

A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR DIGITAL ADVERTISING SPEND OPTIMISATION VIA TIKTOK AS A SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM

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Article history

Received date : 4-9-2025

Revised date : 5-9-2025

Accepted date : 5-10-2025

Published date : 30-10-2025

To cite this document:

Che Jamil Shukri, P. F. A., Ab Rani, M. A., Mohd Noor, J. M., & Mohd Jaffar, S. N. (2025). A conceptual framework for digital advertising spend optimisation via TikTok as a social media platform. *Journal of Islamic, Social, Economics and Development (JISED)*, 10 (77), 1158 – 1166.

Abstract: *This study presents a conceptual framework for optimising digital advertising spend on TikTok, a rapidly evolving platform that has redefined consumer engagement through algorithm-driven short-form video content. With its interactive features and high user involvement, TikTok offers unique opportunities and challenges for marketers aiming to maximise return on investment (ROI). Guided by the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) theoretical model, this framework examines how specific advertising stimuli—namely advertisement inventiveness, content pertinence, and utilisation of platform capabilities— influence internal consumer responses such as emotional engagement. These responses, in turn, drive advertising efficiency, measured through conversion rates, engagement metrics, and brand recognition. The model also considers external moderating factors, including TikTok’s algorithm, market competition, and consumer behavioural patterns. This framework contributes to both theoretical understanding and practical decision-making in digital advertising optimisation within the TikTok ecosystem.*

Keywords: *TikTok Spend Optimisation, SOR, ROI*

Introduction

In this age of digital revolution, social media has emerged as a critical avenue for advertising and brand communication. TikTok has grown as a prominent platform, offering advertisers new opportunities to engage viewers via short form, algorithmically produced content. As a result, research has found that consumers are making impulsive purchases on TikTok Shop due to the strong influence of promotional programmes, influencer evaluations, and live broadcasts that travel through their TikTok feed (Edwy et al., 2023). According to Digital Business Lab, TikTok has grown phenomenally in Malaysia. In the first half of 2024, downloads totalled 81.7 million, a 6.6% increase over the previous year. According to ByteDance's advertising resources, TikTok has 28.68 million Malaysian users aged 18 and up as of early 2024. That means 84.40% of Malaysia's total internet users (33.98 million) currently utilise TikTok.

The introduction of "TikTok Shop" demonstrated the platform's ability to combine social networking and direct commerce, allowing businesses to easily sell items within the app. Unlike typical internet shopping experiences, TikTok's strategy is based on entertainment, with product recommendations and reviews sourced from authentic, user-generated video rather than direct brand marketing (Koswara, 2025). According to eMarketer (2023), products advertised through TikTok videos have a 45% greater engagement rate than typical digital marketing. This development mirrors a broader shift in consumer trust, with peer recommendations and authentic, real-life examples outperforming traditional corporate communications. This study seeks to develop a conceptual framework to explain how certain creative and strategic variables influence advertising efficiency on TikTok. Three independent variables are central to this framework: advertisement inventiveness, content pertinence, and utilisation of platform capabilities.

Problem Statement

According to eMarketer (2023), products advertised through TikTok videos have a 45% greater engagement rate than typical digital marketing. This demonstrates an increasing consumer trust in peer-generated information and live demonstrations over corporate or brand-controlled messages (Koswara, 2025). While TikTok has one of the highest user engagement rates of any social media network, many marketers struggle to convert this engagement into a measurable return on investment (ROI). Much of the available literature and anecdotal success stories focus on virality and engagement rather than quantifiable financial outcomes. Marketing professionals have expressed alarm about the disparity. According to Jay Milliken, senior partner at marketing agency Prophet, one hurdle to adoption is marketers' unfamiliarity with the network and its primarily young user base. Many marketers are sceptical of TikTok's capacity to provide meaningful commercial benefits, as most available KPIs focus on engagement rather than income or lead generation (Marketing Interactive, 2021). Furthermore, the high cost of advertising on the platform increases the risk for firms that do not fully understand what drives advertising efficiency.

