



Marketing Communication on TikTok: Mapping the Intellectual Landscape Through a Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

This study systematically reviews the intellectual development of TikTok marketing communication research by synthesizing 52 Scopus-indexed journal articles published between 2020 and May 2025. TikTok has evolved from a short-form entertainment platform into an algorithmic, creator-driven, and transactional communication ecosystem; however, existing studies remain fragmented across themes, theories, methods, and research contexts. Guided by the PRISMA 2020 framework, this review applied a structured search strategy, explicit eligibility criteria, and thematic synthesis to identify publication trends, theoretical foundations, methodological patterns, dominant research themes, and future research directions. The findings show that scholarly attention increased sharply from 2020 to 2022, with research concentrated in Asian contexts and published mainly in journals related to retailing, consumer behavior, information systems, and business studies. The literature is dominated by consumer-response theories, particularly Uses and Gratification Theory, Stimulus–Organism–Response, and the Technology Acceptance Model, while strategic communication perspectives such as Integrated Marketing Communication remain underdeveloped. Methodologically, most studies rely on quantitative survey designs, especially SEM and PLS-SEM, with limited use of longitudinal, experimental, mixed-methods, and computational approaches. The thematic synthesis identifies seven major domains: content strategy, influencer and creator marketing, consumer engagement, algorithmic visibility, electronic word-of-mouth, brand communication, and social commerce. By integrating these fragmented findings, this review advances TikTok marketing communication scholarship beyond isolated consumer-response models and offers a conceptual basis for future research on algorithmic visibility, creator-led persuasion, ethical platform governance, and social commerce integration.

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INTRODUCTION

Digital marketing communication has entered a new phase in which brands no longer depend solely on linear advertising messages, scheduled campaigns, or one-way promotional exposure. The expansion of social media has shifted marketing communication toward interactive environments where consumers participate in producing, circulating, and interpreting brand-related content. In this context, communication effectiveness is increasingly shaped by engagement, authenticity, entertainment value, social influence, and platform-specific visibility mechanisms. Short-form video platforms have intensified this transformation because they combine audiovisual storytelling, rapid content consumption, and participatory interaction within a highly competitive attention economy. Among these platforms, TikTok has become particularly influential because its recommendation-driven architecture enables content to reach users beyond established follower networks. The

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platform reported surpassing one billion monthly active users in 2021, indicating its rapid emergence as a major global communication infrastructure (Etemad, 2023; Winseck, 2026). Consequently, TikTok has become an important object of scholarly inquiry for understanding how contemporary marketing communication operates in algorithmic, creator-driven, and socially interactive digital environments.

The empirical significance of TikTok lies not only in its scale, but also in the distinctive way it organizes visibility, participation, and commercial interaction. Unlike platforms that rely primarily on social connections or follower-based distribution, TikTok's "For You" feed exposes users to personalized streams of content based on behavioral signals, engagement patterns, and inferred preferences. This architecture allows brands, influencers, creators, and ordinary users to compete within the same discovery system, making creative relevance and audience response central to marketing communication success. For marketers, this condition requires communication strategies that are platform-native, visually compelling, emotionally resonant, and culturally responsive to trends. Commercial messages are often embedded in humor, storytelling, music, challenges, reviews, tutorials, livestreams, and user-generated participation rather than presented as direct advertising. The expansion of TikTok Shop, affiliate marketing, live commerce, and creator-led product promotion has further blurred the boundary between entertainment, persuasion, and transaction. Therefore, TikTok should not be treated merely as another social networking site, but as a distinctive marketing communication ecosystem where algorithmic visibility, creator culture, consumer engagement, and social commerce intersect.

The urgency of studying TikTok marketing communication is strengthened by the growing empirical evidence that the platform influences consumer attitudes, engagement, and purchase-related behavior. Prior studies have shown that humor, originality, content quality, and perceived opinion leadership can increase followers' hedonic experience and willingness to follow influencer recommendations on TikTok (Barta et al., 2023; Kieu, 2025). Other studies indicate that influencer credibility and trust are associated with customer loyalty, purchase intention, and recommendation behavior in TikTok marketing campaigns (Trianasari et al., 2023; Zhao & Wagner, 2023). Research on short-form video advertising also shows that audiovisual features such as colloquial expression, cadence, colorfulness, and visual prominence may shape consumer engagement with TikTok advertisements (Xiao et al., 2024; Yang et al., 2025; Zhang & Zhang, 2025). In social commerce and live-stream shopping contexts, social presence, perceived value, trust, emotional pleasure, and flow experience have been found to influence purchase intention and consumer responses (Dong et al., 2023; Wu & Huang, 2023). These findings suggest that marketing communication on TikTok is not driven by exposure alone, but by the interaction between platform affordances, creator credibility, content design, social interaction, and consumer interpretation. This makes TikTok a critical site for advancing digital marketing communication theory beyond conventional social media advertising models.

