

**From Trends to Transactions:
The Rise of TikTok as a Social Commerce Platform**

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Introduction

In September 2023, a single TikTok video featuring a low-cost beauty product became popular, gaining over 10 million views in 48 hours. Within a week, the product had sold out countrywide. This isn't an isolated incident. On TikTok, beauty serums, kitchen gadgets, books, and even cleaning products routinely trend—only to vanish from retailers' shelves hours later. What was once a platform for dancing videos and comedy skits has quickly grown into one of the most powerful engines of online shopping. TikTok's "For You" page has evolved into a dynamic, personalized showroom where a single swipe might result in an impulse purchase. Roberts (2023), a media and advertising analyst writing for Scholars Compass, investigates how TikTok has altered the digital advertising market by combining authenticity, amusement, and immediacy. Although not a peer-reviewed academic, Roberts uses business trends and case studies to suggest that TikTok's combination of relatable content and algorithmic precision makes it unusually effective at influencing consumer behavior in real time.

The convergence of entertainment and e-commerce represents a substantial shift in consumer behavior, particularly among Generation Z. TikTok is paving the way for social networks to become commerce hubs by combining AI-driven algorithms, influencer marketing, and live shopping events to captivate consumers and turn interaction into sales. The urgency of viral trends, emotional relationships with creators, and the platform's immersive design all contribute to a new type of impulsive buying behavior. Understanding how TikTok creates this environment is critical not only for marketers and businesses, but also for consumers who navigate this hybrid area of social engagement and buying (Jamka, 2021; Burris, 2025).

This literature review explores four key areas that shape TikTok's emergence as a social commerce platform: the platform's rise during the COVID-19 pandemic, its marketing strategies through personalization and AI, the psychological and emotional triggers of impulse buying, and the mechanisms by which trust is built through influencers and short-form content. Together, these themes illustrate how TikTok has evolved from a content-sharing app into a dominant force in online consumer culture.

The Rise of TikTok

The COVID-19 pandemic changed how people interacted, watched content, and shopped—TikTok was at the heart of this transformation. As lockdowns restricted millions to their homes, the app's popularity skyrocketed, providing a platform for entertainment, self-expression, and camaraderie during global uncertainty. By the end of 2020, TikTok had over 2.6 billion downloads, with its short-form, algorithm-driven entertainment enthralling users worldwide, particularly Generation Z. But, beyond viral dance challenges and recipe hacks, TikTok started building the basis for something bigger: a shift in how people discover and buy items. The launch of TikTok Shop marked TikTok's transition from a social media platform to a dominant player in social commerce.

TikTok during COVID-19

TikTok's global popularity surged during the COVID-19 pandemic, as lockdowns and social distancing measures prompted people to find new ways to connect and entertain themselves. In early 2020, users downloaded the app 115 million times; by December, that number had soared to 2.6 billion worldwide, with over 60% of users aged 16-24 (Jamka, 2021). TikTok's diversification of content, ranging from baking tutorials to discussions on social justice, resonated with viewers seeking entertainment and connection during a time of isolation, contributing to the app's rapid rise. The platform's algorithm customized content to individual

interests, boosting user engagement by delivering tailored and relevant videos. TikTok also enhanced mental health throughout the pandemic by fostering communities where users could share their experiences and coping strategies, alleviating feelings of loneliness and promoting overall well-being (Jamka, 2021).

TikTok quickly grew from a relatively small platform to a dominant force in the digital environment, thanks largely to its sophisticated algorithms and focus on short-form content. Its impact extended beyond entertainment, influencing trends, consumer behavior, and marketing strategies across other industries. TikTok's distinct blend of creativity and authenticity made it an indispensable tool for companies looking to interact with younger audiences in real time. In early 2021, Dunkin' partnered with TikTok star Charli D'Amelio, who gained fame during the pandemic in 2020 and currently has 157.2 million followers. According to Raphael (2023), a journalist who covers brand strategy and media for Marketing Dive, Dunkin' Donuts' relationship with TikTok influencer Charli D'Amelio resulted in a 57% increase in mobile app downloads and a 20% increase in cold brew sales. Although not peer-reviewed, the report presents real-time commercial statistics demonstrating TikTok's direct impact on consumer purchase behavior.

