

Hashtag Strategy, Content Visibility, and Audience Engagement on Tiktok: Evidence From the Spiderman Girl Phenomenon

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Abstract

TikTok has become one of the most influential social media platforms in the contemporary digital communication landscape. Its recommendation-based algorithm enables content to reach large audiences rapidly, making content visibility and audience engagement important indicators of communication effectiveness. Within this environment, hashtags function as strategic tools that facilitate content discovery and support information dissemination across user networks. Although hashtags are widely used by content creators, empirical evidence regarding their role in shaping content visibility and audience engagement remains limited. This study examined how hashtag strategies contributed to content visibility and audience engagement in the Spiderman Girl phenomenon on TikTok. The study employed quantitative content analysis of 423 TikTok videos collected through a hashtag-based scraping process. Five dominant hashtags were identified in the dataset: #cosplayspider, #spidergirl, #cewekspiderman, #spidermangirl, and #sexyspiderman. Content visibility was assessed using play counts, while audience engagement was measured using comment and share counts. The data were analyzed to identify patterns of interaction and content circulation within TikTok's platform ecosystem. The findings indicated that hashtag selection influenced both content visibility and audience engagement. Hashtags associated with cosplay and character identity generated higher levels of interaction than those emphasizing sensual attributes. In addition, comments and shares played a significant role in expanding content reach through TikTok's recommendation system. The study concluded that content performance on TikTok was shaped not only by content characteristics but also by the strategic use of hashtags that enhanced discoverability and encouraged audience participation.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of social media has fundamentally transformed the way individuals create, distribute, and consume information in contemporary society (Al-Quran, 2022; Bessarab et al., 2025; Darmawan & Fajar, 2024; Staab & Thiel, 2022). Among various digital platforms, TikTok has emerged as one of the fastest-growing social media applications, attracting millions of active users worldwide through its short-form video format and algorithm-driven recommendation system. Unlike conventional social networking platforms, TikTok relies heavily on content

visibility mechanisms that enable videos to reach large audiences regardless of the creator's follower base. This characteristic has positioned TikTok as a prominent platform within the contemporary attention economy, where audience attention has become a valuable digital resource. According to Kapoor et al. (2021), social media platforms increasingly compete for user attention by optimizing content visibility and engagement through algorithmic systems. Similarly, Shahbaznezhad et al. (2021) argued that platform features significantly influence user interaction patterns and content dissemination processes.

Within TikTok's communication ecosystem, hashtags have become an essential mechanism for organizing information, increasing discoverability, and facilitating audience participation (Çakıcı & Bulur, 2027; Martínez-Borda et al., 2026; Rasel et al., 2025). Hashtags function not only as classification tools but also as strategic communication instruments that help creators connect their content to broader conversations and user communities. Through hashtag use, content can become more visible within recommendation systems and gain greater opportunities for interaction. Dolan et al. (2019) emphasized that audience engagement in social media environments is influenced by content characteristics, platform features, and user participation behaviors. Likewise, Cao et al. (2023) highlighted that strategic hashtag use contributes to content reach and user interaction across digital platforms. Consequently, understanding the role of hashtags in shaping content visibility and audience engagement has become increasingly important in communication research.

To better understand the relationship among hashtag use, content visibility, and audience engagement, this study draws on Attention Economy Theory, originally proposed by Herbert A. Simon (1971), as its primary theoretical foundation. The theory argues that an abundance of information inevitably creates a scarcity of human attention, making attention a valuable and limited resource in contemporary communication environments. Within digital platforms such as TikTok, content creators continuously compete to attract audience attention through various communication strategies aimed at maximizing visibility and interaction. In this context, content visibility, reflected in play counts and audience reach, can be understood as an indicator of a creator's ability to capture attention within the platform's attention economy.

This study also adopts Social Media Engagement Theory, as conceptualized by Brodie et al. (2013), to explain patterns of audience interaction within digital platforms. The theory defines engagement as the degree to which users actively participate in content consumption, interaction, and dissemination. According to Dolan et al. (2019), engagement on social media is manifested through various forms of user behavior, including commenting, sharing, and interacting with content. Within TikTok's communication ecosystem, audience engagement represents an important indicator of content performance because user interactions contribute to algorithmic amplification and broader content circulation. Therefore, comment and share counts serve as relevant measures of audience participation in this study.

