

A Digital Marketing Strategy Analysis and Application in the New Media Era: A Case Study of TikTok

Haozhe Liu

School of Business, University of Leeds, Leeds, UK
jms6574@leeds.ac.uk

Abstract: With the rapid development of mobile internet and short videos, TikTok has rapidly risen to become one of the most influential new media platforms in the world with its innovative content distribution algorithm and social communication model, which had become the most successful app in recent years. This study takes TikTok as a case study and analyzes its digital marketing strategy using Porter's Five Forces model, AARRR model, Yip framework and relevant user behavior data. Based on the analysis of TikTok's industry competitive environment, user consumption trends and technology drivers, it proposes optimization strategies based on user segmentation and global layout. It is found that TikTok's success is due to its accurate recommendation algorithm and strong user stickiness, but it also faces challenges such as homogenized competition and policy regulation. The paper concludes with insights and suggestions for marketing practices in the new media industry, providing reference for the development of similar platforms.

Keywords: TikTok, Digital Marketing, New Media, Porter's Five Forces Model, User Behavior.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the rise of short video platforms and new media technologies has profoundly changed how consumers interact and consume. As a representative short-video application, TikTok has rapidly taken the world by storm with its unique recommendation algorithms and social sharing model. In April 2020, TikTok had over 2 billion mobile downloads globally [1]. Cloudflare named TikTok the most popular website of 2021, surpassing Google as the most popular website ever [2]. With more than 1.582 billion monthly active users worldwide as of April 2024, TikTok is ranked 5th among global social platforms, and the platform's rise has sparked widespread interest in new strategies for digital marketing [3]. TikTok's algorithms have been recognized as one of the most advanced in shaping the user experience and social interactions [4]. TikTok has been ranked as one of the world's most popular social media platforms [5]. Existing studies have focused on TikTok's communication mechanism and international expansion, but there is a lack of systematic analysis of its marketing strategy. Therefore, this paper takes TikTok as an example to explore its digital marketing strategy's key factors and optimization paths by analyzing the industrial competitive environment and user research.

2. Industry overview and business mode

Digital marketing in the new media industry and short video platforms is characterized by algorithm-driven, strong interactivity and fragmentation. Short video platforms such as TikTok achieve accurate reach and efficient conversion through native advertising, Key Opinion Leader (KOL)/Key Opinion Consumer (KOC) marketing, data closure, breaking down social barriers, etc. TikTok's business model relies on the theory of the platform economy, builds a bilateral market, and optimizes content push by using an algorithmic recommendation mechanism. Content Push. Regarding the advertising model, TikTok combines the logic of the sharing economy and realizes user attention and user-generated content (UGC) through infomercials and brand labeling challenges.

Meanwhile, it realizes a closed loop of social e-commerce with the help of live streaming of goods. It also realizes profitability through virtual gift rewards, creator funds, e-commerce commissions, and other parties. Some studies have pointed out that TikTok builds a highly interactive business ecosystem precisely through precise recommendation, UGC content, and KOL cooperation [6]. Further, this paper evaluates the competitive landscape of the industry in which TikTok operates based on Porter's Five Forces model.

2.1. Threat of new entrants

High algorithmic technology barriers: TikTok's recommendation algorithm and artificial intelligence technology require considerable data accumulation and R&D investment, making it difficult for new platforms to replicate its personalized content recommendation system in the short term.

Brand and user scale base: TikTok has formed a huge bilateral market of creators and users. New platforms need a lot of capital for user acquisition and content ecological construction to break this user stickiness.

High capital and human resource requirements: TikTok has a mature UGC content ecosystem. It is difficult for the new platform to meet the significant capital investment and technical talents required for early promotion and maintenance.

Rising compliance and regulatory thresholds: the regulation of data completely and content auditing is getting stricter and stricter globally. Data privacy regulations and localization policy requirements countries face are additional hurdles for new entrants.

Conclusion: New platforms face high barriers to entry, but opportunities still exist in niche areas. For example, regionalized specialty platforms versus short video platforms focusing on specific domain segments.

2.2. Bargaining power of suppliers

TikTok's suppliers mainly include:

Content creators (KOL, Netflix): Although TikTok has a large ecosystem of creators, the top creators have a certain degree of bargaining power. For example, in the distribution of traffic, the platform incentive program may put forward higher requirements. Ordinary UGC content creators rely on platform allocation and lack bargaining power.

