



## Reach vs. Engagement: Analyzing Organic and Paid TikTok Strategies for School Promotion

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### ABSTRACT

This study addressed the critical issue of low brand awareness at Kallista School, which stemmed from an ineffective digital promotion strategy limited to reposting Instagram content to TikTok. This passive approach failed to engage audiences on a platform crucial for reaching prospective students. The research objective was to design, implement, and analyze the impact of a structured, native video content strategy on audience engagement, and to compare the performance of organic versus paid content. The study was based on the theoretical assumption that native content, aligned with platform culture, fosters deeper engagement (measured by watch time and interactions) than generic reposts, and that a trade-off exists between the mass Awareness generated by paid ads and the Interest generated by relevant organic content. A mixed-methods action research design was employed, involving diagnostics (surveys, interviews, observation) and an intervention phase where nine new videos based on informative and branding themes were produced and published. The results demonstrated a substantial increase in audience engagement. The comparative analysis provided clear empirical evidence: new organic content increased views by 45.7% over old content, while paid ads amplified reach by 1,385%. The key finding was that paid ads produced massive reach but low average watch time, whereas new organic content yielded the highest average watch time, indicating superior engagement quality. This study concluded that an optimal hybrid strategy combines paid promotion for reach with high-quality organic content for sustained engagement.

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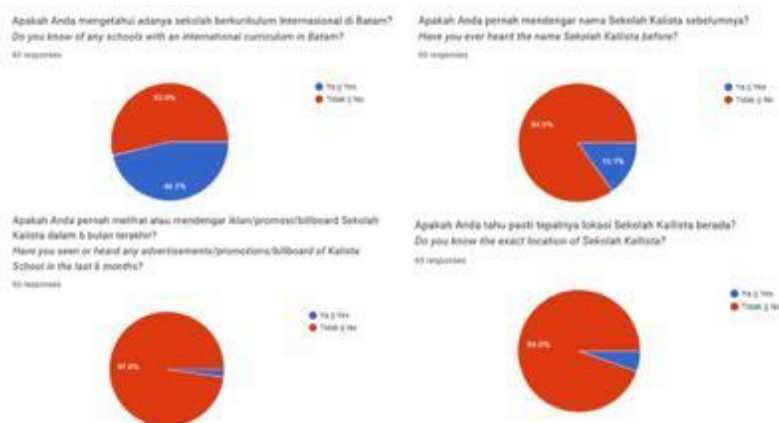
## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the current digital era, the presence and activity of an educational institution on social media are undeniable factors. Social media has evolved into a critical element for building a school's image and enhancing its competitiveness (Hakim et al., 2021). It serves as more than just a promotional tool; it is now a vital public communication channel enabling broad and rapid interaction among students, parents, and the community (Ohara, 2023). This digital shift has fundamentally altered the decision-making process for prospective parents, who now demand digital authenticity and "social proof" (Sarder & Mustaqeem, 2024). Consequently, educational institutions face mounting pressure to proactively manage their digital reputation and build a strong reputation amid competition (Purnomo et al., 2024).

This new competitive landscape is governed by digital marketing principles, where Social Media Marketing (SMM) is critical for building two-way brand relationships (Fauzi et al., 2025; Lestariolita, 2022). A key strategy is video content marketing, which effectively conveys a school's atmosphere and reinforces its Brand Identity and Image (SanjaiKumar, 2024; Acar et al., 2024), fostering the Brand Awareness essential for success (Lady et al., 2024; Samyoss et al., 2024). The production of such high-quality visual content, which is critical for engagement, has been democratized by creative platforms like Canva and Capcut (Sholeh et al., 2020; Nurhayaty, 2022). Concurrently, AI-assisted tools aid in performance measurement (Gołęb-Andrzejak, 2023).

Platform selection is critical (Widodo & Putri, 2024). TikTok has emerged as a strategically vital platform, being the largest market globally and heavily used by students primarily for entertainment (Alfathi, 2025). Unlike other platforms, TikTok's algorithm excels at "discoverability," making it a powerful tool for brand awareness (Woodward et al., 2025), though it demands authentic, short-form video (Manic, 2024). Therefore, for this study, success is defined not by passive metrics but by active audience engagement. This encompasses measurable interactions such as likes, comments, and, critically, average watch time, which serve as valuable indicators of strategic success (Gołęb-Andrzejak, 2023; Truong et al., 2021).

