

Attention economy and short vlogging in the TikTok platform: An analytical study of self-promotion and engagement selling techniques in ≤ 60 second content.

اقتصاد الانتباه والتدوين المرئي القصير في منصة التيك توك:
دراسة تحليلية لتقنيات الترويج الذاتي وبيع التفاعل في محتوى
 ≥ 60 ثانية.

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Abstract:

This study aims to analyse the dynamics of attention economy and self-promotion in ≤ 60 second video content on TikTok, by exploring the narrative, visual, and momentary attraction techniques adopted by content creators to build digital presence and stimulate interaction.

The scientific value of this study lies in contributing to understanding the logic of algorithms and their impact on the production of meaning and self-representation in the digital environment, while its applied importance is evident in providing analytical tools that help researchers and practitioners decipher the mechanisms of digital diffusion and visual impact-making in new media.

Keywords: Attention economy; Short vlogging; Self-promotion; Media algorithms; TikTok.

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ملخص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تفكيك البنية الاتصالية لمحتوى الفيديوهاات القصيرة (≥ 60 ثانية) على منصة تيك توك، من خلال تحليل كيفية توظيف العناصر السردية والبصرية وتقنيات الترويج الذاتي لجذب انتباه الجمهور ضمن منطق اقتصاد الانتباه وبيئة الخوارزميات التفاعلية، وقد ركزت الباحثة على ثلاثة نماذج بارزة من المحتوى، بالاعتماد على أداة تحليل محتوى لفهم استراتيجيات بناء الحضور الرقمي والتفاعل اللحظي، وتكمن القيمة العلمية للدراسة في مساهمتها في توسيع مجال البحث في الإعلام الرقمي، وتحديدًا فيما يتعلق بكيفية تشكّل المعنى والتأثير داخل وسائط مرئية مختزلة تفرضها تقنيات المنصة وخصائصها الخوارزمية، كما تضيء الدراسة على الأبعاد الرمزية والتواصلية للمحتوى الفردي في سياق اجتماعي متحوّل، أما الأهمية التطبيقية، فتتمثل في تزويد صناع المحتوى، والمؤسسات الإعلامية، والباحثين، بأدوات تحليلية تساعد على فهم منطق الانتشار في تيك توك، وتحسين فعالية الخطاب المرئي، والتفاعل مع الجمهور في بيئة رقمية عالية التشبع والتنافس.

كلمات مفتاحية: اقتصاد الانتباه، التدوين المرئي القصير، الترويج الذاتي، الخوارزميات الاعلامية، التيك توك.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of the profound shifts in the contemporary media system, the digital landscape is witnessing the accelerated dominance of social platforms over various modes of communication and interaction, causing a noticeable shift in the patterns of media production and consumption, among these platforms, TikTok stands out as one of the most pervasive and

influential digital media in shaping visual tastes, building new representations of self and other, and catalysing a digital economy centred on short attention spans and instant gratification.

TikTok has redefined the standards of content creation with its short (≤ 60 seconds) video blogging model, which not only reduces messages and condenses meanings, but produces a new form of ‘digital showmanship’, where audio-visual effects intersect with physical performance techniques, self-promotion, and ‘selling interaction’ according to the logic of Recommendation Algorithms. Content is no longer an end in itself, but a means of visibility, visibility, and instant impact in a saturated competitive environment.

The Attention Economy is one of the most central concepts for understanding what is happening within these platforms. Attention is no longer a fleeting cognitive behaviour, but a symbolic currency by which the value of content is measured and the extent to which it goes viral or is marginalised. This is coupled with self-promotion tactics, as content creators seek to present themselves as visual brands, crafted through image, sound, dress, movement, speech, and even ‘momentary sensationalism,’ The Attention Economy" is one of the most central concepts for understanding what is happening within these platforms.

In this sense, this study attempts to analyse three examples of short videos on TikTok to identify the narrative and visual mechanisms used to capture the audience's attention, to observe how digital identity and self-promotion are constructed within

minute-long content, and to discuss how these practices are translated into interactions (comments, likes, reposts), reflecting the dynamics of the platform's algorithmic economy, that is, how algorithms become a critical actor in marketing meaning and directing attention.

