

PULSAR*



Record. Review. Buy.

How Social Video Reviews
Shape Brands, Behaviors &
Categories 2026

76%

of mobile internet traffic
will be video in 2026*

*Ericsson Mobility Report for Q4 2025

Video is where culture happens – and where opinions form

Video – and social video, particularly – is eating the digital world.

Videos being at the center of culture is nothing new, of course. But what's unprecedented is the scale of consumption (and production) driven by algorithmic feeds and livestreams across TikTok, Instagram, Twitch, YouTube, X and beyond.

And it's not simply entertainment either. Social video is increasingly the lens through which audiences view the world and interact with current affairs and the economy.

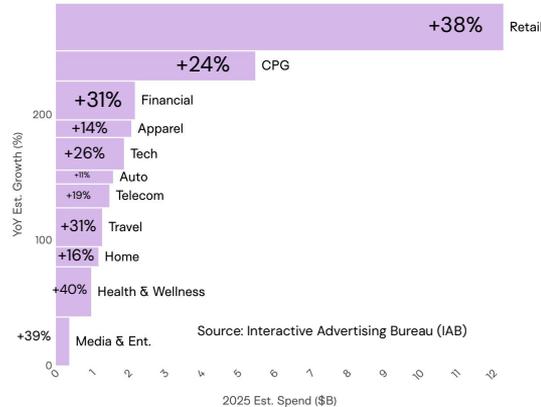
In this report, we'll spotlight and attempt to decode the **Social Video Review** as a specific 'genre' that is particularly significant as video content becomes more and more central.

Why the Social Video Review is important now

A few different shifts are converging to make Social Video Reviews a 'genre' to pay close attention to. The creator economy is growing at a fast clip, with companies in most industries doubling down on social-first and creator programs. For creators, social video reviews are a simple, fun, repeatable format that can bring in revenue. But there's a riskier flipside of this growth: the potential reputational fallout.

Investments in creators grows..

US 2025 Estimated Creator Ad Spend by Category
YoY Estimated Growth (2025 vs 2024)



..and keeps on growing...



Unilever is reported to have shifted from 30% to 50% of its \$10B marketing budget into social-first spend in 2025, with the aim of 20x influencer collaborations.



Walmart has further expanded its creator program, with bonuses, personalized creator-digital aisles, and more.

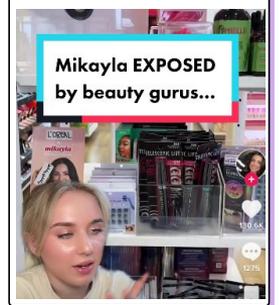
.. but this world is not without risks..

@mkbhd



MKBHD's review of the Fisker Ocean contributed to a 90% stock drop within months. Angelika Oles' exposés have ended beauty brand deals and forced public apologies

@angelikaoles



Applying Video Intelligence

Until recently, video was a black box. Pulsar's video intelligence helps see through that box.

Video intelligence brings the same depth of analysis used for social and news content—topic and narrative detection, sentiment, trends, audience insight—and applies it directly to video, at scale, across YouTube, Instagram, and beyond, across languages.

This report explores social video reviews in two sections: one macro, one a spotlight on highest-engaged content.

3.4 million

We look at the overall conversation around product reviews through 3.4 million pieces of content.

15 hours

We zoom in on the highest performing video review content of that dataset to surface the topics, sentiment, language patterns, and more.

The image shows a composite of social media video review screenshots. At the top, a video by Scott Michael titled "Diet Coke Lime Review Nov 06, 2025 (18:00)" is shown with a "Processing" status and "Unknown" sentiment. Below it, a video by Krazie Reviews titled "Coca Cola Holiday Creamy Vanilla (Review) Nov 07, 2025 (06:38)" is shown with a "Joy" sentiment. At the bottom, a video by Dr Drew titled "Diet Coke lime and Coca Cola holiday creamy vanilla (drin" is shown with a "Joy" sentiment. A circular inset shows a bottle of Coca-Cola. A waveform overlay is positioned over the Dr Drew video. A transcript box at the bottom right contains the following text:

because I'm hyped up. I really want to see this.

Transcript

It is time to do another awesome review video tonight. Let's check it out. Coca Cola holiday creamy vanilla. Hopefully, this will taste better than the original Coca Cola vanilla. Contains no dairy. There's a regular version. We got the no sugar version. Well, let's get into this. Time to go ahead and try it because I am

@kraziereviews's Review of Coca Cola Holiday Creamy Vanilla on Youtube – Nov 2025

1.

