

Factors Influencing the Career Advancement of Malaysian Women Homepreneurs on the TikTok Platform

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Abstract: Entrepreneurship significantly contributes to economic growth, with recent studies highlighting the rise of female entrepreneurs who challenge traditional business roles by becoming "homepreneurs." The current research focuses on Malaysian women homepreneurs using TikTok, a platform that has transformed from entertainment to a vital business tool, facilitating unique career advancement opportunities. This study aims to explore the impact of digital marketing skills, product quality, customer engagement, and understanding of TikTok's algorithm on the career advancement of Malaysian women homepreneurs. In the quantitative study focusing on the career advancement of Malaysian women homepreneurs using TikTok, the methodology incorporated structured questionnaires to assess the relationships between key variables. The data was collected from 400 participants via Google Forms, leveraging a purposive sampling technique to ensure a representative sample of women homepreneurs active on TikTok. The statistical analysis revealed that while digital marketing skills and customer engagement did not significantly impact career advancement on TikTok, a thorough understanding of the platform's algorithm was strongly associated with career progression. Conversely, the results indicate that product quality was negatively significant in driving career advancement for Malaysian women homepreneurs on TikTok. This study highlights the need for targeted strategies focusing on product excellence and deep comprehension of platform algorithms to effectively leverage TikTok for career development.

Keywords: *Homepreneurs, Career Advancement, Digital Marketing Skills, Product Quality Customer Engagement, TikTok Algorithm*

1. Introduction and Background

Entrepreneurship has long been linked to economic growth, historically perceived as male-dominated and female-led businesses as small-scale until recent decades. Recent studies highlight the rise of female entrepreneurs in both developed and developing economies, driven by a desire for independence and personal achievement (Abebe & Kegne, 2023; Aparicio et al., 2022; Bose, 2020). This shift has given rise to "homepreneurs," women who operate businesses from home, demonstrating adaptability and resilience (Rout, Panda, & Panda, 2022). Modern digital platforms, especially TikTok, play a crucial role for Malaysian women homepreneurs by providing a space for innovation, audience engagement, and brand establishment (Wahid et al., 2022). According to the Statistica Research Department (2024), the number of TikTok users in Malaysia is projected to increase from roughly 17 million in 2023 to 21.7 million by 2029. This makes TikTok a favorable platform for economic activities. In addition, TikTok's global reach and interactive nature facilitate career advancement through financial growth, brand recognition, and customer loyalty. Rahayu and Ellyanawati (2023) highlighted the limited empirical evidence on the utilization of social media by women entrepreneurs during the pandemic for business sustenance. While studies by Abebe and Kegne (2023) and Rout, Panda, and Panda (2022) have shed light on the broader landscape of female entrepreneurship and digital platforms, a detailed examination of TikTok's role in the entrepreneurial ascent of Malaysian women homepreneurs is conspicuously absent.

Furthermore, Achtenhagen (2017) echoed the need for more research in media management and entrepreneurship, underscoring the scarcity of empirical findings in this domain. The existing literature, while rich in chronicling the evolution of female entrepreneurship, offers limited insights into the intricate dynamics of digital marketing skills in the context of emerging social media platforms as mentioned by Bose (2020), Dsouza and Panakaje (2023) and Swami and Naidu (2020). The TikTok Algorithm, with its profound influence

on content visibility and audience reach, is another area that warrants detailed exploration (Karizat et al., 2021; Nair et al., 2022). Considering these identified gaps, this study aims to unveil the intricate interplay between digital marketing skills, product quality, customer engagement, and TikTok platform understanding in propelling the career advancement of Malaysian women homepreneurs. Thus, this paper seeks to address the following questions. What is the relationship between digital marketing skills, product quality, customer engagement, and TikTok platform understanding towards the career advancement of Malaysian women homepreneurs on TikTok?

