



ebiquity

TikTok Measurement Spotlight

Beyond ROI: understanding what
drives TikTok performance



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- Analysis across a range of brands reveals the cost and impact dynamics that drive performance beyond ROI
- Practical guidance on measurement best practices, format selection, and strategic implementation



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Introduction

Media investment has never been under more scrutiny. CFOs want proof of every pound spent. Shareholders demand growth accountability. Economic uncertainty means every media decision gets challenged.

At the same time, we're drowning in data. We've gone from tracking 15 metrics across a handful of channels to managing 50+ metrics across 15+ platforms. Each platform has its own measurement universe with its own definitions and claims.

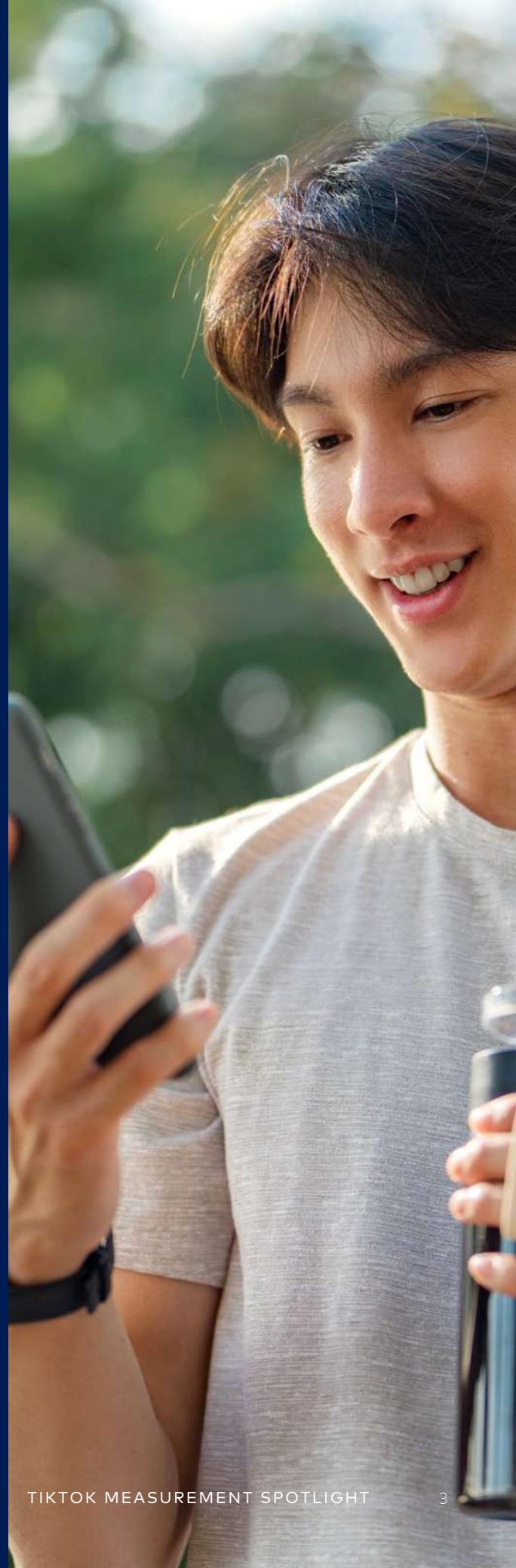
You'd think more data would mean better decisions. It hasn't. Two-thirds of marketing leaders now say they're unclear on investment impact. That's the highest uncertainty level on record. More data hasn't created clarity. It's created confusion.

This study takes a different approach. It's not about adding more metrics or repeating platform claims. It's about understanding what actually drives performance through independent, statistically validated measurement.

What this study covers

We analysed a range of UK brands, with a focus on Retail and Telco, reviewing the most recent 12 months of results from econometric studies conducted through 2024 and 2025, to create a robust understanding of TikTok's efficiency and effectiveness. Not to prove TikTok works, but to understand when it works, why it works, and how to make better decisions about it.

This is measurement in service of Effective and Responsible Advertising. It's about understanding the why behind the ROI. We examine TikTok performance through two lenses: what you pay (cost/efficiency) and what you get (impact/effectiveness).



What makes this study different

This isn't tracking data or attribution models. It's econometric analysis that isolates TikTok's actual incremental contribution to sales, separate from other marketing activities and business drivers.

We used granular data direct from TikTok, tested through econometrics. This shows not just what performed, but why it performed and what that means for your next decision.

How to use this document

- ✓ Section 1 explains why ROI alone isn't enough to guide optimisation decisions
- ✓ Section 2 shows what performed, with benchmarks for TikTok overall and by sector
- ✓ Section 3 is the core analysis, breaking down cost versus uplift dynamics by format, campaign type, and objective. This is where you'll find actionable insights about what actually drives results
- ✓ Section 4 covers how long TikTok's effects last, which matters for budget pacing and campaign planning
- ✓ Section 5 looks at how TikTok works with other channels, particularly TV
- ✓ Section 6 provides practical measurement guidance
- ✓ Section 7 translates everything into strategic recommendations



Executive summary

Beyond ROI: Cost vs quality balance

ROI alone does not tell the full performance story. Results must be viewed holistically, weighing not just cost and ROI, but also quality of impact.

Premium formats (TopView, TopFeed, Pulse) carry higher CPMs and lower ROIs than standard formats. However, they deliver 3-4x higher revenue per thousand impression, demonstrating that higher cost drives higher impact.

The choice, therefore, depends on your objective: premium formats for breakthrough moments or standard formats for sustained scale.

Creative quality: The primary performance driver

Strong correlation exists between average play duration and revenue per thousand impression, confirming longer attention drives higher conversion.

Critical best practices:

- Hook users within first few seconds
- Show brand identity within 2 seconds
- Keep duration under 25 seconds
- Create platform-native content or adapt existing creative for TikTok's format and audience
- Design for sound-on viewing

Following the platforms best practices improves retention, strengthens recall, and drives revenue. Creative quality is not optional for TikTok success.

Context matters: Not all views are equal

Premium formats show stronger impact per video view than standard activity.

Pulse and standard formats achieved nearly identical video view-through rates, but revenue generated per video view for Pulse significantly surpassed standard formats.

Ads served alongside relevant content (Pulse's contextual placement) drive stronger impact than those in the standard feed. Platform engagement metrics matter, but contextual relevance influences business outcomes more than engagement rates alone.

Channel synergy effects

For retail brands, TikTok ROI increased when running alongside TV, suggesting synergy effects.

This does not mean exclusively running TikTok when TV is active, but aligning key messaging periods across platforms can support uplift.

For telco brands, no measurable synergy was detected, though the data was limited. If you have not detected synergy, plan based on standalone TikTok performance.

Important context: This study shows correlation, not definitive causation. Multiple factors could explain patterns (seasonality, creative quality, campaign intensity). The data suggests possible synergy but doesn't prove TV is required for TikTok effectiveness.

Measurement best practices

Model metric selection: impressions proved most statistically robust for modelling TikTok performance across the brands covered. Selecting the right metric increases accuracy and reliability in results. Test multiple metrics during model development to understand their impact on performance measurement.

Omnichannel attribution is essential: TikTok drives both online and offline sales. Digital-only attribution substantially understates true business contribution. Retail showed significant offline sales contribution; telco showed impact across in-store, online, and call centre channels.

Granular platform data enables format-level optimisation: source data directly from TikTok using the MMM API for automated data integration, or the TikTok Ads Manager Tool. Both methods provide the format and objective-level detail required for effective optimisation.

The bottom line

Success requires balancing efficiency and effectiveness. This study provides insights on objectives, formats, creative quality, channel synergy, and measurement practices to support advertisers across multiple facets.

Match format to objective, not to lowest CPM. Invest in platform-adaptive creative. Measure comprehensively across channels and sales environments. The expensive format may deliver cheaper outcomes when measured by business impact.

Your TikTok campaign delivered a 2.20 ROI. Two pounds twenty back for every pound invested.

That number doesn't tell you whether different formats could have delivered higher returns, whether you paid premium prices for average results, or whether continued investment would hit diminishing returns.

ROI tells you what happened. It doesn't explain why it happened or what to do next.

The ROI Equation:



Why ROI alone isn't enough

Two campaigns both deliver 2.50 ROI:

- Campaign A used premium formats driving substantial sales uplift per impression
- Campaign B used cheap inventory that barely moved the needle but cost so little it still hit 2.50 ROI

Same ROI. Completely different value. Different implications for your next decision.

Organisational goals shape ROI interpretation

Clients under financial pressure (economic downturns, underperformance periods) often maximise efficiency: lowest cost per outcome, reduced waste, immediate returns.

Growth-focused advertisers may accept lower short-term ROI for breakthrough impact that builds market share and long-term positioning.

Neither approach is wrong. A 3.00 ROI from low-cost, low-impact volume doesn't serve growth objectives. A 2.00 ROI from premium formats driving strong consideration might be exactly right for a launch campaign.