TikTok Shop

Researchers have given significant attention to TikTok Shop, a burgeoning e-commerce platform integrated into the popular social media app for its innovative approach to online shopping.. Mutiara and Putri (2024) investigated the motivations for using TikTok Shop with a qualitative method that included interviews and user testimonials. Based on the Uses and Gratifications (U&G) hypothesis, they discovered that consumers are drawn to the platform for three primary reasons: entertainment, product discovery, and simplicity of in-app shopping. Although Mutiara and Putri (2024) worked with a small and experimental sample, they revealed

how engagement-oriented material serves multiple purposes in entertainment and business. Users viewed TikTok Shop as a platform that satisfies multiple needs, such as entertainment, information, and social interaction, while also offering a seamless shopping experience. TikTok's interactive and immersive videos, paired with its algorithm-driven content, empower users to discover products in a personalized and captivating way, enhancing their shopping experience. The blend of social media and e-commerce reflected a broader trend in how consumer behavior where entertainment and shopping increasingly overlapped.

TikTok Shop quickly emerged as a serious contender in the social commerce space, competing with Amazon and Temu. It provided an engaging and dynamic shopping experience for its 170 million users in the United States by seamlessly integrating product discovery and purchasing within its platform (Burris, 2025). Marketers leverage this concept through influencer marketing. TikTok Shop's unique blend of entertainment and e-commerce has proved successful. For instance, on Black Friday alone, the site generated \$100 million in U.S. purchases (Burris, 2025), showcasing its growing significance in the digital realm. It continues to illustrate how younger generations engage with brands and make purchases.

Marketing Strategies On TikTok

TikTok's success in social commerce is partly due to AI-powered personalization and interactive purchasing experiences. Its algorithm creates personalized content to increase engagement and drive recurring and impulse purchases (Wang & Oh, 2023). TikTok improves user experience by making adverts feel more relevant and natural (Obada & Tuguela, 2024). Live shopping events augment this impact, with telepresence, trust, and fun all playing important roles in driving impulsive purchases (Parahiyanti & Dimara, 2024; Firdausiah et al., 2023). Together, these methods reshape how customers interact with companies and make purchases.

Personalization and AI Targeting

AI-driven personalization was critical in determining consumer behavior on TikTok, as its algorithm curated custom content that increased user engagement and encouraged repeat purchases. Wang and Oh (2023) studied the important aspects that influence consumers' repeated buying intentions on TikTok, highlighting the platform's personalized shopping experience as a big driver of consumer engagement and long-term purchasing behaviors. Based on the uses and gratifications (U&G) theory, their research indicated that TikTok's algorithm suggestions created a highly engaging and immersive experience that drove repeat purchases. Recent studies by Obada and Tuguela (2024) support the connection between tailored content and user behavior. Obada and Tuguela's (2024) research on online impulse buying purchases among Gen Z'ers in emerging markets supported this. Their study, based on flow theory, investigates how TikTok's tailored ad content contributes to a smooth and immersive user experience. TikTok lowered the intrusiveness of advertising by personalizing them by individual interests, making it feel more connected and natural as part of the browsing experience. The more interesting and relevant the material, the more likely it is to prompt impulse buying as it increases engagement between users and the platform, thus increasing consumers' tendency to make quick, impulsive purchases.

Interactive Shopping

Psychological factors such as telepresence, trust, enjoyment, and flow state played a significant role in influencing impulse purchases during TikTok Live streaming. Telepresence significantly influenced consumer behavior and the sensation that consumers physically experience a virtual purchasing environment. (Parahiyanti and Dimara, 2024). Using a quantitative study using purposive sampling and questionnaires for data, the authors found that telepresence greatly increases impulse buying by fostering a sense of real-time connection. When consumers fully engage in live shopping events, they tend to make impulse purchases, as this increases excitement and immediacy.. Additionally, their results implied that telepresence not

only encouraged impulsive purchases but also built brand awareness and created a flow state, a mental state in which customers lose themselves entirely in the purchasing process and lessen cognitive resistance to impulsive purchases.

Similarly, Firdausiah et al. (2023) examined the role of telepresence in TikTok Live shopping. They found that while it does not directly trigger impulsive buying, it significantly enhances enjoyment. Firdausiah et al. (2023) concluded that fostering positive emotions through telepresence can indirectly boost impulse purchases. Additionally, trust is a crucial element in the decision-making process. Real-time product demonstrations, live interactions, and audience participation all help build credibility and reduce perceived risk, making consumers feel more comfortable with these purchases.

