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# Marketing Reimagined: The Effect of TikTok's Success On Social Media Advertisement

HUMANITIES

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## ABSTRACT

In 2021, the average TikTok user spent 19.6 hours a month on the platform, equivalent to the time spent by users on the leader of Social Media, Facebook (Sweeney, 2022). This year, TikTok is projected to triple its global advertisement revenues to 11.6 billion dollars, surpassing the 10.44 billion dollars global advertisement take of Snapchat and Twitter combined (Sweeney, 2022). TikTok is one of the most recent and successful social media platforms. It has gained worldwide renown for its unique, rapid presentation of content and addictive structure that has engaged a large audience in a short time. With attention increasing on the platform, many business analysts and social media managers have been debating the potential role of TikTok in the realm of social media marketing in the near future. As the discussion continues, the questions arise: "Is TikTok the next big social media marketing platform? How will TikTok's development affect how other social media platforms interact with their consumers in the future?" In a short period of time, TikTok has demonstrated large-scale influencer-consumer relationships, lucrative marketing methods and strategies, and is affecting the way other social media platforms address their consumers and each other. The success of TikTok indicates that it will be a major platform for social media marketing and the unorthodox setup of the app will inspire other social media platforms to adopt similar structures of advertising. This will in turn cause TikTok and other social media platforms to place a heavier focus on brand advertisement and less emphasis on content creation causing social media influencers to tailor their interactions with their audience to aid in brand advertising. This may lead to an overall less pleasurable experience for users.

## KEYWORDS

TikTok • Digital Marketing • Social Media Influencing • Online Advertising • E-Commerce

## Introduction

In 2021, the average TikTok user spent 19.6 hours a month on the platform, equivalent to the time spent by users on the leader of Social Media, Facebook (Sweeney, 2022). This year, TikTok is projected to triple its global advertisement revenues to 11.6 billion dollars, surpassing the 10.44 billion dollars global advertisement take of Snapchat and Twitter combined (Sweeney, 2022). While social media superstars like Facebook and Instagram succeeded in 18 years and 12 years respectively, TikTok has accomplished these feats just four years after its launch in 2018. TikTok is one of the most recent and successful social media platforms that has gained worldwide renown for its unique, rapid presentation of content and addictive structure that has engaged a large audience in a short time. Its two predecessors, Vine and Muscial.ly, were characterized by similar presentations of fast-paced videos and feeds of content tailored to the individual user's preferences. Both of these social media platforms experienced rapid growth within the first 2 years of their launch, but unfortunately, rapidly declined in popularity and user participation in the subsequent years, leading to both platforms being shut down within four years of their launch. Coincidentally, TikTok is currently in its fourth year since its launch and is currently experiencing its highest growth since its creation in 2018. Already setting itself apart from its precursors, TikTok is gaining the eyes of companies all over the world looking to capitalize on the rapidly growing and easily accessible audience that the platform has cultivated. Users of the application have been exceedingly pleased with the platform's ease of sociability, informativeness, and ability to be a platform where users can self-express, which leads to high overall satisfaction that brings more users to the platform and maintains their continued participation (Sharabati et al., 2022). These

factors are very beneficial in cultivating an environment that encourages the marketing of products and ideas to a large audience. With attention increasing on the platform, many business analysts and social media managers have been debating over the potential role of TikTok in the realm of social media marketing in the near future. As the discussion continues, the questions arise: "Is TikTok the next big social media marketing platform? How will TikTok's development affect how other social media platforms interact with their consumers in the future?" In a short period of time, TikTok has demonstrated large-scale influencer-consumer relationships, lucrative marketing methods and strategies, and is affecting the way other social media platforms address their consumers and each other. The success of TikTok indicates that it will be a major platform for social media marketing and the unorthodox setup of the application will inspire other social media platforms to adopt similar structures of advertising. Both YouTube and Instagram have adopted their own quick-feed media algorithms, named Youtube Shorts and Instagram Reels respectively. Four years after the founding of TikTok, both of these major social media platforms have created their own small platforms that closely model the fast and short video model that TikTok has created. Instagram has also implemented a "shop" system, in which users can click on a link in a reel and be taken to a page where the product seen in the reel is being sold on the application. Instagram's successful shop system will likely lead to an implementation of similar features in other social media platforms that seek to find new methods to generate revenue through their platform. This will in turn cause TikTok and other social media platforms to place a heavier focus on brand advertisement and less emphasis on content creation causing social media influencers to tailor their interactions with

their audience to aid in brand advertising. This may lead to an overall less pleasurable experience for users.

