

HOW DO UK-BASED FASHION SMES DESIGN, EXECUTE, AND EVALUATE TIKTOK VIRALITY AS A BRAND-BUILDING ACTIVITY WHEN TARGETING GEN Z WOMEN?



Abstract

This project critically examines how UK fashion SMEs convert fleeting TikTok virality into durable brand equity when targeting Gen Z women. Drawing on practitioner insights, the study uncovers a five-stage 'Virality Consolidation Process' that systematically converts attention spikes into lasting brand assets.

Literature Review

Brand Activity Model

(Beverland et al., 2021)

Defines branding through activities.

Cultural Branding Theory

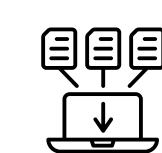
(Holt, 2016)

Creates resonance through culture.

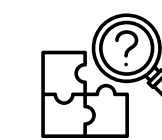
Methodology



Qualitative Design: Employed a qualitative approach to gain rich, contextual insights into brand-building practices on TikTok.



Data Collection: Conducted semi-structured interviews with 7 UK fashion practitioners and 4 Gen Z female consumers.

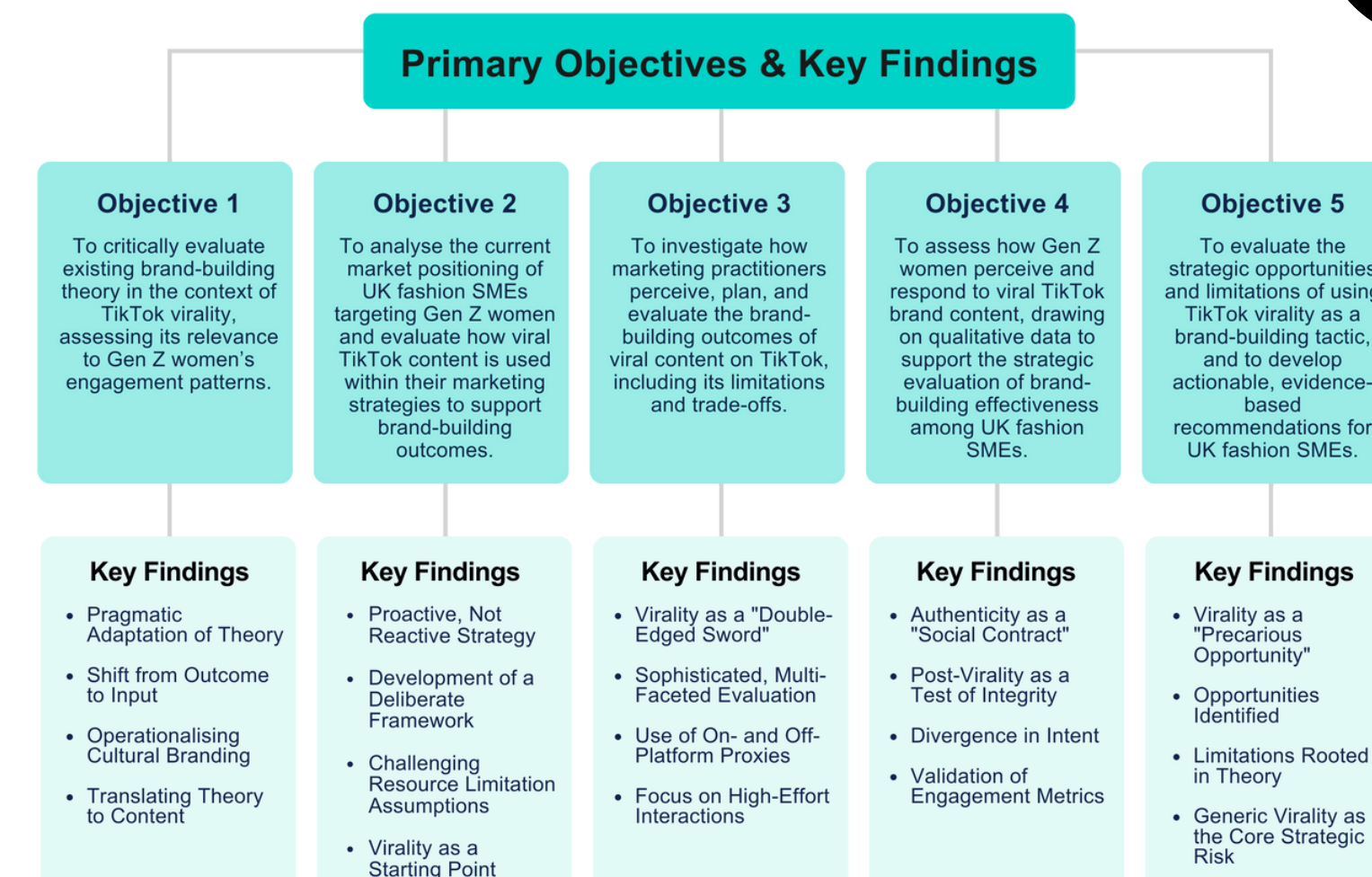


Thematic Analysis: Interview data was systematically analysed using Braun & Clarke's (2006) framework to identify key themes.

