

**NAVIGATING UNCERTAINTY: PROMOTING INDONESIAN
FAMILY BUSINESSES THROUGH TIKTOK AS A SOCIAL
COMMERCE PLATFORM****Jhanghiz Syahrivar¹, Ryo Fadhlur Rozy², Chairy Chairy³**¹President University, jhanghiz@president.ac.id²President University, ryo.rozy@student.president.ac.id³President University, chairy@president.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Family businesses, especially those that fall under the small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) classification, play a crucial role in numerous countries worldwide by fostering regional growth, driving innovation, and creating employment opportunities, all of which positively impact the national economy. The rapid advancements in the digital era have enabled family business practitioners to leverage digital sophistication to expand their businesses amidst political and economic uncertainties. This study aims to understand the motivations behind Indonesian family businesses' choice of TikTok as a social commerce platform and to explore their online promotional strategies utilizing this platform. Employing a qualitative approach, the research delves into why and how family businesses in Indonesia utilize TikTok for their marketing efforts. The findings reveal several factors that make TikTok an advantageous platform for family businesses. Firstly, TikTok is recognized as the most popular social media platform in Indonesia, making it a highly effective tool for attracting potential customers. Secondly, despite the technical challenges associated with digital platforms, TikTok is perceived as user-friendly. Thirdly, TikTok provides unique features that distinguish it from other social media platforms. Fourthly, TikTok is regarded as a cost-effective means of business promotion. Lastly, TikTok enhances customer engagement. Additionally, this paper examines various online promotional strategies employed by local family businesses on TikTok. The study provides valuable managerial insights for family business practitioners.

Keywords: Family Business, Small Medium Enterprise, TikTok, Social Commerce, Indonesia

1. Introduction

Family businesses, particularly those that fall under the small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) classification, play a crucial role globally, contributing to regional growth, innovation, and job creation, all of which benefit national economies (Shemi & Procter, 2018; Pramudya, Syahrivar, & Chairy, 2022). In Indonesia, SMEs contribute over 61 percent to the GDP and employ 97 percent of the domestic workforce (Soumena *et al.*, 2024). Establishing an SME in Indonesia is relatively straightforward, allowing individuals or groups with limited capital to do so (Kawung *et al.*, 2019). According to Law No. 20 of 2008, the criteria for micro, small, and medium enterprises are clearly outlined, ensuring protection against unfair competition (ojk.go.id). However, concerns persist about the sustainability of Indonesia's SMEs, primarily

due to limited access to financing, a lack of comprehensive business plans, and inadequate digital infrastructure (Anatan & Nur, 2023).

Family SMEs face numerous challenges in today's competitive environment, marked by increased market volatility and heightened competition driven by globalization (Troise *et al.*, 2022; Pramudya, Syahrivar, & Chairy, 2022). Globalization, characterized by the free flow of imported goods and intensified price competition, has impacted many Indonesian SMEs that continue to rely on traditional selling and promotional methods (Kurnia, 2023). However, those embracing digital development as an opportunity can rapidly expand through digital channels, enabling cross-border sales and contributing to national development (Baldegger, Wild, & Schueffel, 2021). In this context, digital marketing has gained significant public interest as it increasingly facilitates daily activities, leading to a shift from traditional marketing strategies (Dumitriu & Popescu, 2020). The rise of chatbots as shopping assistants exemplifies the growing adoption of digital tools in today's business landscape (Wei, Syahrivar, & Simay, 2024). Furthermore, the convenience and advantages of buying options on social networking sites have increased user engagement in social network shopping (Abou-Shouk & Soliman, 2021).