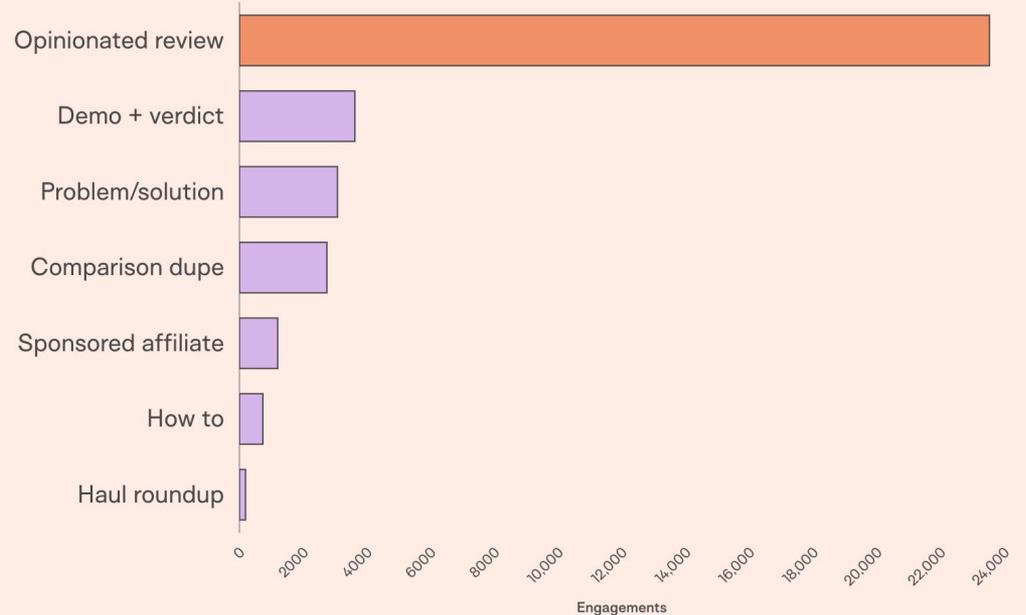
What brands, sectors and types of content dominate social video reviews?

Based on 3.4 million posts

Which review types dominate the conversation?

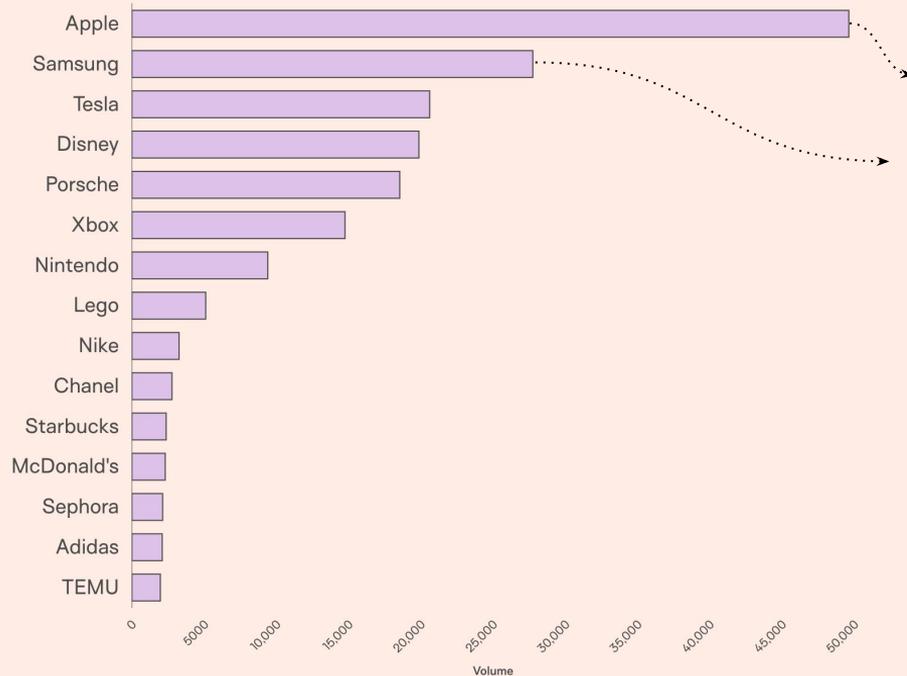
Looking at performance by review type, opinionated content leads. Audiences respond to clear, confident takes more than balanced walkthroughs.