A platform-specific synthesis is necessary because TikTok combines several communication mechanisms that are often examined separately in previous marketing studies. First, TikTok's algorithmic recommendation system changes the logic of visibility by prioritizing content performance and user response rather than follower accumulation alone. Second, its creator economy enables influencers, micro-creators, consumers, and brands to co-produce commercial meanings through trends, challenges, duets, stitches, reviews, and livestream interactions. Third, its short-form audiovisual format requires persuasive strategies that differ from text-based, image-based, or long-form video communication. Fourth, its social commerce infrastructure allows users to move from product discovery to purchase within the same platform environment. These characteristics create a communication setting where branding, persuasion, entertainment, trust, electronic word-of-mouth, and transaction are deeply interconnected. Although general social media marketing literature has examined several of these elements, it does not fully explain how they operate together within TikTok's algorithmic and transactional ecosystem. For this reason, a systematic review is needed to clarify what has been studied, which theoretical perspectives dominate the field, what methodological approaches are most common, and which research areas remain underdeveloped.

Recent studies have contributed important insights into TikTok marketing, but they remain dispersed across themes, disciplines, and methodological traditions. Several studies focus on

influencer marketing by examining humor, originality, credibility, parasocial interaction, trust, opinion leadership, and influencer–follower relationships (Bhattacharya, 2023; Chen, 2024; Garg & Bakshi, 2024). Other studies investigate content characteristics and short-video advertising, showing that trustworthiness, expertise, attractiveness, authenticity, brand heritage, and audiovisual design can shape engagement and consumer behavior (Meng et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2025). A growing stream of research examines social commerce and live-stream shopping, particularly the roles of social presence, perceived value, customer engagement, impulse buying, and purchase intention in TikTok or Douyin-based commerce environments (Liu & Liang, 2025; Zhuang & Xu, 2025). Studies also increasingly discuss ethical and cultural issues, including commercial ambiguity, influencer disclosure, de-influencing, sustainability-oriented persuasion, and the commercialization of entertainment content (Huh et al., 2026). Collectively, these studies demonstrate that TikTok marketing research, influencer disclosure, de-influencing, sustainability has developed rapidly, yet much of the literature still examines isolated variables or specific outcomes rather than integrating them into a broader communication framework. This fragmentation limits the field’s ability to explain TikTok as a complete marketing communication system.

Despite the growing volume of scholarship, several critical gaps remain. First, existing research is still dominated by consumer-response perspectives such as the Stimulus–Organism–Response framework, source credibility theory, parasocial interaction theory, and technology acceptance perspectives, while strategic and ecological perspectives such as Integrated Marketing Communication, media ecology, brand community theory, and consumer culture theory remain less developed. Second, many studies rely on cross-sectional survey designs, which are useful for testing relationships among variables but limited in explaining long-term brand relationship formation, cumulative algorithmic exposure, and changes in consumer behavior over time. Third, prior studies often focus on specific outcomes such as engagement, purchase intention, loyalty, recommendation behavior, or impulse buying without sufficiently explaining how these outcomes are connected within TikTok’s broader communication architecture. Fourth, the literature has not yet adequately synthesized how algorithmic infrastructure, creator-based communication, consumer engagement mechanisms, and social commerce functions interact as an integrated marketing communication system. Fifth, emerging issues such as artificial intelligence, algorithmic transparency, creator commercialization, sponsorship disclosure, privacy concern, and sustainability communication remain insufficiently consolidated within TikTok marketing scholarship. These gaps indicate that the field requires not only additional empirical studies, but also a systematic and critical synthesis capable of organizing accumulated findings into a coherent intellectual map.

Therefore, this study conducts a Systematic Literature Review to map the intellectual landscape of marketing communication research on TikTok. Specifically, it aims to identify publication trends, dominant research themes, theoretical foundations, methodological patterns, and future research directions in the existing literature. Unlike prior studies that examine isolated TikTok-related outcomes or discuss social media marketing in general, this review positions TikTok as a distinct algorithmic and transactional communication ecosystem. The novelty of this study lies in its social media marketing in general, this review positions TikTok as a distinct algorithmic and transactional communication ecosystem. The novelty of this study lies in platform-specific synthesis of TikTok marketing communication by integrating fragmented findings on algorithmic visibility, creator and influencer marketing, content strategy, consumer engagement, electronic word-of-mouth, brand communication, and social commerce into a unified conceptual framework. Theoretically, this review contributes to digital marketing communication scholarship by clarifying how existing theories can be extended to account for TikTok’s algorithmic, participatory, audiovisual, and commercial affordances. Practically, it provides evidence-based insights for brands, digital marketers, content creators, and policymakers seeking to understand how TikTok reshapes communication strategy, consumer interaction, and platform-based commerce. By doing so, this study offers a more rigorous, transparent, and critically grounded foundation for future research on TikTok marketing communication.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) design to map the intellectual development of marketing communication research on TikTok. An SLR was considered appropriate because the study aimed to identify, evaluate, and synthesize existing scholarly evidence through explicit, transparent, and replicable procedures rather than through a narrative review. The review was guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 framework, which provides structured guidance for reporting the identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion of studies in systematic reviews (Cacciamani et al., 2023; Shaheen et al., 2023). In line with systematic review procedures in management and social science research, this study applied predefined search strategies, eligibility criteria, data extraction categories, and synthesis procedures to minimize selection bias and improve methodological transparency (Mancin et al., 2024; Veginadu et al., 2022). The review combined descriptive mapping and thematic synthesis. Descriptive mapping was used to examine publication trends, geographical distribution, theoretical foundations, and methodological patterns, while thematic synthesis was used to identify dominant research themes and future research directions in TikTok marketing communication scholarship.

