

TikTok as a Driver of Digital Marketing Performance: Examining the Role of Content and Viral Marketing in Shaping Purchase Intention

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Abstract

The rapid growth of social media platforms, particularly TikTok, has significantly transformed contemporary digital marketing practices. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of content marketing and viral marketing in influencing consumers' purchase intention remains an important issue for further investigation. This study aims to analyze the influence of content marketing and viral marketing on purchase intention among TikTok users. A quantitative research approach was employed using a survey method involving 150 respondents in Medan Tuntungan selected through purposive sampling. The collected data were analyzed using multiple linear regression, supported by validity, reliability, and classical assumption tests to ensure data quality and model accuracy. The findings reveal that content marketing and viral marketing have a positive and significant effect on purchase intention, both partially and simultaneously. Among the two variables, content marketing demonstrates a stronger influence, indicating that informative, creative, and engaging content plays a crucial role in attracting consumer interest. Meanwhile, viral marketing contributes to increasing product exposure, consumer trust, and information dissemination efficiency. Furthermore, the coefficient of determination indicates that both variables explain a substantial proportion of the variance in purchase intention, although other external factors may also contribute. These findings provide practical implications for businesses, especially small and medium enterprises (SMEs), in developing effective TikTok-based digital marketing strategies through the integration of high-quality content and viral promotional approaches to enhance consumer purchase intention.

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Introduction

The acceleration of information and communication technology has redefined the way marketing activities are conceptualized and implemented (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Tiago & Veríssimo, 2014). In

Indonesia, TikTok has become one of the most influential digital platforms, particularly among younger consumers, due to its short-video format, algorithm-based content distribution, and high user engagement. The widespread use of TikTok for promotional and commercial activities has encouraged businesses, especially small and medium enterprises (SMEs), to utilize digital marketing strategies that emphasize creativity, interaction, and rapid information dissemination. This phenomenon is increasingly evident in urban communities such as Medan Tuntungan, where TikTok is frequently used not only as a source of entertainment but also as a platform for product discovery and purchasing consideration. In the digital era, the dominance of social media platforms has shifted marketing paradigms from traditional, firm-controlled communication toward interactive ecosystems where consumers play an active role in shaping and disseminating information (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Tuten & Solomon, 2017).

Within this evolving landscape, TikTok has emerged as a distinctive platform that combines entertainment, creativity, and algorithmic distribution into a unified digital environment (Boeker & Urman, 2022). Unlike earlier social media platforms that rely heavily on follower networks, TikTok's content recommendation system prioritizes relevance and engagement, enabling rapid diffusion of information regardless of account size (Le Compte & Klug, 2021).

The increasing integration of TikTok into business practices has encouraged the adoption of marketing approaches that emphasize both content value and dissemination speed (Meliawati et al., 2023). Content marketing functions as a strategic tool for shaping brand perception and fostering emotional attachment (Pulizzi, 2012; Alfath & Faruqi, 2023). High-quality content enhances cognitive and affective responses, thereby strengthening trust and perceived value (Putri & Dermawan, 2024).

Conversely, viral marketing operates through network effects, where the spread of information is driven by user participation and social sharing behavior (Rodrigues & Fonseca, 2016). The success of viral marketing is often contingent upon emotional triggers and novelty (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011). TikTok's algorithmic infrastructure facilitates rapid content exposure, allowing messages to reach broad audiences within a short period (Agrawal, 2023).

Purchase intention represents a critical construct in consumer behavior studies, reflecting the likelihood that individuals will translate evaluations into purchasing actions (Ajzen, 1991; Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019). In digital contexts, exposure to engaging content significantly influences consumer perceptions and attitudes toward products (Utami & Lestari, 2025).

Despite the theoretical relevance of content marketing and viral marketing, empirical findings regarding their impact on purchase intention remain inconsistent. Several studies report significant positive effects of content marketing on purchase intention (Aditya & Sirojudin, 2024; Setianingsih & Dema, 2025), whereas others indicate weaker relationships depending on platform characteristics and consumer demographics (Meliawati et al., 2023). Similarly, viral marketing has demonstrated varying levels of effectiveness across contexts (Indrawan & Pradana, 2023; Fitriani et al., 2022). In addition, most previous studies tend to examine content marketing and viral marketing separately or focus on general social media platforms without specifically analyzing TikTok's algorithm-driven ecosystem and its influence on consumer purchase intention at the local level.