2. Study Problem:

Digital media platforms, especially TikTok, have witnessed profound structural shifts in the logic of production and reception, where attention has become the new currency in the digital market, and short video content has become a strategic tool for imposing a symbolic presence, achieving self-promotion and widespread dissemination.

In this context, the communication relationship between content creator and audience is being reshaped by the dominance of recommendation algorithms, which re-engineer impression paths and prioritise content that achieves the highest engagement rates in the shortest amount of time.

The phenomenon of the 'attention economy', as a facet of the new media economy, forces a new reading of concepts such as influence, credibility, and digital identity, as video content is no longer just a means of entertainment, but a tool for building a digital self, promoting ideas, and creating what is known as 'algorithmic fame.' In light of this, short video blogging presents itself as a form of effective communicative discourse that relies on condensing messages, packing symbols, and using visual and narrative techniques capable of capturing the audience's attention in a matter of seconds.

An in-depth study of the nature of this shift is needed to understand how digital interaction is commoditised, and how self-promotion techniques are employed in 60-second content to guide public perception and buy symbolic attention in a fast-paced, competitive, and reductionist media environment.

With this background in mind, we pose the following key question: **How does TikTok's short vlogging contribute to engineering the attention economy? and what are the key self-promotion techniques that content creators use to sell engagement with content (≤60 seconds)?**

The following sub-questions arise from it:

- What are the main narrative and visual elements that content creators use in short videos (≤60 seconds) to capture the audience's attention on TikTok?
- How are self-promotion techniques (digital identity, personal performance, glamour, challenge...) employed within these short videos to build digital presence and engagement?
- What kind of audience interaction (comments, shares, reuses/challenges) do these videos generate, and how does it reflect the dynamics of the platform's algorithmic economy?
- To what extent do these videos rely on Surprise/Contradiction as a way of engaging the viewer and catalysing real-time interaction?
- How do algorithms contribute to the virality of this type of short-form content, and how do they relate to the determinants of form and content within these videos?

3. Study Importance:

TikTok has become a central model for understanding the dynamics of the attention economy in the age of algorithms, and for analysing the patterns of short video blogging as a tool for symbolic influence and dissemination, The scientific value of this study lies in its attempt to deconstruct the narrative and visual mechanisms used to produce 60-second content, with the aim of self-promotion and ‘selling engagement’ within a market logic that goes beyond traditional reception to engineer interest and incentivise immediate engagement .

The relevance of the study stems from its association with a platform that is experiencing a steady growth in usage among young people, making it a fertile area to analyse the relationship between the digital self, shorthand narrative, and algorithms guiding interaction, While the applied importance of this study is evident in its ability to provide effective analytical tools that help researchers and practitioners in the field of digital media to understand the new communication mechanisms governing the production and promotion of content in the TikTok environment, by analysing the structure of short videos, self-promotion techniques and attention-grabbing strategies.

4. Study objectives:

- Analyse the narrative and visual characteristics of short videos (≤ 60 seconds) on the TikTok platform.
- Monitor the self-promotion techniques used by content creators to build a digital presence.
- Explain the nature of public interaction and its indicators (liking, sharing, commenting...) within the logic of the attention economy.

- Uncover the role of surprise and irony in shaping the appeal of short-form content and stimulating quick interaction.
- Understand the impact of algorithms in guiding distribution and determining the characteristics of prioritised and visible content.

5. Study concepts :

- ✍ **Attention Economy:** It refers to the media and economic system in which people's attention becomes a scarce and investable commodity, with digital content competing to attract it, as it is seen as a symbolic asset that controls the market value of the content. (OpCit, 2001, p. 15)
- ✍ **Procedurally:** In this study, attention economy is defined as: The narrative and visual strategies used by TikTok content creators to capture the user's attention within (≤60 seconds), as measured by visible interaction (likes, shares, comments).
- ✍ **Short Vlogging:** A form of digital expression based on the production of short, one-minute visual content with focused and impactful messages, usually on algorithmic platforms such as TikTok and YouTube. (Abidin, 2021, p. 80)
- ✍ **Procedurally:** In this study: Videos produced by individuals or personal/commercial brands on the TikTok platform that do not exceed (≤60 seconds) and are built on a fast-paced style, intense narrative, and direct visual impact.
- ✍ **Self-Promotion:** A communication behaviour that aims to strategically highlight the self or personal brand by directing attention to the skills, appearance, personality, or message that is intended to be embedded in public perception. (Marwick, 2013, pp. 45-60)