Technology providers (e.g., cloud services, AI technology providers): TikTok relies on cloud platforms such as AWS, Google Cloud, etc., for global deployment, and these providers have some bargaining power, especially when data storage and processing capabilities are highly dependent. However, TikTok can reduce its dependency through internal algorithms, a multi-vendor strategy, and the development of its technology (e.g., ByteDance's internal AI team).

Therefore, TikTok's overall bargaining power is medium. It needs to balance it with split optimization and supply chain diversification.

2.3. Bargaining power of buyers

Buyers mainly include advertisers and ordinary users. Advertisers: TikTok's business model relies on advertising revenue. Large brand advertisers have stronger bargaining power regarding ad content, display location, and effect analysis. For example, Coca-Cola can ask for a lower Cost Per Mile by comparing prices across platforms. However, TikTok's current high user activity level and significant advertising results make the platform attractive to advertisers. Small and medium-sized advertisers, on the other hand, rely on TikTok's precise placement tools and have less bargaining power. Ordinary users: Although the core of TikTok's ecosystem, users use the platform's content for free, and their bargaining power is relatively weak. Although users can easily specialize to other platforms such as Instagram Reels or YouTube Shorts, user stickiness remains high, and the real bargaining power is the overall activity and retention of the user base, which affects TikTok's ability to generate advertising revenue.

This leads to the conclusion that the bargaining power of advertisers is polarized, with low individual bargaining power of ordinary users and medium overall buyer bargaining power. User stickiness is high, but TikTok needs to optimize the experience continuously.

2.4. Threat of substitutes

Substitutes include: (1) Other short video platforms, such as YouTube Shorts and Instagram Reels, which have similar functions, but algorithms and community culture differ significantly. (2) Long video platforms: YouTube and Netflix meet the demand for in-depth content, but the substitution is limited in fragmented scenarios. (3) Traditional social media: Facebook and Twitter focus on graphic functions, complementing rather than directly competing with short videos.

Therefore, substitutes are highly accessible and have low switching costs. The threat of substitution in the short video field is strong (especially for Meta-based products). However, TikTok enhances user stickiness by algorithmically enhancing content immersion, creating localized challenges and differentiated content (e.g., magical BGM challenges).

2.5. Industry rivalry among existing competitors

TikTok mainly faces intense competition from YouTube Shorts and Instagram Reels in the global short video industry. Although all three focus on short video content, they show differentiated competition in terms of user scale, usage hours, and commercialization performance:

2.5.1. User scale and growth (2023-2024)

Inventory scale: YouTube maintains the lead with 2.68 billion monthly users, followed by Instagram with 1.47 billion and TikTok with 1.12 billion [5].

Growth dynamics: TikTok shows the strongest growth, with 182 million new users in 2023, growing at a rate of 19.3%, significantly higher than Instagram's 115 million (8.5%) and YouTube's 87 million (3.3%) [7].

User stickiness: TikTok's average daily usage time is 95 minutes, a significant advantage over Instagram's 62 minutes and YouTube's 58 minutes [8].

2.5.2. Platform functions and user experience

Interaction rate: TikTok's user interaction behavior (likes/comments/shares) is 40-60% ahead of other competing brands [9].

Content Quality: YouTube Shorts has a Professionally Generated Content (PGC content professionalism) score of 4.2/5 [6].

Social spread: Instagram Reels share rate of up to 32%, highlighting its social attributes [10].

2.5.3. Commercialization performance (2023-2024)

Advertising Revenue: TikTok's 2024 US advertising revenue is expected to be \$17.2 billion, growing 30.7% annually [11].

E-commerce growth: TikTok Shop's Gross Merchandise Value (GMV) grew at 3x the industry average [12].

Split Mechanism: YouTube maintains the industry's highest ad split of 55% [13].

2.5.4. Technical architecture

Algorithm efficiency: TikTok's multimodal recommendation system has a response speed of <200ms [14].

Arithmetic support: YouTube Shorts relies on the advantages of Google TPU clusters [13].

Social Graph: Instagram Reels optimizes distribution based on a 2 billion+ user relationship network [10].

