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THE FACTORS OF MALAYSIA'S CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT TOWARDS BRAND AWARENESS ON TIKTOK

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Abstract:

In the digital era, social media platforms such as TikTok have transformed brand-consumer interactions, emphasizing the importance of understanding consumer engagement and brand awareness for effective marketing. This study examines the factors influencing Malaysian consumer engagement with brand awareness on TikTok, with a particular focus on AI-driven content marketing, influencer impact, and psychological factors. By exploring these elements, the research aims to determine their influence on brand perception and user engagement, guided by specific research questions. As TikTok continues to expand in Malaysia, brands increasingly leverage the platform to reach their target audiences effectively. To enhance the research methodology, a preliminary study was conducted to refine and validate the approach before full-scale implementation, minimizing potential risks and improving overall reliability. The preliminary study involved 30 respondents and findings from the preliminary study ensured that the questionnaire was well-structured and suitable for the main study, reinforcing the study's credibility in analyzing consumer engagement dynamics on TikTok. This research provides valuable insights into the role of AI content marketing, influencers, and psychological factors in shaping brand awareness and consumer behavior, offering practical implications for brands seeking to optimize their marketing strategies on TikTok.

Introduction

Currently, social media has become an integral part of daily life for billions of individuals around the world. According to Chaffey (2024), over 4.8 billion people actively engage with social media platforms globally, with each user spending an average of 2.5 hours per day on these platforms. According to Statista.com, (2024)further supports this, reporting more than 4.66 billion active users worldwide. Artificial intelligence, as noted by Verma et al., (2021) describes the intelligence demonstrated by machines. Expanding on this, Du Plessis & Swart, (2024) define AI as a branch of computer science dedicated to creating machines that can mimic human thinking and emotions. This widespread adoption of social media has occurred concurrently with its evolution into a dominant channel for marketing communication, particularly in the form of AI content marketing—a data-driven, algorithm-powered approach that enables personalized, real-time, and automated content creation and distribution. This progress also has led to the emergence of numerous AI applications tailored specifically for marketing (Du Plessis & Swart, 2024).

As noted by Ashley & Tuten, (2015) assert that social media has progressed from a simple networking medium to a fundamental element in contemporary marketing strategy. The diversity of social media platforms offers unique avenues for fostering brand engagement. For example, Facebook enables users to share detailed status updates and multimedia content; Twitter, as a microblogging platform, allows users to post brief 140-character messages incorporating hashtags, mentions, images, videos, and geolocation data; Instagram focuses on visually-driven content sharing; Snapchat allows ephemeral ten-second video and photo messages; and LinkedIn serves as a professional networking space for career and business-related interactions (Van Dijck & Poell, 2018). These platforms, increasingly enhanced by AI tools, now empower marketers to create tailored, engaging content that resonates with specific audience segments. AI-driven systems can analyze user behavior, predict preferences, and automatically generate content that increases relevance and engagement, thereby maximizing marketing efficiency and consumer reach.

Problem Statement

In recent years, social media has transitioned from being merely a communication tool to becoming a dynamic and influential platform for businesses and brands to connect, interact, and build relationships with consumers (Mangold & Faulds 2009; Baker & Kramer 2011). This evolution has facilitated the emergence of AI content marketing—a strategy that leverages artificial intelligence to create, optimize, and deliver personalized marketing messages in real-time. The vast and diverse user base of social media offers unparalleled opportunities for brands to engage with both existing and potential customers across different demographic and geographic segments (Cheung et al., 2020). Among the most rapidly growing platforms is TikTok, a short-form video application that allows users to create and share videos ranging from 15 to 60 seconds. Since its launch in 2016, TikTok has experienced exponential growth. By February 2021, the app had been downloaded over 2.6 billion times globally, including a

record 315 million downloads in the first quarter of 2020 alone, and boasted approximately one billion monthly active users (Duarte, 2024).

TikTok shares interactive features with other major platforms such as Instagram and Facebook, both of which introduced "Stories" in 2016—a feature that enables users to share short, looping video content similar to Snapchat's offering since 2013 (Pieter Verstraete, 2016).However, TikTok distinguishes itself through its powerful content discovery algorithm, which is heavily driven by AI. This algorithm not only curates a personalized user experience but also provides marketers with the ability to conduct AI content marketing more effectively by targeting users with relevant branded content based on their viewing patterns, interactions, and preferences (Kanapathipillai & Kumaran, 2022). In this digital ecosystem, AI-powered content facilitates authentic interaction and fosters stronger emotional connections, thereby cultivating trust and long-term brand loyalty. By producing entertaining, relatable, and shareable content, companies can encourage user-generated content, which further amplifies brand reach and fosters a sense of community among users (Ferreira et al., 2017).