In response to these gaps, this study seeks to investigate the extent to which content marketing and viral marketing influence purchase intention among TikTok users. This study offers novelty by simultaneously examining the influence of content marketing and viral marketing within the specific context of TikTok users in Medan Tuntungan, thereby providing more contextualized empirical evidence regarding digital marketing effectiveness in platform-based social commerce environments. By focusing on a specific user group in Medan Tuntungan, this research aims to provide contextualized empirical evidence that contributes to a more nuanced understanding of digital marketing effectiveness. The study is expected to offer both theoretical contributions by clarifying inconsistent findings in prior research and practical implications for businesses in

designing integrated marketing strategies that leverage content quality and virality to influence consumer decisions.

Methods

This study employs a quantitative research design with a descriptive orientation to explain the social context related to the research problem. The objective is to assess the relationship between content marketing, viral marketing, and purchase intention.

The target population consists of TikTok users in Medan Tuntungan aged 17 years and above. A total of 150 respondents were selected using purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique where participants are chosen based on specific criteria.

Data were collected in both numerical and descriptive forms. Primary data were obtained directly from respondents, while secondary data were gathered from relevant academic sources.

Instrument testing included validity and reliability analysis. Items were considered valid if correlation values exceeded 0.4 with significance below 0.05. Reliability was confirmed using Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.6.

Classical assumption tests were conducted, including normality (Kolmogorov-Smirnov), multicollinearity (tolerance and VIF), and heteroscedasticity (Glejser test).

To examine the relationships among variables, multiple linear regression analysis was applied using the following model:

$$Y = a + b_1X_1 + b_2X_2 + e \quad (1)$$

Where:

- Y = Purchase Intention
- X_1 = Content Marketing
- X_2 = Viral Marketing

The coefficient of determination (Adjusted R^2) was used to measure explanatory power, while t-tests were applied to evaluate the significance of each independent variable.

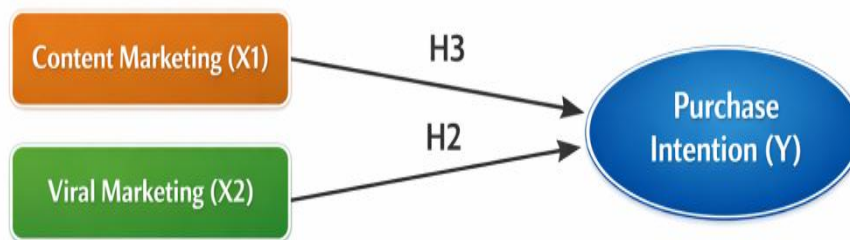


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Based on these studies, this research proposes the following first hypothesis:

H1: Content marketing has a positive effect on purchase intention.

H2: Viral marketing has a positive effect on purchase intention.

H3: Content marketing and viral marketing simultaneously affect purchase intention.

Results and Discussion

Respondent Characteristics

The respondents in this study were categorized according to predefined criteria based on their gender, age, and occupation. The following data on the respondents' characteristics was collected and analyzed by the researcher:

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics Based on Gender and Age

Characteristic	Category	Total	Percentage
Gender	Male	65	43%
	Female	85	57%
Age	17–25 years	90	60%
	26–35 years	60	40%

Validity Test

Table 2. Validity Test

Variables	Item	r Count	r Table	Description
Content Marketing	X1.1	0,512	0,159	Valid
	X1.2	0,634	0,159	Valid
	X1.3	0,587	0,159	Valid
Viral Marketing	X2.1	0,601	0,159	Valid
	X2.2	0,655	0,159	Valid
Purchase Intention	Y1	0,689	0,159	Valid
	Y2	0,701	0,159	Valid

Based on the processed results shown in Table 2 for the three variables content marketing (X1), viral marketing (X2), and purchase intention (Y) along with the respective questions from each indicator, this study utilized a sample size of 150. The results indicate that each variable is valid, with a calculated correlation coefficient (r) greater than the critical value (r) in the table (0.159). Therefore, in this study, the collected data is deemed valid.

