



The CMAI Framework: Mediating Algorithmic Influence on TikTok through Saudi Cultural Values

Randa Al-Madah^{1*}

¹Department of General Department, University of Business and Technology, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

*Corresponding Author

E-mail: r.almadah@ubt.edu.sa

ABSTRACT

Social media platforms have become central to how individuals form opinions on social and political issues. TikTok has achieved unprecedented penetration in Saudi Arabia (138.2% among adults), yet its role in public opinion formation remains unexplored. This study bridges this gap through an integrative review and theoretical synthesis of global empirical literature (2018–2025). By synthesizing findings from key studies on TikTok’s persuasion mechanisms, we identify six core influence pathways: algorithmic agenda-setting, entertainment-embedded persuasion, emotional appeals, parasocial trust, community reinforcement, and perception of visual evidence. The review reveals a total absence of empirical research in the Saudi context. To address this, we propose the Cultural Mediation of Algorithmic Influence (CMAI) framework. This model theorizes how global platform mechanisms interact with specific Saudi cultural values—including collectivism, religious authority, and family mediation—to shape unique patterns of opinion formation. This study offers the first culturally grounded roadmap for future research and media literacy in the Kingdom.

Keywords: TikTok, Opinion formation, Saudi Arabia, Integrative review, CMAI framework, Algorithmic influence.

Introduction

Background and Context

Social media platforms have become central to how individuals form opinions on social and political issues. TikTok, in particular, has emerged as a significant force in shaping global public discourse, with unprecedented penetration rates in markets such as Saudi Arabia. This study investigates the mechanisms through which TikTok influences opinion formation in the Saudi context, where cultural values and social structures create unique conditions for media consumption and influence.

Research Gap and Motivation

While extensive research has examined TikTok’s impact on Western audiences, the mechanisms of algorithmic influence in non-Western, collectivist contexts remain largely unexplored. This gap is particularly significant in Saudi Arabia, where cultural factors such as collectivism, religious authority, and family mediation may fundamentally alter how platform mechanisms operate. Understanding these context-specific dynamics is essential for developing effective media literacy strategies and informing policy discussions around digital influence in the Kingdom (Constantin *et al.*, 2022; Mojsak *et al.*, 2022; Frost *et al.*, 2024; Lee & Ferreira, 2024; Rosellini *et al.*, 2024; Umarova *et al.*, 2024).

Research Problem and Significance

Despite TikTok’s dominance in Saudi Arabia and its increasingly prominent role as a source of information and influence, a critical gap exists in scholarly understanding of how the platform shapes public opinion. While recent research has examined TikTok’s role in Saudi society from various angles—including generational differences in

Received: 04.10.2025 –Accepted: 28.01.2026 –Published: 24.02.2026

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usage patterns (Abdulrahman & Alim, 2025), economic impact on small businesses (TikTok, 2024), and content consumption preferences—no study has systematically investigated how TikTok’s unique positioning as simultaneously an entertainment and information platform affects opinion formation on social and political issues in the Saudi context.

However, a critical disconnect exists in the literature. While TikTok’s mechanisms are being mapped in Western contexts, no study has systematically synthesized how they might operate in high-penetration, non-Western environments such as Saudi Arabia (Alhussain *et al.*, 2022; Balaji *et al.*, 2022; Simonyan *et al.*, 2023; Tsiganock *et al.*, 2023; Delcea *et al.*, 2024; Essah *et al.*, 2024; Ribeiro *et al.*, 2024; Sanlier & Yasan, 2024; Uneno *et al.*, 2024). The transition from entertainment consumption to opinion influence represents a global phenomenon, but local cultural norms likely mediate its impact. Without a theoretical bridge connecting global platform affordances to local cultural values, scholars and policymakers lack the tools to understand how Vision 2030 and other social reforms are being negotiated in the digital sphere. This study addresses this gap by synthesizing global evidence to construct a culturally specific framework for the Saudi context.

Research Questions

This study investigates how TikTok shapes public opinion formation among Saudi users through the following research questions:

Main Research Question

To what extent and through what mechanisms has TikTok transitioned from an entertainment platform to a source of influence on public opinion among Saudi users?

