

THE REASONS BEHIND TIKTOK SHORT VIDEOS' GLOBAL SUCCESS

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Abstract: With the advancement of economic globalization, China's internet-related businesses have developed at an astonishing pace in recent years, with internet communication platforms flourishing like a hundred flowers in bloom. Compared to the traditional video industry, internet short-video platforms have rapidly amassed a vast audience thanks to their advantages such as rapid dissemination, extensive information coverage, rich content, strong timeliness, and convenient search capabilities. Among numerous short-video apps, Douyin stands out as the most popular and highest-downloaded platform. TikTok's user base, built through its "audio-visual integration" combined with "algorithmic recommendation," far exceeds that of various print media relying solely on visual communication. Moreover, TikTok's user base continues to grow steadily. By analyzing the content, production methods, and dissemination models of TikTok videos, this paper identifies key reasons why users are drawn to Douyin's short videos. Finally, based on these findings, the paper advocates for users to proceed steadily in this fast-paced era of media development, cultivate a scientific understanding, adopt a dialectical perspective toward TikTok content, and utilize the platform rationally—to internalize its valuable content as personal knowledge and transform it into a useful tool, rather than becoming mere victims in this age of rapid content dissemination.

Keywords: TikTok short videos; Viral spread; Audio-visual integration; Algorithmic recommendation; Dissemination model

1 INTRODUCTION

With the maturation of China's communication technologies and the widespread adoption of mobile smart devices, the necessary foundation was laid for the advent of the short-video era. Humans have gradually evolved from mere auditory beings into beings that integrate both hearing and vision. To align with the direction of societal development and human needs, people have had to explore new domains, thus ushering in the short-video era. By combining sound and visuals in an extremely concise manner, short videos fulfill people's pursuit of immersive visual and auditory experiences. Born with labels such as "fresh," "fashionable," and "trendy," short videos perfectly cater to audiences' desire for visual engagement and their curiosity about novel experiences in uncharted territories.

Short videos have evolved from the most primitive music videos (MV) and Music VIDEO formats to today's 15-second clips, undergoing a regression in both content and format. These videos convey complete narratives through approximately 15 seconds of audio and visuals, enabling audiences to absorb more useful information within a fast-paced timeframe. The emergence of the short-video era revealed business opportunities for numerous enterprises and individuals, leading to the proliferation of short-video platforms such as TikTok, Kuaishou, Penguin Account, WeVideo, and Huoshan. Even Tencent launched its Video Account on the WeChat platform in 2020. Amid fierce competition, TikTok held its second Creator Conference in Shanghai on September 15, 2020. ByteDance CEO Zhang Nan announced that as of August 2020, TikTok—including its Huoshan version—had surpassed 600 million daily active users. In February of this year, Kuaishou reported 300 million users, while TikTok currently ranks third globally, behind only WeChat and Alipay.

According to statistics, TikTok had 600 million daily active users in 2021, with over 400 million daily video searches. It has become a new hub for information volume and traffic. At the beginning of 2021, TikTok secured exclusive partnerships for the Spring Festival Gala, and numerous official channels launched their accounts on the platform. This further solidified its lead in download rankings, placing it at the top among similar apps[1].

In its early days in 2016, TikTok was merely a format combining 15-second music short videos with camera techniques, gradually attracting users by exploring audience preferences, content characteristics, playback smoothness, and visual clarity. By 2017, TikTok had optimized its comment and technical systems, introduced reporting and complaint features to maintain a healthy content ecosystem, and added more sophisticated stickers, makeup effects, and filters—empowering users to showcase themselves through this diverse creative format. The watermark feature further enhanced the app's reach. It also launched innovative features such as TikTok Stories, Music Brush, hair dyeing effects, and even AR camera capabilities, significantly boosting the visual appeal of TikTok short videos[2].

Under these conditions, after TikTok gained recognition from its audience, the platform leveraged celebrity endorsements, attracting a large number of fans to join the platform. (The celebrity effect) Major web series, television dramas, and films also conducted promotions on TikTok before their releases, and even official media outlets have joined the platform. The ability to comprehensively present content in a concise and clear manner within a short timeframe is one of the reasons why audiences choose it.

In the later stages, TikTok began monetizing its traffic by integrating various e-commerce platforms and incorporating Taobao's shopping yellow carts into live streams, thereby establishing a live-streaming e-commerce model. This approach provided a more convenient and comprehensive showcase of product content while enabling audiences to better understand all aspects of the products. Simultaneously, it directed additional traffic from e-commerce platforms to TikTok, strengthened platform collaborations, and prompted substantial advertising investments—including celebrity endorsements in ads and live streams—to further boost product sales. In 2020, TikTok launched extensive support programs for streamers, increasing live-stream viewership and creating development opportunities for grassroots creators, which drove product transaction volumes. This attracted more capable streamers to the platform, and their mobility consequently expanded their fan bases. A growing number of grassroots streamers emerged on TikTok, producing short videos to promote product sales. Notable examples include accounts such as Maomaojie, Yu Duoyu, Zhang Huiying, and Zhang Xinyao.