Reliability Test

Tabel 3. Reliability Test

Variable	Cronbach Alpha	Standar	Description
Content Marketing (X1)	0,85	0,70	Reliable
Viral Marketing (X2)	0,83	0,70	Reliable
Purchase Intention (Y)	0,87	0,70	Reliable

Table 3 presents the processed data results, which indicate that the content marketing variable (X1), the viral marketing variable (X2), and the purchase intention variable (Y) are reliable, as their Cronbach's alpha values are greater than 0.7; thus, the questionnaire items for these three variables can be considered reliable. Therefore, based on the results of the validity and reliability tests, the collected data can undergo further analysis.

Multiple Linear Regression Test

Table 4. Multiple Linear Regression Test

Variable	B	Std. Error
Constanta	2,135	0,512
Content Marketing (X1)	0,456	0,089
Viral Marketing (X2)	0,389	0,102

$$Y = 2.135 + (0.456)X1 + (0.389)X2 \quad (2)$$

Based on the results of the analysis, the constant value of 2.135 indicates that if the variables content marketing (X1) and viral marketing (X2) are 0 or remain unchanged, the value of the purchase intention variable (Y) is 2.135. The results of the regression coefficient test for each independent variable show that content marketing (X1) has a positive value of 0.456, indicating that an increase in content marketing will increase the value of purchase intention by 0.456. Similarly, the coefficient for viral marketing (X2) is 0.389; an increase in viral marketing will also increase the value

of purchase intention (Y) by 0.389. These findings indicate that content marketing provides a relatively stronger contribution to purchase intention compared to viral marketing. This suggests that consumers on TikTok tend to respond more positively to informative, relevant, and engaging content than merely to the rapid spread of promotional messages. From an academic perspective, the regression coefficients demonstrate that the quality and value of content play a more dominant role in shaping consumer perceptions and influencing purchasing decisions within platform-based digital marketing environments.

T-Test (Partial)

Table 5. T-Test

Variable	t	Sig
Constanta	4,171	0,000
Content Marketing	5,123	0,000
Viral Marketing	3,812	0,001

The critical t-value is 4.171. The results of the data analysis show a calculated t-value of 5.123 for content marketing (X1) with a significance level of 0.000, and a calculated t-value of 3.812 for viral marketing (X2) with a significance level of 0.000, where for both variables the calculated t-values are greater than the critical t-value of 4.171. Therefore, it can be concluded that H_0 is rejected and H_1 is accepted; this indicates that, partially, both variables have a positive and significant effect on purchase intention (Y).

Test of the Coefficient of Determination

Tabel 6. Test of the Coefficient of Determination

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square
0,825	0,680	0,672

The results presented in Table 8 show that the Adjusted R-Square (R^2) value is 0.672, indicating that the two variables content marketing and viral marketing together account for approximately 68% of the variation in the purchase intention variable (Y), while the remaining 32% is attributed to other factors. The relatively high Adjusted R^2 value indicates that the proposed model has strong explanatory power in explaining consumer purchase intention on TikTok. This finding also implies that content marketing and viral marketing are important determinants of consumer behavior in digital marketing contexts. However, the remaining unexplained variance suggests that other variables, such as brand trust, influencer credibility, perceived value, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), or consumer lifestyle, may also contribute to shaping purchase intention and should therefore be considered in future studies.

Discussion

The Effect of Content Marketing on Purchase Intention

The results of this study reveal that content marketing strategies exert a statistically significant positive influence on consumers' purchase intention on the TikTok platform. Well-designed content marketing not only delivers relevant and useful information but also fosters emotional engagement with the audience. Such engagement contributes to increased consumer trust, which ultimately encourages purchasing decisions. In this context, TikTok serves as an effective visual medium that enables brands to communicate messages in a creative, dynamic, and interactive way. These findings are consistent with the study by Leliana Agustina (2025), which emphasizes that content marketing enhances purchase intention by creating meaningful digital experiences for users. In addition, prior studies have consistently highlighted that the quality of content plays a crucial role in shaping consumers' intention to buy. The stronger regression coefficient obtained for content

marketing in this study further indicates that TikTok users in Medan Tuntungan are more influenced by content relevance, creativity, and informational value than by simple promotional exposure. This finding supports the argument proposed by Pulizzi (2012) that content marketing functions not merely as a promotional tool but also as a mechanism for building long-term consumer relationships and trust. However, this result differs from several previous studies that reported weaker effects of content marketing due to differences in platform characteristics and audience demographics (Meliawati et al., 2023). The stronger influence identified in this study may be attributed to TikTok's highly visual and interactive ecosystem, which enables users to engage more intensively with creative content.