Sekolah Kallista, a private educational institution in Batam City, faces significant challenges in this digital domain. Despite its academic reputation, the school management identified obstacles including a lack of strategic promotion and poor location visibility, resulting in minimal brand awareness. The survey results (Figure 1), based on 93 responses, confirm this: 84.9% of respondents had never heard of Sekolah Kallista, and 97.8% had not seen any promotions in the last 6 months.



**Figure 1:** Preliminary Survey Results on Public Brand Awareness

This low awareness indicates an ineffective digital communication strategy (Sya'adah, 2024). An initial analysis revealed the root of the problem: Sekolah Kallista's TikTok content consisted only of reposts from Instagram. This common mistake represents a significant research gap: many institutions apply a "reposting" method that ignores the native culture of platforms like TikTok and fails to generate engagement.

This study addresses this challenge by designing and implementing a dedicated native video content strategy for TikTok. This research aims to fill the identified gap with the following objectives: (1) To design and implement a structured video content strategy (informative, educational, and branding); (2) To analyze the impact of this new strategy on key audience engagement metrics (views, likes, comments, and watch time); and (3) To conduct a comparative analysis of the performance of older reposted content, new organic content, and new paid-ad content. This study contributes empirical evidence on the tangible impact of shifting from a passive, reposting strategy to an active, native content strategy (Altamira et al., 2023).

## 2. METHODS

This study employed a mixed-methods action research design. This framework is highly relevant for organizational development and learning, as it facilitates a systematic process of practical problem-solving and capability building within a specific real-world context (Wiklund-Engblom et al., 2023). This design was selected as the most suitable method for understanding the actual condition of Kallista School's social media, implementing a targeted intervention, and evaluating its effectiveness. The research followed a cycle of problem diagnosis, intervention planning and implementation, and performance evaluation, integrating both quantitative metrics and qualitative insights.

### 2.1. Data Collection Techniques

Data for this study was gathered using a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative insights with quantitative metrics, which included:

1. **Direct Observation:** Observation was conducted on the school's social media accounts, primarily TikTok. This involved analyzing the existing content, posting frequency, and the nature of audience responses before the intervention.
2. **Informal Interviews:** Informal interviews were held with school representatives to gain a deeper understanding of the institution's promotional needs, target audience, and desired brand identity.
3. **Digital Documentation:** This involved the collection and analysis of quantitative data from the platform's backend analytics (insights) and content archives. This data provided baseline metrics for comparison.
4. **Preliminary Survey:** The initial problem diagnosis was informed by a quantitative survey of 93 Batam residents (as detailed in Figure 1) to establish a baseline for public brand awareness.

### 2.2 Intervention and Implementation

Following the diagnosis phase, an intervention was designed and implemented. This "action" phase focused on the production and publication of nine original promotional videos on TikTok. The content was strategically designed to cover informative, educational, and branding themes. The implementation strategy was multi-faceted and included:

1. Scheduled Posting: Content was uploaded at strategic, pre-determined times.
2. Narrative Captions: Each video was accompanied by an informative and engaging narrative caption.
3. Strategic Hashtags: Relevant hashtags were used to enhance content discoverability.
4. Visual Optimization: Compelling thumbnails were selected to increase click-through rates.

### 2.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted descriptively. Qualitative data from observations and interviews were analyzed to identify themes and inform the content strategy. Quantitative data from the platform's insights (views, likes, comments, watch time) was systematically collected. This analysis followed a process of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. A key component of the analysis was a comparative assessment of performance metrics between the old (reposted) content, the new organic content, and the new content promoted with paid advertisements. This analytical approach was used to generate strategic content recommendations based on the field findings (Siminto et al., 2024).

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1. Results

This section presents the data collected after the implementation of the new video content strategy. The findings are organized into the content produced, the overall engagement impact, the comparative performance analysis, and the audience demographics reached.

#### 3.1.1 Content Strategy Implementation

The intervention was designed based on an analysis of the school's communication needs. Video was chosen as the primary medium due to its ability to convey messages visually and emotionally, as well as its prioritization by social media algorithms. A total of nine videos were produced, covering informative, promotional, educational, and interactive themes.

The implementation involved publishing this content on TikTok using a structured strategy. This included scheduled uploads, the use of narrative captions, relevant hashtags, and visually appealing thumbnails to optimize content discoverability. Figure 2 shows examples of the video content produced, while Figure 3 illustrates the use of narrative captions and hashtags.