While demos, problem/solution, and dupe review formats perform solidly, their impact depends on the sector. Food tends to favor verdict-driven reviews, while beauty favors instructional and comparison formats. Review formats are most effective when they match category and audience expectations.



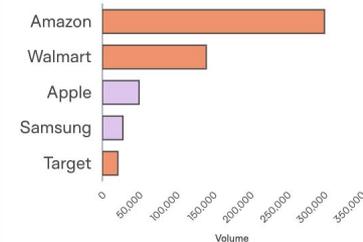
The most-talked-about Brands in social video reviews

The top mentioned brands stretch from Apple and Samsung to Disney, Porsche, Chanel, Starbucks and TEMU, showing that video reviews now shape buying decisions across virtually every consumer category.



Retail platforms on another scale

Amazon, Walmart, Target dominate brand mentions since creators often mention where they found or bought a product. Creator programs like **Amazon Influencer Storefronts** and **Walmart Creator** amplify this further. Amazon alone generated **300k reviews** in the period.



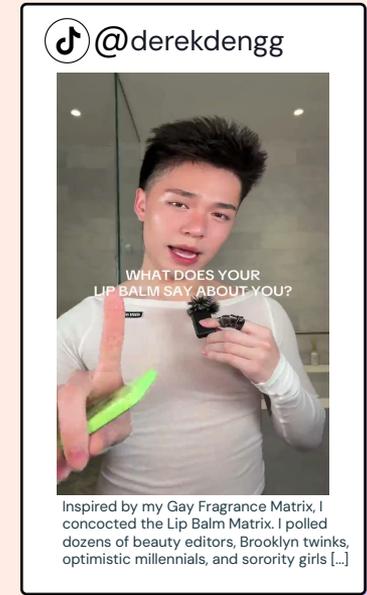
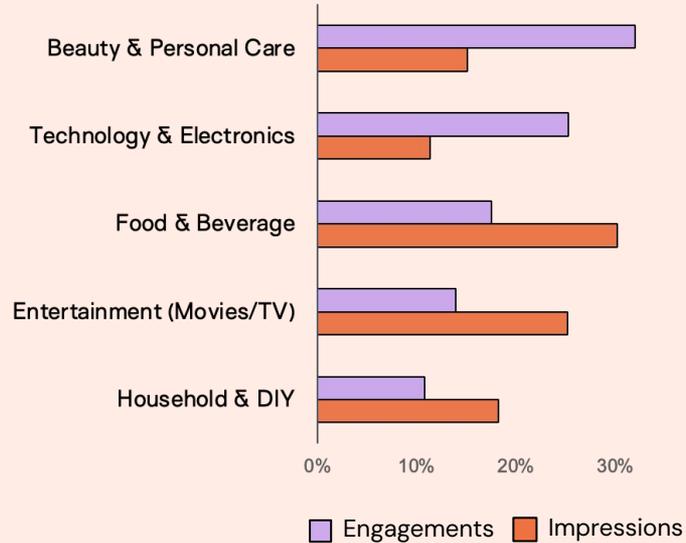
How does engagement differ across sectors?

Video intelligence allows us to break down the most engaging reviews by impressions and engagement.

Impressions reflect distribution and awareness, while engagement signals genuine audience interaction.

Food & Entertainment lead on impressions, casting the widest net but generating relatively less interaction. Beauty & Tech consistently punch above their weight on engagement, with audiences actively participating.

This likely reflects the deep-rooted review culture in these categories, where community-driven conversation is a natural part of the purchase journey.



What the top performing content tends to look like



The highest-engagement beauty content is outcome-driven, and framed as an honest test rather than a brand recommendation.



High-performing tech reviews blend comparison demo with investigative insight, transforming walkthroughs into clear "Should I switch?" decisions.



Reaction-led, seasonal, and "try everything" formats transform eating into entertainment and trigger immediate conversation.

2.

What can video intelligence reveal about the reviews driving the highest engagement?

