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FYP Addiction and the Art of Digital Selling: A Study of MSMEs on TikTok Shop

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Abstrak

This study aims to explore the experiences of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in utilizing TikTok Shop as a digital selling platform, particularly in their efforts to appear on the For You Page (FYP). Using a descriptive qualitative approach and phenomenological method, this research involves eight MSME actors who actively produce content and conduct live selling. The findings reveal that FYP is not only perceived as a visibility target but also as a source of social validation and psychological pressure. MSMEs develop content strategies based on trends, storytelling, and personalization while navigating the ambiguity between promotion and entertainment. Moreover, emotional stress is found to be a consequence of algorithmic demands for consistent performance. These findings highlight the importance of understanding FYP as a performative and emotional space within digital business strategies. This study suggests the need for ongoing support for MSMEs to maintain a balance between creativity and mental well-being in the platform-based digital economy.

Keywords: TikTok Shop, For You Page, MSMEs, content strategy, digital addiction, personal branding.

1. Background

TikTok has evolved into a major force in the global digital landscape, including in Indonesia, with rapid user growth and innovative features such as TikTok Shop. Beyond serving as a medium for entertainment, TikTok has now become a key channel in the digital marketing strategies of various businesses, especially micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) [1][2]. The For You Page (FYP) functions as the main space where business content aims to appear to reach potential consumers. However, visibility on the FYP heavily depends on a complex and ever-changing algorithm, creating new dynamics in digital trading activities [1].

Several previous studies have examined the effectiveness of TikTok as a marketing communication tool, including through the application of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to assess the extent to which perceived usefulness and perceived playfulness influence purchase intentions toward business content that appears on the FYP [3][4]. The findings show that both variables significantly affect users' buying intentions. On the other hand, there has been a noticeable decline in user interaction and engagement with business content, especially when the content approach is perceived as unappealing or overly hard-selling [5].

Other studies have also highlighted critical aspects of TikTok's FYP content. For instance, critical discourse and semiotic analyses of a 10-second video from account TI reveal how FYP content can shape hedonistic lifestyles and deviant social relations [3]. A multimodal approach to this content—through body language, text descriptions, and visuals—uncovers implicit meanings that reflect gender and economic dynamics within the digital sphere. Furthermore, the phenomenon of personal branding, as seen in TikTok creators like @claramonica, demonstrates how TikTok has become a space for identity expression, creativity, and public image building through video content [6]. TikTok's influence extends beyond business, impacting users psychologically and socially, such as boosting self-confidence and developing personal character.

Interestingly, recent studies have also explored the impact of TikTok content on the mental health of young people, particularly in Malaysia. A systematic review found a correlation between intensive consumption of TikTok content and the emergence of symptoms such as anxiety, social isolation, and hopelessness [7]. These

findings reinforce the need to view TikTok not only as a promotional tool but also as a digital environment that shapes user behavior, emotions, and perceptions.

However, a clear gap in the literature remains: while many quantitative studies have assessed the effectiveness of business content on TikTok, few have qualitatively explored the subjective experiences of MSME actors in pursuing FYP exposure and developing balanced business strategies that align with algorithmic expectations. The constant pursuit of FYP visibility often leads to mental pressure, exposure addiction, and content strategies that blur the line between entertainment and commerce [8].

This study aims to uncover the experiences of MSME actors in blending content strategies with sales strategies on TikTok Shop, and how they interpret their engagement with the FYP—whether as an opportunity or a source of pressure. The main research question is: *How do MSME actors experience and respond to FYP addiction and the art of digital selling on TikTok Shop?*

2. Research Methodology

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a phenomenological method, aiming to explore the subjective experiences of MSME (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprise) actors who are actively selling through TikTok Shop and pursuing visibility via the For You Page (FYP) feature. Phenomenology was chosen for its ability to explore the deepest meaning of human experience in real-life contexts, especially complex experiences that are rarely examined in academic research. According to Moustakas [4], phenomenology enables researchers to capture the *essence* of a phenomenon as it is directly experienced by individuals involved.