**Figure 2:** Examples of Video Content Produced Under the New Strategy



Figure 3: Implementation of Strategic Narrative Captions and Hashtags on TikTok Posts

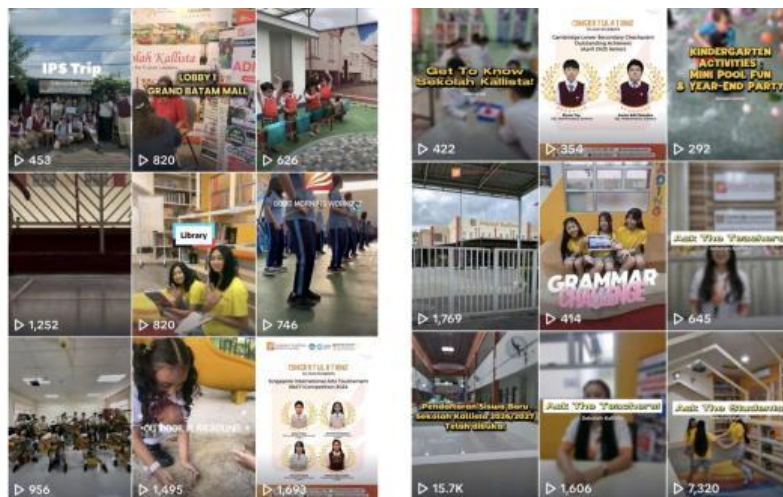


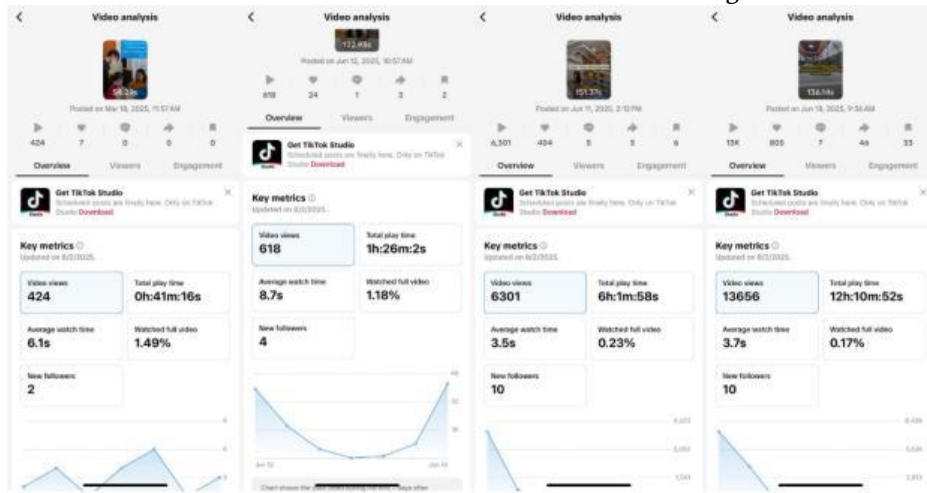
Figure 4: Comparison of Page Before and After Implementation

### 3.1.2 Overall Engagement Impact

Following the publication of the nine videos, a notable increase in audience engagement was observed. The new content strategy successfully generated over 1,200 total likes across all published videos, along with an increase in comments and shares. The qualitative nature of the engagement was also positive, with user comments expressing admiration for the school's atmosphere, facilities, and the style of the video content.

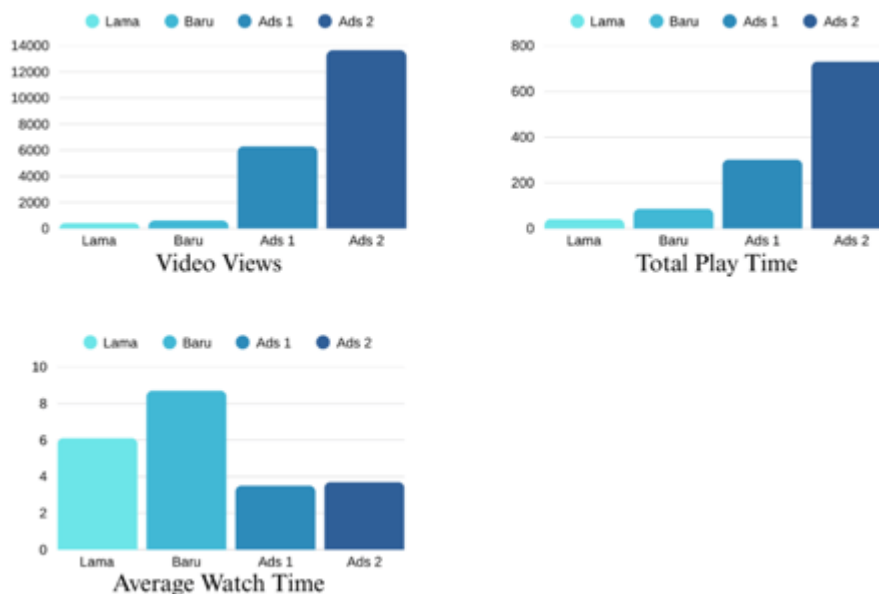
### 3.1.3 Comparative Performance Analysis

A comparative analysis of four videos provides a granular view of the performance difference between the old content (reposted from Instagram), the new organic content, and the new content promoted with paid advertising (Ads). The analytics data for these videos are presented in Figure 5, with a summary comparison in Figure 6.