According to data from iiMedia Research, the size of China's live-streaming e-commerce market reached 961 billion yuan in 2020, with the total transaction volume of live-streaming e-commerce on TikTok short videos exceeding 500 billion yuan. It is evident that the introduction of live streaming has significantly boosted TikTok's monetization figures, driving traffic monetization to a peak level.

In summary, it is evident that TikTok short videos possess unique charm in terms of content, format, and methodology. The author will conduct a detailed analysis and discussion on why these videos have gained widespread popularity, focusing on aspects such as production models, methods, and content types.

2 THE "UGC+PGC" CONTENT PRODUCTION MODEL

TikTok short videos have stood out among numerous video platforms thanks to their philosophy of "documenting beautiful life" and their UGC (User-Generated Content) and PGC (Professional-Generated Content) production models. First, let's discuss TikTok's UGC content creation model—this approach provides ordinary users with a platform to showcase themselves, offering each individual 15 seconds to highlight their strengths and talents, while the content creation process is remarkably simple and accessible. Users can write their own scripts or emulate outstanding works to gain followers' attention and likes, with their creative outputs delivering practical value. Next, we'll examine the PGC model; this professional production approach enhances both page aesthetics and content quality. Advanced filming and editing technologies provide professionals with dedicated platforms for display. This "UGC + PGC" content creation model has driven increasingly professional live-streaming commerce on TikTok, facilitating interaction between general users and professionals, accelerating information dissemination, and broadening knowledge horizons.

3 ALGORITHMIC RECOMMENDATION + MANUAL CURATION"

Technologies such as big data and cloud computing have enabled TikTok to successfully decipher the secrets behind users' continuous browsing behavior. TikTok employs Toutiao's optimized "algorithmic recommendation + human curation" mechanism, analyzing users' viewing duration, likes, replies, and followings to identify their preferred content types. It then systematically recommends similar or related video content based on factors like user fatigue thresholds and behavioral patterns. This approach precisely targets user needs, delivers personalized recommendations, reduces search time costs, and allows users to immerse themselves in their preferred domains. Additionally, leveraging big data and cloud computing, TikTok creates ranking systems akin to Weibo, highlighting the most viewed short videos of the day to satisfy users' information-seeking desires.

4 THE DECENTRALIZATION OF SHORT VIDEO MEDIA

The first concept to grasp is centralization: it resembles a circle drawn with a compass centered on a single point, typically referring to traditional media's audience-centric approach characterized by one-way communication. Decentralization, however, means that in a blockchain ecosystem, every node can serve as a hub—in short-form video contexts, this implies anyone can act as both content creator and consumer. The advent of the short-video era empowers creators to become centers themselves; they actively showcase their expertise to attract traffic and attention, as such engagement yields substantial rewards—a temptation often irresistible to ordinary users. Moreover, short videos provide opportunities for grassroots creators, giving rise to a "third-party effect" where numerous participants compete fiercely in this space.

5 TIKTOK'S TRAFFIC SUPPORT FOR CREATORS THROUGH SHORT VIDEOS

The TikTok platform provides substantial traffic support to innovative and distinctive creators. For example, TikTok holds the annual "Wonderful Night" event to assist talented small bloggers with branding and promotion, allowing them to showcase their talents during the event and helping them rapidly gain followers. Additionally, the platform has introduced features such as Star Map, live streaming, and micro-endorsements to diversify streamers' income sources.

At the same time, it is precisely the grassroots and accessible nature of TikTok that provides everyone with the opportunity to become an online influencer. They can use the TikTok platform to start businesses and monetize their content, all while bearing minimal risks—even if their short videos fail, they still have the chance to start over. This is why countless creators tirelessly pursue high likes and shares for their short video content.

6 TIKTOK SHORT VIDEO "EYE-CATCHING" TYPES

The internet defines our era, and we frequently encounter terms, memes, abbreviated letters, and other "trendy" content. This delights most individuals who enjoy engaging with the "new" and "unique." TikTok, as the most downloaded music short-video platform, keeps its content in sync with contemporary trends, enabling everyone to serve as both a disseminator and recipient of content. The comprehensive and multi-domain coverage of diverse content is one reason why TikTok short videos have gained widespread popularity. I categorize the general content of TikTok short videos into several types below, analyzing the reasons for their immense appeal[3].

6.1 Small Theater Genre

Drama-style TikTok short videos typically feature brief, plot-driven content with twists, such as the short-theater-style videos by TikTok creator Menier, who shares his analysis and solutions for plot twists in the comments section for audience discussion. These mind-bending theatrical pieces effortlessly immerse viewers in the storyline, prompting them to predict its direction and create a sense of presence. Each episode follows a script, presenting a series of jokes, stories, or novel-like plots, with each installment building anticipation and suspense for the next. This keeps even average audiences with limited media literacy engaged and thoroughly entertained.