Database, Search Strategy, and Eligibility Criteria

The literature search was conducted in May 2025 using Scopus as the primary database. Scopus was selected because it provides broad coverage of peer-reviewed literature in marketing, communication, business, management, social sciences, and information systems. The literature search was conducted in Scopus using a Boolean search string applied to article titles, abstracts, and keywords. The search string was formulated as follows:

TITLE-ABS-KEY ("TikTok" OR "Douyin" OR "short-form video" OR "short video platform") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ("marketing communication" OR "digital marketing" OR "social media marketing" OR "branding" OR "advertising" OR "influencer marketing" OR "creator marketing" OR "social commerce" OR "live commerce" OR "TikTok Shop" OR "brand communication" OR "consumer engagement" OR "electronic word-of-mouth" OR "e-WOM" OR "purchase intention")

The terms "Douyin" and "short-form video" were included to avoid excluding studies that examined the Chinese version of TikTok or comparable short-video marketing environments. In addition, "creator marketing," "live commerce," and "TikTok Shop" were included to capture recent developments in TikTok's commercial ecosystem. The eligibility criteria used to screen the articles are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Document type	Scopus-indexed journal articles	Conference papers, books, book chapters, editorials, reviews, and non-peer-reviewed publications
Publication period	2020–2025	Before 2020
Language	English	Non-English publications
Research focus	TikTok, Douyin, or short-form video platforms in marketing communication	Studies unrelated to marketing communication
Research topic	Digital marketing, influencer marketing, branding, advertising, consumer engagement, e-WOM, TikTok Shop, live commerce, or social commerce	Studies focusing exclusively on education, healthcare, politics, entertainment, or technical issues without marketing communication relevance
Accessibility	Full-text available	Abstract-only or inaccessible publications

Table 1 defines the boundaries of the review corpus and ensures that the included studies are directly relevant to TikTok marketing communication. These criteria were applied consistently during the title and abstract screening as well as the full-text eligibility assessment.

Study Selection and PRISMA Procedure

The study selection process followed the PRISMA 2020 flow structure. The initial Scopus search produced 187 records. After removing 23 duplicates, 164 records were screened based on

titles and abstracts. At this stage, 87 records were excluded because they did not meet the document type, thematic scope, or subject relevance criteria. The remaining 77 articles were assessed through full-text reading. During the full-text assessment, 25 articles were excluded for three reasons: non-marketing focus ($n = 12$), conference proceedings or non-journal publications ($n = 8$), and non-English publication ($n = 5$). As a result, 52 Scopus-indexed journal articles were retained as the final corpus for synthesis.

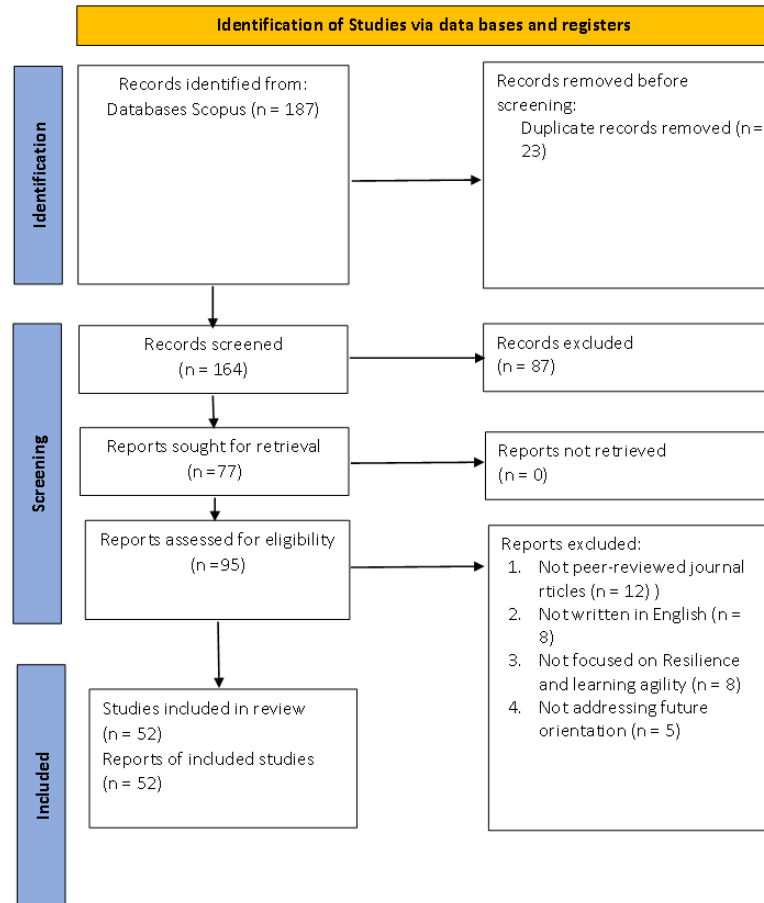


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram

Figure 1 should be visualized as a formal PRISMA 2020 flow diagram in the final manuscript. The figure is important because it documents the movement from identification to final inclusion and allows readers to evaluate the transparency of the article selection process.

Data Extraction and Quality Assurance

Data were extracted from each eligible article using a structured extraction form. The extracted information included author(s), year of publication, article title, journal name, research context, theoretical framework, research method, sample or data source, key variables or concepts, main findings, limitations, and proposed future research directions. Each article was then classified into thematic domains relevant to TikTok marketing communication, including content strategy, influencer and creator marketing, consumer engagement, algorithmic visibility, electronic word-of-mouth, brand communication, TikTok Shop, live commerce, and social commerce.

