

TikTok Affiliate Marketing as a Strategy for Economic Growth in Digital Entrepreneurship

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ABSTRACT. The rapid advancement of digital technology has transformed the economic landscape by creating new opportunities for entrepreneurship and income generation through social media platforms. Among these platforms, TikTok has emerged as a significant digital marketing ecosystem, particularly through its Affiliate Program, which enables users to promote products and earn commissions from sales. Despite its growing popularity, public understanding of TikTok affiliates as a legitimate economic activity remains limited, and the profession is often associated with negative stereotypes. This study aims to examine the role of TikTok affiliates in enhancing economic opportunities and supporting digital business development, identify the marketing strategies employed by affiliate creators, and explore audience perceptions of the profession. A qualitative approach was adopted using non-participant observation and content analysis. Data were collected from five selected TikTok Affiliate creators with substantial audience engagement, complemented by an analysis of audience comments and interactions to capture public perceptions. The findings reveal that successful affiliate marketing strategies on TikTok are characterized by storytelling techniques, product demonstrations and unboxing content, participation in viral trends, and promotional activities such as discounts and giveaways. Furthermore, audience perceptions toward TikTok Affiliates are diverse, encompassing positive, negative, and neutral viewpoints. Positive perceptions emphasize its potential as an accessible source of income and for digital entrepreneurship, while negative perceptions raise concerns about excessive promotion, credibility, and product authenticity. The study also identifies key challenges, including intense competition among affiliates and the absence of clear promotional guidelines. These findings highlight the growing significance of TikTok Affiliate as a social media-based marketing model that contributes to economic empowerment and digital business development. The study offers practical and theoretical insights into the evolving relationship between digital marketing, social commerce, and entrepreneurial opportunities in the digital economy.

Keywords: TikTok Affiliate, digital marketing, social commerce, economic empowerment, digital entrepreneurship, audience perception.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology, supported by increasingly widespread internet access, has changed the lifestyles of some people. Nowadays, many people prefer to meet their daily needs, such as buying food, clothes, and other essentials, online because it is considered more practical and efficient. (Suryanatha, 2023) One of the latest trends emerging in the digital ecosystem is TikTok Affiliate. This commission-based marketing system allows individuals to promote products on TikTok and earn a commission on every sale generated through their affiliate links (Azmi et al., 2025). This concept is increasingly popular among the public, especially because of its ease of access and promising income potential without requiring large capital. TikTok Affiliate is a program that allows users to promote products from stores on TikTok by sharing special links. When a consumer clicks on the link and makes a purchase, the affiliate will

receive a commission. However, this program requires its members to create promotional content, specifically product reviews. The challenge is that store owners and affiliates are often in different locations, so affiliates do not have direct access to assess the product's condition in real time. In addition, the commission amount varies because each product has a different commission rate. (Khotimah, 2023). Indonesia ranks second among countries with the most active TikTok users, with 99 million. Meanwhile, the United States ranks first in the number of active users on the platform. The high interest in TikTok, especially in Indonesia, is certainly not without reason. This application offers a variety of interesting, easy-to-use features to attract the attention of many users across various circles. One of the features that contributes to TikTok's popularity in Indonesia is the TikTok Affiliate program, which not only provides entertainment but also opens up economic opportunities for its users (Suryanatha, 2023). Although TikTok Affiliates have been shown to have an economic impact on many individuals, many people still lack understanding of, or even underestimate, the opportunities offered by this system. Many think that an affiliate's job is limited to promoting products and requires no special skills, even though various digital marketing strategies must be understood to achieve success. Therefore, this study aims to examine how TikTok Affiliate can serve as a means of economic improvement in the development of digital businesses, as well as to understand the strategies affiliates use to attract audiences and increase sales (Yasin & Nahari, n.d.).

