Utilization of TikTok by journalists for news production and engagement at Tuko Media Group, Kenya

Grace Njeri Wekesa[1*]
Lydia Anyonje [2]
Rose Auma [3]
Robert Peter Ogutu [4]

[1*] gnjeri07@gmail.com

[1,2,3]Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, [4]Alupe University, [1,2,3,4] Kenya

Recommended Reference: Wekesa, G. N., Anyonje, L., Auma, R., & Ogutu, R. P. (2026). Utilization of TikTok by journalists for news production and engagement at Tuko Media Group, Kenya. African Quarterly Social Science Review, 3(4), 536–548. https://doi.org/10.51867/AQSSR.3.4.43

ABSTRACT

Kenya ranks highest globally in TikTok usage, with 54% of users engaging with the platform for various purposes, and 29% specifically for news consumption. However, TikTok presents several challenges as a source of news and public information. Unlike traditional media, TikTok lacks formal editorial structures and verification protocols, making it vulnerable to the spread of misinformation and disinformation. The overall objective of the study was to examine the Utilization of TikTok for news production and engagement at Tuko Media Group. This study was anchored on Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). The study was conducted at Tuko Media Group, a leading digital news platform in Kenya. It adopted a qualitative approach. The target population was Tuko Media Group journalists who produce content on Tuko TikTok account. They included journalists who work in the five segments namely; My Story, Couples Show, TUKO Explainers, TUKO Talks, and TUKO Xtra. These segments represented various content genres, ranging from human interest stories to infotainment. This study employed purposive sampling. From the TUKO TikTok account, a total of 15 videos was selected, 3 from each of the five identified segments over a period of one year (July 2024 to June 2025). In addition, interviews were conducted with TUKO's Producers (3), Videographers (2), Editors (2), Photographers (2), and Writers (3). This made a total of 12 in-depth interviews. The interviews provided deeper insights regarding the phenomenon under study. In relation to data collection from Tuko TikTok videos, the researcher visited TUKO TikTok account where the videos have been uploaded for viewers input. This is where viewers can like, comment, repost and share. The researcher logged into Tuko TikTok page with her TikTok account, downloaded videos with highest likes and shares and watched videos which were purposively selected noting the information based on visual appeal, language use and conformity to journalistic ethics. A qualitative content analysis approach was used for this study. Regarding the interview data, thematic analysis was conducted and results were presented in prose form. Based on the findings, the study concludes that TikTok has emerged as an important digital platform influencing news production practices at TUKO Media Group. Journalists increasingly integrate TikTok into their daily work processes as a tool for storytelling, audience engagement, and content distribution. Based on the findings, the study recommends that media organizations should strengthen journalists' utilization of TikTok by providing regular training on short-form video production, audience engagement, and effective use of the platform's interactive features.

Key Words: Engagement, Journalists, News Production, Tuko Media Group, Utilization of TikTok

I. INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of TikTok has introduced a significant development in contemporary journalism by providing media organizations with an additional platform for news production, dissemination and audience engagement (Laor, 2026). TikTok's algorithm-driven content recommendation system enables news stories to reach audiences beyond the established followers of a media organization. Consequently, media organizations are increasingly incorporating TikTok into their digital strategies as they seek to reach younger and more digitally oriented audiences (Newman et al., 2024). However, although TikTok has become an important platform for news dissemination, there remains limited understanding of how professional journalists are actually utilizing the platform within newsroom operations, particularly in relation to news gathering, content production, story packaging, dissemination and audience engagement.

The limited understanding of newsroom utilization creates a knowledge gap because TikTok requires journalists to adapt conventional journalism practices to a short-form, highly visual and interactive environment. According to Al-Rawi (2024) journalists may need to determine which stories are suitable for TikTok, how emerging news stories should be repackaged into short videos, how audiences respond to different formats, and how engagement metrics influence

Licensed Under Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY-NC)

subsequent content decisions. At the same time, the adoption of TikTok may require changes in newsroom collaboration, skills, resource allocation, editorial processes and approaches to audience interaction (Verstappen & Opgenhaffen, 2026). Without empirical understanding of these practices, media organizations may have limited evidence on how the platform can be effectively integrated into professional journalism while maintaining established newsroom standards.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The increasing use of TikTok for news consumption has created opportunities for media organizations to reach wider audiences, experiment with short-form video journalism and develop new approaches to audience engagement. A study conducted in Kenya established that 36% of surveyed respondents used TikTok for news in the preceding week (Newman et al., 2024). However, the growing popularity of TikTok for news consumption does not necessarily establish how professional journalists integrate the platform into their daily newsroom activities or how they use it to support news production and audience engagement.

Existing studies have begun to examine journalistic practices on TikTok, but they provide limited context-specific evidence about newsroom utilization in Kenya. For instance, Al-Rawi (2024) examined journalists' TikTok videos and interviews, identifying practices such as news sharing, educational content production and audience interaction. Degen et al. (2024) investigated how journalists negotiate professional standards and platform-specific demands, while Verstappen and Opgenhaffen (2025) explored how organizational structures and editorial decision-making shape TikTok news production. Although these studies provide valuable insights into the relationship between TikTok and journalism, their findings arise from contexts outside Kenya and cannot automatically explain the practices, organizational arrangements and professional experiences of journalists working in Kenyan media organizations.

This gap limits understanding of both the opportunities and challenges that TikTok presents to professional journalism. The study therefore sought to examine the utilization of TikTok by journalists for news production and engagement, with particular focus on TUKO Media Group, Kenya.

1.2 Research Objective

The overall objective of the study was to examine the utilization of TikTok for news production and engagement at Tuko Media Group, Kenya

II. THEORETICAL REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), developed by Davis (1989), explains how individuals accept and use information technologies based primarily on perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. Perceived usefulness refers to the extent to which an individual believes that a technology improves work performance, while perceived ease of use concerns the extent to which it can be used with minimal effort. In the context of TUKO Media Group, TAM provides a basis for understanding journalists' acceptance and utilization of TikTok for news gathering, production, dissemination and audience engagement. Journalists are more likely to use TikTok when they perceive that it improves their professional activities and is easy to integrate into existing newsroom routines (Davis, 1989; Cheng & Li, 2023).

