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TikTok as a Global Platform Phenomenon: Expansion of ByteDance and Its Impact on Consumer Behavior in Emerging Markets

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Abstract

This study examines TikTok as a global platform phenomenon driven by ByteDance's international expansion strategy and analyzes its impact on consumer behavior in emerging markets, with particular focus on Indonesia. Using a qualitative literature review methodology, this research synthesizes findings from nine empirical studies published between 2024 and 2026 to construct a comprehensive understanding of how TikTok's global reach, algorithm-driven content distribution, and social commerce integration are reshaping consumer purchasing patterns, brand awareness formation, and social consumption behavior in developing economies. The findings indicate that TikTok has emerged as the world's largest social media platform by user base, with Indonesia ranking first globally with 194.37 million users as of 2025, and projected global advertising revenue reaching USD 12 billion in 2024. TikTok's penetration into Indonesian consumer markets has produced measurable behavioral transformations: SME businesses adopting TikTok marketing report sales increases of 20-40% (Afriany et al., 2025), social media influence accounts for 39.2% of consumer behavior variance among millennials (Kurniawati, 2024), and TikTok content exposure explains 64.2% of consumptive behavior variance among Generation Z (Husain, 2025). This study further identifies that TikTok's global expansion has introduced a new consumer behavior paradigm characterized by algorithm-mediated discovery, shoppertainment-driven purchase decisions, and emotionally-influenced consumption that differs fundamentally from conventional e-commerce behavior. The study concludes that TikTok represents not merely a social media platform but a global consumer behavior transformation engine that demands new strategic frameworks for businesses competing in emerging markets.

Keywords: ByteDance; Consumer Behavior; Emerging Markets; Global Platform; Indonesia; Shoppertainment; TikTok.

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INTRODUCTION

The emergence of TikTok as a global digital platform represents one of the most significant phenomena in the history of technology-driven globalization. Developed by ByteDance, a Chinese technology company founded in 2012, TikTok was launched internationally in 2017 and has since expanded to over 150 countries, accumulating more than 1.8 billion active users globally by 2024 (Afriany et al., 2025). This trajectory of expansion from a Chinese domestic application to the world's most downloaded social media platform constitutes a landmark case study in the globalization of digital platforms from emerging economies to advanced markets, fundamentally challenging the historical dominance of Silicon Valley in the global social media landscape.

Indonesia occupies a uniquely strategic position in TikTok's global narrative. According to data from We Are Social and Meltwater released in July 2025, Indonesia's TikTok user population has reached 194.37 million placing Indonesia at the top of the global rankings, surpassing the United States and Brazil (Laraskana & Sakir, 2025). This makes Indonesia not merely a consumer of TikTok's global platform, but the world's single largest market by user volume. The implications for Indonesian consumer behavior are therefore both immediate and profound: the platform that has attracted the largest share of Indonesian digital attention is also simultaneously redefining how Indonesian consumers discover products, form brand preferences, and make purchase decisions.

The behavioral transformations catalyzed by TikTok's global expansion in Indonesia are measurable and well-documented. Afriany et al. (2025) document sales growth of 20-40% among Indonesian SMEs that adopted TikTok as their primary marketing channel, with social media interaction rates increasing from 20-40 interactions per post to 200-300 interactions post-adoption. Kurniawati (2024) demonstrates that social media influence accounts for 39.2% of consumer behavior variance among Indonesian millennials in Surabaya ($r=0.626$). Husain (2025) further confirms that TikTok content exposure explains 64.2% of consumptive behavior variance among Generation Z students ($R^2=0.642$), with content attractiveness, promotional frequency, and influencer trustworthiness identified as the dominant behavioral drivers.

Beyond quantitative impacts, TikTok's global expansion has introduced what UNIKOM (2025) describes as a 'shoppertainment' paradigm the seamless integration of entertainment and commerce that creates a uniquely engaging consumer experience unavailable in conventional e-commerce platforms. This paradigm shift, combined with TikTok's algorithm-driven content personalization, has created conditions in which consumer purchase decisions are increasingly influenced by emotionally-resonant content rather than rational product evaluation, fundamentally altering the decision-making architecture of Indonesian consumers.