## TikTok's Influencer-Consumer Relationships

Social media platforms are complex stages where there are two groups of people: those who influence and those who are influenced. As consumers seek enjoyable content to watch, they look for media that is both relatable and informative. As influencers seek to increase in popularity and grow their own personal brand, they search for ways to increase their prominence and thus, their persuasion over their audience. Platforms like TikTok showcase relationships between influencers and consumers, specifically, the dynamic of users of the application trying to consume content while avoiding the false authenticity of influencers marketing brands and products they do not believe in. However, if an influencer or company is to be fruitful while marketing on TikTok, it is critical that they successfully convince the consumers of benevolent intentions. Christine M. Kowalczyk and Kathryn R. Pounders, who are faculty of marketing and advertising at East Carolina University and the University of Texas respectively, argue that influencers will have the most success attracting a loyal and impressionable fanbase when they present themselves authentically and establish a connection with their audience that makes their audience trust them, like a friend. Social media influencers can establish authenticity and emotional attachments with their audience by stating their honest opinions on situations and presenting personal aspects of their life (Kowalczyk and Pounders, 2016). By presenting themselves in this manner, social media influencers can have greater success in making their audience more likely to purchase items and pay

premium prices for advertised brands (Kowalczyk and Pounders, 2016). As social media influencers seek to grasp and maintain the attention of consumers, consumers actively attempt to find content that is credible and accurate, which may lead to consumers being skeptical of a product. While Kowalczyk and Pounders found that emotional attachment was strong enough to encourage the purchase intention of a product, they did not agree that emotional attachment was strong enough to encourage word-of-mouth advertisement via consumers, which could be a possible flaw in influencer-consumer relationships (Kowalczyk and Pounders, 2016). The dynamic of influencers trying to catch and hold the attention and loyalty of consumers while consumers are actively attempting to maintain the validity of the content they consume can be considered a back-and-forth struggle, leading to influencers and consumers creating relationships based on trust and credibility. The presence of these relationships on TikTok indicates that the application has been successful in creating an environment that encourages and stimulates the marketing and advertising of brands and products. Jung Eun Lee and Brandi Watkins, who are faculty at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in the Department of Resource Management and Communication respectively, assert a similar point to Kowalczyk and Pounders in that social attractiveness and homophily are the two most important factors to a social media influencer's success in encouraging purchase intentions and brand loyalty for luxury brands (Lee and Watkins, 2016). Social attractiveness is the relatability of the influencer to the consumer, and homophily is the emotional attachment a consumer feels toward an influencer. Lee and Watkins believe media influencers can maximize these attributes by exposing their personal life to consumers and building a relationship

of trust (Lee and Watkins, 2016). Moreover, they assert that a higher emotional attachment between the consumer and the influencer tends to encourage consumers to come to the influencer for advice and adopt the influencer's likes and dislikes via the concept of upward comparison (Lee and Watkins, 2016). Upward comparison, being the tendency for someone to view another person in a position of authority as a positive reference and adopt their behaviors, tends to be very prevalent on TikTok. Due to the nature of TikTok's use of trends, users of the application often tend to take heavy inspiration from popular content creators that use a trend, in turn replicating similar dances to achieve a similar level of popularity within the trend. However, the common upward comparison of users to popular influencers benefits social media influencers on TikTok because it gives them an opportunity to advertise a brand or product and present the advertisement as beneficial and necessary for consumers to purchase while also increasing the chances of purchase intention among consumers. Nevertheless, both groups of scholars' research reinforce the common idea that when a social media figure is trying to build a meaningful relationship with their audience, the most significant factor is how authentic the influencer presents themselves to be and how personally connected the audience feels to the influencer.

Godey et al. agree with the previous two groups of scholars in the sense that emotional attachment is a critical component of building brand loyalty, consumer preference, and willingness to pay premium prices for luxury brands (Godey, et al., 2016). These authors approached the question of influencer-consumer relationships from the perspective of the brands instead of social media influencers, which led to this group of scholars addressing influencer-consumer relationships with differing methods. Godey et al. assert that through customization of

their brand page, frequent posting, and participation in trends, brands can directly interact and build a connection with consumers and increase consumer preference for that brand (Godey, et al., 2016). Godey et al. provide additional information regarding the specifics of not only how influencer-consumer relationships work, but also how brands can bypass the need for influencers completely and become the influencers themselves. This scholarly group agrees with the two previous ones in the sense that engagement with consumers in a way that fosters an emotional attachment is the most beneficial to growing an audience that is more inclined to purchase advertised products.