1. Framing ROI: The starting point, not the destination

Lower price doesn't mean better value

Here's a simple example using two TikTok formats:

- Format A: £5 CPM, drives 2 sales per thousand impressions = £2.50 per sale
- Format B: £15 CPM, drives 8 sales per thousand impressions = £1.88 per sale

The "expensive" format is 25% cheaper per outcome despite higher media costs.

Understanding cost versus impact

Strong performance requires two perspectives:

- Cost metrics (CPMs, spend per outcome) show what you paid. Low CPMs mean nothing if impressions don't convert.
- Impact metrics (revenue per thousand impression, sales uplift) show what you got. High sales per impression mean nothing if costs make the ROI unsustainable.

The goal is finding formats that deliver strong impact at viable cost. Sometimes that means prioritising impact (launches requiring breakthrough). Sometimes efficiency (established products at scale). Most often, optimising both simultaneously.

What this study adds

TikTok provides detailed campaign metrics: impressions, video views, completion rates, clicks, engagement. Essential for in-platform optimisation.

This study adds incremental business contribution: how much additional revenue TikTok generated compared to what would have happened without it.

We combined TikTok's granular campaign data with econometric modelling that accounts for all other sales drivers: other marketing, seasonality, pricing, distribution, competitor activity, macroeconomic conditions.

The result: TikTok's true contribution to business outcomes, broken down by format, campaign type, and objective.

This study also examines:

- How long TikTok's effects persist (memory patterns)
- Whether TikTok performs differently alongside other channels (synergy effects)
- Which metrics and methodologies deliver reliable measurement

Looking beyond immediate returns: The long-term value question

This study focuses on ROI measurement within a 52-week period, capturing the immediate and short-term business impact of TikTok investment.

But marketing investment creates value beyond the measurement window. Brand awareness builds over time. Customer relationships develop across touchpoints. Market positioning strengthens through sustained presence.

For brands evaluating media strategy, it's worth considering:

- Customer lifetime value: A customer acquired today may purchase repeatedly over years. Initial acquisition cost should be evaluated against total lifetime contribution, not just first purchase.
- Brand equity: Consistent visibility builds mental availability and brand strength that pays dividends beyond measurable sales windows. Premium formats that drive deeper engagement may contribute more to long-term brand equity than high-volume, low-impact alternatives.
- Market positioning effects: Sustained investment in quality environments can shift brand perception in ways that compound over time.

These longer-term effects don't replace ROI measurement, they complement it. The immediate returns captured in this study provide the foundation. The longer-term value provides additional context for strategic decisions.

The balance between short-term efficiency and long-term brand building varies by brand, category, and market position. Growth-stage brands may prioritise immediate acquisition efficiency. Established brands may weight sustained equity building more heavily. Both approaches are valid when aligned with strategic objectives.

Illustrative examples from the data patterns:

PATTERN 1: THE EFFICIENCY TRAP

A brand chases low CPMs. They achieve £3 CPMs, well below market rates. Their ROI hits 2.1 - seemingly acceptable.

But they're getting minimal uplift per impression. They're buying cheap inventory that barely registers with audiences. They would achieve better ROI paying £6 CPMs for formats that drive three times the sales impact.

They optimised for the wrong metric. Low cost masked low value.

PATTERN 2: EFFECTIVENESS WITHOUT EFFICIENCY

A brand uses premium formats that drive excellent uplift. Strong attention, substantial sales response per impression.

But they're paying such high CPMs that even with strong uplift, overall ROI reaches only 1.8. They would perform better with mid-tier formats driving 70% of the uplift at 40% of the cost.

They delivered impact but couldn't sustain it economically.

PATTERN 3: THE OPTIMISED APPROACH

A brand tests across formats, measures both cost and impact, and finds the sweet spot. They're paying £5-7 CPMs for formats that drive strong sales uplift. Their ROI reaches 3.8.

When they want to scale, they know where to invest more. When they need to cut costs, they know where to trim without destroying effectiveness. They're making decisions based on understanding, not assumptions.



What comes next

Now that we've established why ROI alone isn't enough, the rest of this document shows you what's beneath it.

Before we start with an understanding TikTok's general performance, an overview of the terminology used through this document:

General measurement terms

Term	Definition
ROI	The outcome (the ratio of profit to spend). Return on Investment: Profit per pound spent. A 3.0 ROI means £3 back for every £1 invested.
Uplift	Additional sales driven by your advertising. Incremental sales that wouldn't have happened without the activity.
Efficiency	The cost side. Measured as CPM (cost per thousand impressions)
Effectiveness	The impact side. Measured as revenue uplift per thousand impressions, sales uplift.
Incremental Sales	The sales that happened because of the advertising investment, the difference between what happened and what would have happened without it.
Marketing Mix Modelling (MMM)	The econometric technique behind this analysis. It separates the contribution of each marketing activity from other factors that drive sales (pricing, seasonality, competitor activity, other marketing).

Ad formats and objectives

Format / Objective	Funnel Position	Auction or Reservation	Premium or Standard	Optimisation Type	Description
TopView	Awareness	Reservation	Premium	Reach	The first video users see when opening TikTok. High visibility, high impact
TopFeed	Awareness	Reservation	Premium	Reach	The 4th video users see after opening TikTok. Guaranteed prominent placement
Pulse	Awareness	Reservation	Premium	Reach	Ad placed after 4% trending content. Contextual advertising
Reach Reservation / Standard Feed	Awareness	Reservation	Standard	Reach	Guaranteed high impact ad placements
Reach (Auction)	Awareness	Auction	Standard	Reach	Most cost-efficient reach through auction bidding
Brand Auction	Awareness / Consideration	Auction	Standard	Multiple	A cost-efficient format which can be optimised in multiple different ways
Reach & Frequency	Awareness	Reservation	Standard / Premium	Reach	Ability to plan and reserve activity in advance, optimised for reach, impressions and frequency

Format / Objective	Funnel Position	Auction or Reservation	Premium or Standard	Optimisation Type	Description
Video Views	Consideration	Auction	Standard	6s/15s View Duration	Delivered to maximise video plays.
Product Sales	Conversion	Auction	Standard	Conversion / Value	Driving sales on website, optimised for purchases or purchase value.
Web Conversions	Conversion	Auction	Standard	View Content / Add to Cart	Driving conversions on website through the full purchase funnel.

Key platform metrics

Metric	Definition
CPM	Cost per thousand impressions. The standard metric for comparing media costs.
Video Views	Number of times your video ad was viewed
Average Watch Time	How long, on average, users watched your video ad before scrolling past.
2" VTR	2-second video view through rate. Percentage of impressions where video was watched for at least 2 seconds.



2. The performance picture: What the numbers say

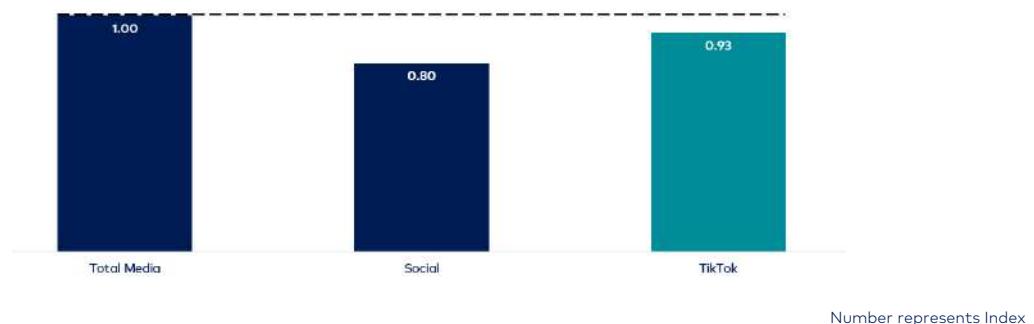
This section shows TikTok's performance across the brands in our study, compared to other channels and broken down by sector.

The numbers tell a mixed story. TikTok isn't outperforming everything else. It's a channel with specific attributes that vary depending on the sector and how it's used.

TikTok's position

Across all brands in the study, TikTok delivered an average ROI roughly in line with total media. It performed slightly above the broader social media average.

Chart 2.1: TikTok ROI vs Total Media and Social Media - Indexed Performance



Note: What "Total Media" means: This represents the weighted average ROI across all paid media channels in the study. It does not include earned media, organic social, or PR activity.

What "Social" means: This represents a combination of Meta, Snapchat, Pinterest, Reddit and LinkedIn. Individual clients in the study may use a subset of these platforms.

TikTok isn't dramatically outperforming or underperforming. It's holding its own as part of the mix.

Understanding performance variation

The aggregate numbers mask substantial variation. Some brands achieved ROI well above the media average. Others delivered results below average.

Three primary factors drove the differences:

- Format strategy: Brands using strategic combinations of premium formats (TopView, Pulse) with efficient base formats (Brand Auction, Standard Feed) outperformed those using only one type. Top performers indexed substantially higher than bottom performers.
- Creative quality: Average play duration varied significantly between best and weakest performers, correlating with revenue per thousand impression.
- Category dynamics: Purchase cycle length influenced baseline performance. Categories with shorter decision journeys generally showed stronger immediate returns than those with extended consideration periods.