TikTok has emerged as one of the most popular social media platforms in Indonesia. As of April 2024, Indonesia had the largest TikTok audience globally, with nearly 127.5 million users actively engaging with the platform (Statista, 2024). This widespread usage extends beyond personal entertainment; TikTok is increasingly leveraged for marketing purposes, benefiting both personal and organizational branding (Wei, Syahrivar, & Widyanto, 2023). The platform, originating from China, has evolved to include e-commerce functionalities, exemplifying the concept of social commerce. This integration of social media and e-commerce has intensified business competition in Indonesia, leading to some SMEs being forced to close their physical stores due to a decline in in-person shoppers who now prefer online shopping (Aljazeera, 2023).

The purpose of this research is to understand why local family SMEs prefer TikTok as a marketing communication and promotion platform. Specifically, this research raises and addresses two important Research Questions (RQs): 1. *Why is TikTok chosen as a marketing communication platform by local family SMEs?* 2. *How is the marketing communication process carried out by local family SMEs using TikTok?* A systematic literature review by Chen, Harncharnchai, and Saeheaw (2021) indicates limited research on SMEs utilizing TikTok, highlighting the need for further exploration in this area.

Today's accelerated digital advancements have provided businesses with opportunities to develop strategies leveraging digital sophistication to expand their operations (Chintalapati & Pandey, 2022). Over the last two decades, internet innovation has been crucial to business performance (Tajvidi & Karami, 2021). According to Datareportal (2024), at the beginning of 2024, Indonesia had 185.3 million internet users (or 66.5 percent of the total population) and 139 million social media users in January 2024 (or 49.9 percent of the total population). With the increasing shift towards online shopping and digital payments, TikTok has become a crucial marketing communication channel, facilitating direct interaction between businesses and customers (Krismajayanti *et al.*, 2023).

Our research is unique for several reasons. First, the application of TikTok in family SME marketing communication remains underexplored, making this study highly relevant and significant for understanding local family businesses' promotional strategies in the context of globalization and heightened competition in Indonesia. Second, this study examines TikTok's role from the perspective of family SME owners, focusing on their motivations and promotional strategies, and offering valuable insights for other local family businesses looking to adopt similar practices. Finally, based on our findings, we propose a conceptual framework that can serve as a foundation for more rigorous research in this area, particularly studies employing a quantitative approach.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Family Small Medium-Sized Enterprises (SME)

A family business is essentially an enterprise owned, managed, and controlled by family members (Pramudya, Syahrivar, & Chairy, 2022). Such a business can also fall under the SME classification. SMEs are traditionally defined in terms of the number of employees, sales or revenues, assets, capital/investment, and operating sectors (Soumena *et al.*, 2024). The definition of SMEs in Indonesia varies between sources. The National Statistical Bureau of Indonesia (BPS) defines SMEs based on workforce size: small businesses employ 5 to 19 people, while medium businesses employ 20 to 99 people (Tambunan, 2008). Meanwhile, Law Number 20 of 2008 concerning Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises defines SMEs based on net worth and annual sales (ojk.go.id). SMEs play a crucial role in creating new jobs, providing various economic services to the community, and contributing to national stability by increasing incomes, driving economic growth, and promoting equity (Chandrarin *et al.*, 2018). Moreover, family SMEs are unique in that they feature close-knit decision-making, intergenerational management, strong values, and deep integration within the local community (Ng, Dayan, & Makri, 2022).

2.2. Previous Studies of TikTok Applications in SMEs

Genoveva (2021) explored the impact of TikTok on brand awareness of SMEs among Generation Z in Indonesia. This quantitative study, which included 238 targeted respondents, utilized multiple regression analysis. The findings indicate that a combination of content marketing, influencer effects, and psychological factors significantly influences brand awareness of local SMEs among Indonesian Gen Z. However, the study did not explore SME owners' perspectives on the effectiveness of TikTok in enhancing brand awareness or improving marketing communication strategies.