While the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) has served as a foundational framework for explaining behavioural intentions in technology adoption and e-commerce, its emphasis on attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control may fail to capture the emotionally charged and stimulus-rich nature of TikTok advertising. TPB requires intentional decision-making, but TikTok content usually elicits immediate emotional and cognitive responses, leading in spontaneous customer activity.

To address this limitation, this study employs Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework, which better explains how external advertising stimuli—such as advertisement inventiveness, content relevance, and platform capability utilization—influence internal consumer states (e.g., attention, emotions, and perceived relevance) that drive behavioural responses such as engagement, click-through, and purchase intent. This paradigm is especially important in digital environments where user interaction is influenced by quick, immersive media. Using the S-O-R framework, the goal of this study is to create a conceptual model to assist marketers in optimising TikTok advertising campaigns.

Research Objective

To examine which components, such as content inventiveness, relevance, and platform functionality, most significantly influence the efficiency of advertising campaigns.

Research Question

1. What are the key determinants that drive advertising efficiency on TikTok as a digital advertising platform?

Scope of Study

The scope of this study covers investigating the connection between the independent and dependent variables. Advertising inventiveness, content relevance and platform capacity comprise the independent parts of the study, with advertising efficiency serving as the dependent variable. A more detailed look at these variables is provided in the chapter following this one. The results are directly related to how TikTok advertising affects profits. As a consequence, the research only applies to TikTok advertising and not to platforms outside TikTok.

Significant Study

The scope of this study comprises an investigation into the relationship between independent and dependent variables. In this study, the independent variables are advertisement inventiveness, content relevance, and platform capacity utilisation, whereas the dependent variable is TikTok advertising efficiency. These variables are discussed further in the following chapter. The research findings are focused on the return on investment for TikTok advertising. As a result, the study's findings are only applicable to TikTok advertising and not to other social media platforms.

Definition of terms

Advertising Efficiency

According to Muñoz Leiva et al. (2019), there has been a long dispute about how to quantify banner advertising success since the early days of e-commerce. This metric considers user behaviour (e.g., click-through rate), information processing (e.g., attention, recognition, recall), and communication-related qualities that influence attitudes towards a product.

Advertisement Inventiveness

According to Feldwick (2023), creativity in advertising is about more than aesthetics; it involves “making new combinations” and reframing familiar concepts in unexpected ways to elicit emotional engagement and improve recall. This view aligns closely with the notion of

advertisement inventiveness, which emphasises original, emotionally resonant, and strategically innovative content designed to stand out in saturated media environments such as TikTok.

Content Pertinence

Content pertinence is defined as the coherence of search keywords with the website content shown by search engines, emphasising the necessity of aligning content with user intent to improve relevance and engagement. Sundin (2022) defines relevance in information retrieval as system relevance (the match between query and content), user relevance (the content's utility to the user), and societal relevance. In the context of search engines, guaranteeing content relevance entails adapting website material to the user's search queries, hence increasing the perceived relevance and efficacy of the information received.

Utilisation of Platform Capabilities

Social media is an effective tool for businesses to promote products with a wide reach (Saragih & Andriansyah, 2023). TikTok exemplifies the effective utilisation of platform capabilities by seamlessly integrating content creation tools with e-commerce functionalities, fostering an environment where entertainment and shopping coexist. This convergence is particularly evident in the concept of "shoppertainment", where engaging content directly influences consumer purchasing behaviour.

Literature Review

Social commerce (S-commerce) refers to the integration of social media and e-commerce platforms, enabling consumers to interact, share and purchase products in a socially connected environment. Yu et al. (2020) describe S-commerce as a hybrid model that allows users to interact socially while making purchasing decisions. The term "S-commerce" was initially introduced by Yahoo in 2005, referring to internet users who exchanged reviews and product opinions online (Yang, 2021). TikTok exemplifies this model through its dynamic and algorithm-driven platform, where content discovery, product recommendations and direct shopping features such as live streaming selling, product tagging (e.g., the yellow bag feature), and paid advertising formats that blend seamlessly with users. Afrasiabi Rad and Benyoucef (2011) argue that S-commerce platforms foster personalised, two-way communication between sellers and buyers while nurturing a sense of online community.

