

TikTok Affiliate as a Reward for Economic Improvement in Digital Business Development

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ABSTRACT. *The development of digital technology has created various new opportunities in the economic sector, one of which is through the use of social media platforms such as TikTok. However, many people are still unaware of the economic potential of TikTok Affiliate and view the affiliate profession negatively. This study was conducted to analyze how TikTok Affiliate contributes to the development of digital businesses, the marketing strategies used by affiliates, and the public perception of this profession. This study aims to analyze the role of TikTok affiliates in improving the community's economy and understand the marketing strategies used by affiliates. The method used is qualitative with an observation approach and analysis of audience opinions on five selected TikTok Affiliate creators. The results of the study show that the marketing strategy in TikTok Affiliate focuses on storytelling, product unboxing, viral trends, and discount and giveaway promotions. In addition, it was found that audience perceptions of this affiliate program are divided into positive, negative, and neutral, with several main challenges, such as the absence of regulations in promotions and tight competition among affiliates. This study provides new insights into how social media-based digital marketing can be a potential source of income.*

Keywords: *TikTok Affiliate, Digital Marketing, Promotion Strategy, Digital Economy*

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology, supported by increasingly widespread internet access, has changed the lifestyle of some people. Nowadays, many people prefer to meet their daily needs, such as buying food, clothing, and various other needs, online because they are considered more practical and efficient. (Suryanatha, 2023) One of the latest trends emerging in the digital ecosystem is TikTok Affiliate, a commission-based marketing system that allows individuals to promote products through the TikTok platform and profit from every sale that occurs through their affiliate link (Azmi et al., 2025). This concept is increasingly popular among the public, especially because of its ease of access and promising income potential without requiring large capital. TikTok Affiliate is a program that allows users to promote products from the store on the TikTok platform through a special link. When a consumer clicks on the link and makes a purchase, the affiliate will receive a commission. However, this program requires its members to create promotional content in the form of product reviews. The challenge is that store owners and affiliates are often in different locations, so affiliates do not have direct access to assess the condition of the product. In addition, the amount of commission received is also not uniform because each product has a different commission value. (Khotimah, 2023).

Indonesia occupies the second position as the country with the largest number of active TikTok users in the world, reaching 99 million people. Meanwhile, the United States is in first place in the number of active users on the platform. The high interest in TikTok, especially in Indonesia, is certainly not without reason. This application offers a variety of interesting and easy-to-use features, so it is able to attract the attention of many users from various circles. One of the features

that has contributed to the popularity of TikTok in Indonesia is the TikTok Affiliate program, which not only provides entertainment but also opens up economic opportunities for its users. (Suryanatha, 2023). Although TikTok Affiliates have been proven to provide an economic impact for many individuals, there are still many people who lack understanding or even underestimate the opportunities offered by this system. Many think that the job as an affiliate is limited only to promoting products without special skills, even though there are various digital marketing strategies that need to be understood to achieve success. Therefore, this study aims to observe how TikTok Affiliates can be a means of economic improvement in the development of digital businesses, as well as understand the strategies used by affiliates to attract audiences and increase sales.

Along with the increasing use of TikTok as a major social media platform in Indonesia, many individuals are starting to turn to TikTok Affiliates as an additional source of income. Some TikTok Affiliate creators have even managed to achieve significant income through this program (Chabibi & Hikmah, 2023). However, there are several main problems underlying this research, including the lack of public awareness, so that many are still not aware of the great potential of TikTok Affiliates as an economic opportunity, as well as negative perceptions of the affiliate profession. A new phenomenon: there is still little research that goes into depth on the economic impact of TikTok Affiliates and the success strategies used by affiliates (Faizal & Laksono, 2021). Several previous studies have addressed the phenomenon of *digital marketing* and affiliates on various platforms. For example, research by Kwan stated that social media-based affiliate marketing has great potential to increase people's purchasing power and expand the market for small and medium enterprises (MSMEs). Research has found that TikTok Affiliate has become one of the most effective marketing strategies for fashion and electronics products, with a higher conversion rate than conventional marketing methods. However, research that specifically examines the role of TikTok Affiliates in digital business development is still very limited. Therefore, this research will focus on an in-depth analysis of TikTok affiliates' strategies in improving the digital economy, as well as the audience's perception of this system. This study aims to analyze how TikTok Affiliate can be a means of economic improvement in digital business development (Rohid, 2024). Identify the marketing strategies used by TikTok affiliates to attract audiences and increase sales. Observing people's perception of TikTok Affiliates as a source of income. Collect data from audience comments to understand the impact and effectiveness of affiliate strategies used by TikTok creators (Adisaputro & Sutamaji, 2021).