TAM is particularly relevant because TikTok enables journalists to reach younger audiences, distribute short-form videos rapidly, obtain immediate audience feedback and monitor engagement through views, likes, comments, shares and watch time. Its use may therefore transform newsroom practices by requiring journalists to adapt stories into short-form videos, strengthen visual storytelling, use captions and voiceovers, monitor analytics and interact with audiences (Yuchen, 2021; Hendrickx, 2023). Perceived ease of use also highlights the importance of training, digital skills, equipment and other resources in facilitating TikTok adoption (Duong & Tran, 2024; Zayani, 2021). However, TAM has been criticized for focusing mainly on individual perceptions while giving insufficient attention to organizational culture, management support, resources, professional norms and institutional policies that may shape technology adoption (Mbaabu, 2025; Mwongela, 2022).

2.2 Empirical Review

Al-Rawi (2024) examined 3,270 TikTok videos published by 30 journalists and conducted interviews with 17 journalists to investigate journalistic practices on the platform. The study identified various forms of journalistic activity, including news sharing, live reporting, educational content, personal commentary and audience interaction. Similarly, Peterson-Salahuddin (2024) investigated the reporting practices of citizen journalists on TikTok, highlighting the influence of platform characteristics on news production and the challenges of misinformation. These studies demonstrate that TikTok offers journalists opportunities to adapt news for short-form video formats while raising questions about information verification and professional standards. However, they provide limited evidence about how journalists in Kenyan media organizations utilize the platform.

Licensed Under Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY-NC)

Degen et al. (2024) investigated the challenges of producing quality journalism on TikTok in Germany through interviews with journalists. The study explored how journalists balance professional standards with the platform's demands for engaging and accessible content. Similarly, Verstappen and Opgenhaffen (2026) examined TikTok news production within a Belgian newsroom, highlighting the influence of organizational structures, editorial decision-making and platform expectations on content production. These findings suggest that TikTok utilization depends not only on individual journalists' skills but also on newsroom routines and organizational arrangements. However, the findings require contextual investigation to establish how these factors influence news production at TUKO Media Group.

Regarding audience engagement, Cheng and Li (2024) analysed 101,292 TikTok news videos to examine the relationship between video characteristics and audience interactions, including likes, comments and shares. Their study demonstrated the relevance of content presentation in understanding engagement with news videos. Al-Rawi (2024) also identified audience interaction as a component of journalistic activity on TikTok. These studies provide a basis for examining how journalists use interactive features and engagement indicators to reach audiences. Nevertheless, measurable interactions do not necessarily establish the quality of audience participation or explain how journalists use feedback to inform subsequent news production.

In Kenya, the Digital News Report 2024 reported that 36% of surveyed respondents used TikTok for news in the preceding week, demonstrating the platform's relevance to the country's digital news environment (Newman et al., 2024). Kitui et al. (2025) also examined social media usage among journalists at Nation Media Group, providing local evidence of the relationship between social media practices and journalism. However, the reviewed studies do not sufficiently establish how journalists at TUKO Media Group utilize TikTok for news production and audience engagement. This study therefore examines TikTok utilization at TUKO Media Group, focusing on journalists' practical use of the platform in producing news and engaging audiences.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Study Area

This study was conducted at Tuko Media Group, a leading digital news platform in Nairobi, Kenya. It primarily operates online and has a strong presence on various social media platforms, including TikTok. Tuko Media Group presents an ideal case study due to its pioneering role in digital journalism in Kenya (Tuko Media Group, 2024).

3.2 Research Design

The study adopted a qualitative research design. The aim was to explore audience engagement with TikTok content produced by TUKO Media and to gain insights into the processes and intentions behind the creation of such content. According to Ahmed (2024), qualitative research explores the intricate details of human behavior, attitudes, and experiences, emphasizing the exploration of nuances and context. The qualitative approach enabled the researcher to explore deeper meanings, perceptions, and interpretations expressed through TikTok videos and interactions.

3.3 Target Population

The target population was Tuko Media Group journalists who produce content on Tuko TikTok account. They included journalists who work in the five segments namely; *My Story*, *Couples Show*, *TUKO Explainers*, *TUKO Talks*, and *TUKO Xtra.* These segments represent various content genres, ranging from human interest stories to infotainment.

3.4 Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

This study employed purposive sampling; a non-probability technique that allows the researcher to select information-rich cases relevant to the study objectives. The focus on the most viewed Tuko TikTok segments that have the highest posts with numerous likes, shares and comments that reflect viewers' feedback. Five (5) of the formal segments run by TUKO Media Group on TikTok platform, namely, My Story (202 posts), Couples show (31), TUKO explainers (59 posts), TUKO Talks (52 posts) and TUKO Xtra (58 posts) were purposively selected for the study.

Three (3) videos from each of the identified segments (My Story, Couples Show, TUKO Explainers, TUKO Talks, and TUKO Xtra) with the highest posts with numerous likes, shares and comments were selected for the study, making a total of 15 videos. The researcher logged in to Tuko Tik Tok page with her TikTok account and downloaded the videos with highest likes, shares and comments. The researcher watched the downloaded videos and manually categorized information and themes emerging from the videos. In addition, interviews were conducted with TUKO's Producers (3), Videographers (2), Editors (2), Photographers (2), and Writers (3). This made a total of 12 in-depth interviews. The interviews provided deeper insights regarding the phenomenon under study.

Licensed Under Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY-NC)

3.5 Data Collection Instruments

This study used an interview guide to collect qualitative data from Key Informants (KIs). In addition, the researcher downloaded the videos and watched them and manually categorized information and themes emerging from the videos. The researcher collected data from 15 videos, purposively selected from each of the 5 identified segments (3 videos per segment).

