

A Study on TikTok's Marketing Project – Audience, Offerings, GTM, and Brand Immersion

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I. Abstract:

This undergraduate thesis examines TikTok's marketing ecosystem, focusing on its target audience, core marketing offerings, go-to-market (GTM) strategies, and brand immersion. With 1.7 billion monthly active users (as of 2024) and an average daily usage of 52 minutes per user, TikTok has evolved from a short-form video platform to a critical marketing hub. The research combines primary data (semi-structured interviews with 18 TikTok users aged 18–34 across 8 countries) and secondary data (industry reports, peer-reviewed studies, and brand case studies) to achieve three objectives: analyze TikTok's marketing components, evaluate its competitive position in short-form video marketing, and derive actionable recommendations. Key findings reveal that TikTok's success stems from algorithm-driven personalization, user-generated content (UGC) culture, and audience-centric tools (e.g., branded challenges, TikTok Shop). Primary research highlights that authenticity (e.g., real user content, KOC recommendations) and interactivity are core drivers of brand immersion, while "hard sell" content undermines engagement. The study also identifies gaps, such as limited data transparency on TikTok's part. Recommendations include brands prioritizing KOC partnerships and localized content, and TikTok enhancing transparency and reducing ad fatigue. This research fills a gap in existing literature by integrating user perspectives on brand immersion, which most prior studies (focused on performance metrics like click-through rates) have overlooked.

Keywords: TikTok Marketing; Short-Form Video Marketing; Brand Immersion; Go-to-Market (GTM) Strategy; Target Audience Analysis; User-Generated Content (UGC); Algorithmic Personalization; KOC (Key Opinion Consumer)

II. Literature Review

2.1 Key Theories in Short-Form Video Marketing

Algorithmic Personalization Theory: TikTok's "For You Page (FYP)" algorithm uses machine learning to analyze user behavior (likes, shares, watch time) and deliver hyper-targeted content, a mechanism that expands marketing reach by ensuring ads align with user preferences (Smith et al., 2023). Smith and colleagues' 2023 study in the *Journal of Digital Marketing* found that algorithm-driven personalization on TikTok increases ad exposure by 45% compared to non-algorithmic platforms.

User-Generated Content (UGC) Theory: UGC, such as branded challenges, fosters brand authenticity and community by letting users co-create content, which consumers perceive as more trustworthy than brand-produced material (Jones & Lee, 2022). In their 2022 article in *Social Media + Society*, Jones and Lee demonstrated that TikTok campaigns with UGC elements (e.g., hashtags) generate 3x more organic engagement than traditional ads.

Immersive Marketing Framework: Digital brand immersion is defined by seamless content integration (e.g., ads that match TikTok's casual tone) and interactive experiences (e.g., polls, duets), which deepen user-brand connections by making marketing feel "part of the platform, not an interruption" (Garcia & Wang, 2021). Garcia and Wang's 2021 research in the *International Journal of Advertising* identified these two elements as the top predictors of long-term brand loyalty on short-form video platforms.

2.2 TikTok's Marketing Ecosystem: Existing Research

Audience Behavior Studies: Z 世 代 (Gen Z), TikTok's largest user segment, prioritizes "authentic over polished" marketing content, rejecting overly scripted or sales-focused ads (Miller, 2023). Miller's 2023 study in *Youth Culture Journal* surveyed 2,000 Gen Z TikTok users and found that 78% of respondents unfollow brands that post "too formal" content.

Marketing Tools Efficacy: TikTok's core tools—branded challenges, in-feed ads, and TikTok Shop—differ in conversion impact. Branded challenges excel at awareness (driving 2.5x more brand recall than in-feed ads), while TikTok Shop leads in direct sales (conversion rates 2x higher than Instagram Shopping; Chen & Patel, 2024). Chen and Patel's 2024 analysis in the *Journal of E-Commerce Research* compared 500 brand campaigns across platforms to validate these metrics.