Several procedures were applied to strengthen the reliability of the review. First, the search string, eligibility criteria, and extraction categories were aligned with the research questions to ensure content validity. Second, a random sample of 20% of the included articles was independently coded by a second reviewer. Inter-coder agreement was calculated using Cohen's kappa, and the result reached $\kappa = 0.84$, indicating strong agreement between coders based on conventional interpretation criteria (Kim et al., 2024). Third, disagreements in coding and classification were discussed until consensus was reached. Fourth, citation relevance was checked to ensure that claims in the synthesis were supported by studies directly related to TikTok, Douyin, short-form video marketing, influencer marketing, social commerce, or digital consumer engagement. This quality

assurance step was necessary to reduce citation mismatch and strengthen the credibility of the review.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed through descriptive mapping and thematic synthesis. Descriptive mapping was used to summarize the distribution of studies by publication year, journal outlet, country or research context, theoretical framework, research design, and analytical method. This stage was used to answer research questions related to the development, theoretical orientation, and methodological characteristics of TikTok marketing communication research.

Thematic synthesis was conducted to identify recurring patterns across the included studies. The analysis followed the main stages of thematic analysis: familiarization with the extracted data, initial coding, theme development, theme refinement, and synthesis writing (Nguyen-Trung & Nguyen, 2026; Riazi et al., 2023). An inductive-deductive approach was applied. Inductive coding allowed themes to emerge from the reviewed articles, while deductive interpretation was guided by concepts from digital marketing communication, Integrated Marketing Communication, consumer engagement, influencer marketing, and social commerce. The final synthesis produced major thematic domains covering content strategy, influencer and creator marketing, consumer engagement, algorithmic visibility, electronic word-of-mouth, brand communication, and social commerce. These themes were then used to develop an integrated conceptual framework linking platform infrastructure, marketing communication strategies, consumer responses, and business outcomes.

Because this study was based entirely on published academic literature and did not involve human participants, interviews, experiments, or personal data collection, formal participant consent was not required. Nevertheless, the review followed academic ethical principles by applying transparent selection procedures, accurate citation practices, fair interpretation of previous studies, and complete acknowledgment of all sources used in the analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This section presents the findings of the systematic review based on the final corpus of 52 Scopus-indexed articles. The results are organized to answer the research questions by examining publication characteristics, theoretical foundations, methodological patterns, and thematic developments in TikTok marketing communication research. Rather than presenting individual studies separately, this section synthesizes the reviewed literature to identify dominant patterns, emerging directions, and areas that remain underdeveloped. The presentation is structured from descriptive mapping to thematic synthesis so that the intellectual development of TikTok marketing communication can be understood systematically.

Publication Characteristics

The final corpus consisted of 52 Scopus-indexed journal articles published between 2020 and May 2025. These articles examined TikTok, Douyin, or short-form video platforms in relation to marketing communication, including content strategy, influencer and creator marketing, consumer engagement, electronic word-of-mouth, brand communication, purchase intention, TikTok Shop, live commerce, and social commerce. Overall, the corpus shows that TikTok marketing communication has developed from an emerging research topic into a more structured field of inquiry, although its development remains uneven across publication years, theoretical orientations, methods, and research contexts.

The annual publication trend shows a sharp increase from 2020 to 2022. The corpus began with three articles in 2020, increased to nine articles in 2021, and reached its highest point in 2022 with sixteen articles. In 2023, fourteen articles were identified, followed by seven articles in 2024. The three articles recorded in 2025 should be interpreted as partial-year data because the search was conducted in May 2025. Therefore, the lower number in 2025 does not necessarily indicate a decline in scholarly interest, but reflects the limited search window and possible indexing lag. This pattern suggests that TikTok marketing communication gained rapid scholarly momentum during the early expansion of short-form video marketing and then began to shift toward more specialized research themes.

Table 2. Annual Publication Distribution of TikTok Marketing Communication Studies

Year	Number of Articles	Cumulative Total	Dominant Research Focus
2020	3	3	Brand awareness, entertainment value, user behavior
2021	9	12	Influencer marketing, purchase intention, engagement
2022	16	28	e-WOM, algorithmic visibility, content strategy, social commerce
2023	14	42	TikTok Shop, live commerce, brand trust, user-generated content
2024	7	49	AI recommendation, creator economy, Generation Z consumers
2025 (partial)	3	52	Sustainability, ethical marketing, cross-platform communication
Total	52	—	—

Table 2 indicates that the strongest growth occurred between 2020 and 2022, suggesting that TikTok became a visible academic object after the rapid expansion of short-form video marketing. The thematic focus also evolved over time. Early studies mainly examined brand awareness, entertainment value, and user behavior, while later studies increasingly addressed influencer marketing, algorithmic visibility, TikTok Shop, live commerce, creator economy, and ethical communication. This pattern shows that TikTok marketing communication research has moved from basic platform adoption and engagement questions toward more complex issues involving algorithmic mediation, creator-based persuasion, and platform-based commerce.