Luthen and Soelaiman (2022) conducted a study to determine the impact of interactivity, cost-effectiveness, and compatibility on the performance of SMEs, with TikTok usage serving as a mediating variable. This descriptive study employed a cross-sectional design approach and included a sample size of 100 SMEs in Jakarta that use TikTok. To test the hypotheses, the research utilized Partial Least Square (PLS) analysis with SmartPLS software. The findings revealed that interactivity, cost-effectiveness, and compatibility all have a positive and significant impact on TikTok usage. Furthermore, TikTok usage was found to have a positive and significant impact on business performance. The study concluded that TikTok effectively serves as a mediating variable, enhancing the performance of SMEs through its interactive, cost-effective, and compatible features. Nevertheless, how TikTok was utilized to improve SME performance remains unexplored.

Zhang and Erturk (2022) investigated how SMEs in China adopt digital marketing strategies and platforms and whether SMEs in New Zealand can learn from these practices. The qualitative involved two sample groups from both countries. Their findings, based on twelve Chinese companies, suggest that Douyin (the Chinese version of TikTok) is effective in acquiring new customers. However, Chinese SMEs expressed doubts about the effectiveness of social media platforms in improving sales. Additionally, SME participants highlighted the potential to enhance customer engagement and generate traffic to their official websites by creating short videos on Douyin. Another promotional strategy involves collaborating with Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) via Douyin live-streaming feature.

A study by Krismajayanti *et al.* (2023) investigates how TikTok can assist SMEs in their business endeavors. This qualitative research includes 7 (seven) business owners from Bali, Indonesia, and reveals that TikTok helps SMEs reach a wider audience and create engaging video content. While TikTok was primarily utilized to drive sales, its impact varied among businesses, with some informants suggesting its effect was not significant. However, the study's limited sample size, even by qualitative research standards, and focus on a specific city may limit the breadth and depth of findings and constrain the transferability of the findings to other contexts.

Hu, Olivieri, and Rialti (2023) explored how SMEs adopted social media platforms, including TikTok, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their qualitative research, which involved 19 Italian SME practitioners, found that TikTok was utilized to build brand narratives, showcase products and ideas, and engage with younger audiences. Their study concludes that social media platforms offer a cost-effective

method for businesses to promote themselves and reach a broader audience that might otherwise be inaccessible, especially during a crisis.

The existing literature on this topic, especially studies focusing on TikTok, remains relatively limited (Chen *et al.*, 2021). This scarcity can be attributed to TikTok's recent emergence as a social commerce platform. Launched in September 2016 under the name Douyin in China, the platform began gaining significant traction internationally shortly thereafter (Anderson, 2020). Our literature review and a simple Google Scholar search involving the keywords “TikTok”, “Indonesia”, “Family Business”, and “SME”, indicate that significant scholarly works on TikTok in the context of Indonesia began to emerge around 2021.

3. Research Method

This research employs a qualitative method, utilizing thematic data analysis. The qualitative approach is particularly advantageous when exploring a topic that is relatively new or sensitive, especially when the existing literature is limited (Fossey *et al.*, 2002). Meanwhile, thematic data analysis is widely used in qualitative social science research due to its straightforward and efficient approach (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). This technique involves detecting, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within data, making it particularly effective for organizing and describing data sets in interpretive research designs (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This study applied thematic analysis to interview data to identify key themes and explore research questions. The process aids in filtering raw information and removing noise, with the primary goal of coding being to provide a more focused and exhaustive exploration of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke’s six-phase steps of thematic analysis were followed (see Figure 1):

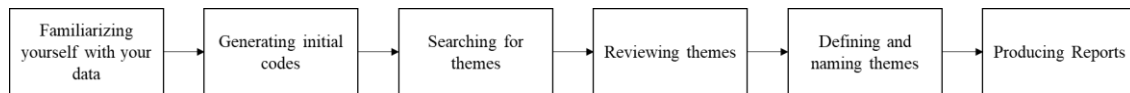


Figure 1. Six-phase of thematic analysis.
(Source: Braun & Clarke, 2006)