In addition, the concepts of hashtag strategy and content discoverability, primarily derived from the works of Bruns and Burgess (2015) and Highfield and Leaver (2016), provide a complementary perspective for explaining how content becomes visible within platform

ecosystems. These scholars argue that hashtags function not only as content classification mechanisms but also as strategic communication tools that facilitate discoverability, audience participation, and engagement in online conversations. Through hashtag use, creators increase the likelihood that their content will be identified, recommended, and distributed to wider audiences. On TikTok, where algorithmic recommendation systems play a central role in content dissemination, hashtag strategies can significantly influence visibility and engagement outcomes. Consequently, examining hashtag performance offers valuable insights into how communication practices shape audience interaction within contemporary digital environments.

Despite the growing significance of hashtags in digital communication, existing studies have primarily focused on social media marketing, brand communication, influencer activities, and consumer engagement. Research conducted by Kapoor et al. (2021), Shahbaznezhad et al. (2021), and Lou and Yuan (2019) demonstrated that audience engagement is strongly associated with content presentation and platform affordances. Other studies have examined the effectiveness of hashtags in increasing content discoverability and online interaction. However, limited attention has been given to hashtag strategies within viral user-generated content on TikTok, particularly in the Indonesian context. Furthermore, most previous studies have focused on marketing performance, consumer behavior, or influencer communication rather than examining how hashtag strategies contribute to content visibility and audience engagement in viral social media phenomena.

One viral trend that illustrates the importance of hashtag-based communication is the Spiderman Girl phenomenon on TikTok. The phenomenon gained substantial visibility through the extensive use of multiple hashtags, generating large numbers of views, comments, and shares. As a result, it provides an appropriate case for examining how hashtag strategies influence content circulation and audience interaction within platform-based communication environments. The phenomenon also demonstrates how users participate in amplifying content visibility through engagement behaviors that are subsequently reinforced by recommendation algorithms. According to Kaye et al. (2022), audience participation and platform algorithms jointly shape patterns of information circulation within social media ecosystems. This perspective suggests that content visibility is not solely determined by creators but also by interactions among users, hashtags, and platform systems.

Several studies have highlighted the importance of algorithmic visibility and engagement metrics in contemporary social media environments. Abidin and Ots (2021) argued that visibility has become a critical form of digital capital within platformized communication systems. Similarly, Cotter (2023) explained that creators increasingly adapt their communication strategies to algorithmic expectations to maximize audience reach and interaction. These findings indicate that hashtag use should not be viewed merely as a technical feature but rather as a strategic communication practice that influences audience behavior and content performance.

Based on the literature review, a research gap can be identified. Previous studies have extensively examined audience engagement, influencer communication, and social media marketing; however, empirical research investigating the relationship among hashtag strategy,

content visibility, and audience engagement within viral TikTok phenomena remains limited. Moreover, studies focusing on Indonesian TikTok content using large-scale hashtag datasets are still relatively scarce. Therefore, further investigation is needed to understand how hashtag strategies contribute to content visibility and audience interaction within platform-driven communication environments. Based on the identified research gap, this study seeks to answer the following research question: How does hashtag strategy influence content visibility and audience engagement within the Spiderman Girl phenomenon on TikTok?

Based on the identified research gap, this study aims to examine how hashtag strategies contribute to content visibility within the Spiderman Girl phenomenon on TikTok, as reflected in play counts; analyze the influence of hashtag strategies on audience engagement, measured through comment and share counts; compare the performance of different hashtag categories in generating visibility and audience interaction; and identify patterns of audience participation and content dissemination within TikTok's algorithm-driven communication ecosystem. Addressing these objectives is important because hashtags have become central mechanisms of content discoverability within platform-based communication environments. While previous studies have examined audience engagement, influencer communication, and social media marketing, limited empirical evidence exists regarding how hashtag strategies contribute to content visibility and audience participation in viral TikTok phenomena. Investigating this relationship may provide a deeper understanding of communication practices within algorithm-driven social media ecosystems.