Despite the growing popularity of TikTok as a social media platform in Malaysia and its potential as a powerful marketing tool, there remains a lack of comprehensive understanding regarding the specific factors that drive user engagement and how these factors influence brand awareness. This gap in knowledge poses challenges for businesses aiming to develop effective and targeted digital marketing strategies to maintain competitiveness and build strong brand awareness through TikTok. Companies that are not ready and unable to adapt to change are at risk of being left behind and losing customers (Carolin et al., 2023). Moreover, previous research has emphasized the role of user-generated content (UGC) in fostering engagement on social media platforms (Brown et al., 2002). However, the extent to which these factors influence user engagement and brand awareness on TikTok—particularly within the Malaysian market—remains insufficiently explored. By clearly identifying and examining these factors, businesses can improve their marketing strategies and make better use of TikTok for promoting their brands. Therefore, this study aims to fill the gap in current research by exploring the main factors that affect user engagement on TikTok and how these factors influence brand awareness, especially in the Malaysian context.

The findings of this research will not only contribute to academic insights into the evolving dynamics of digital marketing on emerging social media platforms but also provide practical guidance for businesses aiming to optimize their TikTok marketing efforts to strengthen brand awareness.

Literature Review

The Relationship Between AI Content Marketing and The Brand Awareness.
AI content marketing refers to the use of artificial intelligence technologies—such as data models, algorithms, and machine learning—to support and improve marketing strategies, especially in creating and delivering content. AI helps marketers gain deep insights into customer behavior. These insights enable businesses to optimize marketing budgets, tailor content to specific audiences, and personalize the overall customer experience. AI in content marketing makes it easier for businesses to scale their efforts quickly, uncover valuable data-driven insights, and minimize human error in the content creation process (Cognizant, 2025).

A study by the Content Marketing Institute (2019) emphasized that effective content marketing plays a key role in enhancing brand visibility and recognition. By consistently creating and sharing valuable and relevant content across multiple platforms, brands can effectively engage their target audience and build authority within their respective industries. The platform's ability to reach and engage younger demographics, especially through viral trends and challenges, further amplifies its potential—an effect supported by Alqahtani et al. (2021), who found that such trends can significantly increase brand recognition. Additionally, Pulizzi and Barrett (2016), in the Journal of Advertising Research, highlighted that well-developed content not only improves brand perception but also builds consumer trust, contributing to greater brand awareness. With the integration of artificial intelligence (AI), content marketing is expected to become even more impactful in strengthening brand awareness through personalized and data-driven strategies.

The Relationship Between Influencer and Brand Awareness

Influencers are consumers who share product information and influence others through social media platforms (Keller & Fay, 2016). An influencer does not necessarily have to be a celebrity; it can be an ordinary individual who creates content for a smaller audience with the aim of building their personal brand, engagement, and online presence. In the context of TikTok, influencer marketing plays a pivotal role in shaping user perceptions and driving engagement with brands. Collaborating with influencers is a smart way for brands to reach the influencers' existing followers. According to Lee, Lee, and Feick (2001), influencers are seen as trustworthy sources, and their suggestions can strongly affect what consumers choose to buy. This trust is especially important on TikTok, where influencers often have a big impact on their followers. By working with them, brands can connect with an already active and interested audience, helping to increase brand awareness.

As highlighted by (Kumar, Bezawada, Rishika, Janakiraman, and Kannan (2016), influencers can act as intermediaries, facilitating the transfer of brand messages to their followers. The study by (Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders (2017) reinforces the idea that influencer marketing can enhance brand awareness, as influencers act as opinion leaders who shape the perceptions of their followers.

The Relationship Between Psychological and The Brand Awareness

Psychological factors play a crucial role in shaping consumer perception, which directly influences the formation of brand awareness. A consumer's perception of a brand is closely tied to their attitudes, beliefs, emotional reactions, and cognitive evaluations (Aronson, Wilson, & Akert, 2010; Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016). On platforms such as TikTok, these psychological elements—particularly emotional and cognitive responses—are activated through user interaction with engaging content. Emotional engagement has been identified as a key factor driving user behavior on social media (Labrecque et al., 2013), and TikTok's visually dynamic, short-form videos often elicit strong emotions such as joy, curiosity, or surprise (Kim & Johnson, 2016). At the same time, cognitive responses involve how users interpret, process, and internalize brand-related messages. Research indicates that higher levels of cognitive engagement enhance message retention and understanding (Hwang & McMillan, 2012). Therefore, in the context of brand awareness, examining how users emotionally and cognitively engage with branded content on TikTok offers meaningful insights into the platform's effectiveness as a branding and communication tool.

Theories

The Social Media Marketing (SMM) model serves as a valuable framework that highlights the interconnectedness of various elements within the social media landscape. In this context, the independent variables (IV) include content marketing, influencers, and physiological factors, while the dependent variable (DV) is brand awareness. Generally, social media marketing is implemented through a variety of brand engagement activities, commonly referred to as Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMA) (Choi et al., 2016). According to Rimadias et al., (2021), SMM involves the use of social media platforms to generate memory, awareness, recognition, and actions for businesses, products, individuals, brands, or other entities. According to Cheung et al., (2020) further emphasized that SMM significantly influences how consumers perceive brands. Consequently, businesses increasingly utilize social media platforms to generate feedback, gather consumer preference data, conduct brand-building activities, and manage customer relationships. Moreover, consumers often turn to social media platforms to seek information about brands and products (Cheung et al., 2020).