**Figure 5:** Comparative Analysis of TikTok Studio Analytics for Four Key Videos

1. Old Content (Mar 18): A video published before the intervention received 424 views with an average watch time of 6.1 seconds.
2. New Organic Content (Jun 12): A new video published without ads achieved 618 views and the highest average watch time of 8.7 seconds.
3. New Content with Ads (Ads 1, Jun 11): The first video promoted with ads saw a substantial jump to 6,301 views. However, its average watch time was lower at 3.5 seconds.
4. New Content with Ads (Ads 2, Jun 18): The second promoted video achieved the highest reach with 13,656 views. Its average watch time was 3.7 seconds.



**Figure 6:** Performance Comparison of Old vs. New Content (Organic and Paid Ads) Across Key Metrics

The data shows a clear trade-off. Paid advertising was extremely effective in drastically increasing views (Awareness), reaching over 13,000 views on a single video. Conversely, the

new organic content yielded the highest average watch time (8.7 seconds), indicating it attracted a smaller but more qualified and highly engaged audience.

### 3.1.4 Audience Demographics

The new strategy successfully reached a relevant target audience. Analytics data (Figure 7) shows the audience was predominantly female (62.2%). The largest age demographic reached was 25-34 (46.2%), aligning with the target group of young parents. The top city for audience reach was Jakarta (16.9%), followed by the school's home city of Batam (13.5%).

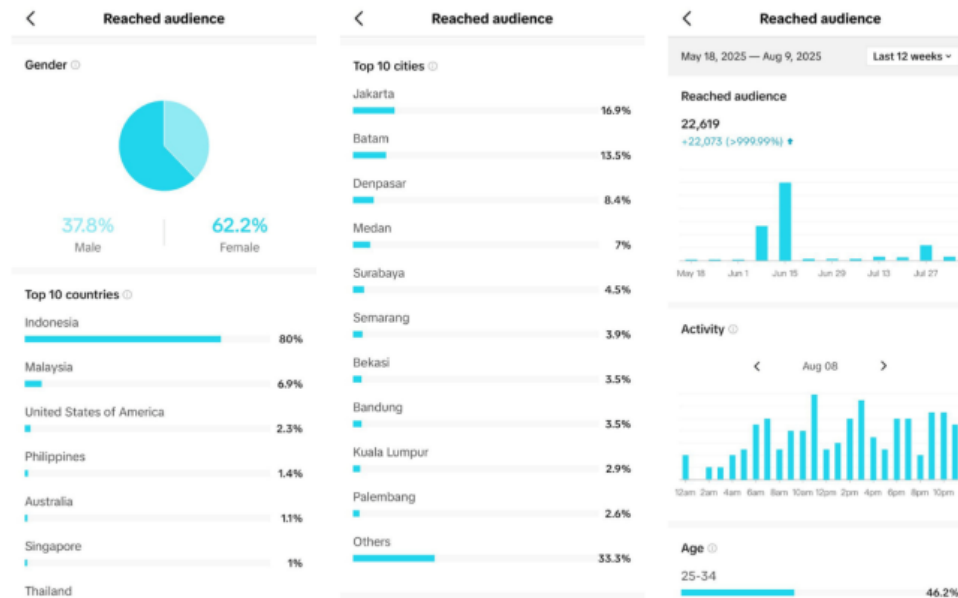


Figure 7: Audience Demographics and Reach Analytics

## 3.2 Discussion

This section interprets the findings presented in the Results, connecting them to the research objectives and theoretical framework.

### 3.2.1 Interpretation of Comparative Performance

The results clearly demonstrate the value of a multi-faceted content strategy. The stark contrast in performance between the old and new content confirms the initial hypothesis: simply reposting content from other platforms is an ineffective strategy for TikTok. The success of the new videos aligns with the principle that creative content specifically designed for an educational institution's social media is fundamental to effective digital communication (Altamira et al., 2023).