In this context, the activities of MSMEs in producing content, responding to algorithms, and building digital selling strategies on TikTok Shop not only represent economic actions but also rich social and psychological phenomena. Therefore, this approach is highly suitable for revealing the dynamics of FYP addiction and the evolving “art of digital selling” among small business practitioners.

The research subjects consist of 8 MSME actors selected through purposive sampling, a deliberate sampling technique based on relevance to the research objectives. The participant criteria are as follows:

1. Having an active TikTok Shop account for at least 6 months;
2. Regularly uploading content aimed at reaching the FYP;
3. Having conducted live selling sessions at least twice per month.

Data collection was carried out between April and June 2025, covering two primary locations: East Java (Malang and Surabaya) and Jakarta, both online (via Zoom) and offline (face-to-face). These areas were selected due to the high concentration of online business activity and active TikTok user penetration.

2.1 Data Collection Techniques

Three primary methods were used:

1. **In-depth interviews**, conducted semi-structurally with a duration of 40 to 60 minutes per participant. The interview format was designed to be flexible, allowing for the natural flow of participants’ narratives. The questions focused on their initial experiences in starting a TikTok business, perceptions of the FYP algorithm, content strategy, and views on engagement and digital pressure.
2. **Digital observation**, conducted by directly monitoring each participant’s TikTok account to identify content production patterns, posting times, popular audio usage, visual styles, live selling frequency, and types of interaction with followers. This observation provided essential context to complement the interview data.
3. **Documentation**, which included screenshots of FYP content, captions, hashtags, and visuals. Additional documents such as promotional scripts or content strategy drafts were also collected as supporting data. These three techniques were applied **triangulatively** to enhance data validity and enrich understanding.

2.2 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the phenomenological thematic analysis approach developed by Moustakas [9], consisting of four main stages:

1. **Horizontalization:** the process of identifying all significant statements from participants equally without prioritizing any single meaning;
2. **Clustering of meaning units:** grouping statements into major themes based on similarities in meaning;
3. **Textural and structural description:** constructing narrative descriptions of *what* was experienced (textural) and *how* it was experienced (structural);
4. **Synthesis of meaning and essence:** integrating descriptions to derive the essential meaning of the phenomenon under study.

To assist in coding and thematic categorization, NVivo 12 Plus software was used, which allowed systematic and transparent processing of interview data. Data validity was strengthened through source and technique triangulation, by comparing interviews with digital observations and documentation. Additionally, member checking was conducted with participants to confirm the accuracy of the narratives and interpretations. From an ethical standpoint, this research upheld the principle of informed consent, whereby all participants were given complete information about the purpose, process, and their rights within the study. Participant identities were anonymized, and all data were kept confidential. They were also given the full freedom to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.

3. Results and Discussion

This study reveals a new landscape in digital business practices among MSMEs through TikTok Shop, which serves not only as a transactional platform but also as a field of visual, emotional, and narrative competition. Based on the experiences of eight informants from diverse business backgrounds—ranging from women’s fashion, cosmetics, and handmade accessories to healthy snacks, books, and packaged coffee—this research found that success on TikTok is determined not only by product quality, but also by the ability to manage digital presence, understand the algorithm, and design performative content.

3.1 Dependence on FYP: Between Satisfaction and Pressure

For MSME actors, the For You Page (FYP) is not just a content distribution feature, but a highly anticipated achievement. All informants explicitly linked their business success to how often and how quickly their content appeared on the FYP. Informant B, for instance, who runs a cosmetics business, stated that a single video appearing on the FYP could increase orders up to fivefold within just 24 hours. This proves that TikTok’s algorithm influences not only exposure but also has a direct impact on revenue.

However, behind the excitement about the algorithm lies significant psychological pressure. Informant C, who sells handmade accessories, reported frequent anxiety and stress when her content failed to reach audiences. She felt personally—not just professionally—unsuccessful. This reflects a digital reinforcement pattern, where each view, like, and share becomes a psychological reward that fosters emotional dependence. Symptoms such as compulsive notification checking, anxiety when not posting, and guilt over low engagement indicate an intensifying trend of digital addiction among small business actors [10].