The retail brands in this study operated in shorter-cycle contexts and generally performed above the social media average. They benefited from TikTok's strength in driving quick response.

Brands in longer consideration cycle categories showed more variable performance, heavily dependent on format mix and objective selection.

Section 3 breaks down exactly which formats and approaches drove results across different business contexts.

What this means for TikTok investment levels

The data showed mixed patterns about when to increase TikTok investment. Some brands showed consistent returns up to a certain investment level. Beyond that point, marginal ROI declined. That's normal for any channel. The key is knowing where that inflection point sits for your brand.

Other brands showed more variable returns that were less predictable based purely on spend level. Format choice and campaign objective mattered more than volume. Some got strong returns at lower investment levels using premium formats. Others spent more but got weaker returns using mass-reach approaches.

The recommendation isn't "spend more" or "spend less". It's "spend smarter based on what drives results for your brand and objectives".

Online and offline impact

For retail brands with physical stores, TikTok showed measurable impact on offline sales, not just online conversions.



This matters for omnichannel retailers. The campaign might be running on mobile, but a significant portion of the sales uplift happened in physical stores. If you're only measuring online conversions, you're missing a large part of the picture.

For telco, TikTok's impact followed the sector's typical sales pattern. This omnichannel impact is exactly how telco works. Measuring only online conversions would have understated TikTok's contribution to the consideration journey. The platform was doing its job by driving prospects into the funnel, even when the final conversion happened offline.

The measurement implication:

Any TikTok measurement framework must capture full omnichannel impact. Digital-only attribution substantially understates the platform's true business contribution across both retail and telco.



What the numbers don't tell you

These averages hide substantial variation. Some brands achieved strong TikTok results, while others experienced weaker performance. The difference came down to format selection, objective alignment, creative quality, and balancing cost against impact.

Section 3 breaks down those dynamics by format, campaign type, and objective, showing you what actually drives the performance differences behind these averages.



3. Understanding the dynamics: The cost vs impact story

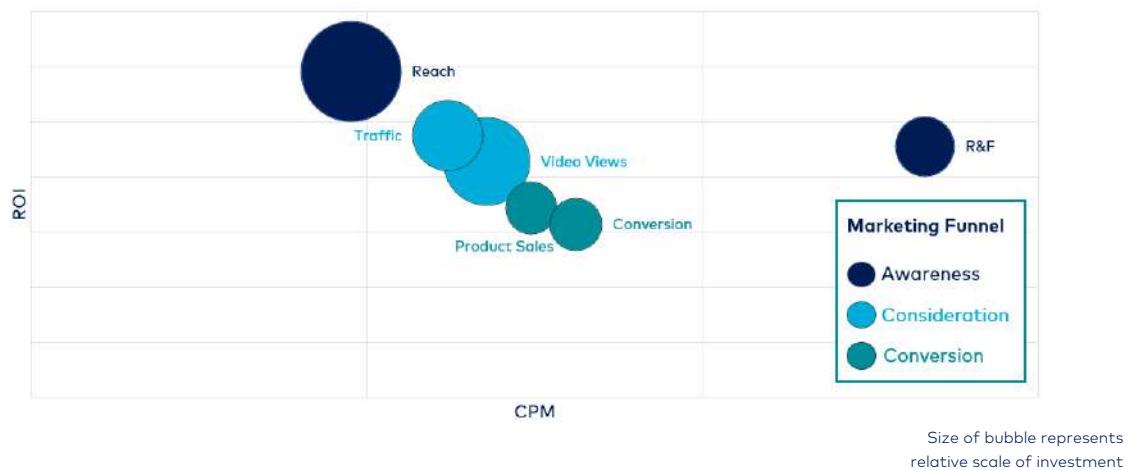
Section 2 showed you what performed. This section shows you why. We're unpacking the relationship between what you pay (efficiency) and what you get back (effectiveness) across formats, objectives, and campaign types.

This is where you'll find the actionable insight. Not just 'TikTok delivered a 2.5 ROI' but 'Brand Auction drove 2.8 ROI at £4 CPM while TopView drove 2.2 ROI at £18 CPM, and here's what that means for your next campaign'.

The big picture: Objectives and the funnel

We start with a pattern that held across nearly all brands in the study. As you move down the marketing funnel, CPMs increase and ROI decreases (except for R&F).

Chart 3.1: Campaign Objectives - CPM vs ROI



Awareness objectives like Reach delivered the highest ROI at the lowest cost, whereas Conversion objectives naturally have higher CPM's because you are paying more to reach audiences that are closer to the point of purchase.

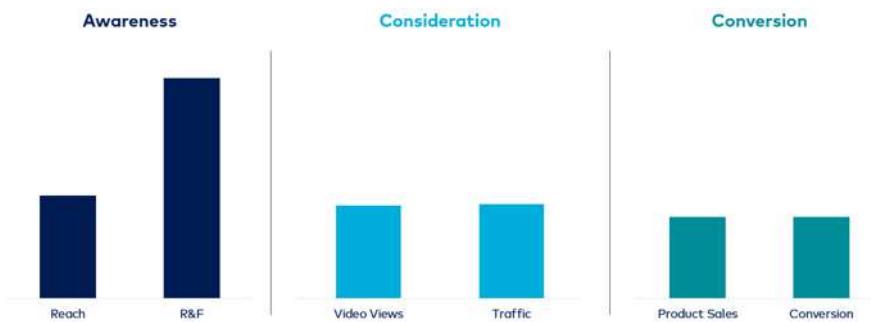
Don't just look at which objective has the better ROI. Look at whether that objective matches what you're trying to achieve and who you're reaching.

Conversion and product sales objectives delivered lower ROIs. Multiple factors affect performance. Ensure campaigns follow best practice: Use 3 – 5 ad sets per campaign and allow sufficient runtime for the platform to optimise performance. Poor setup can undermine campaigns.

Revenue per thousand impression: Showing what ROI hides

ROI alone doesn't tell you whether those high CPMs are justified. Look at what you're getting for that cost.

Chart 3.2: Campaign Objectives - Revenue per Thousand Impression



Reach & Frequency had the highest CPMs, driven by premium formats, but it also delivered significantly higher revenue per thousand impression than everything else. That combination still drove a strong ROI.

Conversion objectives had higher CPMs but didn't deliver proportionally more revenue per thousand impression. You're paying more without getting proportionally more back. That's why the ROI was lower.

This pattern matters because it challenges the assumption that lower-funnel objectives are more "performance-oriented", this is not always the case.

Buying approach: Brand Reservation vs Performance Auction

Two buying approaches dominated the study, each affecting cost and delivery differently.

Brand Reservation guarantees your placement at a fixed CPM. You know what you're paying and where you'll appear. Predictable but premium.

Performance Auction competes in real-time bidding. CPMs can be significantly lower but vary based on competition. Efficient but variable.

Chart 3.3: Brand Reservation vs Performance Auction - CPM vs ROI



For retail brands with always-on activity, Performance Auction's efficiency mattered. They could scale volume cost-effectively during peak selling periods.

For telco brands and product launches, Brand Reservation's guaranteed premium placement likely drove stronger consideration impact. The higher CPM bought certainty and quality of delivery.

Neither approach is universally better. It depends on whether you're optimising for cost or control.

Retail: The format story

For retail, distinct patterns emerged when we looked at format performance. Brand Auction dominated spend volume in the study and delivered the lowest CPMs with strong ROI. High volume, lower impact per impression. It works well where scale matters.

Chart 3.4: Retail Formats - CPM vs ROI

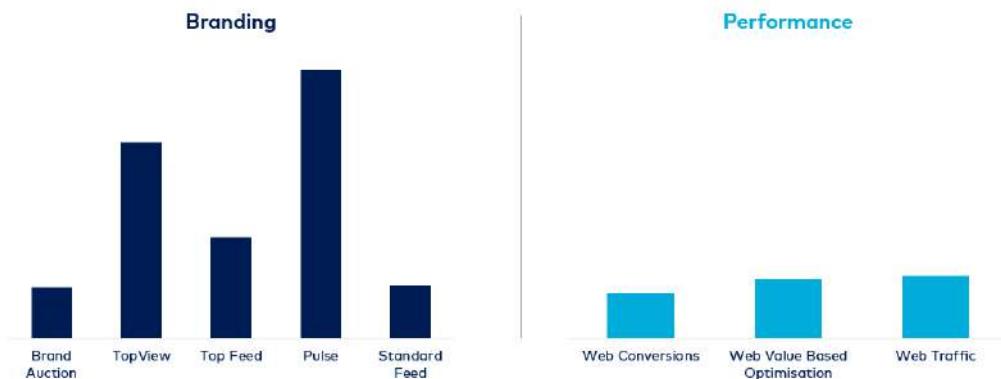


Web Traffic performed similarly to Brand Auction on efficiency. Good returns driven primarily by cost, not impact.