Figure 2. Annual Publication Trend of TikTok Marketing Communication Studies

Figure 2 should be presented as a bar chart based on Table 2. The horizontal axis should show the publication years from 2020 to 2025, while the vertical axis should show the number of articles. The figure is useful because it visually clarifies the publication peak in 2022 and shows that the 2025 data represent a partial-year record.

Geographically, the corpus was concentrated in Asian research contexts, particularly Indonesia, China, Malaysia, and Thailand. The strong representation of China was associated with studies on Douyin and short-form video commerce, while the presence of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand reflects the growing importance of TikTok in Southeast Asian consumer markets. The United States also appeared as a notable research context, whereas Europe and Africa were less represented. This distribution suggests that current TikTok marketing communication scholarship is strongly shaped by markets where influencer marketing, short-form video consumption, and social commerce practices are highly visible. At the same time, the limited representation of several regions indicates that the geographical scope of the literature remains uneven.

The journal distribution also shows that TikTok marketing communication is an interdisciplinary research area. The most frequent journal outlets in the corpus were Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, Computers in Human Behavior, Journal of Business Research, and International Journal of Information Management. This pattern indicates that TikTok is not examined only as a media platform, but also as a phenomenon related to consumer behavior, retailing, information systems, digital communication, and business strategy. The distribution of journal outlets confirms that TikTok marketing research is located at the intersection of communication, platform technology, consumer engagement, and social commerce.

Theoretical Foundations

The theoretical distribution of the corpus shows that TikTok marketing communication research is dominated by consumer-response and behavior-oriented frameworks. Uses and Gratification Theory appeared most frequently, followed by the Stimulus–Organism–Response framework and the Technology Acceptance Model. Other theories used in the corpus included the Theory of Planned Behavior, Elaboration Likelihood Model, Social Exchange Theory, Parasocial Interaction Theory, Source Credibility Theory, Media Richness Theory, Consumer Engagement Theory, Diffusion of Innovation, Signaling Theory, and Integrated Marketing Communication. Because several studies employed more than one theoretical framework, the frequencies in Table 3 are non-mutually exclusive.

Table 3. Theoretical Frameworks in TikTok Marketing Communication Research

Theory / Framework	Abbreviation	Frequency (n)	Primary Application
Uses and Gratification Theory	UGT	18	Motivations for TikTok use; content engagement
Stimulus–Organism–Response	S-O-R	14	Content stimuli, consumer engagement, purchase behavior
Technology Acceptance Model	TAM	11	TikTok adoption; social commerce acceptance
Theory of Planned Behavior	TPB	9	Purchase intention; behavioral attitudes
Elaboration Likelihood Model	ELM	8	Influencer credibility; persuasion routes
Social Exchange Theory	SET	7	UGC motivation; community participation
Parasocial Interaction Theory	PIT	7	Influencer–follower relationships
Source Credibility Theory	SCT	6	Influencer endorsement effectiveness
Media Richness Theory	MRT	5	Live-stream effectiveness; multimedia content
Consumer Engagement Theory	CET	5	Brand engagement dimensions on TikTok
Diffusion of Innovation	DOI	4	TikTok adoption; viral content spread
Signaling Theory	ST	3	Brand signaling; quality cues in short videos
Integrated Marketing Communication	IMC	2	Cross-channel TikTok brand strategy

Table 3 shows that most studies approach TikTok from the perspective of user motivation, persuasion, platform acceptance, engagement, and purchase-related responses. The dominance of UGT, S-O-R, and TAM indicates that the field is still strongly oriented toward explaining how consumers respond to content, creators, advertising messages, and social commerce features. This theoretical orientation is useful for understanding individual-level consumer behavior, but it also shows that the literature remains less developed in explaining TikTok as a strategic communication ecosystem.

The limited use of Integrated Marketing Communication is particularly important. Although TikTok is increasingly used as part of multi-channel brand strategy, only a small number of studies

explicitly examined how TikTok connects with broader communication planning, brand coordination, cross-platform integration, and long-term relationship building. This indicates a theoretical imbalance in the corpus. TikTok is more often treated as a site of consumer response than as a platform embedded within wider organizational and strategic communication systems.

Methodological Characteristics

The methodological distribution of the corpus shows a strong concentration in quantitative survey-based research. Survey studies using SEM or PLS-SEM accounted for the largest proportion of the literature, with 31 articles or 59.6% of the corpus. Qualitative studies appeared in eight articles and included netnography, interviews, and content analysis. Experimental designs were found in six articles, while mixed-methods studies appeared in four articles. Only three articles employed computational or big-data approaches, including sentiment analysis, text mining, or social media data analysis.

Table 4. Research Method Distribution

Research Method	n	%	Common Analytical Tool
Quantitative Survey (SEM/PLS)	31	59.6%	SmartPLS, AMOS
Qualitative (Netnography, Interview, CA)	8	15.4%	NVivo, Atlas.ti
Experimental Design	6	11.5%	ANOVA, factorial design
Mixed Methods	4	7.7%	Sequential/concurrent designs
Computational/Big Data	3	5.8%	Python, R, NLP/sentiment analysis
Total	52	100%	—

Table 4 indicates that TikTok marketing communication research remains heavily dependent on self-reported consumer data. Quantitative survey designs are useful for testing relationships among variables such as content quality, influencer credibility, engagement, trust, attitude, and purchase intention. However, this methodological pattern also limits the ability of the field to explain causal mechanisms, actual behavioral traces, long-term effects, and algorithmic exposure patterns. The relatively small number of experimental, mixed-methods, and computational studies suggests that TikTok's potential as a dynamic and data-rich platform has not yet been fully explored.