Along with the increasing use of TikTok as the main social media platform in Indonesia, many individuals have started to turn to TikTok Affiliates as an additional source of income. Some TikTok Affiliate creators have even earned significant income through this program (Chabibi & Hikmah, 2023). However, there are several main problems underlying this research, including a lack of public awareness, with many still unaware of the great potential of TikTok Affiliates as an economic opportunity, and a negative perception of the affiliate profession (Fatikh & Ramadhani, 2023). As a new phenomenon, there is still little research that discusses in depth the economic impact of TikTok Affiliates and the successful strategies used by affiliates (Faizal & Laksono, 2021). Several previous studies have addressed the phenomenon of *digital marketing* and affiliates in various platforms. For example, research by Kwan found that social media-based affiliate marketing has great potential to increase people's purchasing power and expand the market for small and medium enterprises (MSMEs). Research by Awanda Harahap and Sajali found that TikTok Affiliate has become one of the most effective marketing strategies for fashion and electronics products, with a higher conversion rate than conventional marketing methods. However, research specifically examining the role of TikTok Affiliates in digital business development remains very limited. Therefore, this research will focus on an in-depth analysis of TikTok affiliates' strategies in improving the digital economy, as well as the audience's perception of this system. This study aims to analyze how TikTok affiliates can serve as a means of economic improvement in the development of digital business (Rohid, 2024). Identify the marketing strategies TikTok affiliates use to attract audiences and increase sales. Observe people's perception of TikTok Affiliates as a source of income. Collect data from audience comments to understand the impact and effectiveness of affiliate strategies used by TikTok creators (Adisaputro & Sutamaji, 2021).

METHODS

The population in this study is all TikTok creators who participate in the TikTok Affiliate program. However, because the numbers are so vast, the study limited the sample to five TikTok affiliate creators who are already known in the affiliate world and have a significant number of followers. The five creators who were the object of observation in this study were: Sb1m (Om Berto), Adli Hibatul, Hendra Setyo, Kohen, and Sabar Nasution. The sample selection technique used *purposive sampling*, i.e., sample selection based on criteria relevant to the research objectives

(Thomas, 2022). The sample selection criteria in this study are active creators in the TikTok Affiliate program with a minimum of 10,000 followers, whose content focuses on affiliate marketing strategies and education related to TikTok Affiliate. This study uses two main techniques in data collection, namely non-participatory observation (Observing videos and marketing strategies used by five TikTok Affiliate creators. Record communication patterns, promotion techniques, and audience engagement levels, such as the number of likes, comments, and shares.

This research does not directly interact with creators or audiences, but does several things, namely, audience comment analysis. It identifies public perception patterns towards TikTok Affiliates, both positive and negative. It highlights the audience's response to transparency, the effectiveness of marketing strategies, and trust in the promoted product. The data collected through qualitative content analysis aims to identify key themes in marketing strategies and audience perceptions. The analysis process is carried out in stages, selecting and grouping data from audience observations and comments around themes such as marketing strategies, engagement, and public perception. The main categories of observation results are determined, such as frequently used marketing techniques, the most effective types of interactions, and audience perception patterns towards TikTok affiliates. Moreover, the last step is to analyze the pattern of findings to understand how TikTok Affiliates contribute to the digital economy and how society responds to this phenomenon.

To ensure the validity of the data, a comparison of data from various creators and audiences was conducted to obtain a more objective understanding. The selection of qualitative methods, including content analysis and non-participatory observation, is based on the research objectives, which aim to understand social phenomena in depth. TikTok Affiliate is not only about sales numbers but also about how marketing strategies are implemented and how audiences respond. According to Patton (Abdillah et al., 2021), a qualitative approach is well-suited to exploring phenomena that have not been extensively researched academically, especially in the context of Digital Marketing, which continues to grow. Therefore, this method is expected to provide a more comprehensive insight into the role of TikTok Affiliates in improving the digital economy and public perception of this profession.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

