A Review of Reasons for TikTok's Global Surge

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ABSTRACT

TikTok is a short video application launched in 2016, containing numerous types of videos and initially positioned as a live social network service focused on music sharing. TikTok's parent company, Bytedance, is a Chinese high-tech company with a market value of 75 billion U.S. dollars and was recognized as the world's most valuable startup in 2019. Since TikTok's inception, there were more than 700 million downloads in 2019, making TikTok one of the most downloaded programs in the world, and one of the most popular mobile video products, attracting millions of users worldwide. This paper aims to review the reasons for the "TikTok" app's steady expansion and why it has gained the favor of all platforms, admirers, and capital by analyzing the current related literature review. By synthesizing the relevant scholarly literature, it suggests the reason for the booming of TikTok is that it has a variety of effective marketing strategies, precise algorithm technology and meets the needs of users based on the uses and gratification theory.

Keywords: TikTok, Social media, Short video, Uses and Gratification theory

1. INTRODUCTION

This is the social media era. A slew of new social media apps and technological innovations have flooded our lives. TikTok is a music video-sharing mobile application that debuted in the fall of 2016. It enables users to create and browse short video clips ranging from 15 seconds to 60 seconds in length, allowing them to share all genres of videos online. It is claimed that 'the medium is the message', TikTok as a medium could widely spread the message and influence a series of aspects [1]. TikTok is the most downloaded social media app in the IOS App Store and has more than 500 million active users worldwide [2]. Because TikTok has quickly become a top social media software, many researchers are eager to summarize the reasons for its success from various perspectives, such as content, audience, social influence, technology, and business model. This paper aims to synthesis the related scholarly literature to find out the successful techniques TikTok uses to realize its global booming. In the digital era, the booming of social media applications has attracted great attention from many scholars. There is much literature focused on Instagram, Facebook, etc. Most of the scholarly research focused on the business model and its influence. This paper could provide a roadmap to scholars in the field of social media to

indicate the success of TikTok. This paper also provides a sight for a technical person by elucidating three successful aspects of making a social media application successful.

2. ANALYSIS

The reasons mainly include four points, which include TikTok's use of the Uses and Gratification theory, advertisement and marketing promotion strategies, and their unique AI technology and algorithm. This analysis expounds on the technological advantages, publicity advantages, and product advantages of TikTok, and fully covers the reasons for its popularity.

2.1. Personal Preference

TikTok delivers videos to specific audiences based on personal preference contributes to its appealing performance. TikTok has a wide variety of video types, and each category and audience will be analyzed to facilitate the promotion of users' personal preferences. In Shutsko's research, TikTok's videos are divided into nearly 30 categories, also the research mention that the modelling of the TikTok micro-video recommendation service and the data set obtained from the platform were analyzed [3]. By defining the categories and labels of

TikTok short videos, as well as the refined push algorithm, the videos favoured by the audience are more accurately distributed into the app of the audience, resulting in a series of problems such as longer use time of users, higher dependence of users, and increasing popularity of TikTok.

Besides, TikTok meets the needs of its audiences based on The Uses and Gratification theory (U&G theory). The Uses and Gratification theory causes TikTok users more solid and dependent, which makes TikTok well-known. In Xu's article, it concludes that the U&G theory leads users are regarded as individuals with specific needs, and users' media participation activities are regarded as use media based on specific needs motivation, to satisfy the needs of users, and users use TikTok to meet their needs for leisure, social interaction, and self-expression [4].

The use of TikTok by teenagers fully reflects how U&G theory works through media use and why TikTok is becoming more and more popular among them. Bossen and Kottasz claimed that the main target market of TikTok is teenagers and early adolescent consumers are particularly concerned about the expansion of such networks as they begin to understand themselves as social individuals and begin to form their own identities to satisfy the need for praise and social recognition as well as self-identification and fame-seeking desires, maintaining and building relationships [5]. The relationship and importance among teenagers' developmental needs for identity creation, desire for social approval, self-expression, and related use behaviors are found when teenagers using TikTok. Teenagers could gain insight into the circumstances of others, identify with others, and gain a sense of belonging through using this short video app. It also shows that some portions of adolescents are seeking U&G satisfaction by using TikTok to find reinforcement for personal values [5].

2.2. Marketing Strategy

TikTok's advertisement and marketing promotion make TikTok constantly maintaining popular. TikTok often appears in many TV show advertisements and takes advantage of the popular stars in the show by letting the stars use TikTok and advertise [4]. Also, TikTok invites many celebrities to settle and produce many short videos at the right trend as the result of the fans stampede in and expanded the popularity of the TikTok and improved the user's quantity [4] [6]. The advertising strategy increases the viewing flow of TikTok advertisements and their degrees of exposure, also by the power of celebrity effect and enough propaganda and financial resources in advertisement part. TikTok directly strengthened people's brand impression and the big reputation of TikTok. It

increased the number of TikTok users and make TikTok became more popular.

Besides, TikTok often holds variables online and offline activities that make TikTok maintain it in public focus and don't lose its popularity. In the process of marketing and advertising, TikTok attaches great importance to offline promotion. Another example in Xu, Yan and Zhang's article, TikTok works with media and news companies to hold offline events such as various contests and it can also participate in short video recordings of online interactions with other users and celebrities through TikTok's unique "shake" play [4]. TikTok is also full of all kinds of online activities. In some online activities, users can share their short video clips with their social network circle, which can fully increase the exposure of TikTok and increase its prevalent trend. Overall, TikTok fully utilizes the online and offline communication channels to increase its popularity by the spreading and radiate effect, increment the number of dynamic clients and solid users within the TikTok community.