3.5.1 Interview Guide

The researcher developed an interview guide to facilitate key informant interviews with TUKO's producers, videographers, editors, photographers, and writers. The guide consisted of questions designed to elicit information on their roles, storytelling strategies, audience targeting and engagement, content development, and feedback interpretation. This format allows flexibility while ensuring all relevant themes are addressed.

3.6 Data Collection Procedure

A data collection procedure is a systematic approach used by researchers to gather information from various sources to address research questions or hypotheses. This procedure outlines the steps, methods, and tools used to collect, process, and store data (Cooper & Schindler, 2019). For this study, data collection was conducted in two phases. The first phase involved content collection from TUKO TikTok videos. The second phase was data collection from key informants.

3.6.1 Data Collection from TUKO TikTok Videos

In terms of data collection, the researcher visited TUKO TikTok account where the videos have been uploaded for viewers input. This is where viewers can like, comment, repost and share. The researcher then manually extracted the videos which were purposively selected where the researcher logged in to Tuko Tik Tok page with her Tik Tok account where she downloaded the videos with highest likes, shares, comments and she watched manually noted the information.

3.6.2 Data Collection from TUKO Personnel (Key Informants)

The researcher also conducted interviews with TUKO's producers, videographers, editors, photographers, and writers. Each key informant was contacted and scheduled for an interview at their convenience, either in-person or via virtual platforms such as Zoom. Before beginning, participants were asked to provide informed consent. Interviews lasted between 30 to 45 minutes and were recorded for transcription, themizing and analysis. Field notes were taken during each session to capture contextual information and non-verbal cues. The data, consisting of views, likes, shares and comments were later subjected to a qualitative content analysis involving 15 videos

3.7 Data Analysis and Presentation

A qualitative content analysis approach was used for this study, targeting 15 videos earlier extracted during the data collection phase. This approach resonates with Basch et al (2022) who used content analysis in a study that they carried out on the relationship between TikTok videos and mental health which included 100 videos with the hashtag #mentalhealth on TikTok. Another study by Hooper (2022) also utilized a qualitative content analysis methodology that was applied to 50 TikTok videos shared under the TikTok hashtag #mentalhealthuk to determine how people share their experiences.

3.7.1 TikTok Video Analysis

The researcher manually extracted the videos which were purposively selected where the researcher logged in to Tuko Tik Tok page with her Tik Tok account where she downloaded the videos with highest likes, shares, comments and manually watched and noted the information. Analysis of the data was done through content analysis.

3.7.2 Interview Data Analysis

Regarding the interview data, thematic analysis was conducted following an eight-phase method: Developing an interview guide; Conducting interviews; Transcribing interviews verbatim (Creswell, 2019) and with utmost care (Grant, 2019); Specifying the unit of analysis; Reading and reviewing transcribed interviews in order to extract related meanings; Developing categories and subcategories; Coding and Writing/ Reporting the findings.

Licensed Under Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY-NC)

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Response Rate

Twelve (12) interviews were successfully conducted with participants representing different roles within the newsroom. The study achieved a 100% response rate since all the targeted twelve Key Informants participated in the interviews. This response rate was considered adequate for qualitative analysis because it provided sufficient insights regarding TikTok news production at TUKO Media Group.

Table 1

Response Rate

Category of Key Informants	Targeted Key Informants	Actual Key Informants	Response Rate
Journalists/Editors at TUKO	12	12	100%

4.2 Utilization of TikTok by Journalists at TUKO Media Group

The first objective of the study sought to examine the utilization of TikTok by journalists at Tuko media Group. Integration of TikTok in daily journalistic work: Key Informants were asked to explain how they integrate TikTok into their daily journalist work, and the types of content they create. From the results, Key Informant (*KI6*) indicated that:

> *"Large part of their content is UGC (User Generated Content) usually sourced from social media channels and TikTok is one of the sources the team uses a lot to find human interest content, identify and speak to the subjects, sources before developing the stories.''*

Key Informant (*KI8*) added that:

> *"Our social media team also posts frequently on the TikTok page on current topics, entertainment trending stories and cuts of interviews from the YouTube channel.''*

Key informant (*KI1*) explained that they use their personal TikTok accounts to interact with their fans and post snippets of the interviews they have conducted.

> *"This drives more traffic to our social media pages. As for Tuko TikTok account, we post news updates in form of videos or pictures with captions, post reels (short clips) of the interviews from the main Tuko YouTube Channel, just to push traffic for the interviews in all our platforms.'' -KI1*

Key informant (*KI12*) emphasized that TikTok like any other social media platform is key in sourcing and vital for dissemination of news content in video format adding that as videographers they mostly have their shoot routine.

> *Before shoot (gear, location, setup), During shoot: (BTS, camera movement), After shoot: (result, edit screen, final shot), they also shoot Behind-the-Scenes of the shoot.*

The Key Informants (*KI8*) revealed that they integrate TikTok as a digital-first distribution platform. They create breaking news, human-interest stories, celebrity updates, political clips, as well as trending social issues into short-form and light videos. Further they in-cooperate narrated explainers, subtitled interview clips, and on-screen text summaries. Key informant (*KI10*) indicated that their content targets the new generation that craves quick fun, and relatable updates from high-stakes politics and government drama to celebrity gossip, entertainment buzz, and everything trending in between.

> "*If it's happening in Kenya, you'll see it here first, fast, fresh, and full of energy!"*

The analysis of the specific videos extracted equally revealed that modern newsrooms such as Tuko are utilizing social media platforms not only to carry educative content but also to entertain the audience through the phrases, comedy and humour. Video 1 in the category of Couple Show; *90% of my Family think we are dating'* attested to the fact that the manner in which the videos are packaged and relayed to the audience adhered to good practice as far as journalist ethics is concerned. It is clear that the creator of the videos at Tuko ensured that obscene or foul language was not used. Anyone can watch this video comfortably even with children around. The findings indicate that TikTok has become an integral tool in the daily journalistic practices of TUKO Media journalists, serving both as a source of news content and a platform for news dissemination. Journalists reported using TikTok to identify user-generated content, source human-interest stories, engage audiences, distribute breaking news, and promote content hosted on other platforms such as YouTube.