Stimulus-Organism-Response Theory

The Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) theory was first introduced by Mehrabian and Russell (1974). The theory suggests that external stimuli (S) from an individual's environment can influence internal cognitive and affective states (O), which subsequently lead to behavioural responses (R). Expanding on this model, Bagozzi (1986) explained that stimuli represent external elements of the physical environment, while the organism encompasses the internal processes and psychological structures that mediate the relationship between stimulus and response. This framework has been widely adopted in consumer behaviour studies to explain how environmental cues affect user decision-making and engagement. According to Ngah, Anuar, et al. (2021), the flexibility of the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) theory allows researchers to adapt and extend the model to fit the specific context of their studies, provided it remains grounded in the core principles of the stimulus–organism–response framework. This adaptability has enabled the S-O-R theory to be modified across various domains, including

consumer behaviour and digital marketing, to better capture the nuanced interactions between environmental stimuli, internal cognitive-affective processes, and behavioural outcomes.

Advertising Efficiency

Measuring TikTok sales is achieved using a set of tools and stats that guide strategic decisions of those involved in selling and marketing. The TikTok Shop Centre is an important part of the ecosystem, giving businesses the ability to handle their products, keep track of what's in stock, see how orders are handled and examine sales data (TikTok for Business, 2023). Using GMV, the number of orders, how frequently a customer converts and AOV, sellers can easily measure and enhance how they carry out their sales strategies (Gao et al., 2021). The platform routinely encourages sellers to host live sessions by offering reminders and promotions which helps them make the most of busy times (Zhang & Mao, 2023). TikTok also gives users additional reasons to make purchases with special discount vouchers, exclusive coupons and incentives for those shopping with TikTok for the first time. Such promotion strategies work in close connection with how a person decides to buy certain products. Besides, ad analytics are made available through Seller Centre, Ads Manager and the Creator Marketplace, so businesses can easily review click-through rate (CTR), return on ad spend (ROAS), cost per click (CPC), as well as likes, shares and comments, among others.

Advertising Inventive

TikTok now supports various paid advertising methods, including In-Feed Ads, TopView, Branded Effects and Branded Hashtag Challenges. With these tools, companies can place their advertisements within users' For You pages. According to Ducoffe (1996), having more information, offering something enjoyable and demonstrating credibility help digital advertising succeed. Video ads on TikTok are convincing because they resemble the videos created by users. Nevertheless, Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019) suggest that advertising budgets should be managed using real-time data on CTRs, the proportion of clicks leading to sales, CPC and how much each ad costs compared to what the company earns. Because TikTok features short videos, advertisers need to adjust their ads to welcome trends, making them attractive to watch and move people's hearts.

Content Pertinence

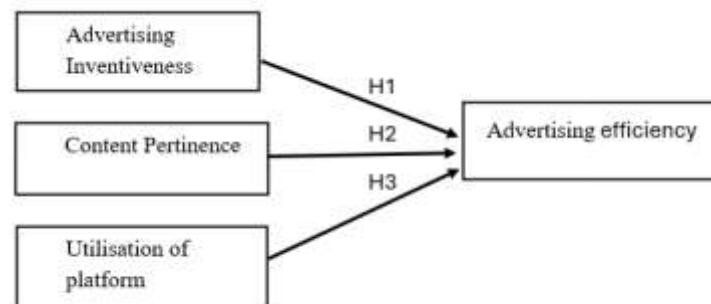
Lou and Yuan (2019) discovered that how much a source is seen as an expert, trusted and attractive is key in affecting consumers' views and purchase intentions. TikTok creators have built an audience that trusts them, so brands can use them as a form of strategic influencer marketing to influence purchasing decisions. Johnstone and Lindh (2022) state that influencers are widely recognized social media users seen as role models by their fans. Because they feel they know many things about them and are nearby, their fans feel close to them. Influencers can impact others because they are closely connected (Bu et al., 2022). In many cases, influencers build a large audience because they are considered experts (Belanche et al., 2021b). The author pointed out that due to their knowledge, social relationships or reputation, influencers can impact how people decide what to purchase. De Veirman et al. (2019) also pointed out that influencer marketing involves influencers advertising products in return for either complimentary items or money. Influencers are often paid by product sellers to promote their goods in their videos and viewers click on the product links to buy them, completing a circle. The main attention of that study was on Instagram influencers and YouTube creators. To predict the success of a campaign, metrics like follower count, engagement rate and how