The Effect of Viral Marketing on Purchase Intention

The findings further indicate that viral marketing has a positive and significant impact on purchase intention through TikTok. This strategy operates by disseminating engaging and attention-grabbing content rapidly across a broad audience, often supported by influencers or users with substantial followings. As content spreads widely, product visibility increases, enabling information to reach potential consumers more efficiently. Frequent exposure to widely shared content can strengthen consumer perceptions and trust, thereby enhancing their intention to purchase. This finding is in line with the research conducted by Indrawan and Pradana (2023), which demonstrated that viral marketing increases consumer attention and purchasing interest through rapid information dissemination. Nevertheless, the effect of viral marketing in this study is relatively lower than content marketing, indicating that virality alone is insufficient to fully influence consumer purchase intention without being supported by valuable and credible content. This result suggests that while viral exposure can attract initial consumer attention, purchasing decisions are still strongly influenced by the perceived usefulness and authenticity of the content delivered. Such findings reinforce the view that consumer behavior on TikTok is shaped not only by exposure frequency but also by content quality and emotional relevance.

The Combined Effect of Content Marketing and Viral Marketing on Purchase Intention

The integration of content marketing and viral marketing results in a more powerful and effective promotional strategy. High-quality content tends to have a greater potential to become viral, which amplifies its reach and impact. Consequently, the synergy between these two approaches can significantly strengthen their overall influence on consumers' purchase intention. The simultaneous significance of both variables indicates that effective TikTok marketing strategies should not rely solely on content creativity or viral dissemination independently, but rather on the integration of both approaches. This finding contributes theoretically to digital marketing research by demonstrating that content value and information diffusion operate complementarily in shaping consumer purchase intention within social commerce environments. Furthermore, the findings provide practical implications for SMEs and digital marketers to prioritize the development of engaging and informative content while simultaneously optimizing sharing mechanisms and audience interaction to maximize marketing effectiveness on TikTok.

Conclusion

The study confirms that content marketing and viral marketing are key determinants of consumer purchase intention on TikTok. Content that is creative, relevant, and informative plays a crucial role in building trust and emotional engagement, which ultimately influences purchasing behavior. At the same time, viral marketing enhances product exposure through rapid and widespread information sharing, increasing consumer awareness and confidence. When applied together, these two strategies produce a stronger and more effective impact. Content that resonates with audiences

is more likely to be shared, thereby expanding its reach and influence. Overall, the findings emphasize the importance of integrating content quality with viral distribution strategies in digital marketing practices. Businesses, particularly SMEs, are encouraged to leverage these approaches to optimize their marketing performance and better influence consumer decisions. Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of digital marketing literature by providing empirical evidence regarding the simultaneous influence of content marketing and viral marketing on purchase intention within TikTok's algorithm-driven ecosystem. The findings also strengthen the understanding that content value and information dissemination work complementarily in shaping consumer behavior in social commerce environments. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on TikTok users in Medan Tuntungan, which provides more contextualized insights into digital consumer behavior at the local level. Practically, the findings suggest that businesses should not only prioritize viral exposure but also focus on producing high-quality and engaging content that is capable of building trust and emotional connection with consumers. This integrated approach is particularly relevant for SMEs seeking to improve marketing effectiveness and competitiveness through social media platforms such as TikTok. Despite these contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the research was conducted using a relatively limited sample size and focused only on respondents in Medan Tuntungan, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Second, the study only examined content marketing and viral marketing variables, whereas other factors such as influencer credibility, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), brand trust, perceived value, and consumer lifestyle may also influence purchase intention. Therefore, future research is recommended to expand the study area, increase the number of respondents, and incorporate additional variables or different analytical approaches in order to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of consumer purchase intention in digital marketing contexts.

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