2. Literature Review

Career Advancement: Career advancement for Malaysian women homepreneurs on TikTok, as defined by Abebe and Kegne (2023) and Rout, Panda and Panda (2022), comprises business expansion, income increase, and brand recognition, especially on digital platforms. This definition sets the stage for exploring how various factors contribute to women's entrepreneurial success in the digital space. Key factors such as digital marketing skills, customer engagement, product quality, and understanding of TikTok's algorithm play a critical role in their success (Bose, 2019; Annett, 2020). Bose (2019) highlights the empowerment of women homepreneurs through technology despite challenges like low profits and perception issues, while Annett (2020) emphasizes the importance of digital marketing skills and customer engagement for business growth. Typically, career advancement involves a merit-based path within companies, motivating employees (Smith, 2018; Mullins, 2007). However, it also includes alternative pathways based on company demands and individual needs (Saari & Judge, 2004). Career progression offers long-term success, higher compensation, job stability, and job happiness (Dialoke & Nkechi, 2017). Further studies explore challenges such as finance and marketing difficulties, societal constraints, and the role of social capital and digital transformation in the entrepreneurial ecosystem (Bose, 2020; Rout et al., 2022; Setini et al., 2020; Nair & Aithal, 2023). Digital marketing skills are essential for promoting products on digital platforms, empowering women entrepreneurs to leverage social media effectively (Bose, 2019; Swami & Naidu, 2020). While there is extensive literature on the importance of these skills, further exploration is needed on their impact on TikTok (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Tiago et al., 2022; Qureshi et al., 2023; Nambisan and Luo, 2022). This review highlights the critical role of digital marketing skills in career advancement and sets the stage for further empirical investigation into their specific impacts, contributing to the discourse on digital entrepreneurship and women's empowerment.

Digital Marketing Skills: Digital marketing skills are essential for Malaysian women homepreneurs on TikTok, including competencies needed to effectively use digital platforms for promoting and selling products. These skills are critical for success and career advancement in the digital age. Bose (2020) highlights that despite challenges like low profits and perception issues, women can leverage social media for effective marketing, leading to empowerment and business growth. Annett (2020) underscores the importance of digital marketing skills in harnessing the benefits of digital entrepreneurship and enhancing personal and professional satisfaction. However, there is a gap in understanding how these skills specifically impact career advancement on TikTok. Studies by Dwivedi et al. (2021) and Tiago and Veríssimo (2022) emphasize that creative and engaging content is crucial for capturing audience attention, leading to higher engagement and customer loyalty. Qureshi et al. (2023) note that digital marketing skills contribute to business resilience and growth, particularly during economic downturns. As shown by Nambisan & Luo (2022), training programs significantly improve these skills. Therefore, this study aims to explore the specific impacts of digital marketing skills on the career advancement of Malaysian women homepreneurs on TikTok, contributing to the broader discourse on digital entrepreneurship and women's empowerment (Bose, 2019, 2020; Swami & Naidu, 2020). Thus, the following hypothesis is designed:

H¹: *Digital marketing skills are positively related to the career advancement of Malaysian women homepreneurs on TikTok.*

Product Quality: Product quality, as outlined by Swami and Naidu (2020), is the standard or grade of a product that reflects its ability to meet customer needs and expectations. High-quality products lead to positive reviews, repeat purchases, and referrals, which are vital for homepreneurs' success (Swami & Naidu, 2020). Dsouza and Panakaje (2023) emphasize the pivotal role of product quality alongside digital marketing and customer engagement in business performance. Similarly, Susanti et al. (2023) highlight that product quality, combined with digital transformation and innovation, enhances the competitive advantage of Micro, Small and Medium

Enterprises (MSMEs). Bose (2020) notes the challenges women entrepreneurs face regarding product quality, which can affect market perception. Overcoming these challenges through improved product quality can lead to better market acceptance and growth. However, there is a gap in understanding how product quality specifically impacts the career advancement of Malaysian women homepreneurs on TikTok. This literature review underscores the critical role of product quality in career advancement and sets the stage for further empirical investigation into its impact on digital entrepreneurship (Swami & Naidu, 2020; Dsouza & Panakaje, 2023; Susanti et al., 2023; Bose, 2020). Hence, the current study suggests the following hypothesis:

H²: *Product quality positively influences the career advancement of Malaysian women's homepreneurs on TikTok.*

Customer Engagement: Customer engagement is a dynamic, interactive process that builds relationships, trust, and community between businesses and customers (Poell et al., 2021). Studies by Bose (2019) and Swami and Naidu (2020) highlight the importance of customer engagement in creating a loyal customer base and enhancing brand visibility, which is crucial for business visibility and growth on TikTok. The significance of customer engagement in the digital marketplace is increasingly recognized as a critical factor for business success. Studies by Bose (2019) and Annett (2020) have highlighted the transformative power of digital platforms in enabling women entrepreneurs to connect with a broader audience. These connections fostered through engagement, are not merely transactional but are deeply rooted in building relationships, trust, and community. Despite existing literature, there remains a gap in understanding the specific dynamics of customer engagement among Malaysian women homepreneurs on TikTok. This study aims to address this gap by exploring how customer engagement strategies on TikTok influence the career advancement of these entrepreneurs. This study contributes to the broader discourse on digital entrepreneurship, women's empowerment, and the transformative power of customer engagement in the digital age (Poell et al., 2021; Bose, 2019, 2020; Swami & Naidu, 2020).