## Marketing on TikTok

Marketing on social media can be a lucrative and effective process if an influencer has a solid understanding of what marketing practices can reach and influence the most consumers. As TikTok rises in popularity, many businesses and entrepreneurs are looking to the platform as a potential testing ground for new marketing strategies and profitable gains. In addition to TikTok's large and engaging audience, TikTok's emphasis on users utilizing trends for content makes the platform a great place to try new and more efficient marketing methods. The quick response time of users and the opportunity for a company to recover from a new trend if a marketing campaign doesn't perform well allow companies to experiment with their advertising approach while still maintaining sustainable returns. Fink et al. discuss effective marketing strategies on Facebook, which is currently the largest social media platform on Earth and is renowned for its effective Facebook advertising system. Fink et al. rebut the validity of claims that social media marketing is not a sustainable or reliable form of

advertising over a sustained amount of time, instead believing that brands' credibility, relevance, and differentiation are the three main factors that ensure consumers stay interested and willing to purchase a product (Fink et al., 2020). Thus, Fink et al. (2020) suggest that building brand credibility by choosing an influencer that is trusted by their audience and presents an honest public image is the most effective method of finding a consumer group that has a high inclination to purchase a product advertised by a brand. Moreover, Fink et al. (2020) assert that the relevance of the influencer is critical to consumers trusting products advertised by the influencer. Suppose a brand chooses an influencer whose content or reputation is related to the field of the product they are advertising to their audience. In that case, it is much more likely that the audience will not only be interested in the product but also have a higher purchase intention for the product being advertised (Fink et al., 2020). Additionally, Fink et al. (2020) believe that it is important for brands to differentiate their product from similar products in their market because it will increase the likelihood of consumers taking an interest in the brand's product. This can be done by increasing the customization of a product, increasing the practicality of a product, and increasing the material quality of a product (Fink et al., 2020). Brand differentiation on TikTok can take several different forms due to the trends on TikTok involving different forms of interaction. Companies can use a TikTok based on a song to create their own remixed version and promote their brand, or they could use a trend based on a dance to creatively advertise their product in a way that brings the product to life. Regardless, differentiation on TikTok allows companies to have access to a wide range of marketing methods, which overall increases the chances of consumer purchase intention and eventual profit for the companies.

Werner Geysler, founder of InfluencerMarketingHub, asserts that demographics are critical to understanding the most effective marketing methods on TikTok (Geysler, 2022). Additionally, Geysler suggests that there are three main methods for brands to successfully market on TikTok: creating a channel to upload relevant content and educate consumers about a product, working with influencers to spread a product to a broader audience, and paying TikTok directly to deliver brand takeover and in-feed native advertisements, which would operate like commercial breaks while a TikTok user scrolls between videos (Geysler, 2022). Geysler seems to downplay the importance of social media influencers as a sort of "middle-man" that can deliver the message and product of a brand to an audience, instead focusing on a brand's direct ability to influence and advertise to consumers. On the other hand, Fink et al. seem to prioritize influencer-based marketing as the most effective method for marketing on social media, seemingly giving little thought to brands directly creating content and influencing consumers in that way. However, both groups agree that the content's relevance is critical in influencing consumers' interest and purchase intention in the product being advertised.

Justin Grome, founder and CEO of Clonefluence Inc. and Forbes Business Council member, agrees with Geysler in the sense that the demographics on TikTok are an important part of understanding the consumer group that will be most willing to purchase a brand's product. When demographics are combined with research about the common ideology of age groups, it gives researchers a greater understanding of the typical mindset of a consumer within that age group. As a result, companies and entrepreneurs can capitalize on those common patterns of thought and create advertisements that are more agreeable and trustworthy for