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative method with a content analysis approach and non-participatory observation. This approach was chosen because this study focuses on an in-depth exploration of TikTok affiliate marketing strategies and public perception of the TikTok Affiliate system. Qualitative research aims to understand the meaning contained in social phenomena by exploring the experiences of individuals or groups through descriptive data (Firmansyah et al., 2021). The content analysis approach was used to understand the communication patterns and marketing strategies implemented by TikTok affiliates. At the same time, nonparticipatory observation allowed researchers to observe affiliate practices without directly engaging in interaction with the study subjects.

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

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

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

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

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

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

Public perceptions of TikTok Affiliates vary, with some seeing it as a promising economic opportunity, while others perceive it as an unsustainable trend. Hernandez (Devega et al., 2024) found that younger generations are more open to affiliate marketing models compared to older generations, as they are more familiar with social media and *E-commerce*. On the other hand, research by Rahardjo (Hirawati et al., 2022) reveals the existence of a negative stigma against the affiliate profession, especially among people who do not understand how this system works. Some of the criticisms that often arise in audience comments against TikTok affiliates are the lack of transparency in product promotion, product quality that does not meet expectations, and too many affiliates selling similar products, so the competition becomes increasingly fierce. Audience comment analysis on TikTok can be an effective tool to understand how people rate TikTok Affiliates as a form of digital work. Some relevant research on this topic includes: Rena Puspitasari (2023), who researched the effectiveness of social media-based affiliate marketing and found that affiliate programs can increase people's purchasing power. (Almaiddah et al., 2025) showing that TikTok Affiliate has a higher conversion rate compared to conventional marketing, especially for the fashion and electronics product categories (B. A. Nugroho & Pattiata, 2024). The study analyzed the psychological factors that encourage consumers to purchase products through affiliate links and found that the credibility of affiliates greatly influences purchasing decisions. Based on the literature studies that have been described, several hypotheses were found in this study, including that TikTok Affiliates contribute to the improvement of the digital economy by opening up new income opportunities for individuals. An engagement-based marketing strategy has a significant impact on the success of affiliates in increasing sales. Public perception of TikTok Affiliates is influenced by the transparency of affiliates in promoting products. By understanding the various aspects of TikTok Affiliate, this research is expected to provide a broader academic contribution in the field of digital marketing, as well as open discussions about the role of social media in the transformation of the digital economy.

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

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

owners or content creators have uploaded various content they create, they still have an engagement rate that shows the level of enthusiasm TikTok users have for the content."

Kohen and Hendra Setyo often use *the unboxing* and product demonstration method. They showcase the product directly, show its advantages, and how to use it. This approach is effective in increasing credibility because the audience can see the product more realistically before buying it. This is supported by the findings of Moningka (2023). Unboxing videos and product demonstrations on social media allow buyers to see the product in action before deciding to buy it.



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

Sb1m (Om Berto) uses marketing techniques with fast, concise, and *targeted delivery*. The videos made are not word-of-mouth, so they are more in line with TikTok's algorithm, which prioritizes short content and is able to attract attention in seconds. Jackson (2025): Video formats have a significant role in capturing the audience's attention because they influence their experience, engagement, and understanding. By paying attention to aspects such as video quality, audio quality, and editing techniques, videos can be made more engaging while being able to convey the message effectively.

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

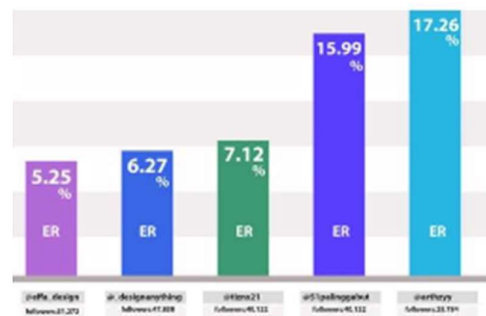


Figure 2. ER Chart (Source: <https://ubiwiz.com/tiktok-engagement-rate>)

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

Some creators use exclusive discount strategies that can only be obtained through their affiliate links. This encourages the audience to be more interested in buying products because of the additional incentives. Giveaways are also a marketing method to increase interaction with audiences and build loyalty. These results show that the marketing strategy in TikTok Affiliate relies heavily on interaction with the audience, the presentation of interesting content, and the use of TikTok features to increase engagement. To understand public perception of TikTok Affiliate, an analysis was carried out on audience comments on the videos of the creators observed.