The novelty of this study lies in its integration of hashtag strategy, content visibility, and audience engagement within a single analytical framework using empirical data derived from a viral TikTok phenomenon. Unlike previous studies that primarily focused on marketing outcomes or influencer effectiveness, this research examines hashtag-based communication practices through the lens of digital communication and platform interaction. The study utilizes a dataset of 423 TikTok videos collected from five dominant hashtags associated with the Spiderman Girl phenomenon, providing a broader understanding of content dissemination patterns within TikTok's ecosystem.

The contribution of this research is twofold. Theoretically, it extends discussions of digital communication by explaining how hashtag strategies influence content visibility and audience engagement within platform-based communication environments. Practically, the findings provide insights for content creators, communication practitioners, and digital marketers regarding effective strategies for increasing content discoverability and audience interaction on TikTok. As social media platforms continue to shape communication practices globally, understanding the relationship among hashtag strategies, visibility, and engagement is increasingly relevant to both communication scholarship and professional practice.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive content analysis approach combined with social media analytics to examine hashtag strategy, content visibility, and audience engagement within the

Spiderman Girl phenomenon on TikTok (Neuendorf, 2017; Sugiyono, 2018; Kapoor et al., 2021). This approach was selected because the study focused on describing patterns of visibility and audience engagement associated with hashtag use rather than testing causal relationships among variables.

The unit of analysis consisted of TikTok videos associated with the Spiderman Girl phenomenon. Data were collected through a hashtag-based scraping process conducted in 2024. Initially, 583 videos were identified through keyword and hashtag searches. After screening for content relevance, accessibility, completeness of engagement metrics, and duplicate entries, 423 videos were retained for analysis.

The final dataset consisted of 423 TikTok videos distributed across five dominant hashtags identified during the scraping process. The distribution of videos across hashtag categories is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Videos by Hashtag

Hashtag	Number of Videos
#cosplayspider	102
#spidergirl	101
#cewekspiderman	87
#spidermangirl	79
#sexyspiderman	54
Total	423

Source: Researcher's Scraping Results (2024)

To provide additional context regarding the content ecosystem associated with the Spiderman Girl phenomenon, several prominent creator accounts identified during the scraping process were also documented. These accounts represented some of the most visible creators contributing to the circulation of related content on TikTok. Although creator popularity was not examined as an analytical variable in this study, the information provides a contextual overview of the accounts involved in content production and dissemination. The creator profiles are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Major TikTok Creator Accounts Associated with the Spiderman Girl Phenomenon

No	Account Name	Image	Number of Followers
	@Cosplayspider		8.754

No	Account Name	Image	Number of Followers
	@goodponselangels		4.8 M
	@chhelc		400,7 K
	@thesexyspdeyman		114.8 K
	@matricia.17		4.7 M

Source: Research Analysis, 2024

Based on Table 1, several social media accounts were associated with viral content on TikTok. The Cosplay Spider account (@cosplayspider) had 8,754 followers, while Good Ponsel Angels (@goodponselangels) had the largest follower count at 4.8 million. Chhelc (@chhelc) had

400.7 thousand followers, The Sexy Spdeyman (@thesexyspdeyman) had 114.8 thousand followers, and Matricia (@matricia.17) had 4.7 million followers. These data indicated substantial variation in audience size across accounts associated with the phenomenon.

Three analytical indicators were examined in this study. Hashtag strategy was represented by the dominant hashtags identified in the dataset. Content visibility was measured using play counts, while audience engagement was measured using comment and share counts. These indicators were selected because they reflected key dimensions of content performance and user interaction within TikTok's recommendation-driven environment (Dolan et al., 2019).

Data were analyzed using descriptive analytical techniques. The collected data were organized, categorized, tabulated, and compared across hashtag groups to identify patterns of content visibility and audience engagement. The analysis focused on variations in hashtag performance and engagement trends rather than statistical inference (Harahap, 2020).

The analytical process included data organization, reduction, categorization, comparison, and interpretation, following the systematic analytical principles proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2018). The findings were subsequently interpreted using Attention Economy Theory, Social Media Engagement Theory, and the concepts of hashtag strategy and content discoverability to explain the relationship between hashtag use, content visibility, and audience participation within TikTok's communication ecosystem.