Zooming in on 15 hours of the most-engaged reviews

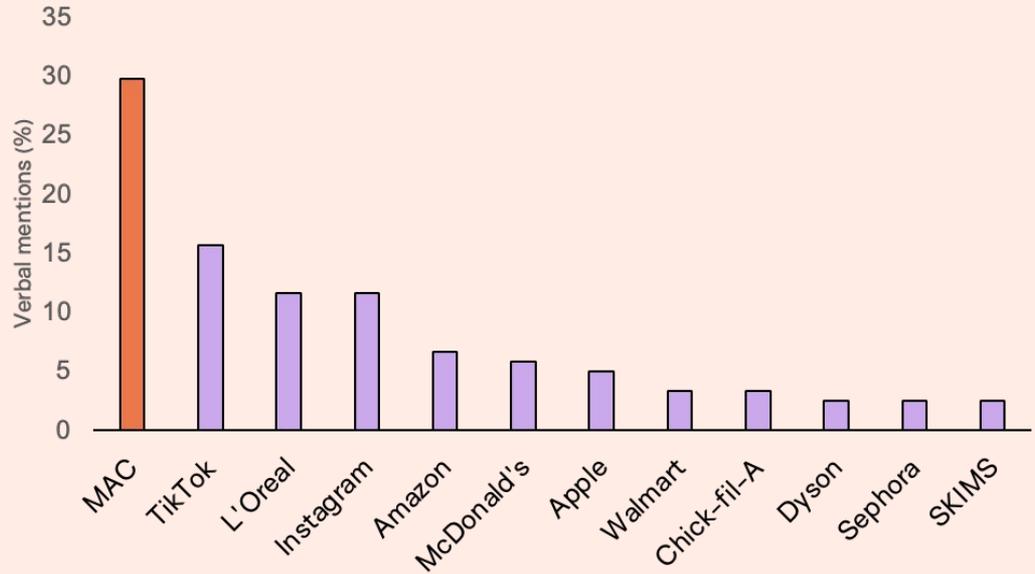
Surfacing the most engaged-with video review content and analyzing it with video intelligence to surface the topics, sentiment, language and narratives.

Beauty brands dominate spoken content

The brands attracting the most mentions in top-performing reviews are different from those who are discussed across *all* reviews.

As seen before, beauty videos drive high engagement and brands are very frequently referenced, even when the video isn't about them.

MAC, for instance, often acts as the benchmark comparison, while L'Oréal shows up repeatedly as the go-to dupe for luxury products.



Common phrases in top video reviews reveal untapped signals

The most revealing insights come not from captions or hashtags, but from the words creators actually use in their videos.

Top-performing reviews tend to orbit around a single question: "Is it worth it?" a blunt but telling signal of buying intent that often is not captured in the accompanying text.

Phrases like "I love this" or "I recommend," and their more negative counterparts (ie, "I hate this") emerge as early markers of conversion or risk. These verdicts are the 'frame' of the review, before the comments section has a chance to weigh in, turning certain videos into powerful opportunities for brands to amplify, defend, or support.

Top phrases in high-engagement review content

1

"Is it worth it?"

Purchase-decision phrase — almost never written in captions

2

"I love this"

Spontaneous endorsement — most authentic testimonial signal

3

"I recommend"

Conversion language brands can identify and boost via paid

4

"I hate this"

Negative verdict + VTT entity detection = brand risk alert

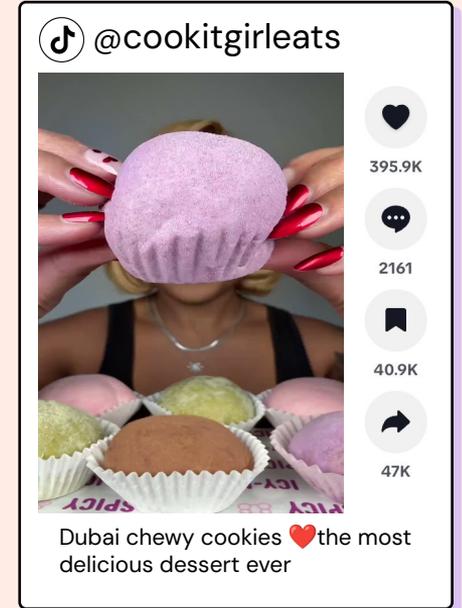
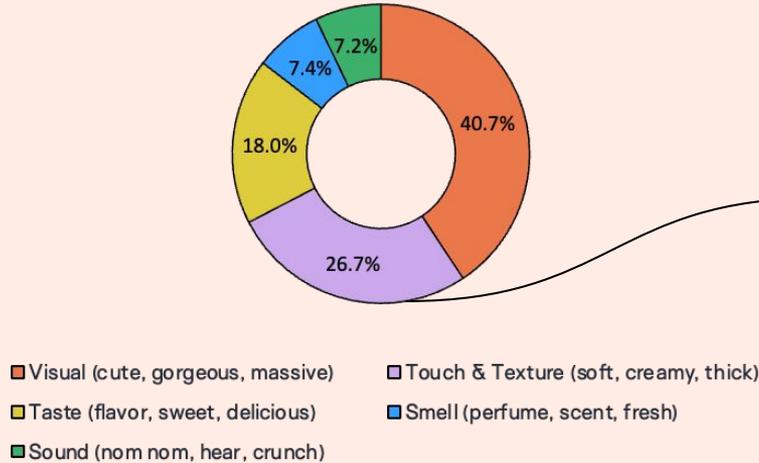
Sensory language drives video engagement

Beyond what each video *shows*, how the creator chooses to *describe* what they're talking about has great influence.