Methodology

This research adopts a quantitative approach, which involves the systematic collection of numerical data and the application of statistical techniques to obtain objective and accurate measurements of the variables under study (Creswell, 2014, p. 55). Quantitative methods are particularly effective for identifying patterns, testing hypotheses, and making generalizations based on statistical evidence. The preliminary analysis, a total of 30 respondents were selected to participate this preliminary study. These individuals were drawn specifically from the demographic of young adults in Malaysia who are active users of the TikTok application, thereby ensuring the contextual relevance of the sample to the focus of the research. The selection criteria aimed to capture respondents who are not only familiar with the platform but also regularly engage with social media content, which is central to the study's emphasis on social media marketing and its influence on brand awareness.

The primary aim of this initial phase was to evaluate the reliability and validity of the questionnaire instrument developed for the study. By administering the questionnaire to a focused sample, the researchers were able to assess the clarity of the items, the internal consistency of the constructs, and the suitability of the instrument for further data collection. The findings from this preliminary test serve as a foundation for refining the instrument, thereby enhancing its effectiveness for large-scale implementation in the main study.

Results

Table 1: Cronbach's Alpha Preliminary Test Results

Section	Measurement	Total Items	Cronbach's Alpha
B	Brand Awareness (DV)	6	0.762
C	Content Marketing (IV)	6	0.898
D	Influencer (IV)	6	0.7354
E	Psychological Factor (IV)	7	0.812

This research explores the factors driving Malaysian consumer engagement on TikTok and how these factors influence brand awareness. The study specifically examines three core elements: AI-driven content marketing, influencer impact, and psychological responses. With TikTok's rapid growth in Malaysia, its algorithm-based personalization, viral trends, and

engaging short-form videos offer a powerful platform for brands to connect with their audience. The literature review underscores how AI enables personalized content delivery, how influencers act as credible intermediaries, and how emotional and cognitive engagement strengthens consumer-brand relationships.

A quantitative approach was employed, and a preliminary study involving 30 young Malaysian TikTok users was conducted to evaluate the reliability and clarity of the research instrument. The questionnaire assessed four main constructs: content marketing, influencers, psychological factors, and brand awareness. The preliminary analysis revealed strong internal consistency, particularly for content marketing (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.898) and psychological factors (α = 0.812), indicating that the items were well-structured and reliable. The acceptable scores for all constructs confirm that the instrument is suitable for use in a full-scale study and capable of capturing meaningful insights into consumer engagement on TikTok.

Overall, the preliminary test validated the soundness of the questionnaire and highlighted the relevance of the identified factors in influencing brand awareness through TikTok. The results suggest that combining AI personalization, trusted influencer collaborations, and emotionally resonant content can effectively engage consumers and enhance brand perception. These insights provide valuable guidance for marketers seeking to optimize their digital strategies and capitalize on TikTok's unique user dynamics in the Malaysian market.

Table 2 : Hypothesis Result

	Hypothesis	Decision
H1	Content marketing influences user engagement towards brand awareness on TikTok	Significant
H2	Influencers influence user engagement toward brand awareness on TikTok	Significant
H3	Psychological factors influence user engagement toward brand awareness on TikTok	Significant

The results presented in Table 2 above indicate that all three proposed hypotheses (H1, H2, and H3) are statistically significant. This suggests that content marketing, influencers, and psychological factors each have a meaningful and positive influence on user engagement toward brand awareness on TikTok. These findings reinforce the critical role of strategic content creation, trusted personalities, and consumer psychological engagement in enhancing brand awareness on social media platforms, particularly TikTok. The confirmation of all hypotheses provides strong empirical support for the study's conceptual model and offers actionable insights for marketers aiming to improve brand visibility through TikTok engagement strategies.

Conclusion
This research provides empirical insights into the determinants of consumer engagement and brand awareness within the context of TikTok usage in Malaysia. The study identifies AI-driven content marketing, influencer impact, and psychological factors as significant contributors to shaping consumer-brand interactions. The preliminary findings underscore the robustness and reliability of the measurement instruments employed, demonstrating strong internal consistency across all constructs. These results validate the conceptual framework and affirm the relevance of the selected variables in understanding consumer behavior on emerging

digital platforms. As TikTok continues to evolve as a dominant force in the social media landscape, this study offers both theoretical contributions to digital marketing literature and practical guidance for brands aiming to enhance consumer engagement and brand visibility. Future research is encouraged to extend this framework across broader demographics and longitudinal settings to further substantiate the model's applicability in dynamic online environments.

Acknowledgements

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