These findings agree with the views of Hermida (2026), who argued that social media platforms have transformed journalism by enabling journalists to gather information, interact with audiences, and disseminate news in real time. The findings are also in line with those of Newman *et al.* (2021), who observed that news organizations increasingly utilize social media platforms to distribute short-form, audience-centred content tailored to digital consumers. Furthermore, the emphasis on user-generated content and audience engagement aligns with the work of Kiunga (2023), who noted that social media platforms facilitate participatory communication by allowing users to contribute content and interact directly with media organizations. These findings therefore demonstrate that TikTok has

Licensed Under Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY-NC)

become an important component of modern newsroom operations, supporting both content sourcing and digital-first news distribution strategies.

Motivation for Using TikTok for News Reporting Compared to Other Social Media Platforms: Key informants were requested to indicate what motivates them to use TikTok for news reporting compared to other social media platforms. From the results, Key Informant *(KI11)* revealed that:

> *"We go where our audiences are. Since data has shown that TikTok is one of the biggest social media platforms, we connect there and focus on growing our content for visual stories and videos.''*

Video 2 in the category of Couple Show; *'Our first wedding night was chaotic' video* showcased this fact as the video used effective visual techniques including facial reactions, close-up shots, and well-timed transitions to maintain audience attention. Captions and transcribed words appear on screen, making it easier for viewers to follow the conversations. Equally on the same video, the visual set up reinforces the authenticity and emotional tone of the discussion, making the content more immersive and relatable. Key Informant (*KI10*) further revealed:

> "*TikTok is popular with the target audience, and is easily available on many devices. It is user friendly and has more potential to make content go viral.''*

TikTok is widely used among youthful audiences hence an appropriate tool for disseminating news that's relevant to the young, for example, entertainment, technology, job market and business startups -KI12

In addition, Key Informant (*KI2*) indicated that TikTok is algorithm driven; it pushes content to non-followers by default, also, stories reach the audience based on watch time and clarity and spread faster without an existing audience.

> *"The younger generation consumes news, they don't go looking for it, it finds them online and TikTok is great at explaining complex issues visually."*

Key Informant (*KI12*) further revealed that it offers organic reach, strong youth penetration, and algorithm-driven discoverability. Compared to Facebook or X, TikTok enables faster viral circulation and deeper engagement through comments and shares and sometimes, downloads.

> *"Compared to other social media platforms, TikTok captures the most of today's news consumers especially young Kenyans who stay glued to their phones all day. It's unbeatable for audiovisual storytelling and snappy text overlays that turn serious news into something fun, relatable, and binge-worthy for the modern audience. Short, visual, entertaining that's how Gen-Z gets informed nowadays.'' -KI12*

Influence of TikTok on Storytelling Techniques and Audience Engagement: Key informants were requested to indicate how the use of TikTok influenced their storytelling techniques and audience engagement. From the results, Key Informant (*KI3*) revealed that they use it as a source to identify trending topics, stories for UGC content and that they also get a lot of feedback there.

Key Informant (*KI8*) added that:

> *"It has eased and increased reach to the audience and as a journalist I am able to respond almost in real time. TikTok has influenced our storytelling techniques in a manner that we publish short videos from longer news content posted on other platforms like YouTube and Facebook. We also create explainer and list videos that resonate with the audience needs. On TikTok the first few seconds determine how long the audience engages with our content.''*

Further, key informant (*KI6*) revealed that it has made them to produce more visual, concise, and emotionally driven stories where hooks are placed in the first 3–5 seconds. Consequently, they include text overlays, dramatic captions, and conversational tone in a bid to catch the attention of the audience while at the same time stimulating comment engagement.

Key informant (*KI2*) indicated that by leveraging TikTok instead of relying on traditional text updates, static images, or long-form YouTube videos (as was common earlier), creators like me can achieve rapid, actionable feedback on every story. The platform excels at real-time storytelling breaking news, reactions, and updates unfold live, with viewers responding instantly via comments, stitches, duets, and shares.

> *"This creates a true two-way conversation. We can easily identify authentic audience members by reviewing their profiles (no anonymous noise), and gauge what they truly want faster than ever by analyzing video performance metrics like reach, completion rates, saves, and engagement spikes.''*

Key informant (*KI7*) concluded that:

> *"In Kenya's hyper-engaged TikTok scene where young users lead global news consumption on the app this real-time loop turns viewers into active participants, helping refine content on the fly and build stronger connections. It's the ultimate edge for staying relevant and responsive."*

Content extracted from the video *"Our first wedding night was chaotic'* employed close up camera shots technique, which creates a sense of intimacy between the speakers and the audience. The conversational delivery, combined with facial expressions and pauses, further strengthens the emotional realism of the content. Equally, speakers in the video used a blend of Sheng, English and Kiswahili, reflecting the everyday communication style of many young

Licensed Under Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY-NC)

people in Kenya and across urban Africa. This informal and natural language makes the video accessible and relatable to ordinary audiences, particularly youthful viewers who identify with such speech patterns in social and digital spaces. Frequency of Posting News Content on TikTok and Determinants of Posting Frequency: Key informants were requested to indicate how frequently they post news content on TikTok, and what determines this frequency. Key informant (*KI7*) revealed that:

> *"For current affairs its thrice weekly, entertainment is as it comes depending on what's trending at the moment.''*

Key Informant (*KI3*) opined that they post at least five news posts and three in-house reels per day.

> "*The news posts depend on their performance on the website, the more the engagement, the better it performs on TikTok as well, because of the interest it generates from the audience."*

In addition, key informants (*KI9*) indicated that the media house's standard operating procedures require that all writers, commonly referred to as editors, compose all their articles on Facebook and Twitter. However, TikTok content which requires video content and takes some time to create is handled by social media managers who have a daily quota of videos to publish.