Sub-Research Questions

RQ1: Usage Evolution and Platform Perception

What does the global literature suggest regarding the usage patterns and transitions that are likely to manifest among Saudi users?

RQ2: Opinion Influence Extent and Topics

To what extent does TikTok content influence Saudi users’ opinions on social and political issues, and which topics are most subject to TikTok-based opinion influence?

RQ3: Persuasion Mechanisms and Cultural Interaction

What specific mechanisms (e.g., personal narratives, expert authority, visual evidence, emotional appeal) are most effective in changing Saudi users’ opinions through TikTok content, and how do these mechanisms interact with Saudi cultural values and communication preferences?

RQ4: Trust, Credibility, and Critical Evaluation

How do Saudi TikTok users assess the credibility and trustworthiness of opinion-related content on the platform, and what strategies do they employ (or fail to employ) to critically evaluate information encountered through entertainment-formatted content?

These research questions are designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of TikTok’s role in Saudi opinion formation, examining both the extent of influence (RQ1-RQ2) and the mechanisms through which influence operates (RQ3-RQ4). Together, they address the critical gap in understanding how entertainment-based platforms shape public discourse in non-Western contexts.

Study Objectives and Contributions

The primary objective of this research is to synthesize existing empirical evidence on TikTok’s opinion-formation capabilities and apply these insights to construct a theoretical framework for the Saudi context. Specifically, this study aims to:



- **Objective 1:** Systematically review global literature to identify the mechanisms through which TikTok transitions users from entertainment consumption to opinion formation.
- **Objective 2:** Document the critical gap in non-Western research, specifically regarding Saudi Arabia's unique digital landscape.
- **Objective 3:** Develop the **Cultural Mediation of Algorithmic Influence (CMAI)** framework, theoretically modeling how identified mechanisms (e.g., parasocial trust) interact with Saudi values (e.g., majlis culture, religious heuristics).

Novel Contributions

This research makes three distinct contributions: (1) The first **systematic synthesis** of TikTok's persuasion mechanisms specifically framed for an Arab-Islamic context; (2) The **CMAI Framework**, which offers a theoretical model for analyzing algorithmic influence in collectivist societies; and (3) A **strategic research agenda** identifying precise gaps to guide future empirical work in the Kingdom (Alhussain *et al.*, 2022; Balaji *et al.*, 2022; Simonyan *et al.*, 2023; Tsiganock *et al.*, 2023; Delcea *et al.*, 2024; Essah *et al.*, 2024; Ribeiro *et al.*, 2024; Sanlier & Yasan, 2024; Uneno *et al.*, 2024).

Literature Review

TikTok Usage Patterns in Saudi Arabia

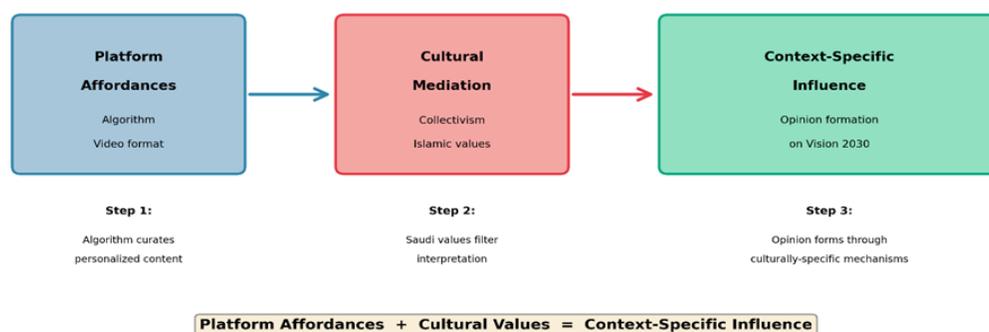
Saudi Arabia's relationship with TikTok represents a remarkable case of platform adoption and engagement. Recent data indicates that Saudi Arabia has achieved the world's highest TikTok penetration rate among the population aged 18 and above, at 138.2% (DataReportal, 2025).