Psychological Drivers of Impulse Purchases

Social media addiction and the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) are key psychological drivers of impulsive consumer behavior on platforms like TikTok. Hilal and Hus (2025) found that while both factors encourage impulse purchases, FoMO exerts a significantly greater influence because the fear of missing out on viral trends creates a heightened sense of urgency. This urgency often leads to post-purchase remorse and emotional strain, creating a vicious cycle of impulsive buying. Similarly, Japutra et al. (2025) found that nearly 62% of TikTok users reported making impulsive purchases due to trend pressure, linking FoMO to both compulsive shopping and psychological stress. Collectively, this data illustrates how TikTok's fast-paced, trend-driven nature amplifies emotional triggers that impact consumer decisions.

Social Media Addiction and Fear of Missing Out

Hilal and Hus (2025) performed a quantitative online survey of 475 Generation Z participants in the United States to investigate the link between social media addiction, Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), and impulsive shopping behavior. Using regression analysis, they

discovered that FOMO had a substantially higher influence on impulse purchase (47%) than social media addiction (22%). These findings imply that the urgency of missing out on viral trends is more critical in impulsive purchasing decisions than general social media use. This research suggests that the urgency and anxiety related to missing out on trends are more influential on impulse purchasing decisions than typical social media use. Additionally, they highlight a significant consequence of impulse purchases: post-purchase regret, which perpetuates the negative emotional cycle driven by social media involvement. The authors suggested that these findings enhance our understanding of digital triggers in consumer behavior, particularly within the context of e-commerce and social media-driven marketing strategies. Fear of Missing Out (FoMo) is a key factor motivating impulse buying behavior on TikTok, as users are often exposed to limited-time trends and viral product recommendations.

Japutra et al. (2025) observed that FoMo can lead to compulsive brand buying. This effect is particularly evident on TikTok, where rapid content cycles and influencer endorsements create a sense of urgency, urging consumers to spend impulsively to keep up with trends. The authors also note that this impulsive spending can induce pressure and generate psychological stress. This environment creates pressure to stay socially relevant, leading consumers to make impulse purchases. According to the study, roughly 62% of participants admitted to impulsively purchasing on TikTok due to trend pressure. Furthermore, Japutra et al (2025) noted that this type of spending behavior causes psychological stress and internal strain, as consumers grapple with the fear of being excluded while attempting to preserve a sense of belonging in digital groups.

Emotional Factors and Parasocial Interactions

Adyantari (2023) conducted a cross-sectional survey with 204 Gen Y and Gen Z TikTok users to examine how Gen Y and Gen Z perceive online video ads and how this influences their

tendency toward impulsive purchases. Based on the Theory of Reasoned Action, which states that customer behavior is driven by their intention to do it, the study identified four key factors that affect users' perceptions of ads: legitimacy, personalization, amusement, and informativeness. The author states that social media can serve as an advertising tool to strengthen a bond between a business and its consumers (pg 293). A positive attitude towards these ads increases the likelihood of impulsive purchases, indicating that well-designed ads can significantly influence consumer behavior if they effectively communicate useful information, engage viewers with captivating content, tailor messages to meet personal preferences, and establish brand credibility. This is aligned with research by Feby et al. (2024), which investigates how local presence and parasocial interaction impact impulsive buying on TikTok. Their findings indicate that stronger parasocial ties with content creators enhance consumers' perceptions of product value, leading to a greater sense of connection and familiarity with those influencers. The study also distinguishes between hedonic and utilitarian incentives, demonstrating that impulse purchasing is affected by both practical and pleasure-driven factors. The results indicated that utilitarian factors account for approximately 35.5% of the influence on impulse buying, while hedonic factors contribute about 30.6%. (Feby et al, 2024). While utilitarian effects depend on usefulness and practical benefits, hedonic motives are driven by emotional satisfaction and the joy of purchasing.

Establishing Consumer Trust

Trust and authenticity are critical to consumer decision-making on TikTok Shop, especially among Gen Z users. Nurdiana Putri et al. (2023) found that both cognitive trust—built through platform security and certifications—and emotional trust—developed via social engagement—significantly influence purchasing intentions. With TikTok's algorithm promoting

user-generated content, trust becomes essential for brands and influencers alike. As Roberts (2023) noted, short-form videos and community interaction help create credibility and social proof, but any perceived inauthenticity can quickly damage consumer confidence. In this trust-driven environment, influencer credibility and platform security are key to sustaining engagement and driving conversions.