> *"At Tuko we post on TikTok a minimum of 3 to 5 videos in a day. The frequency is determined by trending topics in the country and also the videos that are posted on our YouTube channel." –(K17)*

Key informant (*KI3*) indicated multiple times daily. Posting is also determined by trending topics, breaking news, and from feedback.

Further, Key Informant (*KI5*) revealed that unlike their website, where updates are more measured, they post frequently on TikTok to ride the wave of what's trending in Kenya at that moment.

> *"When big events hit like presidential or judicial swearings-in, high-stakes national sports matches, massive political rallies, or any moment generating real buzz we jump in with quick, real-time coverage. The key driver is continued audience excitement and relevance."*

Key Informant (*KI5*) added that their viewers are highly sensitive and demand fresh content as we monitor performance closely:

> "*If a video isn't hitting average viewership or engagement, we stop pushing that angle and shift to what's working. This keeps us agile and locked in with the Gen-Z fast moving pulse in this digital era."*

Types of Stories and Topics that Perform Best on TikTok: Key informants were requested to indicate what type of stories or topics perform best for their TikTok audience. From the results, the Key Informants stated that entertainment content always and current affairs works when it's a trending or debatable content.

> "*Political stories, celebrity news and deeply emotional, extra ordinary posts have the best engagement and viewership on Tuko TikTok account." -(KI1)*

In addition, Key informant (*KI1*) revealed that explainers, human-interests' stories and personal testimonies, business startups and business ideas content.

Key informant (*KI5*) indicated:

> "*The topics that perform best are the trending topics that have been animated and have a voice over explaining the visuals on the screen."*

Further, the Key Informant (*KI3*) revealed that at the moment, human-interest stories, celebrity news, dramatic political moments, emotional testimonies, and controversial social topics perform best due to their emotional pull and relatability to the audience. "*Every trendy buzz is a go-to topic''.*

Key informant (*KI9*) also indicated that short and punchy stories dominate on TikTok.

> *"What blows up quick on TikTok is political sound bites from popular and even controversial politicians, hot new music releases in the entertainment scene, and football breakdowns where fans relive every pass buildup to that sweet goal. Viewers crave fast, exciting, relatable vibes deliver that, and watch the views roll in."*

The third video under Couples Show titled, *'When you are caught with a side chick in Burundi, you are arrested'* the video used on screen there is transcribed captions, which allowed viewers to follow the conversation more easily, especially where accents or pronunciations differences may affect comprehension.

Additionally, content extracted from video 2 under Couples Show named '*Our first wedding night was chaotic'* had new value effect where the topic appeals to the youthful and online audiences who are often drawn to candid conversations about relationships, marriage expectations and emotional experiences. The honesty of the couple's narration increases the video's relatability and shareability.

The findings reveal that the TikTok audience at TUKO Media Group is primarily attracted to human-interest stories, entertainment news, celebrity updates, political developments, emotional testimonies, business-related content, and other trending social issues. Respondents noted that stories with strong emotional appeal, controversy, relatability, and visual storytelling elements tend to generate the highest levels of engagement, viewership, and sharing. These findings are consistent with the study by Regasa and Ettisa (2023), who argued that social media audiences are more

Licensed Under Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY-NC)

likely to engage with news content that evokes emotions and personal connection rather than purely factual information. The findings also support the work of Hermida (2026), which established those human-interest narratives, celebrity news, and emotionally charged stories are more likely to attract audience participation and sharing on digital platforms. Similarly, the results agree with the findings of Bhandari and Bimo (2022), who observed that social media algorithms tend to amplify content that generates strong audience reactions, discussions, and engagement. Consequently, TUKO journalists strategically prioritize content that is emotionally compelling, visually appealing, and socially relevant in order to maximize audience reach and interaction on TikTok.

Balancing Entertainment and Information in TikTok Content: Key informants were requested to indicate how they balance entertainment and information in their TikTok content. Key Informant (*KI8*) revealed that entertainment is also information for the audience.

Key Informant (*KI8*) added that:

> *"As mentioned above, it's a mix of entertainment, current affairs and human interest/people stories.''*

Key Informant (*KI2*) indicated that they post entertainment stories and the current trending and relevant news stories for the day.

> *"The media house has a current affairs, human interest, business, and entertainment desk which have a daily quota of articles to publish both on the website and social media platforms including TikTok." - (KI2)*

Further, key informant (*KI4*) indicated that on TikTok entertainment brings in the attention that they need on their TikTok page while the information that they give builds trust to their audience. The audience wants the not so serious trending topics for entertainment but also rely on TikTok to get information on the serious topics. Key informant (*KI11*) revealed that they lean mostly towards infotainment. They clearly summarize information, while entertainment is embedded through editing style, captions, music, and emotional framing.

In addition, the Key Informant (*KI9*) indicated that they strike the perfect balance between real, informative news and pure entertainment on TikTok. Weekdays are for solid news, updates, and 'nation-building' content when most Kenyans are in work/school mode, mentally sharp, and not chasing random baits. They want quick, valuable insights during commutes or breaks. Weekends shift to entertainment: music drops, fun skits, celeb tea, football highlights perfect for relaxed scrolling and good vibes. This smart mix keeps viewers engaged all week long no one gets bored, and the algorithm loves the variety.

In the third video, *'When you are caught with a side chick in Burundi, you are arrested'* it conformed to journalist ethics as thee discussion is conducted in a light and conversational tone without becoming explicit or inappropriate, making it suitable for broad audience, including mature teenagers and adults. The interviewer also allowed the guests to express themselves freely without interruptions or visible bias.