3.2 Content Strategy and Live Selling: Adapting to the Algorithm

To reach the FYP, the informants implemented relatively systematic content strategies. Informant D, a 24-year-old hijab seller, consistently produced six videos per week, optimized posting times, and followed popular audio trends and visual transitions. She stated, “If I don’t follow the trend, the video just sinks.”

Besides regular content, nearly all MSME actors actively engaged in **live selling**, which was considered more effective in driving conversions. Informant E, a healthy snack seller, conducted live sessions five times a week, each lasting one to two hours. During these sessions, she greeted audiences, demonstrated her products, answered questions live, and created a friendly atmosphere that emotionally involved the audience. Live sessions were seen as crucial for showcasing product authenticity and seller personality—both key factors in purchasing decisions.

Informant H, who sells packaged coffee, deliberately created a live atmosphere reminiscent of hanging out at a coffee stall. With this approach, he fostered a relaxed vibe aligned with his young consumer base’s lifestyle. These examples indicate that content strategies are not merely technical, but also contextual and emotional—tailored to product character and market segments.

3.3 Productivity vs. Mental Balance: The Pressure of Digital Labor

Despite content and live selling being the main strategies for staying competitive on the platform, several informants reported the negative impact of unrelenting algorithmic demands. Informant G (33 years old, book and stationery business) admitted feeling emotionally exhausted from being constantly active on TikTok, even during weekends. He felt that skipping just one day led to a drastic drop in engagement.

This reveals a new form of invisible digital labor—**emotional labor**—stemming from the pressure to perform, greet, respond to comments, and maintain a consistent public image. The burden is even heavier because platforms like TikTok rely heavily on visual performance and emotional expression to attract audiences.

3.4 Personalization and Performance: The Art of Selling in the Visual Era

One key finding in this study is how MSMEs do not just sell products—they sell stories, characters, and personas. They become performers who play specific roles tailored to their target markets. Informant A, for instance, chose a playful and casual persona to connect with a young female audience. Meanwhile, Informant F, who sells household goods, adopted the persona of a frugal, nurturing homemaker, complete with content on cooking tips and home care.

TikTok as a digital stage demands that MSME actors be more than just sellers—they are **storytellers, performers, and micro-public figures** who build trust through image construction. This aligns with **dramaturgical theory**, which posits that in public spaces, individuals craft and perform roles acceptable to their audience. In TikTok's context, the stage is the FYP, where success is determined by a combination of creativity, visual harmony, and emotional resonance [11].

3.5 Blurring the Line Between Entertainment and Promotion: Content as a Hybrid Medium

Almost all informants agreed that content that appeared overly promotional tended to be penalized by the algorithm. Instead, they developed **hybrid content**—entertaining and promotional, educational and persuasive. Informant B, for example, created household parody videos as a narrative frame to promote skincare products. Informant D presented hijab transformation videos in a fun and aesthetic “before–after” format [12].

This ambiguity is not just a strategy—it is a **platform requirement**. TikTok demands uniqueness and creativity, not mere product catalogs. Therefore, MSME actors adopted subtler approaches, embedding promotions into storytelling, humor, or emotional content. They learned to craft narratives that move audiences not just to watch, but to buy—without feeling like they are being sold to.

3.6 Comparative Engagement Strategies: Lessons from Facebook Live and Instagram Hasbro

These findings gain further relevance when compared with content strategies on other platforms like Facebook Live and Instagram. A study on **Facebook Live in Thailand** found that its live streaming feature enables sellers to invite users either privately or in groups [13][14]. Although Facebook Live holds great potential for community-based business communication, only about **8%** of users actively utilize it, even though Thailand accounts for **11.26%** of global streaming traffic. This reveals a gap between potential and actual adoption, highlighting that **the success of live streaming depends on strategic engagement and content relevance**.