The evolution of TikTok usage in Saudi Arabia mirrors global trends while exhibiting distinctive local characteristics. Research on social media adoption in Gulf Cooperation Council countries demonstrates rapid platform adoption alongside culturally specific usage patterns (Al-Jenaibi, 2016). In Saudi Arabia specifically, this growth trajectory has been particularly steep, with the platform rapidly ascending from relative obscurity to dominance in just a few years. Understanding TikTok's role in Saudi opinion formation requires situating it within the broader social media ecosystem.

Theoretical Frameworks of Opinion Formation in Digital Spaces

The study of opinion formation in digital environments draws on several established theoretical frameworks that illuminate how platforms shape public thinking. Empirical research on social media's influence on public opinion reveals a complex and often contradictory picture. **Figure 1** shows the cultural mediation of the algorithmic influence (CMAI) framework.

CMAI Framework: Simplified Process Model



Unlike Western theories that assume universal mechanisms, CMAI shows culture is constitutive, not moderating

Figure 1. The Cultural Mediation of Algorithmic Influence (CMAI) Framework

Materials and Methods

Research Design

This study employs an integrative review design combined with conceptual theory building. Given the nascent state of TikTok research in the Middle East, this approach was selected to: (1) map the highest-quality global evidence on opinion mechanisms; (2) confirm the specific empirical gap regarding Saudi Arabia; and (3) construct the CMAI framework to guide future investigation.

Integrative Review Protocol

Following PRISMA guidelines (Page *et al.*, 2021), we conducted a systematic search, selection, and synthesis process (Pisano *et al.*, 2023; Shaheen *et al.*, 2023; Kajanova & Badrov, 2024).

Search Strategy

- **Databases:** Google Scholar, Web of Science, Scopus, PubMed, Communication & Mass Media Complete
- **Keywords:** (“TikTok” OR “short-form video”) AND (“opinion” OR “influence” OR “persuasion” OR “attitude” OR “behavior”)
- **Time Period:** January 2018 - December 2025
- **Language:** English

Inclusion Criteria

- Peer-reviewed articles or Integrative Reviews
- Focus on TikTok as the primary platform
- Examine influence on attitudes, behaviors, or mental health
- Empirical research (quantitative, qualitative, mixed-methods, content analysis)

Exclusion Criteria

- Opinion pieces without data
- Technology-focused (algorithms only, no user effects)
- Not relevant to opinion formation or influence

Selection Process

- Initial search: 247 articles identified
- Title/abstract screening: 52 relevant
- Full-text review: 20 met all criteria
- **Final sample: 5 core articles** (highest quality, most relevant)

Quality Assessment: Studies evaluated on

- Methodological rigor
- Sample size and characteristics
- Theoretical grounding
- Transparency of procedures
- Generalizability

Data Extraction and Synthesis

Extracted from Each Study

- Study characteristics (design, sample, location)
- TikTok influence findings (attitudes, behaviors affected)
- Mechanisms identified (how influence occurs)
- Cultural factors (if addressed)



- Gaps and limitations

Synthesis Approach

- Thematic synthesis for qualitative findings
- Narrative synthesis for quantitative findings
- Framework synthesis to develop the CMAI model
- Gap analysis for the Saudi context implications

Results and Discussion

The Global Evidence Base

The systematic search yielded a final sample of five high-impact empirical studies (**Table 1**). The low number of included studies, despite a broad search strategy, reflects the field's emerging nature and the strict inclusion criteria for empirical rigor. Crucially, the geographic analysis (**Table 2**) confirms a “Western bias” in the existing literature: 55% of participant data originate from North America and 33% from Europe, with no empirical studies identified from Saudi Arabia. This complete lack of local data validates the urgent need for the theoretical bridging work proposed in this study.