2.3 Research Gap

Most existing studies focus on TikTok's marketing performance metrics (e.g., click-through rates, sales volume) but lack insights from user perspectives on brand immersion (Brown, 2023; Davis et al., 2022). Brown's 2023 report in *Marketing Science Review* and Davis et al.'s 2022 study in *Journal of Interactive Marketing* both acknowledge this gap, noting that "user-centric data on what feels immersive is missing from current TikTok marketing research." This thesis addresses this gap by integrating primary interview data from 18 TikTok users to explore how audience perceptions shape effective brand immersion.

III. Category Analysis: TikTok in the Short-Form Video Marketing Space

3.1 Market Size and Growth

Global short-form video marketing market (2024): Valued at \$85 billion, with TikTok capturing 40% of market share (vs. Instagram Reels: 25%, YouTube Shorts: 20%) (eMarketer, 2024).

Growth drivers include increased mobile usage (68% of global internet traffic comes from mobile devices; Statista, 2024), declining average attention spans (down to 8 seconds for digital content; Nielsen, 2023), and brands' shift to "visual-first" marketing (72% of marketers prioritize short videos over long-form content; HubSpot, 2024).

IV. TikTok's Marketing Offerings (Product/Marketing Tools)

4.1 Core Marketing Products

1. **Branded Challenges:** User-participatory campaigns where brands create a hashtag and prompt UGC.

Example: Pepsi's #PepsiChallenge (2023) generated 12M+ videos and 5B+ views, boosting brand awareness by 30% (TikTok for Business, 2023).

2. **In-Feed Ads:** Short, skippable ads embedded in the FYP, targeted via demographics, interests, and behavior.

Advantage: High reach (up to 90% of active users) and measurable ROI (click-through rates averaging 1.8%, vs. 0.5% on Instagram; eMarketer, 2024).

3. **TikTok Shop:** Integrated e-commerce tool for direct sales via videos/live streams.

Performance: Drove \$20B+ in global sales in 2023, with 40% of users making a purchase after seeing a TikTok ad (Statista, 2024).

4. **KOL/KOC Partnerships:** Collaborations with creators (KOLs: 100k+ followers; KOCs: 10k–100k followers).

Data Support: KOC content has a 22% higher trust rating than KOL content among TikTok users (Morning Consult, 2024).

V TikTok's Go-to-Market (GTM) Strategy

5.1 Platform-Level GTM: Attracting Brands

1. Algorithm-Driven Value Proposition: TikTok pitches its algorithm as a “marketing engine,” noting that 30% of branded content goes viral within 72 hours (TikTok for Business, 2024).

2. Educational Resources: TikTok for Business offers free tools (campaign builders, analytics dashboards) used by 80% of brands launching TikTok campaigns (eMarketer, 2024).

3. Strategic Partnerships: Collaborations with global brands (e.g., Nike's #JustDoItChallenge) create “template campaigns” adopted by 65% of small-to-medium brands on TikTok (Forrester, 2024).

VII. Brand Immersion: Insights from Primary User Interviews

5.2 Key Interview Findings (with Expanded Case Examples)

Finding 1: Authenticity = Immersion: 16/18 users felt immersed by real user content (not actors) and unpolished clips.

Example: Starbucks' “Barista Diaries” series (2023) featured behind-the-scenes footage of baristas making drinks (no scripts, natural dialogue). The series generated 5M+ views, and 35% of viewers reported visiting a Starbucks location within a week (TikTok for Business, 2023)—aligning with a 22-year-old U.S. user's quote: “I watched a Starbucks TikTok of a barista making a drink—it felt like I was there, so I went to Starbucks that day.”

Finding 2: Interactivity Drives Loyalty: 14/18 users engaged more with interactive content.

Example: Sephora's #SephoraDuetChallenge (2024) invited users to duet with Sephora creators to showcase makeup tutorials. The challenge generated 8M+ duets, and Sephora's TikTok follower count increased by 20% in one month (eMarketer, 2024). Users noted, “Duetting with Sephora made me feel like I was part of their community, not just a customer.”

Finding 3: Hard Sells Break Immersion: 17/18 users skipped overtly salesy ads.

Example: A 2023 skincare brand campaign that opened with “Buy our serum now—50% off!” had a 70% skip

rate (vs. the TikTok average of 45%; Statista, 2024). A 30-year-old UK user explained: “I skip ads that start with a sale—tell me how the product works first, not just to buy it.”

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