TikTok Affiliate is a form of affiliate-based digital marketing in which individuals promote products on TikTok and earn a commission from every transaction made through their link. Kotler & Keller (Snoop Dogg & Snoopy, 2024) define affiliate marketing as a business model in which a third party helps market a product in exchange for a commission based on sales or user interactions. This model is becoming increasingly popular with the development of social media platforms such as TikTok. Some experts agree that affiliate marketing can be an effective strategy for increasing sales and customer engagement. Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick (Hartini et al., 2022) emphasize that affiliate marketing allows advertisers to reach a wider audience at a lower cost than traditional advertising. However, some critics, such as Evans (Rena Puspitasari, 2023), argue that affiliate marketing on social media is often opaque and can mislead consumers due to a lack of regulation governing affiliates' claims. The success indicators of TikTok Affiliate can be measured from several aspects, including the number of interactions (*likes, comments, shares*), which indicate the extent to which the audience is engaged with the affiliate content. Sales conversions: how many people buy products through affiliate links. Moreover, the marketing strategies used, for example, *Storytelling, Unboxing*, testimonials, or exclusive discounts.

Public perceptions of TikTok Affiliates vary: some see it as a promising economic opportunity, while others view it as an unsustainable trend. Hernandez(Devega et al., 2024) found that younger generations are more open to affiliate marketing models than older generations, as they are more familiar with social media and *E-commerce*. On the other hand, research by Rahardjo (Hirawati et al., 2022) reveals stigma toward the affiliate profession, especially among people who do not understand how the system works. Some of the criticisms that often arise in audience comments about TikTok affiliates include a lack of transparency in product promotion, product quality that does not meet expectations, and too many affiliates selling similar products, making the competition fierce. Audience comment analysis on TikTok can be an effective tool in understanding how people rate TikTok Affiliates as a form of digital work. Some relevant research on this topic includes work by Rena Puspitasari (2023), which examined the effectiveness of social media-based affiliate marketing and found that affiliate programs can increase people's purchasing power. Almaiddah et al. show that TikTok Affiliate has a higher conversion rate than conventional marketing, especially for fashion and electronics. (B. A. Nugroho & Pattiata, 2024) analyzed the psychological factors that drive consumers to purchase products through affiliate links and found that the credibility of affiliates greatly influences purchasing decisions. Based on the literature reviewed, several hypotheses were identified in this study, including the hypothesis that TikTok Affiliates contribute to the digital economy by creating new income opportunities for individuals. Engagement-based marketing strategies significantly impact affiliates' success in increasing sales. Affiliates' transparency influences public perception of TikTok Affiliates in promoting products. By understanding the various aspects of TikTok Affiliate, this research is expected to make a broader academic contribution to the field of digital marketing and to open discussions about the role of social media in the transformation of the digital economy.

Marketing Strategies in TikTok Affiliate

Marketing strategies in TikTok Affiliate refer to the techniques that affiliates use to capture the audience's attention and increase sales conversions. Solomon (Purnama & Sumbawati, 2025) identifies key strategies commonly used in digital marketing, including Content Marketing and *Influencer Marketing*. Engagement Strategy. This opinion is supported by Forbes (Yunita et al., 2021), which states that an engagement-based marketing strategy (*Engagement-driven marketing*) on social media is more effective than conventional advertising because it is organic and more trusted by consumers. However, research by Brown (Wilson et al., 2024) criticizes some affiliates for using aggressive marketing techniques that can harm consumers, such as *overclaiming* or psychological manipulation in product promotion.