This methodological concentration has important implications for the development of the field. TikTok marketing communication involves fast-moving processes such as content virality, creator-audience interaction, live commerce conversion, e-WOM circulation, and algorithmic recommendation. These processes cannot be fully captured through cross-sectional surveys alone. Therefore, the corpus indicates a need for methodological diversification, particularly through longitudinal designs, experiments, computational analysis, and mixed-methods approaches that combine consumer perception data with platform-based behavioral evidence.

Thematic Synthesis

The thematic synthesis identified seven major domains in TikTok marketing communication research: content strategy, influencer and creator marketing, consumer engagement, algorithmic visibility and platform strategy, electronic word-of-mouth, brand communication, and social commerce. These domains are interconnected rather than independent. For instance, influencer marketing often intersects with consumer engagement, brand trust, e-WOM, and purchase intention. Similarly, social commerce is closely linked to creator credibility, livestream interaction, algorithmic visibility, and impulse buying. The synthesis therefore suggests that TikTok marketing communication operates as an integrated platform ecosystem rather than as a collection of separate promotional tactics.

Content strategy was the most widely examined domain in the corpus, appearing in 38 articles. The reviewed studies examined entertainment value, information quality, aesthetic appeal, authenticity, humor, storytelling, trend participation, and edutainment. The dominant pattern shows that TikTok content tends to perform better when it follows platform-native communication norms rather than conventional advertising styles. Content that appears too polished, formal, or overtly commercial is less likely to generate strong engagement because it does not fit TikTok's informal and participatory culture. By contrast, content that uses humor, trending audio, relatable narratives, creator-like visuals, and practical information is more likely to attract attention and encourage

interaction. This indicates that content strategy on TikTok depends not only on message clarity, but also on the ability to translate brand messages into culturally relevant audiovisual narratives.

Influencer and creator marketing was the second most prominent theme, appearing in 29 articles. The reviewed studies examined influencer credibility, creator authenticity, parasocial interaction, brand-creator fit, KOL marketing, micro-influencers, and user-generated content. The overall pattern shows that creators act as intermediaries who translate brand messages into more personal, entertaining, and socially acceptable forms. Their effectiveness depends not only on reach, but also on perceived expertise, trustworthiness, relatability, and audience connection. Micro-influencers and niche creators were frequently associated with stronger authenticity and closer audience relationships, even when their absolute reach was lower than that of macro-influencers or celebrity creators. This finding is important because TikTok's algorithmic structure allows smaller creators to gain visibility when their content performs well. As a result, influencer effectiveness on TikTok cannot be assessed only through follower count.

Consumer engagement was examined as a multidimensional construct involving behavioral, cognitive, and emotional responses. Behavioral engagement included likes, comments, shares, follows, duets, stitches, video replies, and purchase-related actions. Cognitive engagement referred to attention, information processing, product evaluation, and perceived usefulness. Emotional engagement included enjoyment, excitement, trust, empathy, parasocial attachment, and perceived closeness to creators or brands. The synthesis shows that engagement on TikTok is not merely a reaction to content exposure. It is shaped by the interaction between content relevance, entertainment value, creator credibility, platform features, and perceived authenticity. Engagement also functions as a mechanism of visibility because user interaction contributes to the further circulation of content through the platform's recommendation system.

Algorithmic visibility emerged as a distinctive feature of TikTok marketing communication. Unlike follower-based platforms, TikTok allows content to circulate widely when it generates strong behavioral signals such as completion rate, re-watch behavior, comments, shares, and rapid interaction. This means that marketing success on TikTok depends not only on audience size or advertising budget, but also on the ability of content to trigger responses that support algorithmic amplification. Platform-native tactics such as using trending audio, optimizing the opening seconds of videos, participating in challenges, encouraging interaction, and aligning content with user interests were repeatedly associated with stronger visibility. This theme differentiates TikTok from conventional social media marketing environments because distribution is not merely a post-publication process; it is part of message design itself.

Electronic word-of-mouth emerged as an important mechanism within TikTok marketing communication. The reviewed studies showed that e-WOM operates through comments, product reviews, video replies, duets, stitches, shares, and cross-platform circulation. TikTok's short-video format allows consumer opinions to become visible through demonstrations, reactions, comparisons, and testimonials. Peer opinions and creator reviews can reduce uncertainty, especially in product categories where consumers rely on social proof and experiential information. Unlike traditional word-of-mouth, TikTok e-WOM can move quickly beyond personal networks because videos are redistributed through algorithmic recommendation and shared across other platforms. This shows that e-WOM on TikTok functions both as social influence and as a mechanism of brand amplification.

Brand communication outcomes in the corpus included brand awareness, brand image, brand personality, brand attitude, brand trust, brand love, loyalty, and purchase intention. The synthesis shows that TikTok can strengthen brand visibility even when users do not actively follow brand accounts. Brand-related content may appear through algorithmic recommendation, influencer collaboration, user-generated content, trending sounds, and viral challenges. However, visibility alone does not guarantee positive brand outcomes. Brand communication is more effective when content is perceived as authentic, entertaining, credible, and compatible with TikTok's cultural norms. Brands that use humor, storytelling, creator collaboration, trend participation, and interactive formats are more likely to generate trust and favorable attitudes. This indicates that platform fit is a central condition of effective brand communication on TikTok.