Another way of TikTok marketing and propaganda is making this short video app international. In Ma and Hu's research, TikTok made use of its own business model to enter the international market from the Chinese market and became one of the most downloaded apps in the world [7]. TikTok company does deep research about market characteristics and combines different market characteristics with the innovative business model to achieve internationalization [7][8]. The internationalization of the application not only made TikTok very famous around the world, attracting a large number of users but also opened up numerous new markets. Moreover, TikTok encourages regular users to follow and send messages to each other, and the interaction between users increases engagement with this short video application [7]. The whole internal and external of foreign and domestic markets' advertisement and promotion method achieve the current popularity of TikTok.

2.3. AI Technology

The main reason for TikTok's high popularity could be the apply of AI technology, TikTok is good at using its technical advantages. According to Ma and Hu's research, the AI algorithm TikTok uses was generated by Another Byte Dance app which is Toutiao [7]. The algorithm provides personalized feed content by analyzing user preferences and content interactions. Due to the rational use of unique AI algorithms, Douyin can achieve very accurate content that users like. It shows that the technology can modularize complex forms of content, lower the barriers to user participation, and ensure continuity of the core content, causing increasing in user engagement.

Because TikTok reasonably uses artificial algorithms to label users and videos through algorithms, users do not need to search for videos most of the time. According to user viewing history and calculation data analysis, TikTok can always launch attractive videos. Moreover, even if the 'search' channel could push what audience want to search as TikTok accurately calculate and record the audiences' searching history and preferences, thereby increasing user stickiness and the popularity of TikTok.

In addition, this short video platform will use AI to push localized content according to local tastes and encourage locals to make localized calculation videos [7]. Because the managers of TikTok acknowledge that the culture and preferences of different cities in different regions, countries, and cities are very dissimilar. Regional cultural influence comes from the local community. Through market segmentation and region, a regionalized delivery is achieved and realized in the local market.

At the same time, the AI algorithm is used to provide users with different content in a planned way. According to the user's viewing history and classification, it sometimes calculates what kind of video viewers might like after watching. Users only need to watch it once to accurately analyze their needs and improve their interest in this partition. Take TikTok's education section for example. In Haye, Stott, Lamb and Hurst's research, TikTok has been used to make fun, exciting, and engaging educational videos that encourage the public to spread the science and the science short video [9]. After surveying users, studies have shown that there is a new understanding of science and increased interest in the sector since watching educational science videos [9]. AI algorithms help TikTok reach a wider audience for each type of short video and propel the video and encourage people to follow that particular account later on TikTok. Thus, the new AI technology could help TikTok to reach the global surge.

3. DISCUSSION

Although TikTok has been successfully developing worldwide, there are still some existing problems and potential consequences in TikTok. The privacy and safety issue are probably the biggest problems that the majority of people care about. TikTok faces the challenge of dealing with hate speech and protecting users from threats, harassment, and harm. In the TikTok community, though, established rules not to post, share or send any content that discriminates and incites hatred, and there will be penalties for violating the rule, however, these community guidelines or regulations are usually not a sufficient deterrent for all. TikTok could become a platform for spreading misinformation, conspiracies and there are concerns about the ability of

the platform to deal with these misbehaviors. TikTok's privacy and safety issue may be the consequences of its poor content management, scarce warning, punishment laws, or the content recognition algorithm are not sufficient to face the particular situation. TikTok has announced the privacy and safety issue has been concerned and the company is strengthening the policies to make sure it can better define this kind of content and misinformation, as well as improving the quality of their technology.

TikTok's business model is immature and suffers from a lack of liquidity. Although TikTok's development has reached a mature stage, the business model as a whole is still in its infancy. TikTok was unable to produce a consistent income since it could not build a business model. TikTok has not yet reached monetization maturity since it is still experimenting with various approaches. Furthermore, social shopping is still in its early stages in many nations. TikTok is still exploring several alternative revenue-generating methods.

Another issue reflected by users is the fake goods problem in TikTok and the platform is lack of supervision. As TikTok's popularity grows, some businesses, including WeChat Business or Social E-Commerce, catch an opportunity to profit from it and try to promote goods on short video platforms. In TikTok, some businesses account obtains improper profits through online communication and offline transactions by recording and posting short videos of their homemade products. The commercial violations problems are e caused by weak platform supervision and imperfect laws and regulations of such areas. The fake goods and the illegal business problem affect the TikTok platform environment and its user experience to a large extent.

4. CONCLUSION

Overall, it is clear that TikTok is a new social media app, the operation strategy successfully makes it become popular all over the world. The first attractive point is that it pushes the correct content to the correct audiences which means it gives the audience what they want to watch. Based on the U&G theory, the audience is satisfied when they are browsing these short music videos, also they could fulfill their social interaction needs through posting and watching the videos. The second one is the cutting-edge technology TikTok used to enhance the user's experience and satisfaction. When a product provides users with good feelings, these users tend to be stuck to this product, thus increase the user stickiness. Lastly, the effect of marketing strategy and advertisement cannot be neglected. TikTok has invited many stars and celebrities to advertise this application. The celebrity effect successfully draws the attention of more audiences and brings more customers to TikTok.

The online and offline activities further increase TikTok's global impact. TikTok has been recognized and acknowledged by more users for its interactivity, information, and entertainment. TikTok's marketing strategy and technology are successful to make it popular, but it is still not a mature product. TikTok does have some existing problems and flaws which need to be improved.

This analysis is based on several related pieces of literature. However, the generalisability and timeliness of much published research on this topic are problematic, leading to this analysis potentially being immature and not time-efficient. Besides, this analysis lacks data support. In the future, I might construct a thorough survey on this topic and analyze it with more figures.

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