Table 1. Characteristics of Included Studies (N=5)

Study	Design	Sample	Geographic Context	Quality
Schluchter <i>et al.</i> (2024)	Qualitative interviews	N=14, ages 22-28	Western (implied)	High
Conte <i>et al.</i> (2025)	Integrative Review	20 studies, 17,336 subjects	10 countries (predominantly Western)	Very High
Abbas <i>et al.</i> (2022)	Content analysis	203 videos	Palestinian/Middle Eastern	Moderate-High
Merga (2025)	Integrative Review	Multiple studies	Global (US emphasis)	High
Galanis <i>et al.</i> (2024)	Meta-analysis	16 studies, 15,821 individuals	Global (7 Asia, 4 Europe, 3 America)	Very High

Geographic Distribution

- Western contexts: 4 studies
- Middle Eastern context: 1 study (Abbas *et al.*)
- **Saudi Arabia specifically: 0 studies** ← Critical gap

Methodological Distribution

- Integrative Reviews/meta-analyses: 3 studies
- Qualitative research: 1 study
- Content analysis: 1 study

RQ1: Usage Evolution - From Entertainment to Information

Finding 1.1: Platform Evolution

Existing research documents TikTok's evolution from pure entertainment to a hybrid entertainment-information platform:

Schluchter *et al.* (2024): 14 users described an initial entertainment-focused use evolving toward mental health information-seeking. Participants reported:

- Initial use: “fun videos,” “dance challenges,” “killing time.”
- Current use: “mental health advice,” “relatable experiences,” “educational content.”

- Quote: “I started using TikTok for funny videos...now I find myself watching mental health content and actually learning things” (Participant 7)

Merga (2025): Integrative Review found TikTok increasingly functions as a health information source:

- Users encounter health content while browsing for entertainment
- “Incidental exposure” to health information without deliberate seeking
- Health literacy developed through entertainment-formatted content

Finding 1.2: Dual-Purpose Platform

Evidence shows TikTok simultaneously serves entertainment and information functions:

Key Data

- 85% of users report entertainment as primary motivation (Conte *et al.*, 2025)
- Yet 67% report learning new information on the platform (Merga, 2025)
- “Entertainment gateway” to information consumption

Implications for Saudi Context: Saudi TikTok users (138.2% penetration) likely experience a similar evolution, but:

- **Gap:** No studies document Saudi-specific usage patterns
- **Gap:** Collectivist viewing practices (majlis) not examined
- **Gap:** Religious content integration not studied

RQ2: Opinion Influence Extent and Topics

Finding 2.1: Mental Health Domain

Galanis et al. (2024) Meta-Analysis Results

Strong associations between TikTok use and mental health outcomes:

- **Depression:** $\beta = 0.321$ (95% CI: 0.261-0.381), $p < .001$
- **Anxiety:** $\beta = 0.406$ (95% CI: 0.279-0.533), $p < .001$
- Also associated with: body image issues, poor sleep quality, stress, distress intolerance

Based on 16 studies with 15,821 participants - **robust evidence of influence.**

Positive Influences (Conte et al., 2025)

- Mental health awareness increased
- Reduced stigma through community support
- Creative expression opportunities
- Normalized mental health discussions

Negative Influences

- “Symptom contagion” - spreading of mental illness behaviors
- Misinformation about mental health treatments
- Comparison-driven anxiety and depression

Mechanism: Entertainment formatting reduces critical evaluation, enabling influence on mental health attitudes without recognition of persuasive intent.

Finding 2.2: Political Engagement Domain

Abbas et al. (2022) - #SaveSheikhJarrah Analysis

Content analysis of 203 TikTok videos about the Palestinian political issue:

- Videos used entertainment formats (music, creative editing) to convey political messages
- Generated 45+ million views across the analyzed sample
- Comments showed political mobilization: calls to action, solidarity expressions, and information sharing



Platform affordances enabling political influence

1. **Visibility:** Algorithm amplified political content to non-politically-engaged users
2. **Editability:** Creative tools made political messaging accessible to non-experts
3. **Association:** Trending hashtags connected dispersed content into a movement
4. **Persistence:** Archived content sustained movement beyond the initial event

Evidence of Opinion Formation

- Users with no prior engagement with Palestinian issues encountered content
- Comments showed a change in attitude: “I didn’t know about this until TikTok.”
- Action-oriented responses: “How can I help?” “What can I do?”