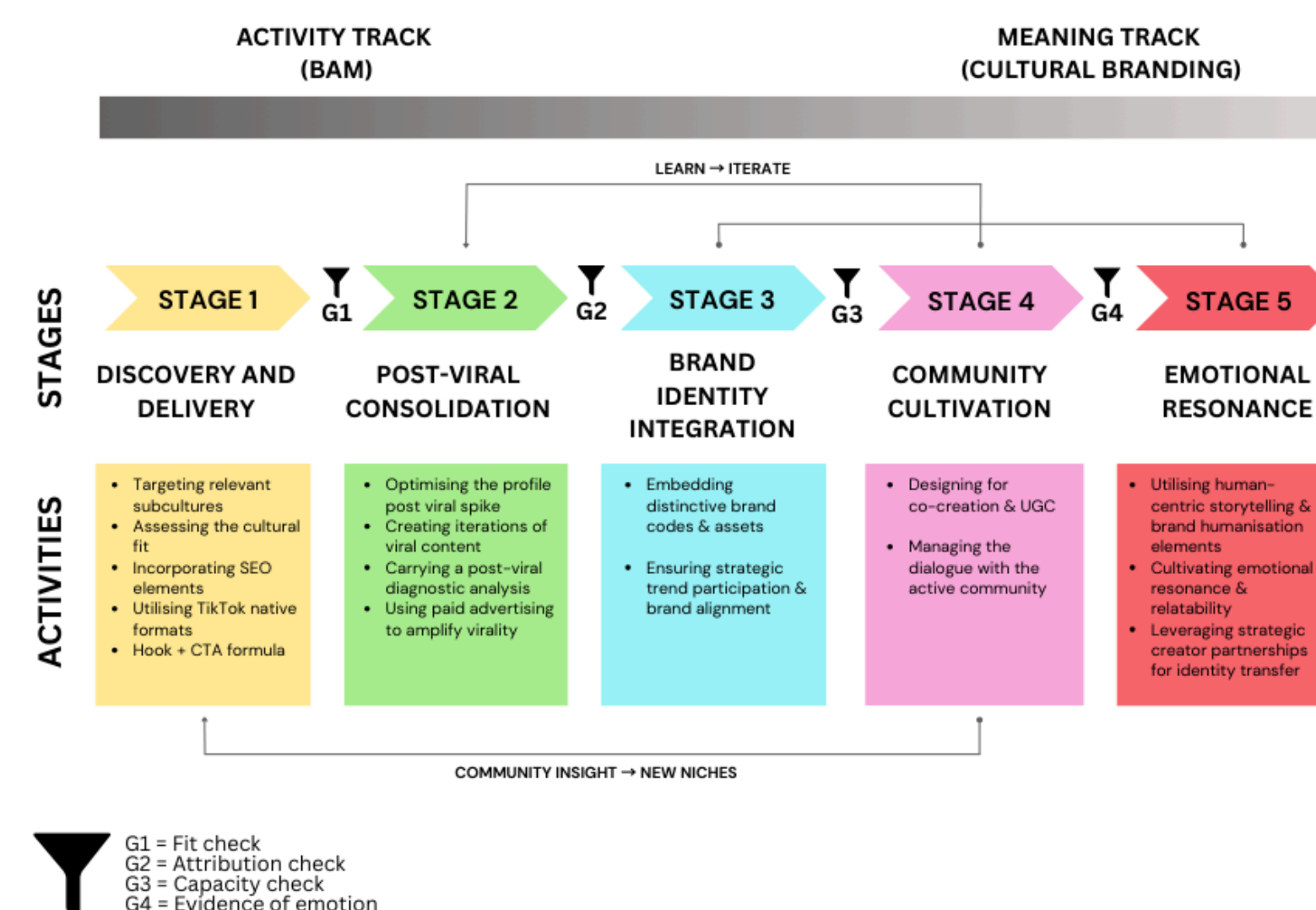


Abductive Approach: Used an abductive reasoning process to iteratively link empirical findings with established brand theory.

Findings



"Virality Consolidation Process" Framework



The Virality Consolidation Process is a five-stage framework that provides a strategic plan for managing a viral moment. It shows brands how to systematically convert a sudden spike in attention into lasting brand awareness and community connection.

Observations

- **The "Virality Consolidation Process":** A key finding is a five-stage framework practitioners use to systematically convert attention spikes into lasting brand assets, moving from immediate consolidation and brand integration to active community cultivation.
- **Virality as a "Double-Edged Sword":** The research confirms that virality offers significant benefits like visibility but exposes SMEs to severe risks, including operational strain, reputational damage, and 'generic virality', high reach with weak brand attribution.
- **Authenticity as a "Social Contract":** For Gen Z women, authenticity is a non-negotiable "social contract". Any perceived breach of trust post-virality, such as a drop in quality or perceived greed, can instantly sever the brand relationship.

Core Recommendations

1. Adopt a Strategic Framework: The Virality Consolidation Process
2. Prioritise Authentic, Audience-Centric Content
3. Integrate Brand Identity to Prevent "Generic Virality"
4. Cultivate Community and Emotional Connection
5. Implement an Evaluation System