The present research utilized a non-probability sampling method, a combination of purposive and snowball sampling. In qualitative research, the primary goal of sampling is to select specific cases, events, or activities that can enhance the understanding of processes within each setting (Gill, 2020). For this study, interview data were collected from 20 family SME owners who volunteered as (anonymous) informants. The decision to stop at 20 informants was due to data saturation, which occurs when no new information is obtained despite the addition of new informants (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The informant profile is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Informant Profile

Informant Label	Age	Gender	Education	Business Sector	Location
F1	26	Female	Vocational school	Cosmetics and skincare	Tangerang
F2	21	Male	Senior high school	Fashion	Yogyakarta
F3	21	Female	Senior high school	Fashion	Cikarang
F4	22	Female	Bachelor degree	Fashion	Bogor
F5	30	Female	Bachelor degree	Retail	Jakarta
F6	26	Female	Bachelor degree	Retail	Jakarta
F7	21	Female	Senior high school	Food and beverage	Bogor
F8	27	Male	Master degree	Food and beverage	Bogor
F9	22	Female	Senior high school	Food and beverage	Bogor
F10	23	Male	Vocational school	Fashion	Depok
F11	21	Female	Bachelor degree	Retail	Bogor

F12	21	Female	Bachelor degree	Food and beverage	Tangerang
F13	21	Female	Bachelor degree	Food and beverage	Jakarta
F14	31	Female	Master degree	Retail	Jakarta
F15	22	Male	Bachelor degree	Fashion	Tangerang
F16	25	Female	Bachelor degree	Food and beverage	Bekasi
F17	27	Male	Bachelor degree	Fashion	Depok
F18	35	Male	Bachelor degree	Retail	Cikarang
F19	46	Male	Bachelor degree	Retail	Jakarta
F20	29	Female	Bachelor degree	Retail	Bekasi

This study employed semi-structured interviews to gather relevant information. The interview questions were developed based on prior knowledge and expert opinions (Kallio *et al.*, 2016). The list of interview questions is presented in Table 1:

Table 1. Interview Questions

Purpose	Interview Questions
Respondent Profile	Age, Gender, Education, Business Sector, Location, TikTok Account
Business Profile	What type of business do you run?
	How many employees do your business have?
	What is the price range of the products you sell?
	How long have you been involved in this business?
	Does your business engage in any online branding and promotional activities, especially via TikTok?
Motivation for Using TikTok	Why do you choose TikTok as a promotional tool for your company?
	How long have you been using TikTok as a platform to promote your business?
	How effective is marketing promotion via social media platforms such as TikTok in enhancing your company's performance?
	How has TikTok affected your business relationships with customers?
TikTok Strategies	What aspects or features do you consider when using TikTok as a promotional strategy for your business?
	How do you respond to competitors on TikTok selling similar products?
	How do you optimize the use of TikTok as a promotional platform for your business?
TikTok Effects	What are the advantages and disadvantages (if any) of using TikTok as a promotional platform?
	Please explain what you like or dislike about TikTok. You can provide comparisons with other social media platforms if you wish.
	Are there any specific costs associated with promoting your business on TikTok?
	Has promoting through TikTok significantly impacted your sales? How?

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Social media popularity

TikTok is widely recognized as an entertaining and engaging platform. In Indonesia, it has become a popular social media network where users can create and share original music videos. The platform is rapidly growing, and its widespread use makes it an effective tool for promoting businesses. Several

informants noted that TikTok's popularity among a broad audience is a key reason for its use in marketing. F1 mentioned, *"TikTok is currently in high demand across various age groups, including adults and parents. Almost everyone uses TikTok."* According to F13, *"We use social media platforms like TikTok for promotion because they are widely embraced by the general public. As more people from diverse backgrounds use TikTok, it becomes easier for SMEs to introduce their businesses and products."* Social media has become an integral part of daily life, and TikTok's trendiness provides family businesses with an opportunity to reach a large audience effectively. F2 stated, *"In my opinion, TikTok is a trending application widely used by many people."* Moreover, TikTok is transforming online entertainment and creating new marketing opportunities for SMEs. As F5 noted, *"TikTok is a popular and entertaining application that has significantly influenced various markets."*