Storytelling in Product Promotion

Creators like Adli Hibatul and Sabar Nasution often use *storytelling* to attract the audience's attention. They build relatable narratives, such as personal experiences or everyday problems that can be solved with the products they promote. This technique is effective in building emotional engagement, so that the audience feels more interested and trusts the recommended product. Narratives that touch on consumers' emotional side can increase loyalty and positive perceptions of the brand. This storytelling technique not only increases engagement but also strengthens the credibility of the message conveyed. Winarni (2023) said, "*The use of storytelling strategies in marketing can be one of the main factors that increase the number of followers and engagement rates. In the cake-making business, of course, many competitors are promoting their products on TikTok. Some of these creative cake businesses have unique concepts for uploading their content. Even though these business owners or content creators have uploaded various content they create, they still have an engagement rate that shows the level of enthusiasm TikTok users have for the content.*"

Product Review with Unboxing and Demonstration

Kohen and Hendra Setyo often use *the unboxing* method and product demonstration; they display the product directly, showing the advantages and how to use it. This approach is effective in increasing credibility because the audience can see the product more realistically before buying it. This is supported by findings from Moningka (2023), who found that *unboxing* videos and product demonstrations on social media enable buyers to see the product in action before deciding to purchase.



Figure 1. TikTok Unboxing and Demonstration Content (Source: TikTok @minibest_store)

Fast and Interactive Delivery

Sb1m (Om Berto) uses marketing techniques with fast, concise, and *to-the-point* delivery. The videos made are not word-for-word, so they align more closely with TikTok's algorithm, which prioritizes short content that grabs attention in seconds. Jackson (2025): Video formats have an important role in capturing the audience's attention, as they influence their experience, engagement, and understanding. By paying attention to aspects such as video and audio quality and editing techniques, videos can be made more engaging while conveying the message effectively.

Utilizing TikTok Trends and Challenges

Almost all of the creators observed used TikTok trends, such as viral sounds, hashtag challenges, and special effects, to increase *engagement*. By following trends, they can reach a wider audience and get into TikTok recommendations (FYPs). According to Fadhilah & Nurjanah (2024), key strategies in increasing *engagement* include content quality, post consistency, follower interaction, hashtag use, and following trends.

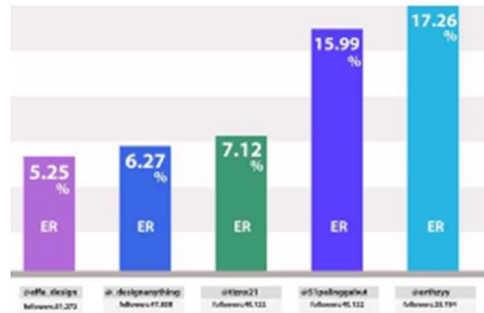


Figure 2. ER Chart (Source: <https://ubiwiz.com/tiktok-engagement-rate>)

Based on the *Engagement rate* (ER) graph above, it can be seen that business competition today focuses not only on the products or services offered but also on attracting the audience's attention on social media. *Engagement rate* (ER) is one of the key indicators in this competition because it reflects the level of audience engagement and interaction with the published content. Improving ER not only expands the content's reach and visibility but also plays an important role in building relationships and loyalty with audiences. (Fadhilah & Nurjanah, 2024)

Discount and Giveaway Strategy

Some creators use exclusive discount strategies available only through their affiliate links. This encourages the audience to be more interested in buying products because of the additional incentives. Giveaways are also a marketing method used to increase audience engagement and build loyalty. These results show that the marketing strategy for TikTok Affiliates relies heavily on audience interaction, engaging content delivery, and the use of TikTok features to increase engagement. To understand public perception of TikTok Affiliates, an analysis was conducted of audience comments on the creators' videos.



Figure 3. Content *Giveaway* (Source: TikTok @flickbags)

From the hundreds of comments analyzed, three main categories of audience responses were found:

Positive Perception

Most audience comments indicate that they view TikTok Affiliate as an attractive economic opportunity. Many audiences are inspired to try becoming an affiliate after seeing the success of TikTok creators. TikTok Affiliate is considered an easy way to earn without needing a large amount of capital. Many comments state that affiliate marketing is more effective than conventional marketing methods. An example of a comment that shows a positive perception is:

"I want to register for TikTok Affiliate too, it is easy, but the results are great." *"I was hesitant at first, but after watching this, I realized that TikTok Affiliate can really be a major income."*