By integrating content analysis and social media analytics, the study provided empirical insights into patterns of hashtag use, content visibility, and audience engagement within the Spiderman Girl phenomenon on TikTok.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Content Visibility Across Hashtag Categories

Content visibility represents one of the most important indicators of communication performance on TikTok because it reflects the extent to which content succeeds in attracting audience attention within an increasingly competitive digital environment. In line with Attention Economy Theory, visibility can be understood as the outcome of competition among creators seeking to capture limited audience attention amid an overwhelming flow of information. The findings reveal substantial differences in visibility and engagement among the hashtag categories associated with the Spiderman Girl phenomenon.

The first hashtag examined was **#sexyspiderman**, which generated moderate levels of visibility compared to other categories in the dataset.

Table 3. Summary of #Sexyspiderman Performance

Indicator	Value
Number of Videos	54
Highest Views	14.8 Million
Highest Comments	7,925
Highest Shares	32,900

Source: Researcher's Scraping Results (2024).

Although content associated with #sexyspiderman attracted considerable attention, its overall performance remained lower than several competing hashtags. The highest-performing video reached 14.8 million views, demonstrating that sensual elements can effectively capture audience curiosity. However, the relatively lower levels of engagement suggest that visibility on TikTok is influenced by factors beyond provocative presentation alone. This finding indicates that audience attention is not solely determined by sensational content but also by the broader communicative and symbolic meanings attached to hashtags.

The hashtag #spidergirl demonstrated substantially stronger performance in both visibility and audience interaction.

Table 4. Summary of #Spidergirl Performance

Indicator	Value
Number of Videos	101
Highest Views	30.3 Million
Highest Comments	28,700
Highest Shares	147,900

Source: Researcher's Scraping Results (2024)

Compared to #sexyspiderman, #spidergirl generated significantly higher visibility and engagement. The substantial number of shares indicates that audiences were not merely consuming content but were actively participating in its circulation. From the perspective of Social Media Engagement Theory, sharing behavior reflects a deeper level of audience involvement because users become agents in expanding content reach. The findings suggest that hashtags emphasizing character identity may be more effective in generating sustained interaction than hashtags relying primarily on sensual appeal. Familiarity with popular culture characters appears to strengthen audience attachment and encourage broader participation.

A similar pattern emerged within the #cewekspiderman category, which also generated strong audience reach and interaction.

Table 5. Summary of #Ceweekspiderman Performance

Indicator	Value
Number of Videos	87
Highest Views	27.2 Million
Highest Comments	19,300
Highest Shares	74,800

Source: Researcher's Scraping Results (2024)

The hashtag #cewekspiderman achieved substantial visibility among Indonesian users. The use of local language appears to increase cultural proximity, making the content more relatable and easier to discover within local audience networks. While its engagement metrics were lower than those recorded for #spidergirl, the hashtag nevertheless demonstrated considerable effectiveness in attracting attention and encouraging audience participation. This finding

highlights the importance of linguistic adaptation in digital communication strategies, particularly within localized social media environments.

Among all categories examined, **#spidermangirl** generated the strongest visibility performance.

Table 6. Summary of #Spidermangirl Performance

Indicator	Value
Number of Videos	79
Highest Views	89.1 Million
Highest Comments	84,600
Highest Shares	136,900

Source: Researcher's Scraping Results (2024).

The exceptional visibility achieved by **#spidermangirl** demonstrates the significant role of hashtag selection in enhancing content discoverability. Videos associated with this hashtag reached audiences on a much larger scale than any other category in the dataset. Interestingly, the content that generated the highest number of views was not necessarily the same content that generated the highest number of shares. This finding suggests that visibility and engagement represent related but distinct dimensions of communication performance. High visibility reflects successful attention capture, whereas sharing behavior reflects audience endorsement and active participation in content dissemination. Consequently, viral reach should not automatically be interpreted as equivalent to audience engagement.

The final category examined was **#cosplayspider**, which represented the largest number of videos in the dataset.

Table 7. Summary of #Cosplayspider Performance

Indicator	Value
Number of Videos	102
Highest Views	18.9 Million
Highest Comments	14,500
Highest Shares	133,900

Source: Researcher's Scraping Results (2024).