consumers. Furthermore, Grome agrees with Geysler that the utilization of hashtags and popular trends on TikTok is an effective way for a brand to gain an opportunity to explain their product and its significance to a large audience, who may also be encouraged to prefer the brand over time (Grome, 2022). However, Grome encourages brands that advertise products more likely to be purchased by consumers over 30 to stay away from TikTok, as he does not believe that marketing is sustainable on TikTok when a brand's products are geared toward an older audience (Grome, 2022). TikTok's disproportionate amount of younger consumers in comparison to older consumers may prove difficult for brands, companies, and entrepreneurs attempting to market brands to an older and more affluent audience. However, it does not mean they can not receive some returns from older users on TikTok. The decision ultimately becomes based on whether a company, brand, or entrepreneur believes the customers they would receive from TikTok are of such a quality that it would be worth losing money in the short term. Older, more affluent consumers may prove to be loyal customers of that brand, creating a sustainable source of profit, or they may be one-time visitors who do not continuously supply a brand with revenue. Either way, it may be worth it for brands to carefully consider their choice to advertise on TikTok, because, despite the engaging and attentive audience that TikTok has cultivated, successful interactions that result in brand purchases are not guaranteed.

## The Influence of TikTok on Social Media Platforms

TikTok is currently a massively popular and influential platform, reaching one billion active monthly users only four years after launching in 2016, and is expected to overtake Twitter's global advertisement

take by the end of 2022 (Sweeney, 2022). As TikTok continues to grow, some people are asking the question, "How will the influence of TikTok affect the development of other social media platforms?" With the continuous success of TikTok, John Herman, *The Times's* David Carr Fellowship award winner and *New York Times* correspondent, asserts that TikTok's popularity can be mainly attributed to its engaging and addictive environment, which catches users' attention and encourages them to use the platform for long periods (Herman, 2019). The application provides quick-feed content, with videos often lasting 15 to 30 seconds, and an easy scroll feature that allows a user to consume hundreds of videos a day. These attributes contribute to the large amount of content that the application presents to a user from the moment they open the application mixed with the powerful AI algorithm which adapts to the user's likes and dislikes. This instantly catches the user's attention and holds it for multiple hours. This is in contrast to other platforms that take a more conservative approach where they recommend a user's content based on who they follow and interact with the most (Herman, 2019). However, Herman argues that after the beneficial effects of this method are shown in the success of TikTok, other social media platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter are beginning to adopt a similar approach to recommending content. These social media platforms are now suggesting more content unrelated to a user's established patterns of behavior by adapting what they suggest based on what the user tends to like and dislike (Herman, 2019). Herman argues that while these platforms may see a rise in engagement, they may not reach the level of TikTok for some time (Herman, 2019). Mark Sweeney, the business correspondent at *The Guardian*, claims that TikTok is having a negative influence on other platforms, such as Facebook, which

reportedly has been paying the Republican Party consulting firm 'Targeted Victory' to launch a campaign against TikTok claiming the application is a dangerous monitoring tool from China (Sweeney 2022). This is a different perspective from Herman, who believes that TikTok's influence on other social media platforms is positively influencing them to upgrade their platforms. However, both groups assert that TikTok has an undeniable influence that is changing the way other social media platforms conduct their applications.

## Doubts on TikTok's Continued Growth

While TikTok is experiencing a monumental and continuous growth that is predicted by many to propel TikTok to the realm of social media veterans like Facebook and Instagram, there are still flaws that some critics tend to highlight as a reason for the potential downfall of TikTok. Chiefly among these flaws is the current declining average time spent per day by users on the application, which critics point out as a potential precursor to TikTok's eventual collapse. Arooj Ahmed, a correspondent for Digital Information World, shares these beliefs and reports that in a 2022 study from eMarketer TikTok's average time spent per day by users peaked in 2021 at 40 minutes a day, and has been reported to decline by 3 minutes by the end of 2023 (Ahmed, 2022). In comparison, YouTube has been experiencing an increase in the average time spent per day by users and is reported to have an average time spent per day of 46 minutes by the end of 2023 (Ahmed, 2022). In Vine and Musical.ly, the predecessors of TikTok, declining time spent per day was a major indicator of the two platforms' eventual downfalls, leading to a relatively fast fall from grace. Although TikTok is showing the opposite trajectory of its previous iterations

and shows no sign of slowing down in terms of growth and revenue, its future is not guaranteed. While it is possible that the consistent skepticism of TikTok being a tool utilized by the Chinese government as a data collection platform for other countries may be contributing to the recent decline in time spent per day by the average user, it is also possible that this decline can be attributed to the natural "ebb and flow" of interest that is common with applications that use trending topics as a source of content. Ahmed believes the decline in average time spent per day by users is a result of the "lack of creativity" that TikTok is currently experiencing. He notes that through his observation of the application, he recognizes that there are many recreations of trends from previous years becoming popular, but very few new and original trends. As a result, users are becoming bored with the application quickly, leading to a decline in time spent per day by users.