Then there were the premium formats: TopView, TopFeed, and Pulse with higher CPMs and varying ROI. Looking at that alone, you'd avoid them as TopView carries a premium and has a lower ROI than Brand Auction, while Pulse, despite having a strong ROI, still carries a noticeably higher CPM than the other formats.

But that's only half the story. ROI alone doesn't capture the full picture of what premium formats deliver. Revenue per thousand impression reveals what's actually happening.

Chart 3.5: Retail Formats - Revenue per Thousand Impression



TopView and Pulse generated 3-4x the revenue per thousand impressions compared to Brand Auction. TopFeed delivered 2x the impact at roughly 2x the cost.

The premium formats weren't failing. They were doing a different job. Brand Auction and Standard Feed delivered volume. Premium formats delivered impact. Which one you need depends on your objective.

Product launch needing breakthrough? Premium formats justify their cost. Promotional campaign needing scale? Brand Auction and Standard Feed deliver better returns.

Chart 3.6: Retail Formats - CPM vs Uplift



TopView and Pulse stand out when combining uplift and CPM, showing premium costs drive premium results. These metrics should not be viewed in isolation, and a holistic view is essential to accurately understand performance. Although these formats cost more, they deliver impact that standard formats cannot match.

The brands in the study used two broad approaches. Each delivered different efficiency and effectiveness characteristics.

For our retail brands performance campaigns delivered a lower ROI at higher CPMs. They used Web Conversion and Web Traffic. High volume, quick response. But lower impact per impression.

With brand campaigns driving higher revenue per thousand impression at a lower cost. They used Brand Auction, Standard Feed, TopView, TopFeed, and Pulse. Lower volume, stronger impact.

Telco: The format story

Telco showed a slightly different format hierarchy than retail. TopView was the standout performer with the highest revenue per thousand impression but with premium CPMs, delivering a strong ROI.

Chart 3.8: Telco Formats - CPM vs Uplift



Brand Auction dominated spend, delivering the lowest CPMs and strong ROI. Once again, high volume but with lower impact per impression compared to TopView.

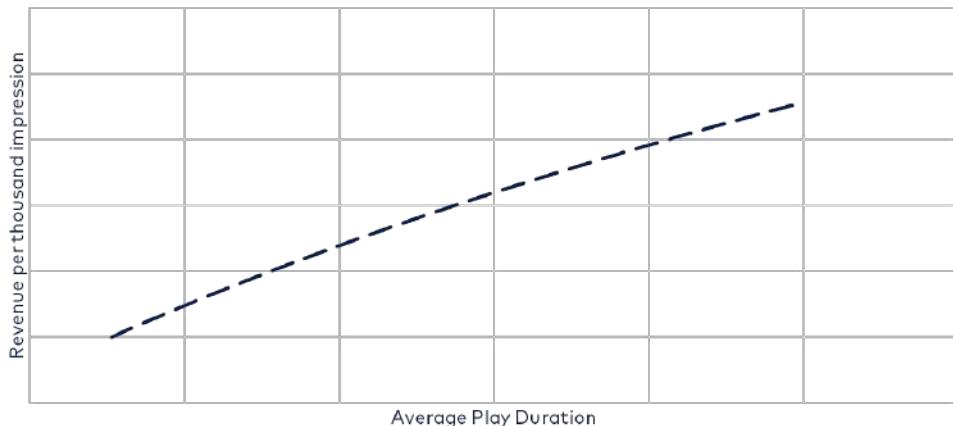
Web Traffic achieved strong ROI through low cost rather than high impact. It worked for retargeting but didn't build the consideration necessary for high-value contracts.

The metrics question: What actually predicts performance?

TikTok provides detailed engagement metrics: completion rates, watch time, video views. We tested whether they predicted which campaigns would drive sales.

Average Play Duration had a clear correlation with revenue per thousand impressions.

Chart 3.9: Average Play Duration vs Uplift



Longer average watch time corresponded with higher uplift (revenue per thousand impressions). Shorter watch time corresponded with lower uplift. The relationship was consistent across the data.

This matters because it shows engagement and creative quality can directly affect business outcomes. Keep people watching longer, correlates to more revenue per thousand impression. Lose their attention early and you get weaker results.

Average watch time can help you understand creative performance within a format. But it may not predict business impact across different formats. A strong creative on Brand Auction could outperform a weak creative on TopView, even though TopView typically drives higher engagement.

Creative quality matters across all social platforms, not just on TikTok. It is vital to follow best practice to retain attention:

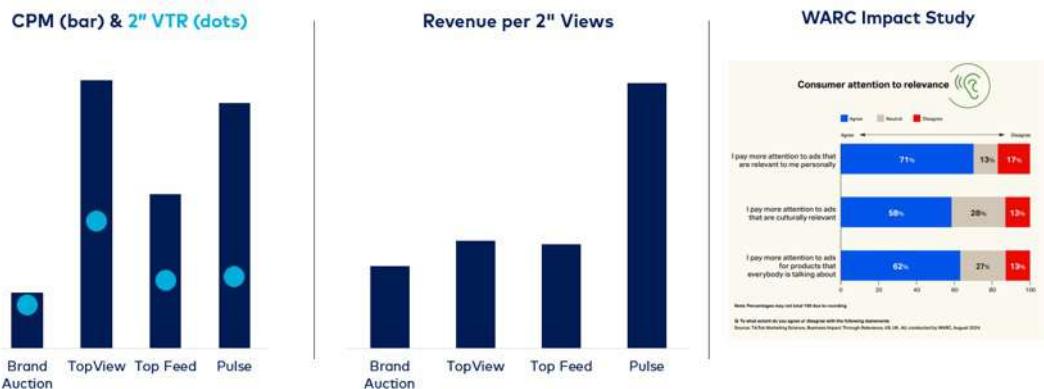
- Ensure ads are kept under 25 seconds
- Show the brand identity within the first 2 seconds
- Create / adapt content that fits the platform naturally

Ads that entertain or have an emotional impact and create a hook early drive stronger attention and recall. Following these practices improves retention, strengthens recall and drives revenue.

Video views story

Video Views revealed a notable pattern. Pulse had lower video view through rates than TopView and TopFeed, but it was among the most impactful formats on revenue per 2" views.

Chart 3.10: CPM, 2" VTR and Revenue per 2" Views



Why? Pulse places your ads next to relevant content that users have already engaged with. That contextual relevance drives impact even when view through rates may be lower. Not all views are equal. A view alongside relevant content can be worth more than a completed view in isolation.

This matched findings from WARC's impact study. Users pay more attention to ads that are culturally relevant to the content they're watching. Although Pulse's view through rates are slightly lower, the views it secured were more valuable.

The platform optimised for exactly what you asked for: views. But those views didn't translate to business outcomes as effectively as other objectives. You got the metric you optimised for, not necessarily the business result you needed.

What this means: platform engagement metrics matter for understanding audience engagement within a campaign. However, they don't always predict business outcomes across formats and objectives. Format choice, objective selection, and contextual placement influence business impact more than engagement rates.

The CPM question: Are advertisers just buying weight?

Look across all the data and one pattern stands out. The formats with the lowest CPMs don't consistently deliver the best returns. The ones with the highest CPMs don't consistently deliver the worst.

What matters is the relationship between cost and impact.

A £15 CPM that drives £8 in revenue per thousand impressions delivers £53 cost per sale. A £5 CPM that drives £3 in revenue per thousand impressions delivers £83 cost per sale. The "expensive" format is actually £30 cheaper per outcome.

Many advertisers optimise for low CPMs because that's the efficiency metric they track. But if you're just buying weight without impact, low CPMs don't help. You're spending less money on something that doesn't work.

Strong performance requires tracking both CPM and revenue per thousand impressions. Know when low CPMs mean efficient scale and when they mean ineffective impressions.

Premium formats: Is the cost justified?

Premium formats consistently drove higher revenue per thousand impression across both sectors. But they cost more. So when is that premium worth paying?

For launches and brand building: Yes. The 2-4x increase in revenue per thousand impression often justified the 2-3x increase in CPM. You needed breakthrough impact.

For consideration campaigns: Usually yes. TopFeed and TopView built consideration more effectively than cheaper alternatives. The higher cost per impression translated to lower cost per contract when conversion rates factored in.

Success required format strategy, not just format selection. Premium formats for specific campaign phases or objectives. Standard formats for scale and efficiency. The ones that used only premium formats overspent. The ones that used only standard formats underperformed. Majority of advertisers ran premium and standard formats together, extending reach during critical campaign periods. Ensure formats are viewed holistically to understand how they support each other, rather than treating them in isolation. This integrated approach maximises their impact.

What works where: Sector format preferences

Clear patterns emerged for format selection by sector.

For retail, Standard Feed and Brand Auction worked best for scale and can be used for always on activity. TopFeed and Pulse suited product launches. TopView delivered breakthrough impact for major launches. Web Traffic handled retargeting.

For telco, Brand Auction served as the primary consideration driver. TopView suited major launches. Web Traffic worked only for retargeting.