4.2. User-friendly interface

TikTok is straightforward and highly accessible, featuring an intuitive interface that streamlines buying and selling transactions. This ease of use enables business owners to effectively attract customers and manage their business activities. As F11 noted, *"It's easy to reach enthusiasts and buyers. TikTok is user-friendly."* Similarly, F9 remarked, *"It is easy to use for beginners as a promotional medium, and its features are very easy to access."* F3 added, *"In my opinion, TikTok is one of the easiest platforms to use because its broad reach helps us, as business owners, make our offerings more visible to a larger community."* F19 also shared, *"Although I'm not as enthusiastic about social media platforms as younger users, I find TikTok's features relatively straightforward and user-friendly."*

4.3. Unique features

TikTok offers features that allow both users and SMEs to engage in online shopping directly through the app. These features aim to attract customer interest and facilitate the buying and selling of daily necessities. Respondents highlighted how TikTok's features help them introduce their products to a wider audience and increase sales. F16 commented, *"It's quite effective because more TikTok users understand how to use social media more effectively. Additionally, there are numerous features designed to make our existence as sellers easier."* The platform's algorithm is praised for aiding family businesses in identifying consumer preferences, marketing, and boosting sales. F11 added, *"TikTok has an algorithm that makes contents visible to anyone without needing to be friends first."* One interviewee was particularly pleased with TikTok's live feature, which significantly enhanced their business. F2 shared, *"It's quite helpful, very helpful even in my opinion. Especially when I go live, I can showcase all my products."* Another feature, the voice-over tool, allows SMEs to add narration to their videos, which is beneficial for creating engaging business content. F12 noted, *"TikTok is not just for dance videos. The features, like sound editing and voice-overs, support running a business creatively."* Music and sound on TikTok facilitate creative product promotion. F11 remarked, *"When using TikTok for business promotion, I consider the quality of sound and music, which seem to be very good."* The use of trending hashtags is another strategy SMEs use to increase their visibility. F15 explained, *"With this content, I usually incorporate the latest trending hashtags to get on more people's FYP (For You Page) quickly."*

4.4. Cost-effective

Price competition has driven family SMEs to seek innovative strategies for reducing business costs. According to the interviews conducted, using TikTok as a promotion platform offers significant cost efficiency, allowing SMEs to promote their businesses without needing a large budget. F2 noted, *"The use of TikTok for promotion is quite effective because I don't need to spend a lot of money on it."* Furthermore, F2 highlighted that TikTok's wide reach allows many people to see the products, providing a significant advantage for business owners. F8 commented, *"It's cost-effective. TikTok's algorithm and engagement are extensive, so we leverage this by incorporating merchandise based on trending content."* This engagement is a key advantage for business actors using TikTok to promote their businesses. Moreover, F9 reported

that TikTok had significantly reduced his business's promotional costs, though he was unwilling to disclose specific figures.

4.5. Improved customer engagement

TikTok's live-streaming feature offers family businesses a valuable tool for real-time interaction with both potential and existing customers. This direct engagement allows family businesses to address questions and concerns about their products promptly, thereby enhancing customer satisfaction. As F18 observed, *"The live streaming feature enables me to help potential customers understand how and when to best use our products."* Similarly, F20 noted, *"Demonstrating how to use our product live is much more effective than email or phone communication, as it allows me to address any remaining concerns immediately."* The key advantage of live-streaming advertising is its ability to provide insights into user needs and facilitate more effective product promotion. By engaging with customers in real-time, family businesses can customize their promotions and improve sales outcomes. As F12 remarked, *"Using Live TikTok can significantly boost sales. It's especially effective because I can showcase all my products live."*

4.6. Discussion

This study aims to address two following Research Questions (RQs): 1. *Why is TikTok chosen as a marketing communication platform by local family SMEs?* 2. *How is the marketing communication process carried out by local family SMEs using TikTok?*