Visual language dominates spoken reviews, followed by description of textures; the most engaging moments communicate through a combination of sensory cues.

The viral "Dubai chewy cookie" is a perfect example. The crunch, the chew, and the stretch of chocolate convey meaning that captions could never capture. Many video reviews center 'feeling' or 'experience' rather than explanations.

Top sensory languages captured in top engaging video reviews



Verbal complexity and categories

Analyzing the language complexity of high-performing reviews through transcription shows what works best in each sector.

Food & Drink creators keep it simple and accessible, while Lifestyle ones tend to speak like a friend – overall reflecting how people actually talk, think, and feel about a product, rather than broadcasting like a distant influencer.

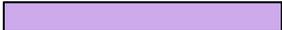
Food & Drink

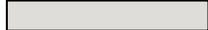
Vocabulary  162 words

Reading Age  8.0 YRS

Top words: Eat, Nom, Yum (viral/sensory)

Beauty & Fashion

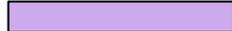
Vocabulary  187 words

Reading Age  9.0 YRS

Top words: Obsessed, Skin, Shade (Vivid/Aesthetic)

Lifestyle

Vocabulary  65 words

Reading Age  9.7 YRS

Top words: A lot of, You're gonna, That's why (Gen-Z/Authentic)

Entertainment

Vocabulary  155 words

Reading Age  9.2 YRS

Top words: Movie, Watch, Actually (Analytical/Critique)

What language patterns show up in which sectors?

Top-performing reviews hook audiences through language that fits the sector. Beauty & Fashion mixes emotion with price signals, Food & Drink leans on authentic community cues, and Lifestyle walks viewers through experiences in a conversational tone. Video intelligence exposes these nuances, showing cultural influence beyond what keywords can explain.

Beauty & Fashion

I **have not seen anyone mention this** advent calendar, which is **crazy** because **it's \$280, but has a value of \$1,200.** **I'm not gonna lie.** It was **hands down** my **favorite** advent calendar... We're talking pretty much full size bougie products the entire time for \$280. I **literally don't know** how they pull this off. [...]But one day, if I make my own advent calendar, this is what it's gonna be like.

Food & Drink

I just bought the entire Starbucks holiday menu so **you don't have to.** **I'm also not media trained,** so if it tastes like doo doo, **girl, I'm gonna tell you.**" First, let's try the sugar cookie. She's not really standing out to me. **Six out of 10.** Let's do a snack because **I'm hungry.** First we have the cranberry bliss bar

Lifestyle

Come with me to a 24 hour luxury spa in Guangzhou, China, except you can get all of this for under **\$120.** The check-in is super easy. **All you need is your passport,** and then **you're guided** to the locker rooms...

■ Authenticity ■ Emotion ■ Value ■ Community ■ Problem-solving

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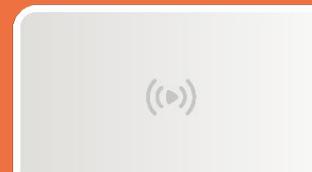
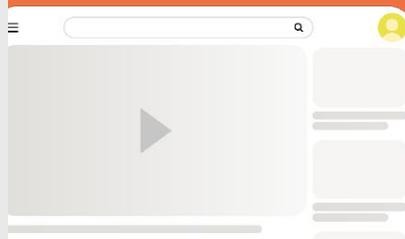
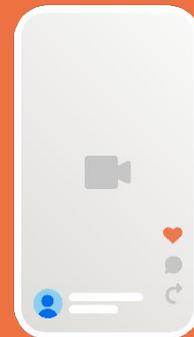
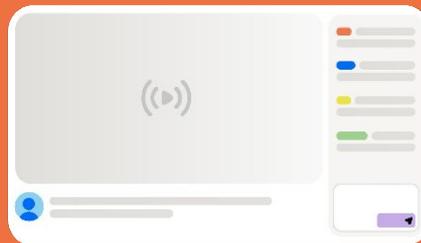
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