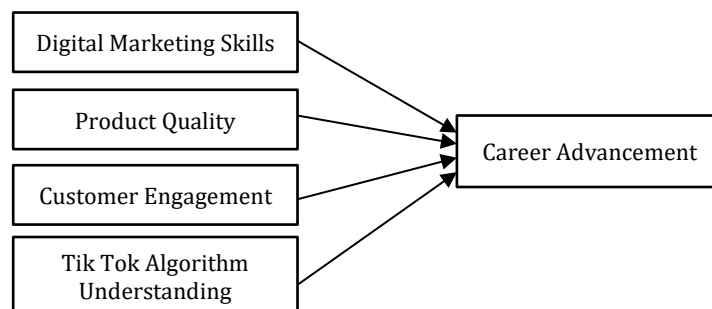
H³: *There is a significant relationship between customer engagement and the career advancement of Malaysian women homepreneurs on TikTok.*

TikTok Algorithm Understanding: The algorithm's comprehension allows entrepreneurs to maximize their presence on the platform, shaping content reach and engagement to enhance digital marketing efforts (Karizat et al., 2021; Nair et al., 2022). Studies by Srivastava and Sharma (2020) and Dsouza and Panakaje (2023) emphasize the importance of algorithm knowledge in crafting effective marketing strategies, enabling homepreneurs to align their content with the algorithm's preferences and increase their audience reach. Despite the general insights available, there is a notable gap in specific research on how understanding TikTok's algorithm impacts the career advancement of Malaysian women homepreneurs. This study aims to fill that gap by exploring how algorithm knowledge influences content strategy and audience engagement, contributing to entrepreneurial success. Doing so provides valuable insights into digital entrepreneurship and practical strategies for leveraging TikTok for business growth and personal branding (Karizat et al., 2021; Nair et al., 2022).

H⁴: *Understanding the TikTok algorithm positively influences the career advancement of Malaysian women's homepreneurs on TikTok.*

Based on the discussion above, this study derived a research conceptual framework, illustrated in Figure 1. Digital marketing skills, product quality, customer engagement, and understanding of the TikTok algorithm are the independent variables, while career advancement is the dependent variable.

Figure 1: Research Framework



3. Research Methodology

This study uses a quantitative research approach to examine how various factors affect the career advancement of Malaysian women homepreneurs on TikTok. Quantitative methods are well-suited for this research because they provide reliable and generalizable data through precise measurements and statistical analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Mertler & Reinhart, 2016). A purposive random sampling technique was utilized where the target respondents were Malaysian female homepreneurs active on TikTok. An online survey questionnaire fits well in this study with their digital-based businesses, and the online setting matches the participants' daily activities, such as promoting products and interacting with customers, which helps gather relevant data. Using familiar platforms like TikTok for data collection minimizes disruptions and increases engagement. This study's sample size is 385, based on a population of 2,700 members from the Women Homepreneur Malaysia page. This number was calculated using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table, which helps determine an appropriate sample size to ensure reliable results. However, within three weeks, the study collected more than 100% of the responses, with 407 responses. However, after data screening, cleaning, and validations, 400 responses were valid for analysis. The five-point Likert scale used in the questionnaire is as follows: 1-Strongly Disagree, 2-Disagree, 3-Neutral, 4-Agree, 5-Strongly Agree. This research applied SPSS 28.0 to analyze the data and test the hypotheses.

4. Results

The data were analyzed using descriptive, correlation, and regression analysis. Descriptive analysis was used to analyze the survey results, and frequency analysis was conducted to describe the demographic profiles of the respondents. Meanwhile, correlation analysis was used to test the relationship between the variables, and multiple regression analysis was used to evaluate the strength and direction of the relationship between various variables.