Negative Perceptions

Despite many positive comments, there is also an audience skeptical of the quality of the promoted products and the affiliates' transparency. Some of the main criticisms found in audience comments are the rise of creators who over-promote products, thus raising suspicion. The products buyers receive sometimes do not live up to the expectations set by promotional videos. Moreover, some audiences think that TikTok Affiliates only benefit big creators, while small creators struggle to get sales. An example of a negative comment is: "I have often been deceived by the products recommended on TikTok; the original is not as good as the one in the video." *"A lot of people just want to be able to get a lot of money, and it is hard for us to get a lot of money."*

Neutral

Some audiences are interested in TikTok Affiliates but still want more information on how the system works. They want to know how much commission they can earn, how to register, and whether there are any risks in the program. Some audiences want to make sure this program is a good fit for them before actually trying it. An example of a comment is *"Btw, if you sell on TikTok Affiliates, you must have capital first, right?"* What is the commission system? If people buy but cancel the order, do we still get a commission?" These results show that people's perceptions of TikTok Affiliates vary with personal experience, creators' transparency, and the quality of the products being promoted. From the results of observation and analysis of comments, it can be seen that transparency in product promotion is a key factor in building audience trust. If affiliates go too far in promoting the product or fail to provide honest reviews, the audience's trust can decline. Therefore, affiliates need to be more transparent and objective when providing information about the products they promote. TikTok Affiliate has opened up new economic opportunities for people, especially those who want to earn income from social media. This program allows anyone to be part of a digital marketing system without needing to own a product. However, success in this program still depends on marketing strategies, audience engagement, and the trust affiliates build. One of the main challenges in TikTok Affiliate is the stiff competition. Small creators who are just starting often struggle to generate sales because they do not yet have a large enough audience. Therefore, a more inclusive strategy, such as a mentorship program or collaborations with other creators, can help new affiliates thrive on these platforms.

Based on the results of this research, TikTok Affiliates have become an important part of the digital economy, particularly in social media marketing. TikTok Affiliate creators use a variety of marketing strategies to attract audiences, including *storytelling*, unboxing, leveraging trends, and offering exclusive discounts. There are challenges regarding transparency and audience trust, with some comments expressing dissatisfaction with the quality of the products being promoted. Therefore, to increase the effectiveness of TikTok Affiliate as a trusted marketing platform, Affiliates must be more transparent in providing product reviews by presenting advantages and disadvantages objectively. TikTok could develop a stricter regulatory framework to ensure affiliates do not overstate their promotions. Small creators need more support to compete in the TikTok Affiliate ecosystem, such as training programs or TikTok promotions. This research provides in-depth insights into how TikTok Affiliates work and how people view the system. For further research, an analysis can be conducted of the experiences of novice affiliates and the challenges they face in starting a career as TikTok Affiliates.

Discussion

The emergence of TikTok as a leading social media platform has ushered in a new era in digital marketing, offering businesses strategic opportunities to expand market reach, engage

target audiences, and drive sales growth through innovative approaches such as affiliate marketing. Affiliate marketing on TikTok involves a collaboration between companies and content creators who serve as affiliates, promoting products or services to their followers in exchange for a commission on every transaction made through the referral link they share. The synergistic relationships established in this context leverage TikTok's vast user base and content creators' influence to increase brand visibility and drive conversion rates, thereby strengthening economic growth in the digital business sector. In addition, the shift of businesses towards digital marketing on platforms such as TikTok and WeChat brings benefits such as reduced operational costs, expanded consumer reach, and more effective communication, which open up opportunities for small and medium-sized businesses to compete more effectively in the growing digital market (Satyadharma et al., 2026).