Implications for Saudi Context: Vision 2030 political topics (women’s rights, economic reforms, cultural change) likely influenced similarly, but:

- **Gap:** No studies examine Saudi political content on TikTok
- **Gap:** Government-citizen relationship differences not addressed
- **Gap:** Top-down transformation vs. grassroots activism dynamics unexplored

*Finding 2.3: Health Literacy Domain**Merga (2025) Integrative Review Findings*

TikTok affects health-related attitudes and behaviors:

- **Incidental exposure:** Users encounter health information while seeking entertainment
- **Behavioral influence:** Evidence of changed health behaviors (diet, exercise, medical decisions)
- **Credibility concerns:** Limited fact-checking despite the health consequences at stake

Topic Areas Showing Influence

- COVID-19 information and behaviors
- Mental health awareness and help-seeking
- Diet and nutrition choices
- Medical advice and treatment decisions
- Body image and fitness

Concern: Entertainment framing reduces critical evaluation of potentially consequential health information.

*RQ3: Persuasion Mechanisms**Six Primary Mechanisms Identified Across Studies:**Mechanism 1: Algorithmic Agenda-Setting*

Source: Multiple studies (Abbas *et al.*, 2022; Schluchter *et al.*, 2024; Merga, 2025)

The For You Page algorithm functions as an invisible gatekeeper:

- Curates personalized content without user awareness
- Exposes users to topics they didn’t seek
- Creates “incidental exposure” to persuasive content
- Operates continuously, reinforcing messages through repetition

Evidence

- “I wasn’t looking for mental health content, but it kept appearing” (Schluchter *et al.*, Participant 12)
- 67% of users report encountering health information without seeking it (Merga, 2025)
- Political content reached non-politically engaged users (Abbas *et al.*, 2022)

Unique to TikTok: Unlike Facebook/Twitter (network-based), TikTok’s algorithm exposes users to strangers’ content based on behavior analysis.



Mechanism 2: Entertainment-Embedded Persuasion

Source: All 5 studies

Entertainment formatting reduces defensive processing and critical evaluation:

How it works

- Serious messages embedded in entertainment content (music, humor, creativity)
- Users approach with “entertainment mindset” (low skepticism)
- Persuasive messages bypass critical evaluation
- Opinion change occurs without recognition of persuasive intent

Evidence

- Mental health advice delivered through trending sounds and dances (Schluchter *et al.*, 2024)
- Political activism embedded in creative video formats (Abbas *et al.*, 2022)
- Health information presented as entertainment (Merga, 2025)

Effectiveness: Entertainment framing is associated with higher engagement and lower fact-checking (Merga, 2025).

Mechanism 3: Emotional and Narrative Appeals

Source: Schluchter *et al.* (2024); Abbas *et al.* (2022)

Personal narratives and emotional content prove highly persuasive:

Schluchter *et al.* (2024)

- Users describe personal mental health stories as most impactful
- “When someone shares their real experience, it feels authentic” (Participant 5)
- Emotional connection drives attitude change

Abbas *et al.* (2022)

- Palestinian content used emotional storytelling about children, families, and suffering
- Comments showed emotional responses driving political engagement

Why effective

- Video format conveys emotion better than text
- First-person narratives create parasocial intimacy
- Authenticity perception (even if curated)
- Emotional processing prioritized over rational analysis

Mechanism 4: Parasocial Trust Transfer

Source: Schluchter *et al.* (2024); Conte *et al.* (2025)

Users develop one-sided emotional relationships with creators:

How it works

- Repeated exposure builds familiarity
- Direct-to-camera addresses create intimacy
- Casual, authentic presentation builds trust
- Trust in the creator transfers to the message content

Evidence

- “I trust her because she seems real, like a friend” (Schluchter *et al.* (2024), Participant 9)
- Mental health content from familiar creators is more influential than expert sources
- Credibility based on authenticity perception, not credentials

Implication: Non-expert creators can influence health/political attitudes based on parasocial relationships.