That study used **K-Means clustering** to categorize Facebook Live sellers based on their activity and engagement levels. It revealed that frequent broadcasting did not always equate to higher interaction, reinforcing this study's conclusion: consistency alone does not guarantee success—it is the **quality of experience and narrative** that determines content performance [15].

Furthermore, Hasbro's implementation of **social media marketing via Instagram (@hasbroactiveid)** demonstrates that marketing success is not measured solely by posting frequency, but also by **content diversity and quality**. The marketing team created thematic content formats—educational, promotional, entertaining, and live sessions—via Instagram Stories, Reels, posts, and lives. The result was a significant increase in reach, engagement, interaction, and followers. This shows that a **multi-format strategy with strong storytelling and precise audience targeting** has substantial impact on campaign performance [16][17].

Both studies—from Thailand’s Facebook Live and Hasbro’s Instagram—affirm that **live streaming and performative content** like those produced by MSMEs on TikTok Shop are not isolated phenomena, but part of a broader trend in the **content-driven digital economy**. However, TikTok’s algorithm provides a distinct advantage by aggressively distributing short-form content to unfamiliar users, making the FYP the most strategic space for market acquisition.

Discussion

The findings of this study affirm that TikTok Shop, through the For You Page (FYP), has given rise to a new form of digital economic activity that is emotional, visual, and narrative in nature. The platform requires MSME actors to become multi-functional entities: content creators, marketers, communicators, and performers all at once. Addition to FYP is not merely technical—it is rooted in an existential need to be seen, acknowledged, and validated within the digital space.

Small business owners can no longer simply sell products; they must sell experiences, emotions, and personas. In doing so, they learn to interpret algorithmic patterns, craft self-presentations aligned with their target markets, and manage their emotional expressions before thousands of potential viewers. However, this does not come without consequences. The accumulation of digital labor, the pressure to stay consistently visible, and the blurred boundaries between entertainment and work have created new challenges not present in traditional business models.

Therefore, the art of digital selling on TikTok Shop should be understood as a complex and non-linear form of social adaptation. It requires a balance of creativity, performance courage, algorithmic literacy, and emotional resilience. MSME actors on TikTok Shop are no longer merely merchants—they are content architects, image builders, and performers on a constantly shifting algorithmic stage.

4. Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive portrayal of the experiences of MSME actors in utilizing TikTok Shop as a digital selling platform, particularly in their efforts to appear on the For You Page (FYP). The findings reveal that FYP is perceived not only as a space for promotion but also as a symbol of digital existence and social validation. For MSME sellers, reaching FYP often signifies overall success in their selling strategy—sometimes even more than actual sales. This has led to a form of psychological dependency that drives them to continuously produce content, conduct live selling, and monitor algorithmic responses with intensity. In practice, MSMEs combine various elements in their content strategies—from following audio-visual trends and employing storytelling techniques to crafting personas that align with their product identity. These strategies reflect adaptations to algorithmic behavior and audience preferences. Moreover, the content produced serves dual functions—as both promotional material and entertainment—turning MSME actors into hybrid figures: both seller and entertainer. In this sense, the art of digital selling is not merely about transactions, but about communication, emotional engagement, and the ability to package value in algorithm-friendly formats. However, the ongoing pressure to remain relevant on FYP and the demand for consistent content production have created significant emotional burdens. Some sellers experience mental fatigue, guilt over inactivity, and pressure to keep up with rapidly changing trends. This indicates that digital labor on platforms like TikTok requires not only creativity but also emotional and psychological stamina. Practically, the findings of this study can serve as a foundation for MSMEs in developing more conscious and sustainable content strategies that balance creativity, marketing objectives, and mental well-being. Moreover, platforms like TikTok Shop should consider providing educational support to sellers to help them cope with the demands of digital labor and foster healthier interactions with audiences and algorithms. For future research, it is recommended to apply quantitative or mixed-method approaches, include a wider variety of locations and demographics, and analyze the long-term impacts of business engagement within the FYP ecosystem. Further studies may also explore the consumer perspective—particularly how perceptions of FYP content influence purchasing decisions and brand loyalty toward MSMEs.

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