The social commerce theme shows that TikTok has evolved from a content-sharing platform into a transactional communication environment. Studies in this domain examined TikTok Shop, live

commerce, affiliate marketing, product demonstrations, scarcity cues, limited-time offers, social proof, and impulse buying. TikTok social commerce reduces the distance between product discovery, evaluation, interaction, and purchase. Users can encounter products through creator content, evaluate them through comments and reviews, interact with sellers or creators during live sessions, and complete purchases within the platform ecosystem. Live commerce intensifies this process by combining entertainment, product explanation, urgency, social validation, and direct interaction. The synthesis therefore indicates that TikTok marketing communication increasingly operates as a full-funnel system that connects awareness, engagement, credibility, social influence, and conversion.

Summary of Results

The results show that TikTok marketing communication research expanded substantially between 2020 and 2022, with the highest number of publications appearing in 2022. The field is geographically concentrated in Asian contexts and is distributed across journals in retailing, consumer behavior, business, information systems, and digital communication. Theoretically, the literature is dominated by consumer-response frameworks such as UGT, S-O-R, and TAM, while strategic communication perspectives remain less visible. Methodologically, most studies rely on quantitative survey designs, with limited use of experimental, mixed-methods, longitudinal, and computational approaches.

The thematic synthesis identified seven major domains: content strategy, influencer and creator marketing, consumer engagement, algorithmic visibility and platform strategy, electronic word-of-mouth, brand communication, and social commerce. These domains show that TikTok marketing communication should be understood as an integrated platform ecosystem. Its effectiveness is shaped by the interaction among algorithmic infrastructure, creator-based communication, platform-native content, consumer participation, social influence, and transactional features. This synthesis provides the empirical basis for the discussion section, particularly in explaining why TikTok requires platform-specific theories and more diverse methodological approaches in future research.

Discussion

The findings show that TikTok marketing communication has developed from an emerging topic into a more recognizable research domain, particularly after the sharp increase in publications between 2020 and 2022. This pattern indicates that TikTok became academically salient when short-form video, creator culture, and platform-based commerce began to reshape how brands communicate with consumers. Conceptually, this supports the view that digital marketing communication is no longer organized only around brand-controlled messages, but increasingly around platform-mediated interaction, algorithmic visibility, and creator participation. The strong concentration of studies in Asian contexts also suggests that the development of this field is closely linked to markets where TikTok, Douyin, livestream selling, and influencer-based commerce are already embedded in everyday consumer behavior. This interpretation is consistent with studies showing that TikTok-based purchase intention, Douyin live-streaming commerce, and short-video consumer behavior are shaped by trust, perceived value, social interaction, and platform-specific engagement (Dong et al., 2023; Liu & Liang, 2025; Wu & Huang, 2023; Zhao & Wagner, 2023). However, the geographical imbalance in the corpus also means that current knowledge may not fully represent markets with different regulatory systems, digital cultures, advertising norms, and social commerce maturity. Therefore, this review positions TikTok marketing communication as a globally relevant but contextually uneven field that still requires broader cross-cultural and comparative validation.

The dominance of Uses and Gratification Theory, Stimulus–Organism–Response, and the Technology Acceptance Model shows that TikTok marketing research is still largely organized around user motivation, consumer response, and platform acceptance. This theoretical orientation is appropriate because TikTok content is experiential, affective, and interactive; users engage with the platform not only to receive information, but also to seek entertainment, social connection, self-expression, and purchase inspiration. The S-O-R logic is particularly useful for explaining TikTok because content characteristics, influencer credibility, audiovisual cues, or live-commerce features can operate as stimuli, while trust, enjoyment, flow, and perceived value function as internal states that shape behavioral responses. This is consistent with studies showing that humor, hedonic

experience, influencer recommendation, short-video advertising features, and multimodal content design influence engagement and purchase-related outcomes (Barta et al., 2023; Kieu, 2025; Meng et al., 2024; Yang et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2025; Zhang & Zhang, 2025). Nevertheless, the limited use of Integrated Marketing Communication reveals an important theoretical weakness in the field. TikTok is often examined as a stimulus environment for individual consumers, but less often as part of broader brand coordination, cross-platform communication, and long-term relationship strategy. Thus, this review extends existing theory by arguing that TikTok should be conceptualized not only as a consumer-response platform, but also as a strategic communication infrastructure connecting content, creators, algorithms, and commerce.

The methodological pattern of the reviewed literature reveals a field that is empirically active but still dependent on a narrow set of research designs. The dominance of quantitative survey studies has helped clarify relationships among content quality, influencer credibility, trust, engagement, brand attitude, and purchase intention. However, cross-sectional self-report data cannot fully capture TikTok's most distinctive processes, such as algorithmic amplification, content virality, creator-audience interaction, livestream persuasion, impulse buying, and the cumulative effects of repeated exposure. This limitation matters because TikTok marketing communication is dynamic and behaviorally traceable, while much of the existing evidence remains perception-based and temporally static. Studies on live-streaming e-commerce and short-video advertising show that flow experience, time pressure, perceived value, audiovisual features, and consumer trust influence user responses, yet these mechanisms would be better explained through experimental, longitudinal, computational, or mixed-methods designs (Dong et al., 2023; Xiao et al., 2024; Yang et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2025; Zhuang & Xu, 2025). The implication is that future research should move beyond asking users what they think and begin examining how they actually interact with TikTok content, creators, and commerce features over time. By identifying this methodological limitation, this review contributes to the field by showing that stronger causal and platform-sensitive explanations require methodological diversification.