Therefore, by analyzing the competitive landscape of global short video platforms in 2023-2024, it can be seen that each of the three major platforms, TikTok, YouTube Shorts, and Instagram Reels, has established differentiated competitive advantages. YouTube maintains a scale lead with its 2.68 billion monthly active users, while TikTok's 19.3% user growth rate shows the strongest growth momentum [6,8]. It is worth noting that TikTok excels in user stickiness, with an average daily usage time of 95 minutes, which is inextricably linked to its innovative multimodal recommendation system and significantly higher user interaction rate than its competitors [7,9,14]. Regarding commercialization, TikTok has demonstrated all-around dominance, with US advertising revenues projected to reach \$17.2 billion in 2024 and its e-commerce business, TikTok Shop, growing at a rate three times the industry average [11,12]. In contrast, YouTube maintains its attraction to creators through its 55% ad share ratio, and Instagram Reels strengthens its social attributes with its 32% social sharing rate[10,13]. The current competition in the industry has entered a multi-dimensional contest stage, and platforms need to continue to make efforts in multiple aspects, such as technological innovation, commercial realization, and user experience, in order to maintain competitiveness in the rapidly changing market environment.

3. User and consumption trend analysis

TikTok's users are mainly concentrated in the younger age groups, especially Generation Z. Research shows that about 41% of TikTok users around the world are between the ages of 16 and 24, which is the core user group of the platform [15]. In terms of geographical distribution, by 2023, TikTok will have more than 150 million monthly active users in the US, accounting for nearly 45% of the total population; in the European market, the U.K., Germany, and France are the most active countries, with the U.K. already having more than 23 million users [8]. In Southeast Asia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam are the fastest-growing markets, with a total of over 100 million users [16]. In terms of content preference, TikTok users prefer short entertainment content (15-60 second videos), which accounts for 68% of their average daily usage [17]. Younger users, especially those aged 18–24, show higher engagement with emotional UGC content and tend to complete tutorial-style videos more often than pure entertainment clips [18]. According to TikTok's official data released in December 2023, the #Beauty hashtag has seen a 192% increase in annual airplay, #Gaming uploads have reached an average of 3 million per day, and the number of creators in the fitness category has grown by 142% year-on-year [19]. There are also significant differences in user content preferences across geographies: dance videos account for 29% of total content in Europe and the US, while in

Southeast Asia, the conversion rate for live shopping is 87% higher than in other regions, showing the geographic adaptability of TikTok's content operation strategy in different markets [20,21].

3.1. User behavior (activation & retention)

Average Daily Usage Hours & Interaction Rate: according to the Pew Research Center survey data, the average time spent by American teenagers on TikTok is close to 1.5 hours per day, showing an extremely high frequency of use [22]. According to the 2023 research, the average daily usage time of TikTok users worldwide is more than 95 minutes, which is significantly higher than Instagram (51 minutes) and YouTube (74 minutes) [15]. In terms of user interaction behavior, TikTok has the highest average interaction rate in social media (~5.96%), much higher than Instagram (0.83%) and Twitter (0.13%) [15].

TikTok users show strong preferences for short-form content across categories such as entertainment, education, beauty, and fitness. Content formats like challenges and humorous clips tend to generate higher engagement [18].

3.2. Consumption trends (referral & revenue)

Integration of e-commerce and short videos: TikTok vigorously develops the "content as e-commerce" ecosystem. Through TikTok Shop, live streaming, and inserting product links in short videos, the platform is rapidly transforming into a "content-led shopping platform" [23]. Research shows that TikTok is becoming one of the leading platforms for Gen Z users' online shopping, especially in the beauty, apparel, and digital product sectors [24].

Advertising Consumption Habits: According to an international market research organization, nearly 49% of TikTok users have clicked on a purchase link or visited a brand's official website after watching a video [17]. In addition, TikTok ads have one of the highest conversion rates among mobile advertising platforms, attributed to their algorithmic accuracy and the immersive communication nature of short videos [15].

3.3. Summary of AARRR model

Acquisition: the platform attracts target users, especially Gen Z, through personalized recommendation algorithms [15].

Activation: Lowering the threshold of content creation through interactive challenges, short video creation templates, etc., to motivate users to participate [18].