To answer the first RQ, the findings of this study indicate that local family businesses choose TikTok as a marketing communication platform due to its popularity, user-friendly interface, unique features, cost-effective promotional opportunities, and high level of customer engagement. The digitalization of the local market and the gradual shift toward online shopping have compelled family businesses in Indonesia to innovate by seeking out popular social media platforms that allow them to reach a wider audience while reducing promotional costs (Li *et al.*, 2023; Zhou & Tang, 2024). TikTok, with its user-friendly interface (Hung & Chiang, 2024) and unique features such as live streaming and a clever algorithm, is perceived as ideal by local family businesses for promoting their businesses. Unlike other social media platforms, TikTok enables direct and interactive communication with potential and existing customers, thus enhancing overall customer engagement. Furthermore, informants reported a boost in sales after using TikTok, thereby justifying their preference for this platform over others.

To answer the second RQ, the findings of this study indicate that there are several ways by which the marketing communication process is carried out via TikTok. The results of family businesses' activities after utilizing the TikTok platform indicate that TikTok holds significant potential for aiding family businesses in promoting and developing their businesses. According to the interview results, respondent F15 emphasized, *"By providing promotions related to the products I sell, more people become aware of these products."* Brand awareness is critical in purchasing decisions as it increases the likelihood of the brand being remembered and considered by consumers (Genoveva, 2021). Several processes are employed by family business practitioners to enhance product visibility and boost sales, such as conducting live sessions on TikTok. Respondent F2 mentioned, *"I took advantage of this by including merchandise based on popular content and using live features to sell."* Electronic word of mouth (E-WOM) is a powerful communication process where individuals recommend products or services, significantly influencing sales (Syahrivar & Ichlas, 2018). Additionally, collaborating with influencers can elevate product awareness (Genoveva, 2021; Simay *et al.*, 2023). TikTok is described as an entertaining and versatile platform that enhances users' moods through creative videos with unique special effects and music choices. This makes TikTok an ideal promotional platform for family businesses. Respondent F10 stated, *"Creating interesting video content and timing uploads to align with trends increases visibility."* Engaging videos, especially those with product reviews, styling, and hashtag challenges, are highly effective in shaping brand reputation (Bratu, 2019). Furthermore, informants noted that trending content and strategic timing of posts can significantly increase viewership, thereby enhancing product visibility and engagement.

The managerial implications of our study are as follows: First, family SME owners seeking to leverage social media platforms like TikTok for their businesses should consider the platform's popularity and the likelihood that their target consumers are active users. Second, TikTok (Douyin) developers should prioritize enhancing the platform's user-friendliness, ensuring that older family SME practitioners can

navigate and utilize it efficiently. Third, family SME owners can boost brand awareness by leveraging TikTok's unique features, such as live streaming, e-commerce integration, hashtag challenges, and short, engaging videos. We recommend using TikTok to drive traffic and attract potential customers to the family business's official website, if available. Fourth, family SME owners aiming to reach a broader audience might leverage TikTok to reduce their promotional costs. Nonetheless, objective measurements are essential to determine the extent of cost reduction relative to traditional methods and to evaluate TikTok's effects on other marketing objectives, such as sales and brand awareness. Lastly, we contend that trust is the foundation of every successful business. To build trust and foster effective business relationships, meaningful customer engagement is crucial. Family business owners seeking to enhance customer engagement should consider using TikTok alongside traditional media (e.g., email, telephone). Specifically, TikTok can be used to address potential queries and concerns related to marketing offerings promptly.

Based on our findings, we propose a conceptual framework in Figure 2.