This study aims to comprehensively analyze TikTok's trajectory as a global platform phenomenon, understand the mechanisms through which ByteDance's expansion strategy has penetrated Indonesian consumer markets, and synthesize evidence on the consequent transformations in consumer behavior across dimensions of purchase intention, brand awareness, consumptive behavior, and social commerce engagement.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Globalization of Digital Platforms and Emerging Markets

Platform globalization theory suggests that digital platforms achieve global dominance through a combination of network effects, algorithmic advantages, and strategic localization that adapts global technology to local cultural contexts. TikTok's global expansion exemplifies this dynamic: ByteDance's international strategy combined a globally standardized algorithmic recommendation engine with locally-adapted content moderation, creator incentive programs, and marketing strategies tailored to each national market (Syafri, 2025). Indonesia, as an emerging market with a young demographic profile, high mobile penetration, and culturally-rich content creation traditions, proved to be fertile ground for TikTok's expansion model.

Syafri (2025) identifies digitalization as the fundamental driver of contemporary consumer behavior transformation, noting that companies capable of adapting digital strategies effectively can sustain competitive advantage in increasingly competitive global markets. The digitalization of consumption accelerated by platforms like TikTok has enabled faster purchase processes, more personalized shopping experiences, and greater market transparency. However, it has simultaneously introduced challenges around data privacy and unequal technology access that remain policy concerns in emerging markets including Indonesia.

Uses and Gratifications Theory in TikTok Context

Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1974) posits that media users are active agents who purposively select media to satisfy specific psychological and social needs, including information, entertainment, social interaction, and identity expression. In the TikTok context, this theory explains why users engage with the platform across multiple dimensions simultaneously consuming content for entertainment, discovering products through influencer recommendations, participating in community trends, and making purchase decisions within a single seamless experience. RSIS International (2025) confirms that TikTok trends significantly influence the buying intentions of Generation Z consumers,

with the platform's unique ability to satisfy multiple gratification needs simultaneously explaining its disproportionate influence on consumer behavior relative to other social media platforms.

Social Influence and Consumer Behavior in Digital Platforms

Social influence theory in digital consumer contexts posits that purchasing behavior is significantly shaped by the perceived behaviors and preferences of social reference groups, including peers, influencers, and online communities. TikTok's architecture amplifies social influence mechanisms through its algorithmic For You Page (FYP), which exposes users to content from creators they do not follow, creating a continuous stream of social influence signals that shape product awareness and purchase inclinations. Muamar (2025) confirms that digital marketing strategies on TikTok specifically storytelling, trending hashtag utilization, influencer collaboration, and upload consistency effectively increase brand visibility and consumer interaction. Renuat et al. (2026) extend this understanding by documenting how TikTok Shop's communication patterns including live selling, influencer endorsements, and interactive comments function as catalysts for broader social change, normalizing digital consumerism and redefining trust-formation dynamics in Indonesian society.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

TikTok's Global Expansion: ByteDance as a New Paradigm of Platform Globalization

TikTok's rise to global dominance represents a paradigm shift in the geography of digital platform power. For the first time in the history of the internet era, a platform originating from an emerging economy China has achieved genuine global dominance over platforms developed in the United States, including Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook. This reversal of the traditional technology diffusion pattern, whereby innovation flows from developed to developing economies, has profound implications for how scholars and practitioners understand platform globalization in the contemporary era.

The data presented by Afriany et al. (2025) illustrate TikTok's global growth trajectory with remarkable clarity: from 800 million active users in 2020 to a projected 1.8 billion in 2024, with global advertising revenue growing from USD 1 billion to USD 12 billion in the same period, and average daily usage time increasing from 52 to 100 minutes. This growth is not uniformly distributed emerging markets in Asia-Pacific, including Indonesia, Southeast Asia, India (prior to the ban), and Brazil have been the primary growth engines of TikTok's user expansion, reflecting the platform's particular resonance with young, mobile-first consumer populations in rapidly digitalizing economies.

The author argues that TikTok's success in Indonesia cannot be explained solely by its algorithmic superiority or content format innovation. Equally important is ByteDance's deliberate strategy of platform localization investing in local content creator ecosystems, partnering with Indonesian brands and government institutions, and calibrating content moderation policies to align with Indonesian cultural and regulatory expectations. This strategy of "glocalization" thinking globally while acting locally explains why TikTok has achieved deeper market penetration in Indonesia than in markets with similar demographic profiles but less localized platform strategies.

Transformations in Consumer Behavior: From Rational to Emotion-Driven Purchasing

The most consequential impact of TikTok's global expansion on Indonesian consumer markets is the fundamental shift in consumer decision-making architecture from rational, information-driven evaluation toward emotionally-resonant, content-driven impulse. Renuat et al. (2026), in their netnographic analysis of TikTok Shop behavior, document this transformation with precision: TikTok's unique communication model combining short-form video, algorithm-driven recommendations, and real-time live commerce interaction creates a purchasing environment in which emotional engagement, social presence, and algorithmic personalization collectively overwhelm the rational deliberation mechanisms that characterize conventional e-commerce.