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

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

Most of the comments from the audience indicate that they see TikTok Affiliate as an attractive economic opportunity. Many audiences are inspired to try becoming an affiliate after seeing the success of TikTok creators. TikTok Affiliate is considered an easy way to earn income without the need for large capital. There are many comments stating that affiliate marketing is more effective than conventional marketing methods. An example of a comment that shows a positive perception is "I want to register for TikTok Affiliate too, it seems easy, but the results are great". "I was hesitant at first, but after watching this, I realized that TikTok Affiliate can really be a major income."

While there are many positive comments, there are also audiences who are skeptical of the quality of the products being promoted and the transparency of the affiliates. Some of the main criticisms found in audience comments are the rise of creators who over-promote products, thus raising suspicion. The products that buyers receive sometimes do not live up to the expectations built through promotional videos. Moreover, some audiences think that TikTok Affiliates only benefit big creators, while small creators struggle to get sales. An example of a negative comment

is "I have often been deceived by the products recommended on TikTok; the original is not as good as the one in the video". "It is just a matter of time before we get a lot of followers, and we are going to have a lot of fun."

Some audiences are interested in TikTok Affiliates, but are still looking for more information about how the system works. They want to know how much commission they can earn, how to apply, and if there are any risks in the program. Some audiences want to make sure if this program is right for them before actually trying it out. An example of a comment is: "Btw, if you sell on TikTok Affiliates, you have to have capital first? What is the commission system? If people buy but cancel the order, do we still get a commission?" These results show that people's perceptions of TikTok Affiliates are diverse, depending on personal experience, the transparency of the creators, and the quality of the products being promoted.

From the results of observation and comment analysis, it can be seen that transparency in product promotion is a key factor in building audience trust. If affiliates go overboard in promoting products or do not provide honest reviews, audience trust can decline. Therefore, affiliates need to be more transparent and objective in providing information about the products they are promoting. TikTok Affiliate has opened up new economic opportunities for the public, especially for those who want to earn income from social media. This program allows anyone to be a part of a digital marketing system without the need to own their own product. However, the success of the program remains dependent on marketing strategies, engagement with the audience, and the trust built by the affiliates. One of the main challenges in TikTok Affiliate is the stiff competition. Small creators who are just starting often have a hard time getting sales because they don't have a large enough audience yet. Therefore, a more inclusive strategy, such as a mentorship program or collaborations with other creators, can be a solution to help new affiliates thrive on these platforms.

From the results of this research, it can be concluded that TikTok Affiliates have become an important part of the digital economy, especially in the realm of social media marketing. TikTok Affiliate creators use a variety of marketing strategies to attract audiences, including *storytelling*, unboxing, taking advantage of trends, and providing exclusive discounts. There are challenges related to transparency and audience trust, where some comments show dissatisfaction with the quality of the products being promoted. Therefore, to increase the effectiveness of TikTok Affiliate as a trusted marketing platform, affiliates must be more transparent in providing product reviews by presenting advantages and disadvantages objectively. TikTok could develop a stricter regulatory system to ensure that affiliates do not overclaim their promotions. Small creators need to be given more support so that they can compete in the TikTok Affiliate ecosystem, for example, through training programs or promotions from TikTok. This research provides in-depth insights into how TikTok Affiliates work and how people view the system. For further research, an analysis can be carried out on the experiences of novice affiliates and the challenges they face in starting their career as affiliates on TikTok.