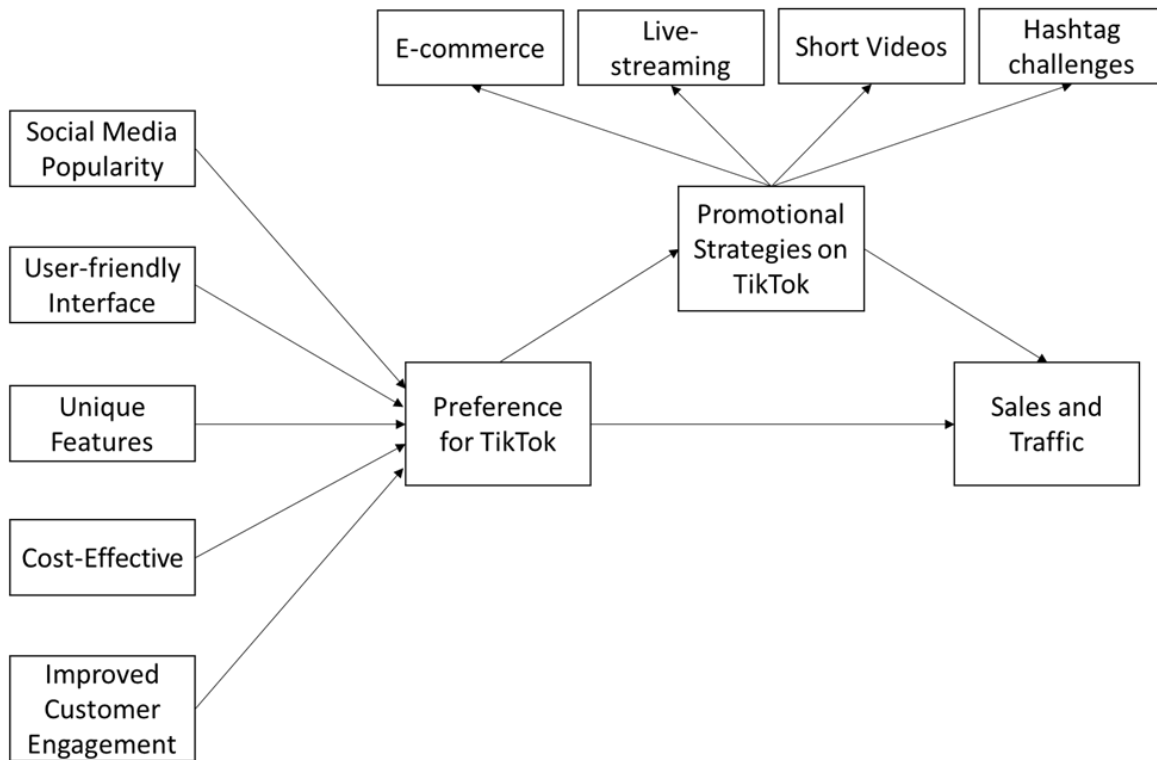


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework of TikTok's Role on Family SME Performance

5. Conclusion and Implications

In the digital era, family SMEs face significant challenges, such as price competition, yet the conveniences of digital and internet-connected activities also present numerous opportunities. TikTok, one of the most popular social media platforms, has emerged as a powerful tool for business branding and product promotion. This study reveals that family SMEs leverage TikTok to boost their product sales and traffic to their official websites or shopping stores. With 127.5 million active users in Indonesia alone, TikTok offers a vast potential audience for family businesses looking to expand their reach. Increased interaction with videos—through comments, likes, and shares—enhances the likelihood of the algorithm promoting content to the trending area, enabling SMEs to reach a broader audience. To maximize their business potential, family businesses engage in various promotional activities on TikTok, such as leveraging the platform's e-commerce features, showcasing products through live streaming, creating short, engaging video content, and launching hashtag challenges. Some family SME owners reported collaborating with influencers during live streams, though this approach can be costly. As a result, many owners either promote the products

themselves or utilize their existing staff for online promotions on TikTok. By developing engaging and timely video content that aligns with current trends, family SMEs can effectively utilize TikTok as a promotional platform. Incorporating elements such as product reviews, useful tips, and hashtag challenges into sponsored content further enhances its visibility and reach, increasing the likelihood of it being seen by a larger audience.

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