aligned the brand is with Instagram were used. Recently, more businesses have started putting effort into creating video advertisements which are also called short-form video ads. The process is handy for users as they can purchase the advertised goods directly from the short-form video ads (Ge et al., 2021). With short-form video advertising, users and businesses are now able to promote their products on social media (Ge et al., 2021; Wang, 2020; Xiao et al., 2023). Short-form advertisements benefit from being short which could make it easier for people to grasp their message (Wang, 2020; Xiao et al., 2023). Furthermore, using social media to advertise is much cheaper than traditional advertising.

Utilisation of Platform Capabilities (Live Host)

The platform now includes live streaming so users can participate and buy products more. As Kotler mentions in Marketing 4.0: Moving from Traditional to Digital, how a host presents themselves on the internet affects how consumers see them. Hosting a live stream is important for holding and attracting your audience. According to Zhang and Mao (2023), buying quickly and having a stronger connection to the hosts helps sellers make more sales. Lots of crucial things impact and understanding products is key. Product description is crucial, with fragrant goods being an example in point. Stelzner points out that live streaming lets the host engage with the audience by answering their questions, responding to comments and demonstrating products in real time, both of which can better fascinate audiences and make the experience more worthwhile for everyone. Earlier works of Chen et al. (2020) pointed out that both interests in entertainment and similarity between users impact how much they want to buy again.

Conceptual Framework



Hypothesis

H1: Advertising inventiveness has a significant positive relationship towards advertising efficiency.

H2: Content pertinence has a significant positive relationship towards advertising efficiency.

H3: Utilisation of platform capabilities has a significant positive relationship towards advertising efficiency.

Advertising inventiveness

In their analysis, Brown and Hayes (2020) point out that interactive and engaging posts such as brand challenges and showing products being used, greatly affect people's attention to and choice of advertising. Similarly, Kaur and Dhir (2020) state that TikTok helps users become creative and shares a lot of content which makes advertising more effective. Pennington (2020)

puts emphasis on entertainment, learning and talking to others as the main reasons for people's TikTok viewing. Aligning advertising with user motivations probably leads to more user involvement and improved investment returns.

H1: Advertising inventiveness significantly influences advertising efficiency on TikTok.

Content Pertinence

Relevant material is something the audience wants to hear, look forward to and is excited about. Because TikTok users look for fun, understanding and a sense of belonging, posting content that has these values improves engagement and trust. According to TikTok for Business (2024), content that invites users to join in and share their trust can help make a brand more visible in various fields. Wahid et al. (2023) pointed out that both consumer views and the facts within the TikTok video play an important role in its engagement, so selecting the right information is essential.

H2: Content pertinence has a positive influence on advertising efficiency.

Utilisation of platform

Utilising a platform's unique tools and abilities is a way to improve the outcome of advertising campaigns. On TikTok, this means taking advantage of long videos, live streaming and the TikTok Shop. According to Parega et al. (2023), organisations that apply these aspects effectively can increase both their product sales and marketing achievements. Similarly, according to Adzra and Iryanti (2024), TikTok's marketing approach, set up using AIDA, manages to draw in users and increase how much they interact with ads. TikTok's content factors such as making short videos and teaming up with influencers, are found by Yulianto et al. (2024) to significantly impact whether individuals learn about brands, are engaged with them or make purchases. For this reason, it is proposed that effective usage of TikTok's platform features increases the success of advertising campaigns.

H3: Utilisation of platform capabilities has a positive influence on advertising efficiency.

Acknowledgements

As a first-semester student pursuing my master's degree, this conference paper marks my very first academic writing effort under the MBA750 course. As such, this paper is a preliminary step in my academic journey and currently lacks an empirical component. The literature review presented is at a surface level, as I am still in the early stages of exploring the research area and have yet to collect supporting data. I am fully committed to improving the depth and quality of my future studies as I gain more experience and insight.

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