Discussion

The emergence of TikTok as a leading social media platform has marked the beginning of a new era in digital marketing that offers a variety of strategic opportunities for businesses to expand market reach, interact with target audiences, and drive increased sales through innovative approaches such as affiliate marketing. Affiliate marketing on TikTok involves collaboration between companies and content creators who serve as affiliates, who promote products or services to their followers in exchange for a commission from every transaction that occurs through the referral link they share. The synergistic relationships established in this context take advantage of

TikTok's vast user base as well as the influence of content creators to increase brand visibility and drive conversion rates, which in turn contributes to the strengthening of the economic growth of the digital business sector. In addition, the shift of businesses towards digital marketing on platforms such as TikTok and WeChat also brings benefits in the form of reduced operational costs, expanded consumer reach, and increased communication effectiveness, thus opening up opportunities for small and medium-sized businesses to compete more competitively in the ever-growing digital market.

TikTok's success as a marketing platform can be explained by a number of key factors, including its advanced algorithms, the capacity to develop interest-based e-commerce, a well-integrated interactive advertising system, and an incentive mechanism for live broadcasting, all of which play a role in increasing the volume of user traffic. TikTok's algorithm works by curating content based on the user's individual preferences, thus ensuring audiences are presented with products and services that match their interests. This increases the likelihood of engagement and purchase conversions. Furthermore, the advertising system that TikTok offers provides a variety of options for companies to promote their products, from ads that appear in user feeds to branded hashtag challenges, which allow for the customization of marketing campaigns according to the target audience and goals they want to achieve. In addition, affiliate marketing further strengthens the reach and effectiveness of promotions on these platforms by leveraging the level of trust and credibility that has been built between affiliates and their followers.

The advantages of using TikTok as a means of promotion can be seen from various aspects, especially in terms of content creation and distribution. TikTok serves as an effective platform in supporting sales, given its ability to provide direct links to e-commerce sites on user profiles. Its very popular presence also helps introduce e-commerce sites to a wider audience. TikTok's engaging content, characterized by short videos, creative challenges, and authentic user-generated content, resonates strongly with younger demographics, making it an ideal platform for businesses targeting this segment. TikTok provides a wide range of tools and features for editing and enhancing videos, including filters, special effects, and music. These features allow users to express themselves uniquely as well as showcase their talents and interests. Additionally, the emphasis on authenticity and user-generated content on the platform encourages the creation of a sense of community and trust, which makes it easier for affiliates to connect with their audience as well as promote products in a more relevant and authentic way.

The integration of affiliate marketing within the TikTok ecosystem has opened up new economic opportunities for content creators, allowing them to monetize their influence and creativity. This convergence not only empowers individual creators but also creates a dynamic and competitive marketplace, where affiliates compete to produce content that is engaging and able to resonate with their audiences, while driving increased sales for their partners' businesses. Additionally, TikTok's algorithm personalizes ads, taking into account the user's habits and interests, which in turn increases the effectiveness of affiliate marketing campaigns. TikTok's algorithm works by curating content based on user preferences, where every user interaction—such as watching a video, liking, commenting, or following an account—will be analyzed to identify behavior patterns and predict the type of content that might be of interest to that user. This process ensures that the content presented to users is relevant, thereby increasing the chances of engagement and conversion. The impact of TikTok affiliate marketing is not only limited to individual businesses and content creators, but it also contributes to the growth and development of the digital economy in general. The platform's broad user base and ability to connect businesses with a niche audience have created new opportunities for entrepreneurship and innovation, thereby driving economic activity and job creation in the digital space. Additionally, TikTok's influence on consumer behavior and its ability to shape trends have made it an increasingly important platform for businesses to understand and interact with customers. TikTok has become a source of entertainment and a means of communication that allows users to express themselves creatively.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study show that TikTok Affiliates have great potential as a means to improve the economy through digital business development, especially for individuals who want to utilize social media as a source of income. Effective marketing strategies on TikTok Affiliate include storytelling, unboxing, leveraging viral trends, as well as promotional discounts and giveaways. However, some key challenges, such as unclear promotion regulations and fierce competition, remain significant obstacles for affiliates. This research makes several important contributions. From the perspective of digital marketing theory, the results of this study enrich the understanding of effective affiliate marketing strategies on social media platforms, specifically TikTok. From a practical perspective, for affiliates, this study underscores the importance of developing a more transparent and trust-based marketing strategy to build long-term relationships with audiences. For TikTok as a platform, this study shows the need for stricter regulation in affiliate programs to ensure consumers obtain more honest and reliable information.

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

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