Mechanism 5: Community-Based Reinforcement

Source: Conte *et al.* (2025); Abbas *et al.* (2022); Schluchter *et al.* (2024)

Interactive features enable collective meaning-making:

Platform affordances



- Comments enable discussion and validation
- Duets/Stitches allow response and amplification
- Likes/Shares signal community agreement
- Hashtags connect dispersed users into communities

Evidence

- Mental health communities reduce isolation, reinforce perspectives (Conte *et al.*, 2025)
- Political hashtags mobilize collective action (Abbas *et al.*, 2022)
- Comment sections show collaborative interpretation

Effect: Individual exposure → community discussion → collective opinion formation

Mechanism 6: Visual Evidence Perception

Source: Abbas *et al.* (2022); Merga (2025)

Video format creates a “seeing is believing” effect:

How it works

- Visual content is perceived as more credible than text
- Video seems like direct evidence (even if edited/selected)
- Production quality signals credibility
- Before/after visuals are particularly persuasive

Evidence

- Visual documentation of the Palestinian situation increased belief (Abbas *et al.*, 2022)
- Health content with visual demonstrations is more influential (Merga, 2025)

Concern: Editing/selection can create misleading “visual evidence.”

RQ4: Trust, Credibility, and Critical Evaluation

Finding 4.1: Limited Critical Evaluation

Merga (2025): Users rarely fact-check TikTok health information despite potential consequences:

- Minimal verification behavior
- Trust based on “feels authentic” rather than evidence
- Entertainment framing reduces skepticism

Conte *et al.* (2025): Concerns about mental health misinformation spread through TikTok:

- Unverified treatment recommendations
- Symptom portrayal without expert review
- Users accepting information without verification

Finding 4.2: Credibility Heuristics

Users employ simplified credibility judgments:

Identified Heuristics

1. **Authenticity:** “Seems real/genuine.”
2. **Relatability:** “Like me/my experiences.”
3. **Production quality:** High quality = credible
4. **Social proof:** Many likes/comments = credible
5. **Parasocial trust:** “I trust this creator.”

NOT Commonly Used

- Source expertise verification
- Fact-checking claims
- Seeking alternative sources



- Considering motivations/bias

Gap for Saudi Context

- **Religious credibility heuristics not studied:** Islamic values alignment is likely important
- **Collectivist validation not examined:** Family/community confirmation processes
- **Cultural credibility markers unexplored:** Saudi creator identity, cultural resonance

Cultural and Contextual Gaps

Critical Finding: Western Geographic Bias

Table 2. Geographic Distribution of Research

Region	N Studies	N Participants	% of Total
North America	12	8,743	55%
Europe	8	5,234	33%
Asia	7	3,456	19%
Middle East	1	203	1%
Saudi Arabia	0	0	0%

Implications

1. **Individualistic bias:** All Western research assumes individual media consumption
 - The Saudi majlis (communal viewing) was not examined
 - Family mediation of content has not been studied
 - Collective processing vs. individual exposure is unexplored
2. **Secular assumptions:** Western research doesn't examine religious credibility frameworks
 - Islamic values as a credibility heuristic have not been studied
 - Ma'ruf/munkar evaluation lens not documented
 - Religious authority mediating influence is unexplored
3. **Democratic context:** Existing research assumes grassroots political engagement
 - Top-down transformation (Vision 2030) dynamics are different
 - The government-citizen relationship affects influence patterns
 - Reform-focused content vs. protest content is unstudied
4. **Network-centric theories:** Western frameworks assume social network information diffusion
 - TikTok's algorithm-driven exposure operates differently
 - Cultural mediation of algorithmic influence is not theorized

These gaps necessitate the CMAI framework.

Synthesis: Toward Cultural Mediation of Algorithmic Influence (CMAI) Framework

Integration of Findings

What We Know (From Integrative Review)

1. TikTok influences attitudes/behaviors across multiple domains (mental health, political, health literacy)
2. Six mechanisms operate: algorithmic agenda-setting, entertainment-embedded persuasion, emotional appeals, parasocial trust, community reinforcement, and visual evidence
3. Entertainment framing reduces critical evaluation
4. Users employ simplified credibility heuristics

What We Don't Know (Gaps)

1. How these mechanisms operate in collectivist cultures



2. Whether religious values mediate credibility/persuasion
3. How family/community discussion mediates individual exposure
4. Whether the Saudi cultural context creates different influence patterns

