tone and approach of these videos, providing an understanding of the discursive strategies used by these content creators and the audiences they target. Regarding

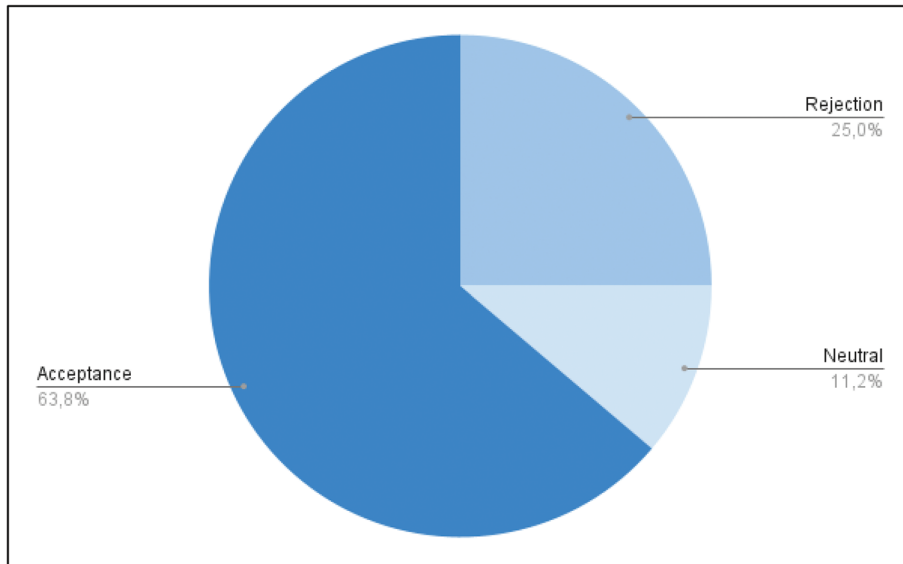
this matter, it is worth noting that all the videos analysed (100%) discuss the 'Sephora Kids' phenomenon in feminine terms, excluding boys and older individuals from this trend.

63.8% of prosumers speak positively about 'Sephora Kids'. These videos show girls buying cosmetic products, sometimes with their parents, applying makeup or sharing their opinions. There are also videos where adults support this initiative and share their views. In contrast, 25% project a negative perception. In some cases, they are accused of being poorly educated and treating Sephora staff disrespectfully. In others, jokes are made about the state in which they leave the fitting rooms, and they are criticised for implementing habits unsuitable for their age. Surprisingly, many girls are filmed while shopping, seemingly without their consent. Relatedly, there are videos of adults reacting to them when they enter a store, sometimes without showing their faces. Finally, 11.2% of the videos are labelled as neutral, as they show both positive and negative aspects.

The tone that predominates on the platform is humorous (61.4%), followed by serious (35.6%), emotional (2%) and dramatic (1%). Supporters of this trend primarily use the humorous tone. These are brief messages, of short duration, and are divided into the following types: shopping (32.9%), where we see girls purchasing products in stores like Sephora; makeup (14.8%), where girls and adults apply makeup in front of the camera; parody (15.7%), where different people make jokes about the behaviour of 'Sephora Kids'; recommendations (2.3%), where the virtues of makeup and personal care products are praised.

Regarding the approach (Figure 2), 63.8% of prosumers have expressed support for this trend. Among the voices backing it, 100% of brands, 90% of influencers, 85% of fashion and beauty profiles, and 62% of individual channels are included. These supporters argue that children need to take care of their skin (34%), that it is a harmless fashion trend that does not harm girls (76%) and that it is normal for girls to want to imitate their mothers' behaviour (27%). However, 27% are against promoting the sale of products like retinol to minors. In contrast, 25% of users oppose the trend.

Among the detractors are 100% of health-related channels, 38% of individual users, 15% of fashion profiles and 10% of influencers. These users believe that introducing minors to makeup contributes to shortening childhood (67%), which is crucial for their growth and cognitive development. This leads to excessive dependence

Figure 2. *Level of acceptance and rejection of 'Sephora Kids' on TikTok*

Source: Authors' own work.

on cosmetic products, which in turn affects self-perception (38%). They also point out that many of the products popular among girls are highly damaging for their age. 21% believe this trend may lead to mental health issues. 11.2% of prosumers do not have a clear stance, offering both supporting and opposing arguments, as indicated earlier. It is important to note that among the ten videos with the highest views, six show an accepting attitude towards the phenomenon, while four show rejection.

Content related to health has a limited impact on the platform. Only 10.1% address this aspect; in other words, 89.9% make no mention of it. The main issues identified by this minority include: skin problems resulting from the use of cosmetic products (43%), increased social pressure on girls to project a particular image (29%), the promotion of gender stereotypes (28%), self-esteem deterioration (18%) and sexualisation (17%).

77.4% of the videos did not mention any responsible parties. Those who did consider parents as the main contributors to the proliferation of this trend (72%), followed by the high fashion and beauty content these girls consume on social

media (23%) and the immense persuasive power wielded by influencers (18%). It is worth noting that many of these creators state that their content is not aimed at girls and that they are not responsible for the content they watch at home. No responsibility is attributed to brands, nor to public and educational institutions.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

The data presented shows that 'Sephora Kids' has had a significant impact on views, likes and comments. This dynamic is not an isolated case within the universe of visual content on social media. Instead, it fits into broader patterns of persuasive communication and media exposure that influence the behaviours, values and perceptions of younger audiences, in line with Montúfar-Calle et al. (2024). In this regard, several studies point to an increase in the sale of makeup and personal care products among Generation Z (Social Standards, 2021; Numerator, 2024). Academic literature supports the idea that social media serves as a space for discovery and recommendation, where trends foster purchase intent among Generation Z consumers for these products (Jovanka & Subarsa-Putri, 2024).