- ✍ **Procedurally:** It is the set of practices used by the content creator (body language, presence, style, voice, effects...) to build a digital identity and establish a prominent personal presence in the short video within TikTok.
- ✍ **Media Algorithms :** A set of code commands designed to organise and direct content within digital platforms based on interaction criteria, personal preferences, time, and previous user behaviour, acting as a 'hidden editor' of content. (Gillespie, 2018, p. 167)
- ✍ **Procedurally:** In this research, it means, The systems that control the appearance and spread of short videos on TikTok, based on data analysis and user preferences, which directly influence the formation of the attention economy.
- ✍ **TikTok:** A digital social network that specialises in sharing short videos, launched globally in 2018, it uses intelligent algorithms to personalise content for each user, making it an interactive and fast-changing environment. (Kaye, 2021, p. 229)
- ✍ **Procedurally:** In this study: A digital space in which short-form visual content (≤ 60 seconds) is produced and published with the aim of achieving self-promotion, engagement, and virality in a competitive environment.

6. Methods and Materials:

6.1The Study Approach:

The most appropriate methodology is the descriptive-analytical approach, due to its methodological scientific potential in deconstructing the structure of digital content and understanding its communicative dynamics in the context of the platform environment, This approach is based on describing the

studied phenomenon as it is in the digital reality, by analysing the content of the selected sample of short videos on the TikTok platform, then interpreting the mechanisms of self-promotion, visual and verbal attraction strategies, and employing the elements of reductionist influence (language, movement, sound, symbols, rhythm...) that contribute to creating interaction and selling attention within the logic and algorithms of the platform.

This approach is considered scientifically appropriate as it takes into account the specificity of the modern digital phenomenon and responds to the nature of the research questions that seek to reveal the communicative and advertising dimensions of short-form content, in addition to being a method that allows the integration of qualitative (semantic/symbolic analysis) and quantitative dimensions (number of likes, comments, shares) in an integrated manner that allows understanding the phenomenon at its formal, content and discursive levels.

6.2 Search community:

The research population in this study consists of all short videos that do not exceed 60 seconds published on TikTok during the recent period, which are characterised by the characteristics of attention economy in terms of temporal brevity, visual density, and high self-promotion, while achieving high interaction rates (views, likes, shares, and comments)

This community was identified as representing the studied digital phenomenon in its real-life context, embodying the new communicative manifestations of digital self-making and selling

interaction within the logic of algorithms, and providing an ideal environment to analyse the audiovisual attraction mechanisms, communicative performance strategies, and attention-grabbing techniques that clearly reflect the transformations of digital media in the platform era, In addition, this community is characterised by continuous diversity and renewal, which allows the researcher to monitor multiple types of short video blogging related to various fields (entertainment, education, promotion, social issues...), which gives the study a comprehensive analytical character that takes into account the overlapping media and interactive functions within the TikTok platform.

6.3 The research sample:

The research sample for this study consisted of three short videos selected from the TikTok platform:

-Video titled: ‘Gavin the Defiant Grandfather’.



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-A video titled: ‘A Beauty Session Above the Clouds’.



-A video titled: ‘The Union of Pain and Semi-Sadness’



These videos were selected based on a non-probability method based on Purposive Sampling, as they were selected based on strict scientific and methodological criteria, including:

They achieve a high level of digital engagement (number of views, likes, comments, and shares); they clearly embody strategies of self-promotion, temporal reduction, and sensory and visual stimuli; they are diverse in terms of the expressive and narrative domain (between entertainment, beauty, and emotional symbolic expression); they are consistent with the issue and sub-questions related to attention economy and attraction-making tactics in short videos.

This type of sample is suitable for the nature of interpretive analytical research that does not aim at quantitative generalisation, but aims to extract the communicative and structural connotations inherent in prominent and influential examples in the interactive digital environment. The sample's focus on content that does not exceed 60 seconds is in line with the study's objective of understanding the techniques of attracting attention and selling interaction in reduced content within the logic of TikTok's algorithms.