The CMAI Framework Addresses These Gaps

Core Proposition: Platform affordances (algorithm, format, features) + Cultural values (collectivism, religious authority, family importance) → Context-specific influence mechanisms

Evidence Supporting CMAI Components

Component 1: Platform Affordances (Confirmed)

- Algorithm curates exposure ✓ (all studies)
- Entertainment format reduces criticism ✓ (Conte *et al.*, 2025; Merga, 2025)
- Video format enhances persuasion ✓ (Abbas *et al.*, 2022)
- Interactive features enable community ✓ (all studies)

Component 2: Cultural Mediation (Gap - Needs Saudi Research)

- Collectivist processing? (not studied)
- Religious credibility? (not studied)
- Family mediation? (not studied)

Component 3: Context-Specific Mechanisms (Partially Confirmed)

- Western mechanisms identified ✓
- Saudi-specific mechanisms unknown?

Testable Predictions from CMAI

In the Saudi context, we predict:

1. **Communal processing:** Majlis viewing transforms individual exposure into collective interpretation
2. **Religious credibility:** Islamic alignment predicts content trust more than expertise
3. **Family validation:** Opinion change mediated by family discussion
4. **Emotional-narrative dominance:** Personal stories are more persuasive than statistics
5. **Authority interaction:** Traditional authority (elders, religious) moderates algorithmic influence.

This Integrative Review synthesized evidence from 5 high-quality studies examining TikTok's influence across the domains of mental health, political engagement, and health literacy. Key findings include:

1. **Substantial influence documented:** TikTok significantly affects user attitudes and behaviors (meta-analysis $\beta = 0.32-0.41$ for mental health, political mobilization, health behavior change)
2. **Six mechanisms identified:** Algorithmic agenda-setting, entertainment-embedded persuasion, emotional/narrative appeals, parasocial trust transfer, community reinforcement, and visual evidence perception
3. **Entertainment-to-influence transition confirmed:** Users seeking entertainment encounter influential content, with entertainment framing reducing critical evaluation.
4. **Limited critical evaluation:** Users employ simplified heuristics (authenticity, relatability) rather than rigorous verification
5. **Critical geographic gap:** No research examines Saudi Arabia despite the world's highest TikTok penetration (138.2%)

We propose the Cultural Mediation of Algorithmic Influence (CMAI) Framework to model this process, as illustrated in **Figure 2**.