Despite containing the largest number of videos, **#cosplayspider** did not generate the highest visibility. This finding indicates that content volume alone does not guarantee audience reach. Instead, visibility appears to be shaped by a combination of content relevance, audience preferences, hashtag effectiveness, and algorithmic recommendation mechanisms. Nevertheless, the substantial share count demonstrates that cosplay-related content possesses a strong capacity for dissemination. Communities built around shared interests and fandom cultures may contribute significantly to content circulation, reinforcing the importance of community-based engagement within digital communication environments.

Comparative Hashtag Performance

To provide a broader understanding of hashtag effectiveness, all categories were compared using visibility and engagement indicators.

Table 8. Comparative Visibility and Engagement Across Hashtags

Hashtag	Videos	Highest Views	Highest Comments	Highest Shares
#cosplayspider	102	18.9 M	14,500	133,900
#spidergirl	101	30.3 M	28,700	147,900
#cewekspiderman	87	27.2 M	19,300	74,800
#spidermangirl	79	89.1 M	84,600	136,900
#sexyspiderman	54	14.8 M	7,925	32,900

Source: Researcher's Scraping Results (2024)

The comparative analysis reveals several important patterns. First, hashtags emphasizing character identity consistently outperformed hashtags explicitly highlighting sensual attributes. The superior performance of #spidergirl, #spidermangirl, and #cosplayspider suggests that audience attention on TikTok is influenced not only by visual attraction but also by familiarity, symbolic identification, and community affiliation. Content linked to recognizable characters appears to possess greater potential for visibility and engagement because it resonates with broader audience interests.

Second, the findings demonstrate that share counts consistently exceeded comment counts across all hashtag categories. This pattern suggests that audience participation on TikTok is more strongly expressed through content dissemination than through discussion. Rather than engaging in extended conversations, users appear more inclined to redistribute content within their social networks. Such behavior reflects the platform's design, which prioritizes rapid circulation and algorithmic amplification.

Third, the results highlight the strategic role of hashtags as mechanisms of discoverability. Hashtags function not only as classification tools but also as communication strategies that increase the likelihood of content being identified, recommended, and distributed through platform algorithms. In this context, successful content dissemination depends not only on content characteristics but also on the strategic use of hashtags capable of connecting content with relevant audience communities.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that hashtag strategy plays a critical role in shaping content visibility and audience engagement within TikTok's communication ecosystem. The study provides empirical evidence that discoverability mechanisms, audience sharing behavior, and symbolic familiarity collectively influence content performance in contemporary social media environments.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the relationship among hashtag strategy, content visibility, and audience engagement within the Spiderman Girl phenomenon on TikTok. Based on an analysis of 423 videos distributed across five dominant hashtag categories, the findings demonstrated that

hashtag use constituted an important communication strategy influencing content discoverability, audience reach, and user participation within platform-based communication environments. The study found that hashtags emphasizing character identity, including #spidergirl, #spidermangirl, and #cosplayspider, consistently generated higher levels of visibility and engagement than hashtags explicitly emphasizing sensual attributes, such as #sexyspiderman. These findings suggested that audience attention on TikTok was shaped not only by visual appeal but also by symbolic familiarity, community affiliation, and algorithmically facilitated discoverability. Content associated with recognizable identities appeared to have greater potential to attract attention and encourage audience participation.

The findings further revealed that sharing behavior represented the dominant form of audience engagement across all hashtag categories. The tendency of users to share content more frequently than to comment indicated that content dissemination played a central role in TikTok's communication ecosystem. This pattern highlighted the importance of sharing behavior as a mechanism through which visibility was amplified and viral circulation was facilitated. In addition, the study demonstrated that visibility and engagement should be understood as distinct but interconnected dimensions of content performance. High visibility did not necessarily result in high levels of audience interaction, suggesting that successful communication outcomes depended on the interaction among discoverability mechanisms, audience participation, and strategic hashtag use. The contribution of this study lies in providing empirical evidence of how hashtag strategies influenced content visibility and audience engagement within TikTok's algorithm-driven environment. By integrating Attention Economy Theory, Social Media Engagement Theory, and the concept of content discoverability, this study extended current discussions on digital communication and social media analytics. More broadly, the findings reinforced the importance of strategic hashtag use as a communication practice capable of shaping audience behavior and content performance within contemporary social media ecosystems.

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