Some patterns held across both sectors. Reach & Frequency delivered strong ROI regardless of category. Moving down-funnel consistently increased costs without proportionally increasing impact. But other patterns were sector-specific. Retail needed volume efficiency to support frequent promotional activity and shorter purchase cycles. Telco needed consideration depth to support longer decision journeys and higher-value contracts.

Success came from adapting format mix to sector dynamics rather than following generic best practices.



4. The memory effect: How long does TikTok stick?

Advertising doesn't just stop working when it stops running. The question that we need to answer is how long does TikTok's impact last, and what does that mean for how you plan campaigns?

This matters for budget pacing and flighting strategy. If effects fade quickly, you need frequent bursts but if they linger, you can space activity out more.

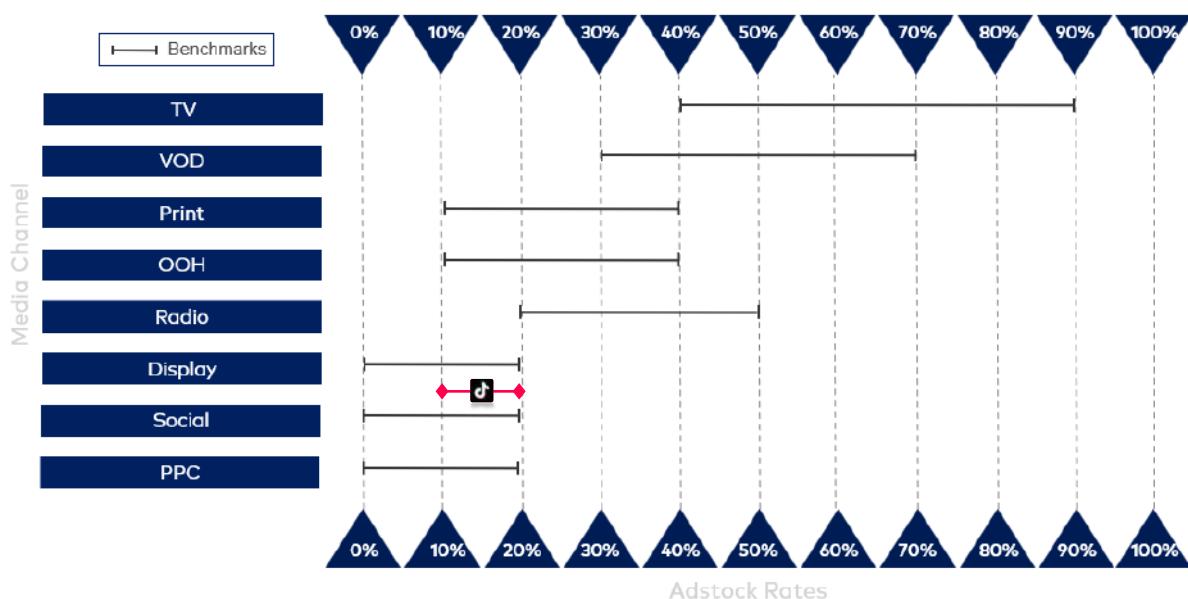
How we measure memorability

In marketing mix modelling, we measure the memorability through adstock which looks at the carryover effect from one period to the next. It tells you what proportion of this week's advertising impact is still driving response next week.

All channels will have different decay rates and setting this parameter correctly is very important. Too low and you underestimate lasting impact. Too high and you overstate long-term effects, leading to misaligned budget decisions.

Based on Ebiquity's benchmarks, here's how channels compare on typical adstock ranges:

Chart 4.1: Adstock Ranges by Channel from Ebiquity Benchmarks



Fast-scroll platforms like TikTok show lower retention than traditional media, reflecting rapid pace and fleeting attention. In contrast TV and VOD maintain higher carryover from longer exposure and more sustained audience attention.

Even with this general pattern, we saw that TikTok consistently performs at the upper end of the social media range. We suspect this is driven by higher engagement rates compared to other social platforms and the impact captured through extended play duration.

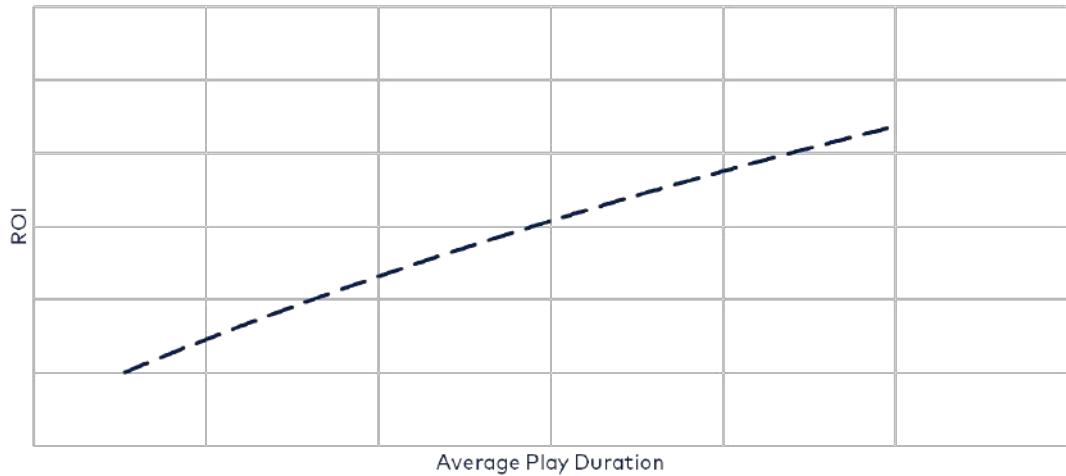
However, a key insight from System1 and TikTok's study *The Effectiveness of Creativity on TikTok* is that "ads under 25 seconds achieve, on average, 21% higher attention scores".

This introduces an important tension: although longer engagement boosts performance, brands must still win attention quickly. TikTok's skippable format heightens this challenge, requiring creative work that delivers instant impact while retaining enough substance to sustain viewer engagement.

Creative quality drives memorability

We saw earlier the strong correlation between average play duration and uplift, it is a similar relationship with ROI and this relationship matters particularly for memorability.

Chart 4.2: ROI vs Average Play Duration Correlation



Creative quality and audience engagement don't just drive immediate sales - they're the primary drivers of both memorability and commercial outcomes. Ads that hold attention longer create stronger memory structures, extending impact beyond the initial exposure.

Category insights: creative trumps sector

We analysed retail and telco to see if memorability varied by sector. The finding: minimal difference in decay rates between categories.

Retention patterns are driven overwhelmingly by creative execution, not sector dynamics.

This has implications. Sector benchmarks matter less on TikTok than on any other major channel. A poorly executed retail campaign will underperform a brilliantly executed telco campaign, regardless of sector.

Creative quality is not an optimisation variable for TikTok. It's a primary determinant of effectiveness.

The dual-screen reality

Dual-screen consumption has blurred boundaries between channels. TikTok doesn't replace TV, it competes for attention during TV viewing. TikTok is a second screen that often becomes the first point of emotional connection.

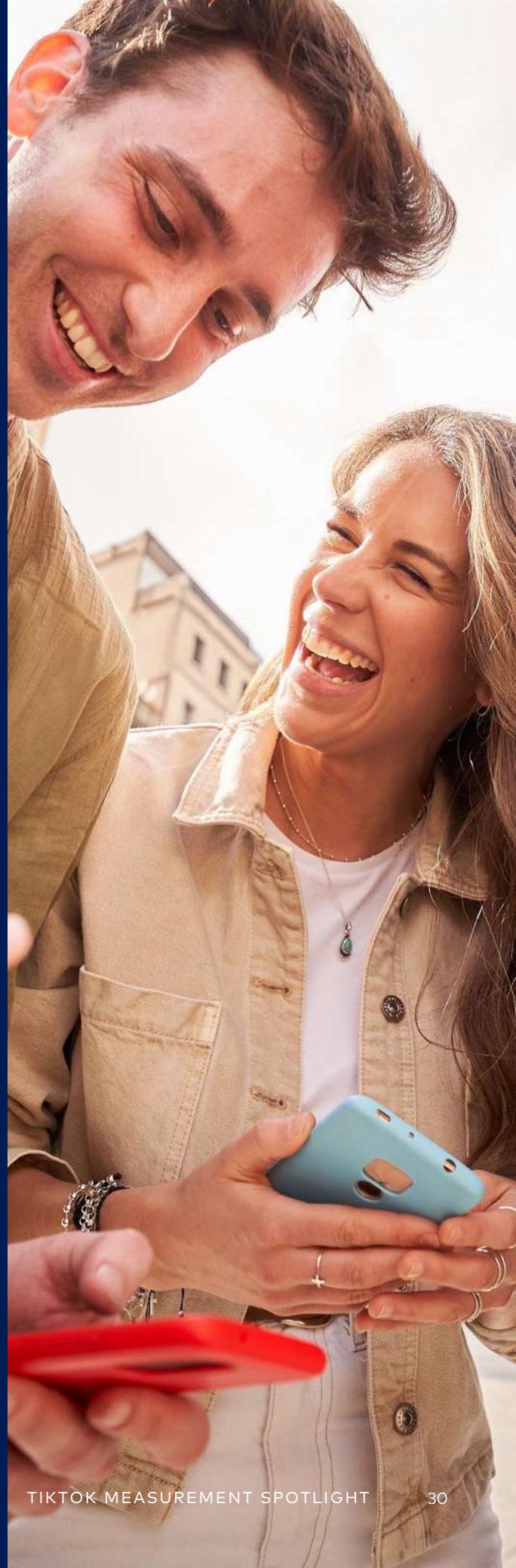
The implication: the question isn't "Can I take from the TV budget?" but "How do I orchestrate across platforms to capture fragmented attention?" TikTok works alongside traditional media. It captures immediate attention and reinforces messages in ways TV can't.