Retention: Continuous content updating and pushing mechanism creates user reliance, averaging 17 daily opens [15].

Referral: Users spontaneously share TikTok's content on other platforms, enhancing the fission spread of the brand and platform [25].

Revenue: Multi-channel realization through advertising, e-commerce, brand cooperation, and live streaming reward.

4. TikTok marketing strategy analysis

4.1. Content marketing and algorithm strategy

TikTok has significantly increased user stickiness through its unique algorithmic recommendation system and content creator program. According to research, TikTok's recommendation system personalizes distribution based on user behavior, making its user stickiness much higher than that of Instagram and Facebook [15].

TikTok's "Creator Reward Program" also effectively motivates users to produce high-quality content. According to the official introduction, the program is incentivized by RPM (revenue per thousand referrals). Combined with content performance, audience interaction video value, and other indicators, it guides creators to continuously output high-quality content to optimize the platform's content ecosystem [26]. The core of the algorithm optimization lies in its interest mapping model, which combines collaborative filtering and deep learning to ensure that the content accurately reaches the target audience [27]. For example, the beauty brand @elfcosmetics increased the airplay of its branded topics by 300% through challenges and algorithmic recommendations [28].

4.2. Social media strategy

TikTok's social media strategy relies on trending topics and hashtag challenges. According to statistics, 50 million new hashtag challenges were added daily on TikTok in 2023, of which 30% were initiated by brands [26]. For example, the #InMyDenim challenge was initiated by Levi's, and the cumulative number of broadcasts exceeded 1 billion, driving an 18% increase in its online sales [28].

Celebrity collaborations are also key strategies, such as Selena Gomez's collaboration with TikTok to promote #MentalHealthAwareness, with a single video receiving 20 million likes.

4.3. Internationalized marketing

According to Yip's global strategy framework, TikTok's internationalization success is due to four major factors:

- (1) Market globalization drive: TikTok adopts localized operations in overseas markets, with 60% of overseas users in 2023.
- (2) Technology sharing: Its algorithms are unified and optimized globally, e.g., 40% penetration in the Japanese market.
- (3) Cultural penetration: user growth rate increased by 50% through local KOL cooperation.
- (4) Cost advantage: ByteDance's global server layout reduces operational costs.

4.4. Branding and advertising strategy

TikTok's advertising model is centered on "native content + precise placement." Its "Spark Ads" allow brands to borrow content from creators for placement, and the click rate is 1.5 times higher than that of traditional ads. In addition, TikTok's "shopping cart" function (TikTok Shop) exceeded \$20 billion in GMV in 2023.

5. Strategy optimization and recommendations

Combined with the above analysis of TikTok's marketing strategy in the new media environment, this paper concludes that TikTok has demonstrated significant advantages in content ecology, user stickiness, social communication, and business conversion. However, in the face of fierce competition in the industry and the trend of tighter regulation in the global market, TikTok still needs to optimize its digital marketing strategy to maintain long-term competitiveness.

5.1. Short-term strategy optimization suggestions

5.1.1. Optimize the content ecosystem and creator incentive mechanism

The phenomenon of homogenization of TikTok content is relatively obvious, and the risk of loss of some high-quality creators has risen. It is recommended that the platform increase the importance of

high-quality creators through layered traffic support, advertising cooperation, and other ways to enhance their creative enthusiasm. At the same time, promote content diversification and vertical content (such as education, life, and beauty) to enhance user stickiness.

5.1.2. Enhance user participation

Combined with the Activation and Retention phases in the AARRR model, the platform can further introduce gamification mechanisms, such as point systems, interactive medals, and creator co-creation tasks, to increase user participation and interest. In addition, by improving the frequency of labeling challenges and topic interactions, users can be pushed to increase their involvement.

5.1.3. Optimize advertising to support small and medium-sized brands

Currently, TikTok advertising products favor big brands, and there is still room for improvement in the support of small and medium-sized advertisers. It is recommended that an intelligent assistant be launched that simplifies the placement process and lowers the advertising threshold based on the Promotion dimension in the 4P theory of marketing.