The findings indicate that journalists at TUKO Media Group deliberately combine entertainment and information to create content that is both engaging and informative for TikTok audiences. Respondents revealed that entertainment attracts audience attention while factual information builds credibility and trust, leading to the adoption of an infotainment approach characterized by concise news summaries, creative editing, captions, music, and emotionally appealing storytelling. These findings support the work of Bhandari and Bimo (2022), who observed that modern media increasingly blends information and entertainment to capture audience attention. The results also align with the findings of Cheng and Li (2023), who argued that digital journalism has evolved toward audience-centered content production where news organizations adapt their presentation styles to changing consumer preferences. Similarly, the findings corroborate the study by Kimboi et al., (2025), which found that emotionally engaging and entertaining news content performs better on social media platforms because audiences are more likely to interact with content that is both informative and personally relevant. Therefore, TUKO's use of infotainment reflects broader trends in digital journalism aimed at maximizing audience engagement while preserving the informational value of news content.

Collaboration with Other Journalists and Departments in Creating TikTok Content: Key informants were requested to indicate in what ways do they collaborate with other journalists or departments when creating TikTok content. From the results, there is coordination between social media team, video desk and editorial. Key Informant (KI1) indicated that:

> "*Whenever there's a topic of interest, we always send topics or video ideas to be executed since it's our primary interest to grow the channel and for advertising plans. We have a common place where that communication is done in order to reach the entire team."*

Secondly, Key Informant (*KI4*) revealed that they collaborate by sharing insights that may have developed after they have published a particular story. They also assist in getting the right angle for TikTok posts. They also share contacts of their sources for more information that they may need to post and perhaps consider a video interview.

Licensed Under Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY-NC)

"Social media managers at Tuko who have the primary responsibility for creating TikTok content collaborate with editors and writers across all departments to inform them on the type of content majority of the audience are seeking and trending news topics." - *(KI1)*

Key informant (*KI4*) further revealed that as a journalist, different departments depend on each other to work together, they shoot and edit the content that is needed then pass it on to the social media manager who then posts the content and follows up on the metrics and reply to comments and direct messages.

"The social media manager can also spot the trending topics online and then asks us to shoot and edit the material for posting on our Tuko TikTok account."

Key informant (*KI5*) revealed that by working as a team, they get scripts from stories and video editors craft complimenting visuals and captions as they post. The social media editor then crafts complementing social leads, captions, hash tags and engages the audience. Further, Key informant (*KI2*) indicated that they double-check authenticity by collaborating with other journalists and using specialized software to detect AI manipulation or edits. They coordinate closely to select the best clips, cut them sharp, and share fast especially on breaking events.

"Being among the first to drop verified content builds momentum: others repost, trends ignite, and that make us stay ahead of the pack with consistent, trustworthy updates. Speed + credibility = loyal audience."

The findings show that TikTok content creation at TUKO Media Group is highly collaborative, involving coordinated efforts between social media managers, editors, videographers, writers, and the broader editorial team. Journalists reported continuous communication through shared groups where story ideas are discussed, refined, and assigned for execution, while post-publication feedback is used to improve future content angles and engagement strategies. This collaboration also extends to sourcing information, verifying content authenticity, and aligning video production with audience preferences and trending topics. These findings are consistent with the work of Duong and Tran (2024), who emphasized that contemporary journalism increasingly operates through participatory and networked newsroom structures where content production is distributed across multiple actors. The results also resonate with Yuchen (2021), who argued that convergence culture in digital journalism has led to integrated news production where editorial, technical, and social media teams work collaboratively to produce multiplatform content. Similarly, the findings support the study by Hendrickx (2023), which highlighted that modern news production is characterized by cross-departmental collaboration aimed at improving speed, accuracy, and audience responsiveness in digital environments. Consequently, collaboration at TUKO reflects a broader shift toward converged and team-based journalism driven by the demands of social media platforms like TikTok.

Metrics and Indicators Used to Measure TikTok Content Success: Key informants were requested to reveal what metrics or indicators they use to measure the success of your TikTok content. From the results, the Key Informants indicated views and followers. The Key Informant (*KI10*) revealed that:

"We use views, total playtime, average watch time, comments, shares, repots, favorites, likes (love or heart clicks) traffic sources and search queries. The more they are, the more successful the post would be."

Key Informants (*KI6*) further revealed that follower growth and views are the main ones. Additionally, watch time, completion rate, shares, comments and downloads play a role.

"To gauge success on TikTok, I focus on vitality metrics: how many views a video racks up, plus comments, shares, saves, and recommendations that signal real buzz. I also scan comments for direct shoutouts like people congratulating us for dropping timely stories as a strong sign of trust and impact." (KI3)

Key Informants (*KI4)* added that tools like TikTok's built-in Analytics, Google Analytics (for linked traffic/insights), and free AI-powered helpers allows them to dive deeper, spot trends, and quickly see what resonates with Kenyan audience. "*Data-driven wins every time."*

The findings indicate that TikTok content success at TUKO Media Group is primarily measured using a combination of quantitative engagement metrics and audience interaction indicators. Key performance measures include views, follower growth, likes, shares, comments, average watch time, completion rates, saves, and traffic sources, with particular emphasis on engagement quality such as audience feedback and direct responses in the comment section. Journalists also assess the level of content virality through recommendations and the extent to which videos generate discussions or emotional reactions among viewers. These findings are consistent with the work of Zayani (2021), who argued that contemporary digital journalism increasingly relies on real-time analytics and engagement metrics to evaluate content performance and audience behavior. The results also align with the study by Hermida (2026), which emphasized that social media platforms have shifted news evaluation from traditional reach-based measures to interactive indicators such as shares, comments, and participatory engagement. Similarly, the findings support the observations of Hermida (2026), who noted that data-driven journalism increasingly depends on audience analytics to guide editorial decisions and optimize content distribution. Therefore, TikTok success at TUKO is strongly defined by data-driven performance metrics that reflect both visibility and audience engagement.