Profile of Respondents: Table 1 summarizes the respondents' demographic profiles. According to the table, all respondents were female since the study focused on women homepreneurs. Most of the respondents were aged between 35-44 years old (44%), followed by those aged below 25 years old (23%) and 25-34 years old (21.5%). In addition, most of the respondents hold a Diploma (57%) and a Master's (26.8%). For the years of business experience, the majority of them have below five years of experience as homepreneurs, with 55 percent, while 27.5 percent of them have 6-10 years of business experience. For the income category, it can be concluded that most of the respondents' monthly income range is between RM3000-RM3999 (42.5%), followed by RM5000 and above (25.8%) and RM4000-RM4999 (18.8%).

Table 1: Respondent Demographic

Characteristics	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	400	100.0
Age Group	Under 25 years old	92	23.0
	25 - 34 years old	86	21.5
	35 - 44 years old	176	44.0
	45 - 54 years old	43	10.8
	55 years old and above	3	0.8
Highest Level of Education	Diploma	228	57.0
	Degree	49	12.3
	Master	107	26.8
	PhD	16	4.0
Years of Business Experience	5 years or below	220	55.0
	6 - 10 years	110	27.5
	11 - 15 years	35	8.8
	Above 16 years	35	8.8
Monthly Income Range	RM2000 - RM2999	52	13.0
	RM3000 - RM3999	170	42.5
	RM4000 - RM4999	75	18.8
	RM5000 and above	103	25.8

Descriptive Statistic Results: Table 2 shows that the descriptive statistics indicate generally high ratings and moderate variability among the respondents. Digital Marketing Skills had a mean score of 4.11 (SD=0.696) showing that respondents generally rated their skills highly with some variation. Product Quality received a mean of 4.13 (SD= 0.643), suggesting a consistent perception of high-quality products. Customer Engagement had a mean of 4.12 (SD= 0.701), indicating a high level of engagement with slightly more variability. Understanding of the TikTok algorithm had a mean of 4.04 (SD= 0.645), reflecting a strong and moderately consistent understanding among respondents. Lastly, Career Advancement had a mean of 4.0908 (SD= 0.659), indicating positive feelings about career progression with moderate variability. Overall, the participants rated all variables favorably, with mean values above four on a 5-point scale.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics Results

Variable	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Digital Marketing Skills	400	4.11	0.696
Product Quality	400	4.13	0.643
Customer Engagement	400	4.12	0.701
TikTok Algorithm Understanding	400	4.04	0.645
Career Advancement	400	4.09	0.659

Reliability Analysis: The reliability test results in Table 3 demonstrate high internal consistency for all variables, indicated by their Cronbach's Alpha values. Digital Marketing Skills (IV1) has a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.873, showing excellent reliability. Product Quality (IV2) has a strong reliability with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.840. Customer Engagement (IV3) exhibits the highest reliability with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.897. TikTok Algorithm Understanding (IV4) and Career Advancement (DV) show robust reliability, with Cronbach's Alpha values of 0.822 and 0.852, respectively. These high-reliability coefficients confirm that the survey items used to measure each variable are consistent and reliable, validating the data collected for analyzing the factors influencing the career advancement of Malaysian women homepreneurs on TikTok.

Table 3: Reliability Test Results

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha
Digital Marketing Skills (IV1)	0.873
Product Quality (IV2)	0.840
Customer Engagement (IV3)	0.897
TikTok Algorithm Understanding (IV4)	0.822
Career Advancement (DV)	0.852

Relationship between Variables: Pearson's correlation analysis has been used to test the relationships between the independent variables (Digital Marketing Skills, Product Quality, Customer Engagement, and TikTok Algorithm Understanding) and the dependent variable (Career Advancement). Referring to Table 4, it can be concluded that Digital Marketing Skills (0.179) and Product Quality (0.171) have a weak positive relationship, Customer Engagement (0.233) has a low positive relationship, while TikTok Algorithm Understanding with a coefficient of 0.410, indicating a moderate positive relationship. These findings suggest that understanding the TikTok algorithm is the most critical factor in enhancing the career advancement of Malaysian women homepreneurs on TikTok. At the same time, digital marketing skills, product quality, and customer engagement have weaker impacts.