Husain (2025) quantifies this behavioral transformation with compelling empirical precision. In her study of Generation Z university students, TikTok content exposure explains 64.2% of consumptive behavior variance ($R^2=0.642$), with three factors identified as dominant drivers: content attractiveness, promotional frequency, and influencer trustworthiness. These findings align with Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) theory and the concept of parasocial interaction the one-sided quasi-social relationship that develops between audiences and media personalities both of which explain why TikTok's emotional and visual content elements are so powerful in shaping consumer behavior among digitally-native cohorts.

Kurniawati (2024) extends this understanding to the millennial demographic, finding that social media influence predominantly through TikTok accounts for 39.2% of consumer behavior variance among Indonesian millennials in Surabaya, with a strong positive correlation ($r=0.626$) between social media engagement and shopping habits. This finding establishes that TikTok's behavioral influence is not limited to Generation Z but extends across generational cohorts, suggesting that the platform's impact on Indonesian consumer behavior is structurally embedded rather than cohort-specific.

TikTok as a Brand Awareness Engine for Indonesian Businesses

Beyond its impact on individual consumer behavior, TikTok's global expansion has created structural opportunities for Indonesian businesses particularly SMEs to build brand awareness at unprecedented scale and at dramatically lower cost than traditional marketing channels. Laraskana & Sakir (2025), in their qualitative case study of UMKM Bakso Granat Mas Azis Palembang, document TikTok's contribution to three simultaneous dimensions of brand awareness development: enhanced brand recognition through visual content exposure, strengthened brand recall through consistent narrative repetition, and deepened brand association through community interaction and user-generated content engagement. The cumulative effect of these three mechanisms produced sales performance increases of approximately 25-30%.

Afriany et al. (2025) provide a broader empirical foundation for this finding through their intervention study involving 20 Indonesian SMEs across culinary, handicraft, and service sectors. Following a structured TikTok digital marketing training program, average social media interaction rates increased from 20-40 interactions per post to 200-300 interactions a 10-fold improvement while participating businesses reported sales growth ranging from 20-40%. These results confirm that TikTok's brand-building potential is not limited to large brands with professional content production capabilities, but is accessible to micro-enterprises with modest digital literacy, provided they receive structured guidance in content strategy and platform optimization.

Muamar (2025) synthesizes these practical findings into a strategic framework for TikTok-based brand awareness building, identifying four key strategies that consistently drive brand visibility and consumer interaction: storytelling-based content that creates emotional connection with audiences, strategic use of trending music and hashtags that leverages TikTok's algorithmic amplification, collaboration with influencers whose audience demographics align with target consumer segments, and upload consistency that maintains algorithmic favorability and audience habit formation.

The Shoppertainment Paradigm: TikTok's Unique Contribution to Global Commerce

The concept of 'shoppertainment' the integration of shopping and entertainment into a single seamless experience represents TikTok's most distinctive contribution to the evolution of global commerce. Unlike conventional e-commerce platforms that present shopping as a utilitarian transaction, or conventional social media platforms that treat commerce as a secondary function, TikTok's architecture is designed from the ground up to dissolve the boundary between content consumption and commercial activity. UNIKOM (2025) identifies this as the defining characteristic of TikTok's competitive position in the global digital marketplace.

The shoppertainment paradigm operates through multiple simultaneous mechanisms. Algorithmically, TikTok's recommendation engine continuously surfaces product-relevant content to

users based on their behavioral patterns, creating a perpetual stream of commercially-influenced entertainment that maintains purchase intent without the psychological friction of deliberate shopping. Socially, TikTok's comment, duet, and stitch features create participatory communities around products and brands that transform passive viewers into active brand advocates. Commercially, TikTok Shop's integration of in-video product links, live commerce, and affiliate marketing programs creates frictionless pathways from content consumption to purchase completion.