Licensed Under Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY-NC)

Editorial Guidance and Freedom in TikTok Content Production: Key informants were requested to indicate if they receive editorial guidance or freedom when posting on TikTok. From the results, the Key Informant (*KI7*) indicated that there's an internal policy that advices editorial standard, they also developed rules especially for TikTok. Key informant (*KI11*) revealed that:

> *"There are editorial guidelines to be followed to suit Tuko house style for authenticity and ability to differentiate from potential copy and deep fake copies that may be created by unscrupulous people. However, creativity is encouraged and must conform to the Tuko style."*

Key informant (KI6) reiterated that every social media platform has its publishing policies that guide which type of content to post but primarily, the media house has guidelines of sourcing and publishing news on social media platforms, TikTok included.

The Key Informant (KI5) also revealed that when posting content that can have legal repercussions, they seek guidance from their legal team and their editorial manager before posting.

> *"But on some issues, mostly there is a lot of freedom."*

Further, key informant (*KI8*) indicated that they are guided by editorial guidelines as well as the code of conduct for the practice of journalism as stipulated by the Media Council of Kenya and in compliance with the Kenyan laws. In addition, they adhere to clear editorial guidelines a direct adaptation of their standard style book combined with the Media Council of Kenya's Code of Conduct for Media Practice.

> *"Our core principles are: objectivity, balance, and fairness in every story. We strictly avoid nudity, defamation, sensationalism, or yellow journalism. This ensures our short-form TikTok content remains accurate, responsible, and trustworthy even while being fast and engaging for Kenyan audiences. Ethics first, always."*

The findings indicate that TikTok content production at TUKO Media Group is guided by a combination of formal editorial policies, platform-specific rules, and professional journalism codes that ensure accuracy, credibility, and legal compliance. While journalists experience a considerable degree of creative freedom in producing short-form content, this flexibility operates within established editorial frameworks such as house style guidelines, internal TikTok rules, and the Media Council of Kenya Code of Conduct for the Practice of Journalism. Respondents further noted that content likely to raise legal or ethical concerns is subjected to additional review by editorial and legal teams before publication. These findings are consistent with the work of Newman *et al.* (2021), who argues that digital media environments expand creative autonomy for journalists while still requiring institutional structures to maintain credibility and accountability. The results also align with the study by Kiunga (2023), which emphasizes that ethical journalism in digital spaces depends on strong editorial governance to balance speed, creativity, and accuracy. Similarly, the findings support the observations of Mbaabu (2025), who notes that convergence journalism requires adaptive editorial oversight to ensure that content shared across multiple platforms remains consistent with professional standards. Therefore, TikTok journalism at TUKO reflects a hybrid model of controlled creativity, where editorial freedom is exercised within clear ethical and institutional boundaries. Management of Ethical Considerations in TikTok Journalism. Key informants were requested to reveal how they manage ethical considerations when producing content specifically for TikTok.

From the results, key informant *(KI1)* indicated that:

> *"At least with backdrop knowledge of community guidelines of other social media sites, and after going through the TikTok community guidelines, one is able to stay clear of violation, because if a post violates the ethical considerations, it is usually flagged and may lead to suspension of the account."*

In addition, key informant (*KI2*) revealed that since their social media platforms (pages, channels and accounts) are an extension of their business as a media house. Basic media ethics and laws guide the publication of content.

> *"Laws on right to privacy, libel, slander, fairness, right of reply and freedoms provided for by the Constitution of Kenya are key guiding pillars to us in our daily operations."*

Key informant (*KI7*) further indicated that TikTok has community guidelines that guide them on content to post on their Tuko Tik Tok page.

> *"As a content creator platform, we understand how Tik Tok operates, so we avoid our content being flagged by adhering to the rules."*

Key informant (*KI5*) revealed that they verify facts before publishing, avoiding too graphic visuals, and frame sensitive stories carefully. Further, the Key Informant (KI10) indicated that they handle ethical considerations by passing every story through their internal media style book and the Media Council of Kenya's Code of Conduct guidelines. Their approach stays objective, balanced, educative, informative, and patriotic always prioritizing accuracy, fairness, and public trust. They strictly avoid defamation, abusive language, sensationalism, or anything harmful. Content must be suitable for family viewing; if it doesn't meet these standards, it's dropped immediately. This keeps their TikTok news responsible, trustworthy, and Kenya-focused.

Licensed Under Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY-NC)

On the segment '*Tuko Talks'* third video "*I mistreated my children because of depression'* has adhered to journalistic ethics. The language used is clean and respectful, while the interviewer handles the discussions with empathy and sensitivity as the woman shares deeply painful experiences. The interview avoids sensationalizing the subject and instead presents her story in a humane and compassionate manner. These findings are consistent with the work of Jose (2021), who argues that digital journalism requires strengthened ethical frameworks to address the speed, scale, and risks associated with online content distribution. The results also align with the study by Jain *et al*. (2025), which emphasizes that social media journalism demands proactive ethical judgment to balance audience engagement with responsibility and harm prevention. Similarly, the findings support the observations of Regasa and Ettisa (2023), who notes that platform-driven journalism must integrate both institutional ethics and platform governance systems to maintain credibility in algorithmically distributed news environments.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

Based on the findings this study concludes that TikTok has become an important platform for news dissemination, particularly for reaching younger audiences such as Gen Z and Millennials. The platform's algorithm, interactive features, and emphasis on short-form visual content enhance audience engagement, making it effective for quickly sharing breaking news, trending topics, and human-interest stories.

5.2 Recommendations

The study recommends that media organizations should strengthen journalists' utilization of TikTok by providing regular training on short-form video production, audience engagement, and effective use of the platform's interactive features. Journalists should also develop content strategies that align with TikTok's visual and fast-paced nature while maintaining accuracy, professionalism, and journalistic standards to enhance news dissemination and engagement with younger audiences.

Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that they do not have any known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Funding Declaration

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

REFERENCES

Ahmed, S. K. (2024). The pillars of trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Journal of Medicine, Surgery, and Public Health, 2*, Article 100051. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.glmedi.2024.100051

Al-Rawi, A. (2024). Metajournalistic discourse on TikTok. *Emerging Media, 2*(1), 134–154. https://doi.org/10.1177/27523543241244566

Bhandari, A., & Bimo, S. (2022). Why's everyone on TikTok now? The algorithmized self and the future of self-making on social media. *Social Media + Society, 8*(1). https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051221086241

Cheng, Z., & Li, Y. (2024). Like, comment, and share on TikTok: Exploring the effect of sentiment and second-person view on the user engagement with TikTok news videos. *Social Science Computer Review, 42*(1). https://doi.org/10.1177/08944393231178603

Cheng, Z., Durotoye, T., Medina, L., & Chadha, M. (2025). News on TikTok through the lens of quality journalism: How TikTok users perceive news values, content, and engagement. *Journalism Studies*. https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2025.2559020

Cooper, D. R., & Schindler, P. S. (2019). *Business research methods*. McGraw-Hill Education.

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Davis, F. D. (1989). Perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and user acceptance of information technology. *MIS Quarterly, 13*(3), 319–340.

Degen, M., Olgemöller, M., & Zabel, C. (2024). The tortured journalists department? Challenges and characteristics of quality journalism on TikTok in Germany. *Emerging Media, 2*(4). https://doi.org/10.1177/27523543241300942

Licensed Under Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY-NC)

Duong, L., & Tran, T. (2024). Exploring fake news awareness and trust in the age of social media among university student TikTok users. *Cogent Social Sciences, 10*(1), Article 2302216. https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2024.2302216

Dvir-Gvirsman, S., & Tsuriel, K. (2022). In an open relationship: Platformization of relations between news practitioners and their audiences. *Journalism Studies, 23*(11), 1308–1326. https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2022.2084144

García-Avilés, J. A. (2021). Journalism as usual? Managing disruption in virtual newsrooms during the COVID-19 crisis. *Digital Journalism, 9*(9), 1239–1260. https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2021.1942112

Gicheru, C., & Nyabuga, G. (2024). Kenya. In *Digital news report 2024*. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2024/kenya

Grant, R. M. (2019). *Contemporary strategy analysis* (10th ed.). Wiley.

Hendrickx, J. (2023). From newspapers to TikTok: Social media journalism as the fourth wave of news production, diffusion and consumption. In *Blurring boundaries of journalism in digital media* (pp. 229–246). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-43926-1_16

Hermida, A. (2026). Ambient journalism after Twitter: Algorithmic curation and the emergence of synthetic ambience. *M/C Journal, 29*(2). https://doi.org/10.5204/mcj.3254

Jain, L., Velez, L., Karlapati, S., Forand, M., Kannali, R., Yousaf, R. A., Ahmed, R., Sarfraz, Z., Sutter, P. A., Tallo, C. A., & Ahmed, S. (2025). Exploring problematic TikTok use and mental health issues: A systematic review of empirical studies. *Journal of Primary Care & Community Health, 16*. https://doi.org/10.1177/21501319251327303

Kimboi, J. M., Simiyu, V. N., & Wangari, J. (2025). Scrolling away Ubuntu: Social media's silent disruption of communal ethos among young people in Limuru, Kiambu County in Kenya. *Journal of Research Innovation and Implications in Education, 9*(3), 694–703.

Kitui, S. L., Lumala, P. M., & Nyamboga, E. N. (2025). Understanding patterns of homophily in social media usage among journalists at the Nation Media Group, Kenya. *Journal of the Kenya National Commission for UNESCO, 5*(2). https://doi.org/10.62049/jkncu.v5i2.299

Kiunga, M. G. (2023). *The effects of social media on newspaper content distribution: A case study of The Star newspaper* [Thesis, Aga Khan University]. eCommons@AKU. https://ecommons.aku.edu/etd_ke_gsmc_ma-digjour/64/

Laor, T. (2026). Breaking newstainment: Professional journalism and TikTok platform culture, evidence from the Israeli media system. *Journalism and Media, 7*(2), Article 79. https://doi.org/10.3390/journalmedia7020079

Mbaabu, N. M. (2025). *Examining the status of AI use guidelines in editorial policies of Kenyan digital media houses and challenges in their formulation and implementation in newsrooms* [Master's thesis, Aga Khan University]. eCommons@AKU. https://ecommons.aku.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1008&context=etd_ke_gsmc_ma-digjour

Mugenda, A., & Mugenda, O. (2019). *Research methods: Quantitative & qualitative approaches* (3rd ed.). Centre for Innovative Leadership & Governance.

Mwongela, F. K. (2015). *A study on how social media have changed newsroom operations in Kenya: A case study of the Standard Group and Nation Media Group* [Thesis, University of Nairobi]. University of Nairobi Repository. http://hdl.handle.net/11295/94730

Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Schulz, A., Andi, S., Robertson, C. T., & Nielsen, R. K. (2021). *Reuters Institute digital news report 2021*. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.

Newman, N., Ross Arguedas, A., Robertson, C., Nielsen, R. K., & Fletcher, R. (2024). *Digital news report 2024*. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2024

Newman, N., Ross Arguedas, A., Robertson, C., Nielsen, R. K., & Fletcher, R. (2026). *Digital news report 2026*. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2026

Peterson-Salahuddin, C. (2024). News for (Me and) You: Exploring the reporting practices of citizen journalists on TikTok. *Journalism Studies, 25*(9), 1076–1094. https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2023.2293829

Verstappen, M., & Opgenhaffen, M. (2026). The TikTok news challenge: The influence of the news organization on the editorial decision-making of TikTok editors. *Journalism, 27*(9), 2693–2711. https://doi.org/10.1177/14648849251383067

Wang, Y. (2022). A review of reasons for TikTok's global surge. In *Advances in social science, education and humanities research: Proceedings of the 2021 International Conference on Social Development and Media Communication (SDMC 2021)* (Vol. 631, pp. 588–591). Atlantis Press. https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.220105.107

Licensed Under Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY-NC)

Zayani, M. (2021). Digital journalism, social media platforms, and audience engagement: The case of AJ+. *Digital Journalism*, *9*(1), 24–41. https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2020.1816140

Licensed Under Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY-NC)