The thematic synthesis indicates that content strategy, influencer and creator marketing, and consumer engagement form the central mechanisms of TikTok marketing communication. Unlike conventional digital advertising, TikTok communication appears more effective when it uses platform-native forms such as humor, storytelling, trending audio, creator-style production, informal expression, and participatory interaction. This finding supports source credibility and parasocial interaction perspectives because creators do not simply deliver brand messages; they translate commercial content into communication that feels personal, entertaining, and socially embedded. It also extends consumer engagement theory by showing that engagement on TikTok is not only an outcome of exposure, but also a mechanism that increases algorithmic circulation and brand visibility. This interpretation is supported by studies showing that TikTok influencer marketing, KOL-based recommendation, brand trust, and influencer endorsement can shape purchase intention, recommendation behavior, and consumer response (Barta et al., 2023; Kieu, 2025; Trianasari et al., 2023; Zhao & Wagner, 2023). At the same time, the findings challenge the assumption that high production quality, large follower count, or direct promotional clarity automatically produces stronger marketing effectiveness. A more convincing explanation is that TikTok rewards perceived authenticity, platform fit, and interaction-generating content, making creator credibility and cultural relevance as important as message design.

Finally, the emergence of algorithmic visibility, e-WOM, brand communication, and social commerce as interconnected themes shows that TikTok increasingly functions as a full-funnel marketing communication ecosystem. Users may discover products through algorithmic recommendation, interpret them through creator content, validate them through comments and reviews, interact through livestreams, and complete purchases within the same platform environment. This finding extends social commerce theory by showing that TikTok compresses the consumer journey, allowing awareness, engagement, trust formation, social influence, and conversion to occur within a single audiovisual and transactional space. It is consistent with studies demonstrating that TikTok-based purchase intention, short-video advertising, perceived value, live-streaming commerce, and creator-led interaction can influence consumer decision-making (Liu & Liang, 2025; Wu & Huang, 2023; Zhao & Wagner, 2023; Zhang et al., 2025; Zhuang & Xu, 2025). However, this integration also creates critical risks, especially when entertainment,

recommendation, sponsorship, and transaction become difficult for users to distinguish. Issues such as sponsorship disclosure, creator commercialization, privacy concern, algorithmic transparency, and sustainability-oriented persuasion therefore need greater attention in future TikTok marketing research. The main conceptual contribution of this review is to frame TikTok not as a single promotional channel, but as an algorithmic, creator-driven, and transactional communication system that requires coordinated content strategy, credible creator collaboration, ethical transparency, and social commerce integration.

CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review mapped the intellectual development of TikTok marketing communication research based on 52 Scopus-indexed journal articles published between 2020 and May 2025. The findings show that TikTok has evolved from a short-form entertainment platform into an algorithmic, creator-driven, and transactional communication ecosystem. Research in this field expanded sharply between 2020 and 2022, with dominant attention given to content strategy, influencer and creator marketing, consumer engagement, electronic word-of-mouth, brand communication, algorithmic visibility, and social commerce. The review also reveals that existing scholarship is still concentrated in consumer-response theories, particularly Uses and Gratification Theory, Stimulus–Organism–Response, and the Technology Acceptance Model, while strategic communication perspectives such as Integrated Marketing Communication remain underdeveloped. Methodologically, the field is dominated by quantitative survey designs, indicating the need for more longitudinal, experimental, mixed-methods, and computational approaches to capture TikTok’s dynamic and platform-based communication processes more accurately.

The main contribution of this review lies in positioning TikTok not merely as another social media channel, but as a platform-specific marketing communication system in which algorithmic recommendation, creator credibility, platform-native content, consumer participation, and social commerce interact to shape brand and consumer outcomes. The study extends digital marketing communication scholarship by integrating fragmented findings into a more coherent conceptual understanding of how TikTok operates as a full-funnel communication environment. Practically, the findings suggest that brands should not simply repurpose conventional advertisements for TikTok; instead, they need strategies that combine authentic content, credible creator collaboration, algorithmic literacy, interactive engagement, and transparent social commerce practices. Despite its contribution, this review is limited by its reliance on Scopus-indexed English-language journal articles and by the partial coverage of 2025 publications. Future research should broaden database coverage, include underrepresented regions, examine ethical and regulatory issues, and employ more diverse methods to investigate algorithmic transparency, AI-generated content, creator commercialization, livestream commerce, and long-term brand relationship formation on TikTok.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

Bisma Arraafi conceived the study, designed the research framework, conducted the systematic literature search, performed data screening and thematic synthesis, interpreted the findings, and drafted the original manuscript. Johantan Alfando W contributed to the research design, data extraction, methodological validation, critical interpretation of the results, and substantial revision of the manuscript. Dony Kristian participated in data analysis, verification of the literature synthesis, refinement of the theoretical framework, and manuscript editing to improve the academic quality and coherence of the paper. Ziya Ibrizah contributed to quality assurance, reviewed the methodological consistency and interpretation of the findings, provided critical feedback throughout the writing process, and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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