Influencer Credibility/Security

Nurdiana Putri et al. (2023) used structural equation modeling (SEM), a method that combines factor analysis and regression to explore correlations between numerous variables, to investigate the role of trust in TikTok Shop purchases made by Generation Z. The authors found that both cognitive and emotional trust significantly influence purchasing intentions. Specifically, cognitive trust contributed 35% and emotional trust 28% of the intention to purchase on TikTok Shop. Emotional trust primarily develops through the platform's social engagement and the consistency of purchasing behavior within the TikTok network, while clear security measures and third-party certifications enhance cognitive trust. These components alleviate privacy concerns and promote greater trust in the platform. The study emphasizes the necessity of building trust and privacy assurances as key elements in influencing consumer behavior on social commerce platforms.

Furthermore, Roberts (2023) highlighted how the TikTok algorithm and unique content curation methods have transformed the social media advertising landscape, making it essential for brands to foster trust and credibility with users. TikTok's short-form videos allow businesses to integrate more seamlessly with the daily flow of information, in contrast to traditional advertising methods that can feel intrusive. The ability for consumers to quickly interact with content- commenting, sharing, and creating their versions of branded posts- generates a sense of

community and social proof, enhancing the brand's credibility. "Influencers will achieve the most success...when they present themselves authentically and establish a connection with their audience that inspires trust, like a friend" (pg 3). However, given this reliance on UGC, brands must exercise caution when engaging with influencers or promoting their products, as any perceived inauthenticity can rapidly erode confidence.

Short Form Content and Consumer Perception

The development of social networking as an effective shopping tool has dramatically altered customer behavior. A study by Barcelona et al. (2022) examines how the short, compelling format of TikTok Shopee Finds videos impacts both planned and spontaneous purchases. These short-form videos are designed to be brief, engaging, and visually appealing, making them highly effective at capturing the attention of Gen Z consumers, who are more inclined to interact with content that aligns with their social media-driven lifestyle. The blend of entertainment and discovery creates a dynamic environment where the line between browsing and purchasing is evident. Moghddam et al. (2024) reinforced this concept by exploring how the rapid consumption of social videos shortens decision-making time. The study refers to this as the "scroll-stop-shop" effect- a psychological response in which customers scroll through their social media feed, pause to examine a product that captures their interest, and make a decision within seconds. The speed of this process not only promotes impulse buying but also gives shopping an appearance of spontaneity. This combination of instant gratification and reduced decision-making time enhances the likelihood of impulsive spending, making platforms like TikTok essential for marketers aiming to capture consumer attention and drive sales.

Conclusion

TikTok's climb to social commerce powerhouse status is the result of a purposeful convergence of algorithmic personalization, emotional engagement, and platform design.

According to Jamka (2021), TikTok's dramatic rise during the COVID-19 pandemic produced a venue where users not only sought entertainment but also engaged in new forms of buying behavior. According to Wang and Oh (2023) and Obadă and ũugulea (2024), the platform's utilization of AI-driven recommendations and flow theory has led to increased engagement and impulse purchases.

Furthermore, psychological factors such as Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), as mentioned by Hilal and Hus (2025) and Japutra et al. (2025), have a substantial impact on impulse buying on TikTok. Emotional connections formed through parasocial interactions with influencers (Febby et al., 2024) and immersive live shopping experiences (Parahiyanti & Dimara, 2024; Firdausiah et al., 2023) have also been demonstrated to minimize consumer hesitancy and promote spontaneous purchases. The platform's short-form video format accelerates decision-making by establishing a "scroll-stop-shop" environment that encourages impulsive action (Moghddam et al., 2024).

However, while the research comprehensively investigates psychological and technological triggers of impulse purchase, there is a significant vacuum in knowing how demographic parameters such as age, gender, and income level influence this behavior on TikTok. Most studies focus broadly on Gen Z, without delving into differences within the generation or comparing them to other age groups. Exploring these demographic disparities is critical for determining which populations may be more vulnerable to social commerce influences and adjusting interventions or ethical marketing techniques accordingly. Understanding these distinctions could help marketers adjust their efforts ethically and identify which groups are more sensitive to social commerce influences.

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