Table 1. TikTok's Global Growth and Its Impact on Indonesian Consumer Markets: Key Data Points

Dimension	Key Data	Implication for Indonesian Consumers	Source
Global User Base	1.8 billion active users projected 2024; Indonesia #1 globally with 194.37 million users (2025)	Indonesia is TikTok's single largest market behavioral patterns established here have outsized global influence	Laraskana & Sakir (2025); Afriany et al. (2025)
Platform Growth Rate	25% annual user growth 2020-2024; advertising revenue USD 1B (2020) to USD 12B (2024)	Accelerating commercial ecosystem creates increasingly sophisticated consumer-brand interaction opportunities	Afriany et al. (2025)
Consumer Behavior Impact	Social media explains 39.2% of consumer behavior variance (millennials); TikTok content explains 64.2% of consumptive behavior variance (Gen Z)	TikTok is the single most powerful behavioral influence on Indonesian digital consumers across generations	Kurniawati (2024); Husain (2025)
Brand Awareness Impact	SMEs using TikTok: interaction +10x (20 to 200-300/post); sales +20-40%	TikTok democratizes brand-building accessible to micro-enterprises with modest production budgets	Afriany et al. (2025); Laraskana & Sakir (2025)
Behavioral Transformation	Shift from rational to emotion-driven purchasing; normalization of digital consumerism; redefinition of trust formation	New consumer decision architecture requires brands to prioritize emotional resonance over product specifications	Renuat et al. (2026); Husain (2025)
Strategic Opportunity	Storytelling, trending hashtags, influencer collaboration, and	Local businesses can compete with global brands through content quality and community engagement	Muamar (2025); UNIKOM (2025)

	upload consistency proven as core brand-building strategies		
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Source: Synthesized from literature, processed by the author (2026)

Challenges and Critical Perspectives on TikTok's Global Expansion

While the evidence overwhelmingly confirms TikTok's positive commercial impact for businesses and its transformative effect on consumer markets, a comprehensive analysis must also acknowledge the challenges and critical concerns associated with the platform's global expansion. Afriany et al. (2025) identify two persistent challenges in the Indonesian SME context: maintaining consistency in content production, and adapting to TikTok's rapidly and frequently changing algorithm. Both challenges reflect structural disadvantages that SMEs face relative to large brands with dedicated social media teams and substantial content production budgets.

At a societal level, Renuat et al. (2026) document that TikTok's communication model particularly its live selling, influencer endorsement, and promotional incentive mechanisms has not only influenced individual purchase decisions but has catalyzed broader social changes including the normalization of digital consumerism, increased dependency on digital marketplaces, and the emergence of new socially-influenced buying behaviors driven by FOMO and algorithmic personalization. Husain (2025) raises the critical policy implication that emerges from her findings: the strong influence of TikTok content on Gen Z consumptive behavior necessitates investment in digital literacy and financial literacy programs that equip young consumers to critically evaluate promotional content rather than responding reflexively to algorithmic stimuli.

From a geopolitical perspective, TikTok's status as a Chinese-owned platform operating in over 150 countries has generated regulatory scrutiny in multiple jurisdictions regarding data sovereignty, content neutrality, and potential surveillance concerns. Syafril (2025) acknowledges data privacy and unequal technology access as persistent challenges in the digitalization of consumer behavior, concerns that are particularly acute for platforms with ByteDance's ownership structure and data management practices. These challenges do not negate TikTok's commercial value, but they underscore the importance of developing regulatory frameworks that balance the economic benefits of global platform adoption with the protection of national consumer data interests.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that TikTok's global expansion, driven by ByteDance's sophisticated platform globalization strategy, has produced a fundamental and measurable transformation in consumer behavior in Indonesia as a representative emerging market. Three principal conclusions emerge from the synthesis of nine empirical sources.

First, TikTok has established itself as the dominant force shaping Indonesian consumer behavior across generational cohorts explaining 39.2% of consumer behavior variance among millennials (Kurniawati, 2024) and 64.2% of consumptive behavior variance among Generation Z (Husain, 2025). Indonesia's position as TikTok's largest global market by user volume (194.37 million users) means that the behavioral transformations documented in this study are not peripheral but central to understanding how the platform's global expansion reshapes consumer markets at scale.

Second, TikTok's impact on brand awareness and commercial performance for Indonesian businesses is empirically substantiated and economically significant. SMEs adopting TikTok marketing consistently report sales increases of 20-40% and interaction rate improvements of up to 10-fold (Afriany et al., 2025; Laraskana & Sakir, 2025). This commercial democratization making

sophisticated brand-building accessible to micro-enterprises represents one of the most consequential economic contributions of TikTok's global expansion to emerging markets.

Third, TikTok's introduction of the shoppertainment paradigm has fundamentally altered the architecture of consumer decision-making, shifting from rational product evaluation toward algorithm-mediated, emotionally-driven, socially-influenced consumption. This shift, documented with particular depth by Renuat et al. (2026) and Husain (2025), demands new strategic and policy frameworks: businesses must develop content strategies centered on emotional resonance and community building rather than product specification communication, while policymakers must invest in digital literacy programs that equip consumers particularly youth to navigate algorithmically-amplified commercial environments critically and responsibly.

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