While it is true that TikTok is currently experiencing a period of decreased average time spent per day, TikTok utilizes trends and popular culture which inherently have periods of prominence and periods of decline. Thus, if a trend is popular on TikTok, it is likely that it will eventually come to decline rapidly in popularity soon after it rises to prominence. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic facilitated many situations in which users of social media were able to spend much more time on platforms such as TikTok. As businesses and other places that would normally occupy social media users' time were shut down, it provided more time for users to spend on social media. As the COVID-19 pandemic begins to reach its conclusion, the previously closed places of business are opening up once again, and users are finding less time to spend on the application, which may account for the declining time spent on TikTok. However, this does not mean that all the content on



TikTok is declining. Content is constantly being produced and remixed by users on the platform, and more TikTok videos are being produced each year as the number of users increases. In the four years since its creation, there have been thousands of trends that have been popular for a month or two and then faded from prominence. An example of this is the “Six Feet Tall” trend, in which users danced to the popular song *Guy.exe* by SUPERFRUIT. This trend began in September, peaked in popularity around January, and by May was practically nonexistent on the platform. However, this trend was quickly replaced by the “Flawless Victory” trend, where users post a picture of themselves without makeup and then cut to a shot of them with makeup with the classic *Mortal Kombat* sound bite playing in the background. This trend continues to this day. Based on TikTok’s previous history, it is likely that new trends will be created soon, rekindling time spent per day by users and prolonging the growth and success of the application.

## Final Remarks

TikTok has experienced substantial growth within a short period of four years. Its global advertisement take and user participation have skyrocketed, and the growth of the platform continues to multiply with each passing year. The revenue that TikTok is receiving in such a short amount of time indicates the potential of a large market being possible on TikTok, which incorporates companies, influencers, and consumers in a relationship that leads to feedback from consumers and influencers on brands and overall leading to potentially better products being created as a result. Influencers and consumers also have their own relationship on TikTok, as influencers seek to gain the trust of consumers to successfully market sponsored brands and

consumers seek to find informative, practical, and credible products from influencers that they view as having benevolent intentions in their presentation of a brand. Large social media platforms like Facebook are acknowledging TikTok’s presence as a major contender and a threat to the integrity of information, while other platforms like Youtube and Instagram have taken massive inspiration from TikTok, creating their own versions of the application in the form of Youtube Shorts and Instagram Reels. Despite being much larger than TikTok, these platforms recognize something revolutionary and beneficial within TikTok that they view as necessary enough to implement on their platforms. Whether it be the massive growing audience of young, engaged consumers, or the unique style of the application which allows marketing to be fun, creative, and engaging, TikTok has created a platform that has many desirable traits and has the potential to be a hub of the exchange of ideas and products. In contrast to other veterans in social media such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube, TikTok has achieved great popularity and a large amount of revenue within a short window of time since its public release in 2016. This indicates that the structure and the presentation of TikTok are attracting the right audience in the right way, and it is clear that other social media want to add those traits to their platforms. TikTok is undeniably influencing the way other social media platforms present content to their audience, and the model of TikTok has proven to be lucrative. With the increasing amount of attention that TikTok is receiving, companies are beginning to look at the platform as a plausible place for profitable marketing and fruitful audience recruitment and growth. The ability for brands to create their own accounts and create content gives them the ability to communicate with consumers directly and advertise products with little to no upfront cost being necessary.

Furthermore, the booming audience of young, easily engaged consumers allows an opportunity for brands to experiment with different methods of marketing to find the most lucrative approach, while also having little to no drawbacks financially. However, TikTok's addition of in-feed native advertising and brand takeover advertisements to their platform serves to encourage and facilitate companies to not only pay TikTok to advertise their product but also to participate in content creation and utilize trends at the time to reach a massive and easily accessible audience. TikTok influencers are also beginning to adapt to the influx of possible sponsorships, creating more kid-friendly content, and building a stronger connection with their audience to gain trust once they begin marketing brands. Overall, all of the evidence points toward the perpetual success of TikTok as a marketing platform, and its steady influence on social media continues to be important in determining how social media platforms connect with their audiences in the future.

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