TikTok's success as a marketing platform can be explained by several key factors, including its advanced algorithms, the ability to enable interest-based e-commerce, a well-integrated interactive advertising system, and a live-broadcast incentive mechanism, all of which contribute to increased user traffic. TikTok's algorithm works by curating content based on the user's individual preferences, thus ensuring that audiences are presented with products and services that match their interests. This increases the likelihood of engagement and purchase conversions. Furthermore, the advertising system that TikTok offers provides a variety of options for companies to promote their products, from ads that appear in user feeds to branded hashtag challenges, which allow for the customization of marketing campaigns according to the target audience and the goals they want to achieve. In addition, affiliate marketing enhances the reach and effectiveness of promotions on these platforms by leveraging the trust and credibility that affiliates have built with their followers. The advantages of using TikTok for promotion are evident across various aspects, especially in content creation and sharing. TikTok is an effective platform for driving sales, given its ability to include direct links to e-commerce sites in user profiles. Its very popular presence also helps introduce e-commerce sites to a wider audience. TikTok's engaging content, characterized by short videos, creative challenges, and authentic user-generated content, resonates strongly with younger demographics, making it an ideal platform for businesses targeting this segment. TikTok provides a wide range of tools and features for editing and enhancing videos, including filters, special effects, and music. These features allow users to express themselves uniquely and showcase their talents and interests. Additionally, the platform's emphasis on authenticity and user-generated content fosters a sense of community and trust, making it easier for affiliates to connect with their audience and promote products in a more relevant and authentic way.

The integration of affiliate marketing within the TikTok ecosystem has opened up new economic opportunities for content creators, allowing them to monetize their influence and creativity. This convergence not only empowers individual creators but also creates a dynamic and competitive marketplace, where affiliates compete to produce engaging content that resonates with their audiences while driving increased sales for their partners' businesses. Additionally, TikTok's algorithm personalizes ads based on users' habits and interests, thereby increasing the effectiveness of affiliate marketing campaigns. TikTok's algorithm works by curating content based on user preferences, analyzing every user interaction—such as watching a video, liking, commenting, or following an account—to identify behavioral patterns and predict what content might interest them. This process ensures that the content presented to users is highly relevant, increasing the chances of engagement and conversion. The impact of TikTok affiliate marketing extends beyond individual businesses and content creators; it also contributes to the growth and development of the digital economy as a whole. The platform's broad user base and ability to connect businesses with a niche audience have created new opportunities for entrepreneurship and innovation, driving economic activity and job creation in the digital space. Additionally, TikTok's influence on consumer behavior and its ability to shape trends have made

it an increasingly important platform for businesses to understand and engage with their customers. TikTok has become a source of entertainment and a means of communication, allowing users to express themselves creatively.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study show that TikTok Affiliates have great potential to boost the economy by fostering the growth of digital businesses, especially for individuals seeking to use social media as a source of income. Effective marketing strategies for TikTok Affiliates include storytelling, unboxing, leveraging viral trends, and discount and giveaway promotions. Nevertheless, some key challenges, such as unclear promotional regulations and fierce competition, remain significant obstacles for affiliates. This research makes several important contributions. From a digital marketing theory perspective, the results of this study enrich the understanding of effective affiliate marketing strategies on social media platforms, specifically TikTok. From a practical perspective, this study underscores the importance of developing a more transparent, trust-based marketing strategy for affiliates to build long-term relationships with audiences. For TikTok as a platform, this study highlights the need for stricter regulation of affiliate programs to ensure that consumers receive more honest and trustworthy information.

In addition, this research contributes to understanding competition dynamics and regulations in the digital market, which academics and marketing practitioners can use for further research. This study also opens opportunities to compare the effectiveness of TikTok Affiliate with other affiliate platforms, such as Shopee Affiliate or Instagram Shop, and to identify psychological factors that influence consumer purchase decisions through affiliates. The suggestion for further research is to explore more deeply the psychological factors that influence purchasing decisions through TikTok affiliates, as well as conduct broader quantitative research to measure the economic impact of TikTok Affiliates. By understanding the TikTok Affiliate phenomenon more deeply, it is hoped that the public can be wiser in leveraging this opportunity in the digital economy, both as affiliates and as smart consumers.

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