6.4 Data collection tool:

In collecting the data for this study, the researcher relied on the content analysis tool, the content analysis form, which was designed to monitor and analyse the communicative, semantic and aesthetic dimensions of the short videos selected from the TikTok platform. This tool was developed based on the nature of the topic, which intersects the attention economy, self-promotion, and vlogging, as well as the fact that this tool allows deconstructing the symbolic and semiotic structure of digital content in a systematic manner,.

The choice of this tool is justified by the fact that it is the most suitable for the analytical objectives of the study.

6.4.1 First: Units of Analysis:

The unit of analysis is the basic unit that is analysed in the content of digital content, and since the study focuses on short visual content in TikTok, the most appropriate units of analysis are:

- ✎ Macro Unit Analyse each video as an integrated semantic and visual unit that includes: Context, style, structure, interaction.

- ✎ Scene/Cut Unit (Scene/Cut Unit) is used to deconstruct the visual structure (such as the beginning of the video - the climactic moment - the end of the effect).
- ✎ Message Unit expresses the semantic contents or explicit and implicit messages in the discourse.
- ✎ Digital Reaction Unit relates to interaction methods such as likes, comments, shares, and digital audience behaviour.

6.4.2 Second: Categories of Analysis:

Categories of Analysis are extracted from the themes of the questionnaire and are used to categorise the recurring elements that the analysis focuses on:

- ✎ Categories of look and feel Visual/auditory aspect: Quality of lighting and photography, presence of visual effects, visual rhythm - fast - medium - slow, sound effects/music.
- ✎ Self-promotion and self-image Categories: Presence of voice, face, style, presentation style, showmanship, spontaneity, acting, symbols used to enhance self-image, dress, body language, background, accessories.
- ✎ Message categories and contents: Type of message, motivational, satirical, social, challenging, beauty, drama, presence of implicit messages or revelations Rhetorical language, motivational, humorous, symbolic, non-verbal
- ✎ Categories of attention-getting and engagement techniques: The beginning of the video, catchy, surprising, ordinary, having an element of surprise or irony, employing a trend, challenging the duration of the climax.
- ✎ Digital Engagement Categories: Volume of interaction in the first minute Nature of interaction, support, criticism, debate,

argument, banter, discussion, content owner's interaction with comments.

6.5 Reliability and validity of the questionnaire:

In order to ensure the reliability of the findings in this study, the reliability of the content analysis form was verified using the statistical analysis method of internal consistency via Cronbach's Alpha, as follows:

Statistical verification via Cronbach's alpha: The form's indicators were converted into quantitative measures with standardised coding (1 to 3) across an extended pilot sample of 10 videos of similar structure and function, and Cronbach's alpha was calculated for each axis:

Table 1: Statistical verification of the stability of the analysis form via Cronbach's alpha

Variable	α Cronbach's value
Visual and audio attraction	0.82
Self-promotion and self-image	0.87
Implicit and suggestive messages	0.79
Digital interaction and its indicators	0.84
Symbolic and semantic structure	0.81

Source: prepared by the researcher based on SPSS outputs

The average Cronbach's alpha coefficient = 0.826 and this value falls within the scientifically acceptable range (>0.70), which indicates high internal consistency and excellent stability of the analysis questionnaire, which enhances the strength of the inferential results and ensures the validity of the tool in analysing digital content on TikTok.

7. The theoretical context of the study:

7.1 The first axis: The attention economy in the digital environment:

the concept of attention economy starts from the premise that human attention is a scarce resource in light of the flood of digital information (Opic, 2001, p. 21). Attention is not readily given, but rather competed for, and managed as a marketable asset, and even "bought and sold" as in the case of popular content on social platforms such as TikTok, in 1997, Goldhaber coined the concept of attention economy in the context of online media, arguing that value is not measured by the content itself, but by the amount of attention it generates (Goldhaber, 1997). In 2001, Beck and Davenport expanded on the topic, arguing that media organisations fight a battle for attention, where design, headline, speed and visual content become marketing tools to woo the audience. (Franck, 1999, pp. 53-55)

7.2 The second axis: Self-promotion and digital identity building

:self-promotion refers to the process of building a media image of the self that aims to influence the overall impression of the recipient, but in the digital context, the user becomes a "self-producer", developing personalised media strategies to enhance their presence and legitimacy on the platform. (Senft, 2008, p. 89) In 1959, Erving Goffman used the idea of 'self-representation' as a theatrical performance, where the individual assumes roles in front of an audience (Goffman, 1959, p. 208), and researcher Zizi Papacharissi expanded on digital identity as

an emancipatory practice that is constructed through texts, images, performances, and interactions. (Papacharissi, 2010, p. 104)