Following Sartori (2012), 'Sephora Kids' react positively to audiovisual stimuli, leading to a generation of girls, in this case, 'video girls on TikTok', who are culturally impoverished. These are distracted girls who navigate their lives in imaginary worlds. While the author's criticisms focus on television, there is a strong connection with this social network. Television and, in this case, TikTok, do not reflect the transformations taking place in society. In fact, both disseminate the changes they wish to instil. The results suggest that the community has reacted positively to this new trend, creating optimal conditions for its acceptance. According to Cortés-Quesada and Vizcaíno-Verdú (2025), this logic demonstrates how TikTok's algorithms promote visual consumption content that reinforces beauty ideals and encourages consumption behaviours among younger audiences.

Institutions and educational agents are not taking advantage of TikTok's reach to speak out about this trend. This dynamic is similarly observed in the study presented by Tejedor-Calvo et al. (2022).

The predominant approach in the videos analysed is one of acceptance, and the barriers to its proliferation, at least on the platform, are minimal despite its

impact. In an unprecedented public relations operation in history, Bernays orchestrated a campaign (Torches of Freedom) to encourage women to smoke in the early 20th century (Wilcox et al., 2012). Now, times have changed, and major makeup chains have expanded their audience by encouraging girls to adopt beauty and personal care routines that were previously considered unnecessary.

Physical and mental health occupies a small space in the messages that have been broadcast (10.1%). For many, there is no connection between the two concepts, even though many studies warn that members of Generation Z are more prone than other generations to suffer from anxiety or stress related to social media consumption, the self-demanding nature of personal care, and social comparisons (Wyman, 2023; Camacho-Vidal et al., 2023; Digennaro & Tescione, 2024).

The study aimed to answer the following research questions: How is the trend presented in the messages posted by TikTok users, and what is the predominant approach (positive or negative)? Is there a critical discourse on mental health on TikTok? Who are the instigators and responsible parties for this trend affecting minors? Below are the answers to these questions, based on the analysis of 500 videos from the platform.

The 'Sephora Kids' trend is primarily presented in a positive light on TikTok. 63.8% of the videos analysed promote this trend, defending it as a harmless activity for girls, who see these cosmetic products as a form of fun or imitation of their mothers' or influencers' behaviours. The humorous tone predominates a significant portion of the videos (61.2%), reflecting that many prosumers do not perceive a problem with this trend. This conclusion aligns with other studies that also highlight how this network has become a space for everyday life narratives that represent an opportunity for brands, as they subtly permeate the collective imagination, promoting needs (García-Rivero et al., 2022). Persuasive communication is disguised as experiences, testimonials or simply personal opinions that resonate more than other advertising formats in the makeup industry (Sahu & Karnuta, 2022).

The critical discourse on mental health is limited on TikTok. Most users do not address the health implications. The few who do (10.1%) point out issues such as the social pressure that girls experience to project a particular image (Ibn-Auf et al., 2023), self-esteem deterioration, the perpetuation of gender stereotypes and the sexualisation that the trend itself entails; issues that align with recent academic literature (Papageorgiou et al., 2022; Martín-Cárdaba et al., 2024).

The main parties responsible, as identified by TikTok users, are families, specifically parents (72%), who allow and sometimes encourage their daughters to access beauty products. The role of social media and of most influencers who promote this trend among minors is also highlighted. In contrast, brands are not held responsible.

The findings of this research confirm that the hegemonic discourse around the 'Sephora Kids' phenomenon promotes the normalisation of consumption practices unsuitable for children, predominantly through humorous and aspirational codes. The marginality of the critical counter-discourse (10.1%), which warns of the implications of this trend, highlights the lack of media literacy practices among girls and the absence of specific digital competencies. There is a need to design and implement training interventions in media and information literacy that are adapted to social media. These interventions should equip children and adolescents, as well as their parental and educational environments, with the necessary competencies to deconstruct commercial narratives, identify the persuasive nature of user- and influencer-generated content, and foster healthy, reflective digital participation practices.

This study has some limitations. Firstly, the research focuses on a single platform, limiting the generalisability of the results. Secondly, the sample is subject to TikTok's algorithmic dynamics, which may have favoured certain content over others, limiting the diversity of approaches. Finally, the research does not include direct consultation with main actors affected, such as the girls themselves, their families or mental health professionals. In future research, this work will be crucial, as it is necessary to understand the opinions of these actors within this phenomenon, which could enrich the study of health risks posed by 'Sephora Kids'.

Authors' contribution

Juan Pablo Micaletto Belda: Conceptualisation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Project administration, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Resources, Validation, Visualisation, Supervision, Writing -original draft, and writing - review and editing.

Noemí Morejón Llamas: Formal analysis, Data curation, Project administration, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Resources, Validation,

Visualisation, Supervision, and writing- review and editing. All authors have read and agree with the published version of the manuscript.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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