What this means for planning

TikTok sits between TV and standard social on memorability. That affects deployment.

You can't treat TikTok like always-on display. The effects last longer than that. But you can't treat it like TV either. The effects don't persist for months.

Next question: does TikTok work better on its own or alongside other channels? That's what Section 5 examines.





5. The synergy story: TikTok in the media mix

TikTok doesn't run in isolation. Most brands select it as one of multiple channels for their campaigns, running it alongside TV, other social platforms, and digital channels. But this analysis focuses on one relationship: TikTok and TV.

The principles likely apply to other social platforms, but this is a TikTok-specific study, so we examine what we can measure directly.

The question: does TikTok perform better when it's part of a coordinated plan with TV, or does it work just as well on its own?

This matters for media planning. If TikTok gets a boost from running alongside TV, you should coordinate timing. If it doesn't, you can plan them independently.

The investment picture

The context matters. TV holds the larger share of investment across the brands in this study, whilst TikTok represents a smaller but growing allocation. Retail brands invested more than twice as much in TikTok as telco brands, creating different scales for analysis and affecting what we can measure about synergistic effects.

The media behaviours differ too. TV typically runs continuously or near-continuously for both sectors. TikTok tends to activate in bursts, most often during periods when TV is also live. This pattern creates natural conditions for testing whether the channels amplify one another.

Retail: TikTok performs better alongside TV

For retail brands, we compared TikTok performance when TV was running versus when it wasn't. The result: TikTok ROI was higher when both channels ran together.

This suggests TV primes audiences in ways that make TikTok more effective. TV builds broad awareness and familiarity. Dual screening behaviour matters here: many viewers are on their phones whilst watching TV, creating immediate opportunities for TikTok content to land with audiences already primed by TV messaging. The channels amplify each other.

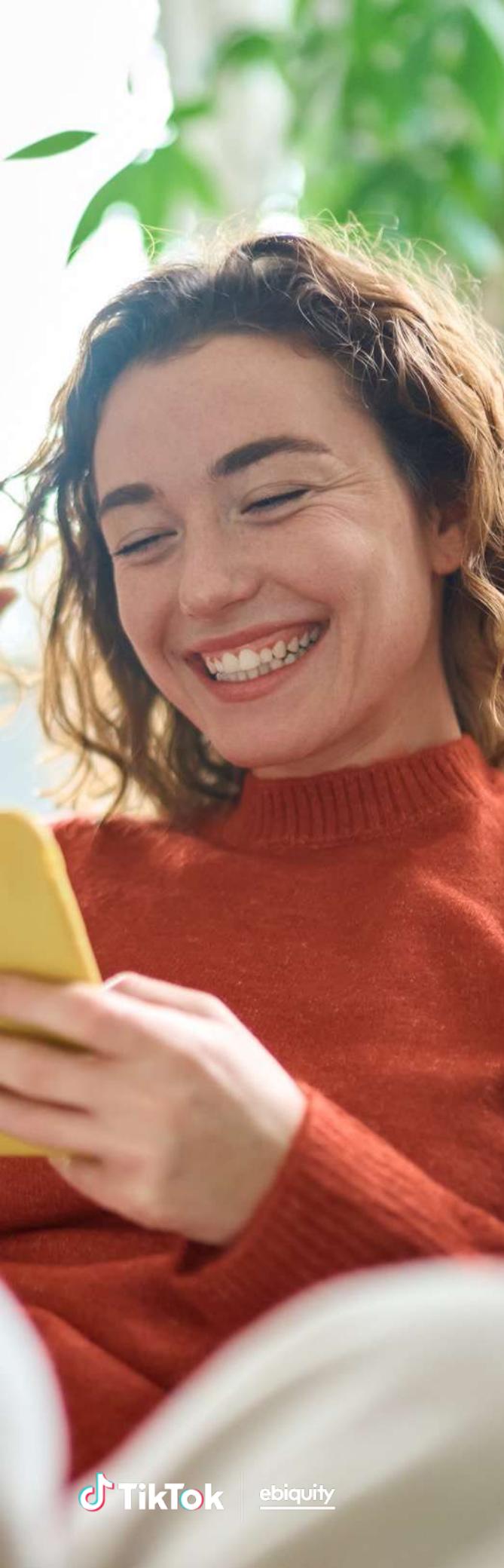
Most TikTok investment in retail already happens during TV-active periods, which limited the TV-off data available for comparison.

But the uplift during concurrent activity was clear enough to be confident in the finding.

The planning consideration for retail

Given the measurement limitations, approach TikTok planning based on standalone performance metrics whilst recognising that synergy may exist but remain unmeasured.

If you want to test for synergy, design for it deliberately. Options include running TikTok during a sustained TV-off period and comparing performance or implementing Geo-Lift testing where correlation data is lacking. This allows you to measure incremental effects in test markets versus control markets with greater precision.



The planning consideration for telco

Given the measurement limitations, approach TikTok planning based on standalone performance metrics whilst recognising that synergy may exist but remain unmeasured.

As with Retail, if you want to test for synergy, design for it deliberately.

Why synergy differs by sector

Retail has shorter purchase cycles and more promotional activity. TV and TikTok delivering the same offer creates clear reinforcement.

Telco has longer consideration cycles and more sustained brand building. TV does the heavy lifting. TikTok's incremental effect is harder to isolate.

The relative maturity of TikTok deployment also differs between sectors.

The measurement challenge

Isolating synergy effects is hard. TV's dominance and near-constant presence creates limited variation to analyse.

Future measurement could improve with more deliberate test design: controlled TV-off periods, sequential deployment, or varied intensity ratios. All require more discipline than most media plans allow.

Important context

This study shows correlation, not definitive causation. Multiple factors could explain the pattern, seasonality, creative quality differences, or overall campaign intensity during TV-on periods. The data suggests possible synergy but doesn't prove TV is required for TikTok to work effectively.



6. Measurement excellence: Your practical guide

Getting TikTok measurement right requires understanding both cost and impact. CPM and ROI are key metrics, but real insight comes from examining how cost and impact interact.

This section covers the practical steps: what data to collect, which metrics to use, and how to set up your models.

Data requirements: Source platform data

This study required granular data directly from TikTok to enable format and objective-level analysis. Agency-supplied data provided a baseline, but understanding what drives performance requires platform-level detail.

TikTok offers multiple data access routes:

- API integration: Automated data pulls for ongoing measurement. This is the suggested method to pull consistent granular data in a timely manner
- TikTok Ads Manager MMM Data Export Tool: To extract data with a pre-designed formatting suited for MMM analysis

The good news: when we sourced data directly from TikTok and validated it against agency reporting, the data aligned. That confirmed consistency and gave us confidence in the granular analysis.

Why granular data matters:

Without format and objective-level detail, TikTok gets modelled as a single aggregated variable, or worst case, modelled as part of the social total. You see overall performance but can't identify what's working versus what's dragging results down. Optimisation becomes limited to "spend more" or "spend less" on TikTok overall.

With granular data, you can:

- Isolate format-level performance (TopView vs Brand Auction vs Pulse)
- Understand objective-level dynamics (Reach vs Conversions vs Video Views)
- Build specific optimisation strategies based on what actually drives your results
- Improve model fit and statistical reliability

Granular platform data can improve model fit, reduce coefficient uncertainty, and improve prediction accuracy.

Practical recommendation: Source granular data from any platform where you invest significantly. This applies to Google, Meta and all major channels. The measurement improvement justifies the data management effort.

Metric selection: Impressions work best

To identify the optimal modelling metric, we tested multiple variables: Spend, Impressions, 2-second Video Views, and Clicks.

Each was evaluated against standard criteria including model fit, contribution accuracy, and coefficient stability.

The result: Impressions emerged as the optimal foundation metric for TikTok measurement. This held true across retail and telco, regardless of brand or campaign composition.

The campaign objective nuance:

When TikTok activity shows clear, sustained focus on specific objectives - say Video Views across an extended period - the aligned metric (2-second video views) may offer better alignment with campaign strategy.

But be careful. MMM models typically cover 24 to 36 months of data, and campaign strategies often evolve. A recent emphasis on video views may not reflect the approach across the full measurement period, when reach-oriented or conversion-focused objectives may have dominated.