5.2. Long-term strategy optimization

5.2.1. Increase AI technology-driven innovation to improve user experience and business efficiency

Enhance the application of AI and AR technology to lower the threshold of content production for creators through generative AI tools. Develop immersive AR, virtual live streaming, and other forms of interaction. Improve the TikTok Shop system and optimize the e-commerce model, such as introducing AI product selection recommendations and cross-border logistics. It can also use big data to build more accurate user analysis solutions, provide cross-channel data analysis tools for advertisers, and optimize Return on Investment (ROI).

5.2.2. Promote the integration of globalization and localization operations

Based on Yip's global strategic framework, TikTok should push forward content localization operations more deeply while maintaining globally unified technical standards. For example, TikTok should strengthen the recruitment of local creators and community operation in emerging markets such as Southeast Asia and Africa, so as to enhance users' cultural identity and retention rate.

5.2.3. Improve platform compliance and governance system

In the face of increasingly strict data privacy and content regulation requirements in various countries, TikTok should establish a more transparent compliance strategy. This includes improving user data control privileges and algorithm preference settings. Meanwhile, TikTok should emphasize community governance and positive energy guidance, and strengthen the audit of false information and illegal content. Launch environmental protection, public welfare and other brand activities to enhance the social image of the platform.

5.2.4. Layout of emerging markets and incremental users

Capture sinking markets: For emerging regions such as Southeast Asia and Latin America, launch low-bandwidth adapted versions and local language support to lower the threshold for users. Develop simple operation modes for middle-aged and elderly users. Meanwhile, the content of education, health, and other vertical fields should be expanded.

6. Limitation and outlook

6.1. Research limitations

This study has some limitations. First, only one case study of TikTok is analyzed, and the findings may not be fully applicable to other digital platforms. Multiple case comparisons can be used in the future to enhance generalizability. Second, limited by public data, some core indicators (e.g., algorithm details, internal revenue structure) are difficult to obtain, which may affect the depth of analysis in this paper. In addition, the study mainly relies on secondary data and lacks first-hand user research. So much so that capturing regional and demographic differences may not be comprehensive enough. Finally, although Porter's Five Forces model and the AARRR model provide a systematic analytical framework, they have limited ability to explain emerging factors and have limitations in adapting to the complex environment and changes in new media.

6.2. Future prospects

Future research can consider adopting a multi-case comparison approach, selecting multiple short video platforms such as YouTube Shorts, Instagram Reels, etc., for horizontal comparison. Further, it explores the differences in algorithmic mechanisms, user growth, and digital business strategies for each platform. In addition, it is suggested that questionnaire research, user interviews, and behavioral data be combined to build a more realistic research framework. In the face of global regulatory tightening, platforms need to find a balance between data compliance and localized operations. The rise of social e-commerce will make TikTok Shop a strong competitor to traditional e-commerce platforms. In emerging markets such as Southeast Asia and Africa, localized content and low-traffic-consumption strategies may fuel growth. In addition, platforms will need to take on more social responsibility, addressing issues such as addiction and disinformation through algorithmic transparency and user control features. Together, these trends will shape the future landscape of new media marketing.

7. Conclusion

Taking TikTok as the research object, this paper systematically analyzes TikTok's digital marketing strategy around its industry environment, user behavioral characteristics, core technological capabilities, and internationalization strategy, combined with Porter's Five Forces model, AARRR model, and Yip's globalization framework. It was found that TikTok's success stems from its advanced recommendation algorithm, highly sticky community, and globalization layout. However, TikTok also faces the challenges of content homogenization, fierce competition among technology platforms, and increasingly strict global regulation. Therefore, based on its successful experience, this paper proposes a multi-level optimization path from content ecosystem optimization, creator incentives, and advertising strategy improvement to technology and compliance governance. In the short term, optimizing creator incentives, enhancing user engagement, and supporting small and medium-sized advertisers enhance the platform's competitiveness. In the long term, AI technology innovation, deepening localized operations, and expanding the emerging market will determine TikTok's sustainable competitiveness.

The case of TikTok provides important insights for digital marketing in the new media industry: algorithm-driven personalized experience, UGC community operation, and social e-commerce integration have become the industry standard. In the future, the digital marketing industry will continue to change as technology advances and user needs evolve. TikTok and its peers must focus on user experience, localized operations, and social responsibility while maintaining technological innovation.

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