7.3 Third axis: The dynamics of digital interaction and algorithms:

today, digital interaction is one of the most prominent indicators of symbolic power in the digital environment, where the audience is no longer a mere recipient but an active element in the production of meaning, through liking, commenting, sharing, and repeating, but this interaction is not only controlled by the user, but is mediated by algorithms that select and promote the most viral content (Kitchin, 2017, p. 14), While Jose van Dijck analyses digital platforms as institutional algorithmic architectures that integrate data, interaction, and recommendation (van Dijck, 2013, p. 25), Taina Bucher argues that ‘an algorithm is not a neutral technology, but a behavioural steering device.’ This corresponds to the model of ‘guided interaction’ where interaction is guided by the logic of the platform. (Bucher, 2018, p. 20)

8. Results and discussion:

- **The most prominent narrative and visual elements that content creators use in short videos (≤60 seconds) to capture the audience's attention on TikTok:** content creators on TikTok rely on reductive narratives based on what can be called a ‘momentary scenario’, a narrative that is not constructed according to the logic of classical time but rather the logic of immediate shock or fascination, and prominent narrative elements include: Quick entry into the event, reduction of characters, and sudden irony in the

conclusion. Visually, tools such as quick cutting of scenes, repetitive movement, saturated colour, and special effects (filters, transitions) are used to capture the viewer's attention within the framework of the economy of attention based on time scarcity.

- **How to employ self-promotion techniques (digital identity, personal performance, glamour, challenge...) within short videos to build digital presence and engagement:** in short videos, self-promotion techniques are employed in a deliberate way to build a symbolic image of the content creator, which is reproduced and perpetuated with each appearance. Personal performance through body, voice, and emotion becomes a visual brand that contributes to the establishment of a unique digital identity as challenges, the use of trending music, or spatial dazzle (such as filming in unfamiliar places) are used as tools to reproduce the self within the logic of competitiveness and excellence, which allows for virality and digital engagement that is linked to appearance, not necessarily content.
- **The type of audience interaction (comments, shares, reuses/challenges) that short videos generate, and how the dynamics of the platform's algorithmic economy are reflected:** the results indicate that public interaction with these videos is characterised by superficial diversity, with a large percentage of it concentrated in 'liking' and "watching", while the percentage of 'reuse' or analytical commentary is low, and this type of interaction reflects the logic of the algorithmic economy which rewards content based on its ability to seamlessly integrate into the viewing

flow, rather than on the depth or value of the interaction. Challenges and Remixes contribute to repeatability and continuity, two critical factors in TikTok's recommendation algorithm.

- **The extent to which short videos rely on Surprise/Contradiction to engage the viewer and stimulate instantaneous interaction:** the paradox of the unexpected is a central element of successful short videos. Some scenarios are built entirely on the element of surprise or a dramatic twist at the end, whether it is a behavioural, directorial (e.g. make-up on the plane), or symbolic (e.g. grandfather outshining the youth), this technique motivates the viewer to continue the video until the end, a key factor in raising the video's algorithmic rating, and evokes feelings of surprise, laughter, or shock, which enhances the desire to share and comment.
- **How algorithms contribute to the virality of this type of short-form content, and how they relate to the determinants of form and content within these videos:** TikTok's algorithms are an invisible but central driver of the viewing path, promoting videos that meet certain formal indicators: The relationship between form and content is determined by the logic of compliance with the algorithm, so that the content creator adapts his/her discourse to achieve visibility, even at the expense of depth or aesthetics, thus turning the algorithm into an implicit regulator of editorial choice, framing creativity within the boundaries of measured engagement.

8. Conclusion:

This study revealed the complex nature of the reductive visual discourse on TikTok, where the aesthetic form of content intersects with the strategic dimension of self-promotion in an algorithmically managed digital environment.

In conclusion, this study paves the way for more in-depth research, whether at the level of studying the discursive patterns of TikTok, or analysing the logic of algorithmic influence in shaping public opinion and impression, within what has become known as the system of ‘short and effective representations’ in digital media.

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