Practical recommendation: Use impressions as the input variable, unless there's clear evidence of sustained, consistent objective focus across the modelling window. When in doubt, test multiple metrics and compare model performance.

Understanding format and objective composition

Understanding TikTok activity composition is crucial for interpreting results. Performance expectations should vary based on formats and objectives deployed.

A media plan weighted toward premium formats (TopView, TopFeed, Pulse) will show different cost and uplift characteristics compared to Brand Auction-dominated activity. Similarly, shifts in campaign objectives between periods influence performance comparisons. An upweight in reach-oriented objectives versus conversion-focused activity will alter both CPM profiles and sales uplift patterns.

While granular modelling at format and objective level may not be feasible due to investment levels and statistical constraints, maintaining visibility of activity composition enables proper interpretation of performance changes.

Practical recommendation: Maintain detailed records of TikTok format deployment and objective selection throughout measurement periods. Use this context to interpret performance variation beyond simple CPM and ROI comparisons.

As TikTok investment scales, consider even more granular measurement approaches:

- TopView as distinct variable: High reach, short-duration impact
- Pulse as distinct variable: Contextual relevance, sustained effect
- In-Feed as distinct variable: Always-on background presence

This granularity becomes statistically viable at higher investment levels, start with platform-level analysis, add granularity as investment and data accumulate.

Omnichannel attribution: Capture both online and offline

This study showed TikTok drives impact on both online and offline sales channels. This held true across retail and telco. Users exposed to TikTok advertising convert across different channels. Restricting attribution to digital conversion only substantially understates TikTok's true commercial contribution. The offline component represents meaningful incremental value.

Practical recommendation: Ensure MMM frameworks capture full-funnel, omnichannel impact by including both online and offline sales. Where possible, model online and offline sales separately to understand channel-specific contribution patterns while maintaining visibility of total impact.

Methodological approach: Bayesian

To enable stable, granular analysis of TikTok formats and objectives, we used Bayesian modelling methodology.

How it works: Bayesian approaches allow models to incorporate prior information. In this application, we hypothesised that granular TikTok components (formats, objectives, etc.) would perform broadly in line with total TikTok performance, while allowing the data to determine specific performance levels for each component.

This prevents extreme estimates when analysing many correlated variables simultaneously, while still allowing the data to reveal genuine performance differences.

Benefits of this methodology for TikTok analysis:

1. Collinearity management: TikTok formats and objectives often run simultaneously, creating statistical challenges. Bayesian methods use "soft" priors that help stabilise estimates when variables are highly correlated. This doesn't eliminate collinearity entirely, but handles it more robustly than standard approaches, enabling meaningful estimation despite overlapping campaign activity.
2. Small sample robustness: Some brands have lower TikTok investment relative to other social platforms, which can produce unstable ROI estimates in typical MMM models, potentially skewing strategic recommendations. Bayesian modelling delivers more stable, reliable estimates despite lower spend levels and smaller sample sizes, making it well-suited to emerging channels or granular splits where investment may be modest.
3. Stability under complexity: Despite concurrent deployment of multiple formats and objectives, Bayesian estimation provides stable, interpretable estimates for each component, preventing the extreme coefficients that can emerge from pure data-driven optimisation.

The modelling choice depends on data characteristics, prior information availability, and analytical objectives.

For TikTok's specific measurement challenges (concurrent formats, emerging channel status, overlapping objectives), Bayesian methods provided advantages in this study.

Ensuring robust measurement

An important measurement consideration: insufficient investment relative to other channels can produce unreliable ROI estimates that reflect measurement limitations, not necessarily poor channel performance.

The false negative pattern:

1. Brand invests modestly in TikTok relative to total media mix
2. MMM shows weak or unstable ROI estimates
3. Conclusion: "TikTok doesn't work for us"

The actual problem: Investment may be insufficient to:

1. Generate statistically detectable signal within the total sales pattern
2. Allow platform algorithms adequate time and data to optimise delivery
3. Deliver sufficient frequency to drive measurable sales response
4. Test multiple formats or objectives to find what works

Statistical power considerations:

When TikTok (or other platforms) represent a small fraction of total media investment, measurement becomes challenging. The channel may be driving incremental sales, but the signal is difficult to isolate cleanly from all other factors affecting business performance.



Rather than arbitrary thresholds, focus on measurement quality indicators:

- Coefficient stability: Does TikTok's estimated contribution vary wildly between modelling periods, or is it reasonably consistent?
- Confidence intervals: Are the error bands around TikTok's ROI estimate narrow enough to be actionable, or too wide to draw conclusions?
- Relative investment scale: Does TikTok represent sufficient share of media spend for statistical detection?

The saturation curve context

Performance follows a curve: Optimal investment shows strong, measurable ROI. Excessive investment shows declining marginal ROI due to saturation effects.

Finding your optimal level requires investment sufficient for robust measurement, then testing incremental spend while monitoring both marginal ROI and estimate stability.

Don't confuse "we can't measure it reliably" with "it doesn't work." If measurement quality indicators suggest low statistical power, consider increasing investment to levels where detection becomes reliable, or use complementary measurement approaches like geo-lift testing that can detect effects at lower spend levels.

Platform evolution and measurement adaptation

TikTok evolves constantly with continuous innovation in ad formats, targeting capabilities, creative specifications, and measurement products. Measurement approaches must evolve in parallel.

Review available metrics regularly. Test new measurement dimensions. Incorporate enhanced data sources as platform capabilities expand. Measurement frameworks from 18 months ago may not capture what's possible today.

Balance rigor with practicality

The framework in this study provides a template for rigorous, granular TikTok measurement. Measurement excellence isn't an end in itself. It's the foundation that enables genuine optimisation.

By sourcing comprehensive data, selecting appropriate metrics, deploying suitable methodology, maintaining strategic context, and capturing omnichannel impact, advertisers can extract maximum value from TikTok investment.

Measurement checklist

Questions to ask your MMM providers and media agencies:

DATA INTEGRITY:

- Where has TikTok data been sourced, and does it align with platform reporting?
- Have we validated consistency between agency-supplied data and platform data?
- Do we have access to granular metrics beyond impressions and spend?
- Are we using TikTok's API or direct data access for ongoing measurement?

MODELLING STRUCTURE:

- How are we modelling our Social bucket of media? Are platforms grouped or isolated?
- If TikTok is separated, are we applying consistent adstock structures?
- What methodology handles granular analysis, and is it appropriate for investment levels?
- Have we tested multiple metrics to determine the optimal modelling input?

STRATEGIC CONTEXT:

- Do we have visibility of campaign objectives and formats deployed throughout the measurement period?
- How are shifts in TikTok strategy being interpreted when looking at period-over-period performance changes?

ATTRIBUTION SCOPE:

- Are we capturing both online and offline sales impact?
- Have we validated that TikTok's omnichannel contribution is being measured?

EVOLUTION AND ADAPTATION:

- When was our measurement framework last reviewed for fit with current TikTok capabilities?
- Are we testing new formats and objectives as they become available?

ROBUSTNESS CHECKS

- Does TikTok's estimated ROI remain reasonably consistent across modelling periods?
- Does TikTok represent sufficient share of media spend for statistical detection?



7. From insight to action: Strategic implementation

The previous sections showed you what works and why. This section translates that into decisions you can make.

The optimisation cycle

ROI was the starting point. Understanding efficiency and effectiveness was the analysis. Now comes the optimisation.

This isn't one-time. It's continuous. Measure performance, understand what's driving it, adjust, measure again.

Every time you run activity, you generate data about what works for your brand, your audience, your category. Use it.

Where to start depends on where you are:

Running TikTok now:	Planning TikTok investment:	Optimising existing activity:
Start with measurement. Do you have visibility of cost and impact by format? Do you know which formats and objectives are driving your ROI? If not, fix measurement first before optimising spend.	Start with format strategy. What are you trying to achieve? Match your format mix to your objectives, not to the lowest available CPM. Invest in TikTok-native creative from the start, whether purpose-built or adapted from existing assets.	Start with the cost versus uplift analysis. Start with the cost versus uplift analysis. Where are you getting strong impact? Where are you just buying cheap volume? Reallocate toward formats delivering both reasonable efficiency and strong effectiveness.

Format strategy: Matching formats to objectives

Format choice matters more than most advertisers realise. The same budget on different formats delivers completely different results.

For promotional campaigns and scale:

Use Brand Auction and Standard Feed. They deliver volume at low cost. You may not get breakthrough sales impact, but you don't need it. You need reach at a price that works. For regular promotional activity, this approach can work.

For product launches and consideration building:

Use TopView and Pulse. They cost more but can drive significantly higher impact. You're paying for impact, not just reach. For launches where you need to break through quickly, that premium is justified.

Consider Brand Reservation for guaranteed placement during key launch windows. You're paying for certainty of delivery at critical moments.

For major launches requiring breakthrough:

TopView delivers strong impact per impression. It's premium, but for major moments where you need maximum visibility, the cost can be justified.