The most critical finding lies in the trade-off between paid and organic content, as follows:

1. Paid Ads (Awareness): The use of paid ads (Ads 1 & 2) was highly effective for achieving the top-of-funnel goal of Awareness, a key first step in the AIDA promotional model (Tristanto & Hurriyati, 2023). They successfully pushed the content to a massive audience (over 13,000 views), resulting in the highest absolute number of likes and shares. However, the low average watch time (3.5-3.7s) suggests this audience was broad and less qualified. This finding supports the idea that while reach is a measure

of visibility, it is a weak metric for measuring actual social marketing impact (Truong et al., 2021).

2. Organic Content (Engagement): The new organic video (Jun 12) achieved the highest average watch time (8.7s). This indicates that while its reach was smaller, the audience it attracted was more "patient" and genuinely interested in the content. This metric is a far stronger indicator of true audience engagement (SanjaiKumar, 2024) and is a more valuable Key Performance Indicator (KPI) for measuring the effectiveness of digital communication (Gołęb-Andrzejak, 2023). This audience has effectively moved to the Interest stage of the promotional model.

This data suggests that an optimal strategy requires a hybrid approach: using paid promotion to expand Awareness, combined with high-quality organic content designed to build Interest and retain an engaged community.

### **3.2.2 Content Strategy and Audience Relevance**

The data validates the importance of content optimization. The low retention on ad-supported videos highlights that a strong "hook" in the first 3 seconds is absolutely critical to stop users from scrolling. Furthermore, the fact that the old content (Mar 18) still received views suggests that strong TikTok SEO (relevant titles, hashtags, and descriptions) can give content a long shelf-life in the platform's recommendation system.

The demographic data (Figure 7) confirms the strategy's effectiveness not just in quantity of engagement, but in its relevance. Reaching an audience dominated by females (62.2%) aged 25-34 (46.2%) is a clear success. This aligns perfectly with the primary decision-makers for school enrollment (mothers and young parents) and highlights the importance of targeting content based on demographic segmentation. Research indicates that factors such as gender can significantly moderate consumer intention and behavior, making such targeted strategies more effective (Lady et al., 2025). This success in reaching a specific target audience is fundamental to building a strong brand identity and positive brand image (Shams et al., 2024).

This quantitative success was supported by qualitative feedback from the school management, who evaluated the new content as "informative, attractive, and relate[d] to what new prospective parents need to know". They also noted that, as a result of the intervention, the "school's Tiktok account algorithm as a whole looks better than before". This indicates the strategy was successful in both engaging the public and positively influencing the platform's perception of the school's account.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

The implementation of this action research at Sekolah Kallista demonstrates that a structured, native-content strategy for digital promotion on TikTok can yield substantial results. The shift from a passive, content-reposting approach to an active strategy involving the production of informative, educational, and branding-focused videos led to a measurable increase in audience engagement and digital visibility. The performance comparison provided clear empirical evidence of this success. The new organic content successfully generated 45.7% more views than the old, reposted content. Furthermore, the strategic use of paid promotion amplified this effect, driving a significant surge in reach, as evidenced by a 1,385% increase in views compared to the old content. This finding indicates that a hybrid strategy is optimal: paid advertising is highly effective for accelerating top-of-funnel awareness and expanding reach, while high-quality organic content is essential for attracting and retaining a more deeply engaged audience, as shown by its superior average watch time. This strategy

not only enhanced visibility but also contributed to building a more relevant and potential audience community, successfully reaching the target demographic of young parents. The school management supported this finding, evaluating the new content as "informative, attractive, and relate[d] to what new prospective parents need to know," and noted that the "school's Tiktok account algorithm as a whole looks better than before." This study contributes a practical model for educational institutions, highlighting that moving beyond a simple content-reposting habit is critical. With this foundation, Sekolah Kallista is now positioned to develop a consistent, measurable, and integrated long-term digital marketing strategy, thereby enhancing its competitiveness in a crowded educational landscape.

This study is not without limitations. The findings are based on a single case study at one private institution, and the implementation period was limited to the duration of this research project. Therefore, the results may not be generalizable to all educational contexts, such as public schools or universities. Furthermore, this study focused solely on TikTok, without comparing its performance against other video-based platforms like Instagram Reels. Future research is encouraged to apply this hybrid model (organic and paid) across a more diverse range of educational institutions to test its wider applicability. A longitudinal study is also recommended to measure the long-term impact of this strategy on audience engagement and, ultimately, on new student enrollment rates.

## 5. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. Authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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