Table 4: Pearson's Correlation

Variables	Pearson Correlation
Digital Marketing Skills	0.179
Product Quality	0.171
Customer Engagement	0.233
TikTok Algorithm Understanding	0.410

Regression Analysis: The regression analysis was used to explain the impact of changes in the independent variables on the dependent variable. Table 5 shows that the independent variables-TikTok Algorithm Understanding, Digital Marketing Skills, Customer Engagement, and Product Quality account for 18% of the variance in Career Advancement. The R-value of 0.424 signifies a moderate positive correlation between the combined predictors and Career Advancement. Meanwhile, Table 6 shows the outcome from the regression analysis that highlighted the TikTok Algorithm Understanding has a significant positive relationship with Career Advancement ($p = 0.001$), and Product Quality has a significant negative relationship with Career Advancement ($p = 0.035$). However, Digital Marketing Skills ($p = 0.671$) and Customer Engagement ($p = 0.303$) have no significant relationship with Career Advancement. The Beta Coefficient explained the relative importance of the factors in terms of their contribution to the variance. Of all four factors, TikTok Algorithm Understanding ($\beta = 0.459$) carried the heaviest weight in explaining career advancement. Overall, understanding the TikTok Algorithm positively affects career advancement. At the same time, product quality has a significant negative effect, and digital marketing skills and customer engagement do not significantly influence career advancement in this context.

Table 5: Model Summary of Regression

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.424	0.180	0.171	0.59969

Table 6: Regression Analysis Results

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	2.572	0.221		11.647	<0.001
Digital Marketing Skills	0.026	0.061	0.027	0.425	0.671
Product Quality	-0.192	0.091	-0.187	-2.11	0.035
Customer Engagement	0.076	0.073	0.081	1.032	0.303
TikTok Algorithm Understanding	0.468	0.062	0.459	7.666	<0.001

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This study aims to understand the relationships between digital marketing skills, product quality, customer engagement, and TikTok algorithm mastery and their impact on women homepreneur's career advancement. Regarding digital marketing skills, the study found no significant relationship with career advancement. Despite the common belief that digital marketing should enhance business growth, the unique nature of TikTok, which emphasizes creative content and viral trends, may diminish the impact of traditional digital marketing strategies. This suggests that standard digital marketing competencies are necessary but insufficient for career advancement on TikTok. Studies by Annett (2020) and Bose (2019) have highlighted the challenges posed by

rapidly changing digital landscapes and the unique demands of platforms like TikTok, which may not align perfectly with traditional marketing skill sets. Additionally, Nair and Aithal (2023) suggest that cultural and technological barriers can significantly shape the business practices and success rates of digital entrepreneurs in specific regions. Furthermore, although previous studies show that high-quality products contribute to a strong brand reputation and customer trust (Swami & Naidu, 2020; Susanti, 2023), the study found a negative coefficient for product quality, suggesting that an overemphasis on product perfection might divert focus from other critical business activities. When examining customer engagement, the finding was not significant, thus confirming that while engagement increases visibility, it may not necessarily convert to tangible business growth or career advancement. The transient nature of TikTok trends and the platform's algorithm may overshadow the effects of engagement alone. Lastly, the study found a significant relationship between understanding the TikTok algorithm and career advancement. Mastering the algorithm is crucial for enhancing content visibility and engagement. This finding underscores the importance of aligning marketing strategies with algorithmic preferences for success in digital entrepreneurship. As noted by Karizat et al. (2021) and Nair et al. (2022), understanding and adapting to the algorithmic preferences of TikTok can significantly enhance content visibility, thereby amplifying the impact of product quality on market reach and consumer engagement.

This study provides valuable insights into the factors influencing the career advancement of Malaysian women homepreneurs on TikTok, revealing that while digital marketing skills are important, they must be paired with strategic content creation and algorithm alignment to enhance career success. The significant impact of product quality on business success is underscored, especially in the visually-driven TikTok environment, while the expected direct link between customer engagement and career advancement was not supported, suggesting that engagement alone may not drive business growth without effective conversion strategies. The study's implications span entrepreneurs, educators, policymakers, and digital platform developers, highlighting the need for a comprehensive approach to support women's entrepreneurship in digital contexts. Future research should broaden the demographic scope, integrate qualitative methods for deeper insights, and adopt longitudinal approaches to track evolving digital trends. This research enriches the understanding of how TikTok can aid Malaysian women homepreneurs' career growth, offering theoretical and practical insights to enhance entrepreneurial strategies in the digital age.

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