For retargeting and lower-funnel activity:

Web Traffic works here. Low cost, reasonable ROI driven by efficiency. You're reaching people who already know you, so you don't need the same impact per impression.

Don't rely on Web Traffic as your primary approach. It works as part of a full-funnel strategy, not as the main driver.

Objective selection: What you optimise for matters

Objectives matter as much as formats.

Reach & Frequency consistently delivered strong ROI across sectors. Low CPMs combined with high impact. If your goal is building broad awareness efficiently, this objective performs well.

Conversion objectives (Product Sales and Web Conversions) had higher CPMs without proportionally higher revenue per thousand impression. You're paying more to target higher-intent audiences, but this doesn't always translate to better business outcomes.

Video Views as an objective drove high completion rates but lower revenue per view. The objective delivered on its metric (views) but that didn't always translate proportionally to sales outcomes.

The lesson: Optimise for business outcomes, not just platform engagement metrics.

Campaign sequencing: Brand then performance

Best results came from using both brand and performance in sequence, not choosing between them.

Example sequenced approach:

- Week 1-2: Brand formats (TopFeed, Pulse, TopView) to build awareness and consideration. Higher CPMs, higher impact per impression. You're establishing presence and priming the audience.
- Week 3-4: Performance formats (Brand Auction, Web Traffic) to drive conversion. Lower CPMs, high volume. You're converting the consideration you built.

This sequenced approach can deliver better overall ROI than using only brand formats (too expensive to sustain) or only performance formats (insufficient consideration to convert effectively).

But sequencing doesn't mean TikTok should only run in bursts.

Some brands in this study ran TikTok continuously with strong results. Others ran it in campaign bursts and also succeeded. The right approach depends on your business model and purchase cycle.

Investment levels: Knowing when to scale

The data showed diminishing returns beyond certain investment levels. But where that point sits varies by brand.

Watch marginal ROI. When the ROI of your next pound invested drops below your hurdle rate, you've hit your optimal investment level for that format or objective.

Test incremental investment carefully. Increase spend by 20-30% for a sustained period (4-6 weeks) and measure the marginal ROI. If it's above your hurdle rate, you can scale further.

If it's below, you've found your ceiling.

Ensure measurement robustness: Before concluding TikTok performance is weak, check measurement quality indicators:

- Are confidence intervals around ROI estimates narrow enough to be actionable?
- Is TikTok's estimated contribution reasonably consistent across periods?

If measurement quality is poor, consider using complementary approaches like geo-lift testing or increasing investment to improve statistical detection.

Don't assume you can scale indefinitely at the same efficiency. Every channel hits diminishing returns eventually.

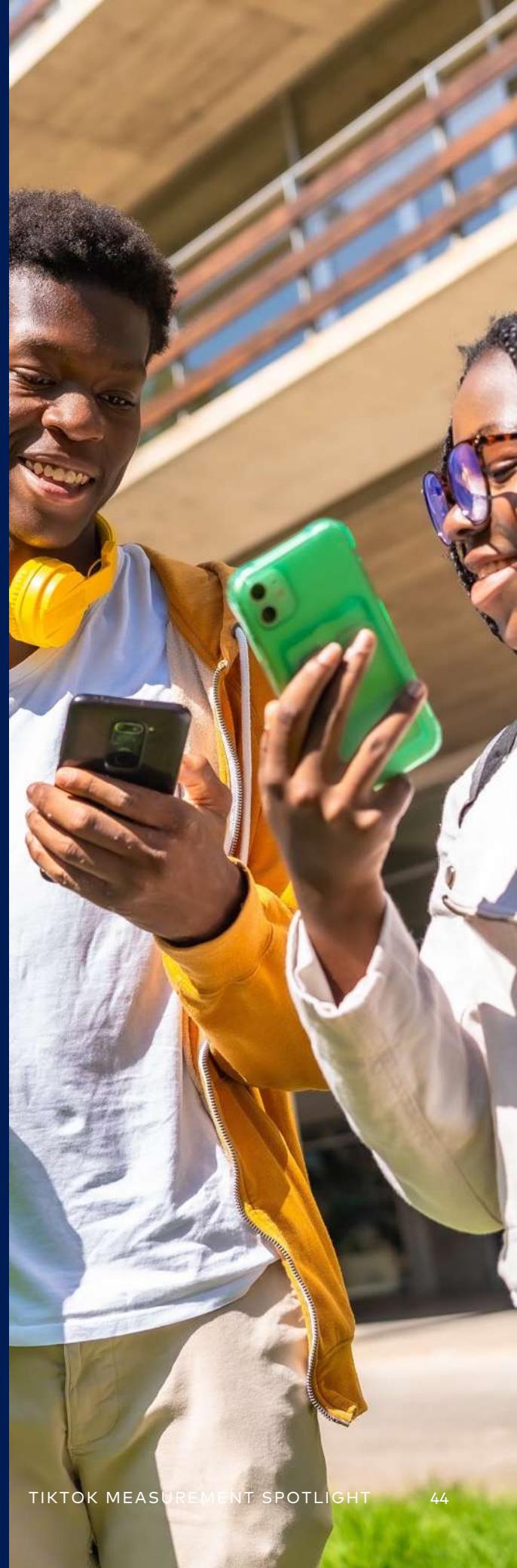
Synergy with other channels

For retail brands, TikTok appeared to deliver higher ROI during periods when TV was also running, suggesting the channels may work well together.

If you're running both TV and TikTok, consider coordinating timing of key campaigns. Align messaging where appropriate but ensure creative is properly adapted for TikTok rather than running TV ads as-is.

Important: This does not mean TikTok requires TV to work. Plan TikTok based on standalone performance metrics. If you're running TV during key periods and can coordinate timing, it may provide additional benefit, but it's not a prerequisite for TikTok effectiveness.

For telco, we didn't detect measurable synergy. That doesn't mean it doesn't exist, it may just be harder to measure. Plan TikTok based on standalone performance until you have evidence of amplification effects.



Testing synergy through geo-lifts:

If you want to understand synergy effects for your brand specifically, consider geo-lift testing:

- Select matched geographic markets
- Run TikTok in test markets while holding dark in control markets
- Maintain consistent TV and other media across all markets
- Measure sales differences between test and control

This provides clearer evidence than observational data from campaigns designed for other purposes. These results can be fed back into MMM models to help optimise and calibrate results, allowing for more advanced measurement and insights.

Measurement evolution

Your measurement approach needs to evolve as TikTok evolves.

The platform changes constantly. New formats launch. Targeting capabilities evolve.

Measurement products expand. Your framework from 18 months ago may not capture what's possible today.

Review your measurement approach regularly:

- Are you using the right metrics? (Impressions work best for most brands, but test others)
- Do you have access to granular data at format and objective level?
- Are you testing new formats and objectives as they launch?
- Are you capturing omnichannel impact (both online and offline sales)?
- Have you validated platform data against independent sources?

Data sourcing matters: This study required granular data directly from TikTok to enable format and objective-level analysis. Agency-supplied aggregate data provides a baseline, but optimisation requires platform-level detail.

What success looks like

Strong TikTok performance comes from three fundamentals:

1. Measuring both efficiency and effectiveness. Not just CPMs. Not just ROI. Both cost and impact together, understanding the trade-offs.
2. Matching formats to objectives. Premium formats for breakthrough moments. Efficiency formats for scale. The right tool for the job.
3. Adapting to sector dynamics. Retail strategies for retail. Telco strategies for telco. Not generic best practices applied everywhere.

Success isn't achieving the lowest CPM or the highest ROI in isolation. It's getting the right balance of cost and impact for your specific situation.

The practical checklist

Before your next TikTok campaign:

FORMAT SELECTION:

- What's my primary objective: breakthrough awareness, sustained consideration, or conversion?
- Am I using formats matched to that objective or defaulting to the cheapest option?
- If launching something new, have I weighted toward impact formats (TopView, TopFeed, Pulse)?
- If driving volume on established products, have I weighted toward efficiency formats (Brand Auction, Standard Feed)?

OBJECTIVE SELECTION:

- Am I optimising for business outcomes (revenue, sales) or platform metrics (views, completion rates)?
- Have I tested Reach & Frequency against conversion objectives with actual ROI measurement?

CAMPAIGN STRUCTURE:

- Am I sequencing brand and performance activity or treating it as a binary choice?
- For launches, have I planned brand formats first, then performance formats?
- For always-on activity, have I found a sustainable mix that balances impact and cost?
- If running TV during key periods, have I considered coordinating TikTok timing?

CREATIVE EXECUTION:

- Is my creative properly adapted for TikTok, or simply repurposed from TV/other channels?
- Does brand appear within first 2 seconds and remain visible for >50% of duration?
- Is duration under 25 seconds for optimal attention retention?
- Am I following platform best practices for hook, engagement, and authenticity?

MEASUREMENT:

- Am I capturing both online and offline sales impact?
- Do I have granular data at format and objective level?
- Do I know my marginal ROI at current investment levels?
- Have I reviewed my measurement framework in the past 12 months?

The insights are in this document. The decisions are yours to make.

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