6.2 Knowledge Category

The knowledge category encompasses various types of information about daily life aspects such as clothing, food, housing, and transportation—such as beauty tips, culinary knowledge, and life skills. Short video bloggers (opinion leaders) leverage their specialized expertise to share this knowledge with the general audience through the TikTok platform, helping them acquire more practical insights[4]. For example, in cosmetic reviews, bloggers conduct professional evaluations of various makeup products, comparing actual performance with advertised claims and analyzing the effectiveness of their active ingredients. This provides viewers with actionable guidance when considering purchases, saving time and alleviating purchase hesitations for optimal results[5]. By presenting dry theoretical concepts through visually engaging explanations, these videos make complex knowledge more accessible. Practicality is the defining feature of such content. For audiences less familiar with specific fields, these bloggers serve as authoritative voices—often perceived as more professional than the subjects themselves. Moreover, since many review videos are authored by industry experts, these creators are seen as trusted "teachers" by the public. This explains why more people prefer searching for relevant reviews on TikTok short videos[6].

6.3 Film Commentary

Short film commentary videos break down a feature-length movie into three segments—the opening, climax, and conclusion—to provide narrative explanations and analyses. They sometimes employ professional terminology to discuss camera angles, helping viewers grasp the film's details and deeper meanings; other videos focus solely on explaining the plot development or analyzing the protagonists.

Under normal circumstances, watching a movie typically requires over an hour. In contrast, these short video commentaries condense the film's key moments, significantly reducing viewing time while helping viewers grasp the overall narrative structure. This caters to audiences who value fast-paced lifestyles, for whom understanding the film's plot is paramount.

6.4 Daily Life Vlog Category

A vlog, a new form of short video also known as a video blog or video diary, is a medium where creators record their daily lives through video footage and share it on platforms with online audiences [7]. Audiences who enjoy such videos often exhibit a sense of curiosity, seeking to fill gaps in their lives through these clips—be it daily moments of romance, cooking routines, or parenting experiences. Vlogs also feature the daily lives of celebrities, particularly those of currently popular stars, whose content significantly attracts a dedicated fanbase.

6.5 Appearance-Related Factors

Beauty-themed videos typically feature dance performances, lip-syncing, and singing videos performed by handsome or beautiful individuals with diverse aesthetic preferences. These creators generally don't merely showcase their looks; instead, they produce short videos that integrate their talents, guiding viewers from initial attraction to appreciation of their artistic skills. This approach is a key strategy for beauty bloggers to retain followers. Ultimately, viewers engage with such content not just for visual appeal, but to jointly appreciate both the creator's appearance and artistic abilities.

6.6 Technical Category

These short videos center around various professional techniques, delivered through instructional video formats. Examples include technical videos on photography, document processing, and Photoshop tutorials that transform textbook knowledge into hands-on demonstrations. The 1:1 teaching approach makes the content more accessible and

practical for viewers. Users who favor this type of video typically prioritize skill acquisition; when encountering difficulties during practice, they first turn to these videos. Video instruction is inherently more vivid and visual compared to text-based materials. Following video guidance clearly outlines each step, especially for computer operation-related skills, eliminating the need to read lengthy texts or search for step-by-step instructions.

6.7 Chicken Soup Text Type

These short videos typically use accessible language to convey simple yet profound messages. They usually contain encouraging words that motivate those feeling disheartened to look forward. Users who enjoy such videos are generally reflective and thoughtful when facing challenges; they draw inspiration from the motivational content online to reflect on their real-life situations and apply the useful insights from these videos to better navigate their lives.

6.8 Unique Attractions

Short videos featuring scenic spots capture the beautiful landscapes of various locations—including mountains, rivers, and trees—from different angles, showcasing their picturesque views. These videos often employ filming techniques such as human figures within the scenery or mutual interaction between people and their surroundings. Such content encourages travel enthusiasts to visit these attractions for photo-taking, thereby boosting local economies and attracting widespread praise for China's stunning natural beauty. Simultaneously, these videos spread awareness of China's diverse landscapes beyond niche circles, allowing more people to witness its lush greenery and pristine waters[8].

The above categories represent the general types of TikTok short video content. By capturing the essence of the content, TikTok also captures its audience and users—by focusing on the content itself, it wins over users' hearts and satisfies their curiosity and thirst for knowledge. Naturally, TikTok boasts a massive user base and a significantly larger number of creators compared to other platforms, enabling more diverse and extensive content production. This is an advantage that other short-video platforms can emulate but cannot surpass. In the eyes of users, TikTok has emerged as a leader in the industry; consequently, when downloading short videos, they tend to choose apps with high download volumes and superior user experience. This explains why later entrants struggle to outperform it: TikTok was the "first to try something new" —the pioneering innovator—and especially when its innovations gained widespread acclaim, subsequent competitors often find themselves unable to match its success.

7 CONCLUSION

In summary, through TikTok short videos, users can learn about the cultural traditions, humanistic knowledge, and latest developments from various countries without leaving their homes. This not only satisfies users' curiosity about the world but also helps them step out of their comfort zones and numbness, allowing them to understand the perspectives and viewpoints of people across different age groups worldwide, thereby enhancing their personal values and worldview. By acquiring new knowledge through this platform and integrating these positive, optimistic, and creative ideas into their lives, users can better improve themselves. TikTok has not only mastered content creation and dissemination methods but also captured the trends of our era, making it the pioneer in ushering in the short-video age—this is precisely why it became an instant sensation beyond its original niche.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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