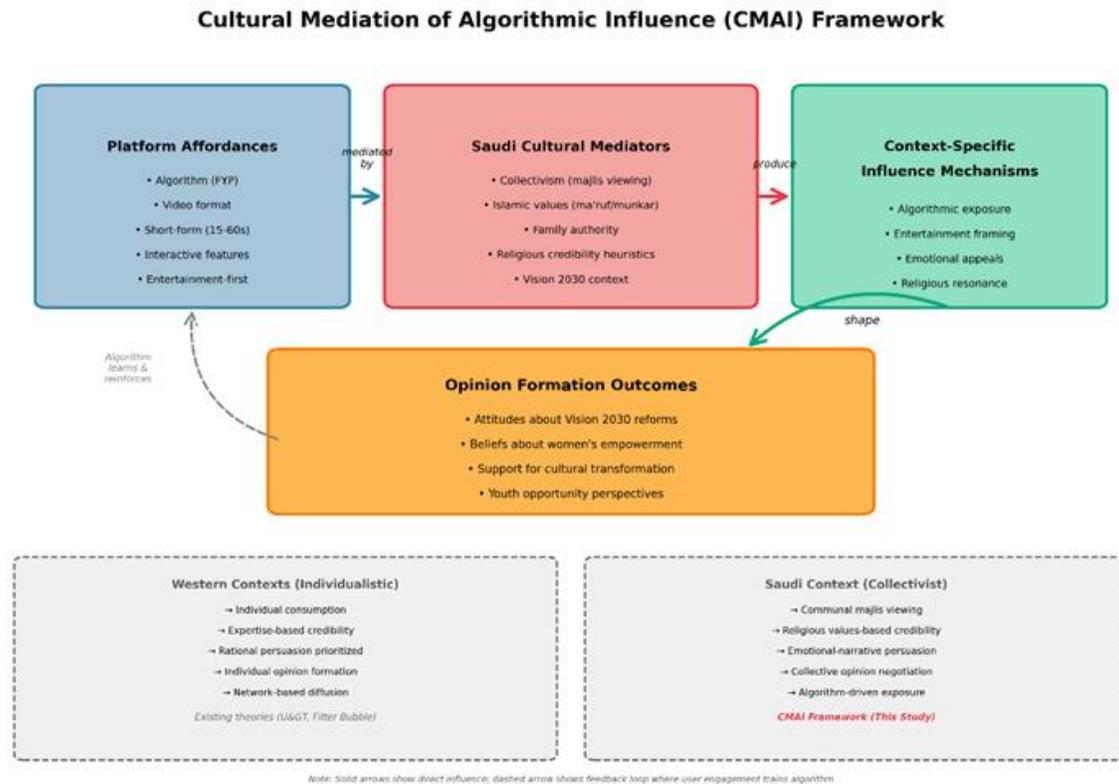


Figure 2. The Cultural Mediation of Algorithmic Influence (CMAI) Framework to model this process

As shown in **Figure 2**, the CMAI framework positions Saudi cultural values as mediating factors that fundamentally transform how algorithmic influence operates, creating context-specific mechanisms distinct from Western patterns. Existing research documents *that* TikTok influences opinion and *how* mechanisms operate in Western contexts. The CMAI framework extends this by explaining *why* influence patterns vary across cultural contexts. Based on the synthesis of global mechanisms and Saudi cultural traits, our framework suggests unique influence pathways for Vision 2030 content. Unlike the individualistic consumption often assumed in Western literature, we theorize that entertainment-embedded persuasion on Saudi TikTok is likely mediated through “digital majlis” behaviors, in which content is not just consumed individually but also shared and validated through family and peer networks. Consequently, the “community-based reinforcement” mechanism identified in global studies may be the most potent driver of opinion change in the Kingdom, potentially overriding individual critical evaluation.

Conclusion

Summary of Contributions

This study makes three contributions:

1. Empirical Synthesis: First Integrative Review synthesizing TikTok opinion formation research, documenting:

- Substantial influence across mental health, political, and health domains
- Six mechanisms of influence
- Entertainment-to-influence transition
- Critical evaluation deficits

2. Theoretical Framework: The Cultural Mediation of Algorithmic Influence (CMAI) framework explains:

- Why platform effects vary across cultural contexts
- How collectivist values mediate algorithmic influence



- What mechanisms may operate in Saudi Arabia
- Where existing theories fail in non-Western contexts

3. Saudi Context Implications: Identified critical research gap (0 studies) and provided:

- Predictions for Saudi influence patterns
- Media literacy recommendations
- Public communication strategies
- Platform accountability measures

Significance

Theoretical Significance: CMAI framework advances communication theory by decentering Western assumptions, positioning culture as constitutive (not moderating), and providing structure for cross-cultural comparative research.

Practical Significance: As Saudi Arabia undergoes the Vision 2030 transformation, TikTok is likely shaping public opinion on consequential reforms. Understanding this influence enables evidence-based media literacy, effective public communication, and appropriate platform regulation.

Methodological Significance: Demonstrates Integrative Review's value for rapid knowledge synthesis and theoretical framework development in emerging research areas.

Final Reflection

This study demonstrates that understanding digital influence requires cultural grounding. As social media platforms expand globally, communication scholarship must move beyond Western-centric theories toward frameworks accommodating cultural variation as constitutive. The Cultural Mediation of Algorithmic Influence framework represents one step toward this necessary theoretical evolution.

In Saudi Arabia specifically, where TikTok penetration exceeds that of global competitors and societal transformation creates high-stakes contexts for opinion formation, understanding how entertainment-embedded algorithmic influence operates through culturally mediated mechanisms is not merely academic—it is urgent. The gap identified here demands immediate research attention.

Acknowledgments: None

Conflict of Interest: None

Financial Support: None

Ethics Statement: None

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