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# **#Trending News on TikTok: How Content and Topics Impact Audience Engagement**

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## #Trending News on TikTok: How Content and Topics Impact Audience Engagement

### Abstract

TikTok is rapidly becoming a hotspot for news consumption. Recent studies show that TikTok keeps expanding among audiences, with young and older generations increasingly using the short-video sharing platform to acquire their news. This phenomenon has not gone unnoticed by journalists and those in the news industry. Like their peers worldwide, Dutch media has embraced TikTok as an addition to their online presence over the last few years. Yet how successful these efforts have been remains unclear. Thus, this paper aims to explore how the content and topic of news-based TikTok posts impact audience engagement on the platform. To achieve this, I gathered and analysed 75 TikTok posts from two Dutch media organisations: RTL Nieuws and NOS Stories. Drawing from statistical tests, I aimed to find correlations between a post's content elements, topic and descriptive information regarding audience engagement, such as likes, comments, shares, and more. The results of this study indicate that neither content nor topics are predictors of audience engagement for these two Dutch media organisations on TikTok. Additionally, the results show that the Dutch media does not make its content "TikTok-ready," as they scarcely (possibly unintentionally) utilise any of the elements required to become trending on the platform. Nonetheless, these observations carry important implications concerning TikTok's role in news content distribution and audience engagement.

### Introduction

Content and topics are central, although vary per platform, to the success and functioning of social media platforms (Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021; Aldous et al., 2019). Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat allow users to use the digital stages to express their feelings and ideas about a news topic (Dogan et al., 2020). In doing so, they also allow users to create connections between groups of people (Kaye et al., 2022). Users cannot only share their own feelings but also reflect on others' by liking, commenting, or sharing. In turn, the type of content produced by users helps drive engagement and interaction on these platforms, which is instrumental in increasing advertising revenue (Yoon & Kim, 2019).

Users produce, consume and overall engage with content by relying on the different affordances on these platforms. Each of these different affordances has a specific meaning to them. This is noticeable when pressing "like" on a video, as this has a deeper value than just "liking" that video (Bucher & Helmond, 2018). The button carries the name "like," but can mean a variety of other interpretations, such as having respect for someone or finding a post humorous. In doing so, users can express and communicate their feelings towards a post, without explicitly saying how they feel about it. Features are 'communicational actors' meaning that they "produce meanings and meaningfulness" (Langlois, 2014, p. 52). A feature, like a heart-shaped button, is not just a feature. The symbols and their connotations matter and "shows how features are objects of intense feelings" (Bucher & Helmond, 2018, p. 2). The buttons mediate, communicate, or relate to different affordances.

As platforms became the "dominant infrastructural and economic model of the social web" (Helmond, 2015, p. 1), redefining "online participatory culture" on their way (Jenkins, 2006), organisations and individuals using this infrastructure must adopt its underlying

practices (Schreiner et al., 2021). This involves not only understanding how to engage users through content but also integrating these practices into their strategic approach to leverage the platform's full potential for connectivity and interaction. Chief among these organisations are media outlets. Since the 2010s, news organisations have used social media platforms to generate website traffic and increase advertising revenue (Tandoc, 2014). In the 2020s, social media platforms have become a primary source for consuming (online) news, exceeding news outlets' stands and search engines, especially with young audiences (Hendrickx, 2023; Verstappen & Ogenhaffen, 2023).

Newcomer TikTok has become the go-to and fastest-growing social platform, due to its addictive algorithm that provides a constant stream of short, entertaining videos (Newman, 2022). TikTok is the first short-video platform to successfully grow "into an international mainstream operation whose influence has been able to rival that of major Silicon Valley technology companies such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube" (Kaye et al., 2022, p. 7).

Before TikTok, there was Musical.ly, a platform popular with preteen children. The more integrated it became into their daily lives, the more older generations got involved by gatekeeping the platform (Savic, 2021). This means new social groups were introduced, and new meaning was given to TikTok by tailoring content to fit these new audiences. Not only did TikTok offer a distraction from the COVID-19 pandemic, but this event and other socially heavy topics such as Black Lives Matter and the war in Ukraine "have helped make news a much bigger part of the mix" of content on TikTok (Newman, 2022, p. 3). In 2021, the Reuters Digital News Report showed that social media platforms have become the primary source of news online (Newman et al., 2021). For TikTok this is partly due to additional changes introduced to the platform over the years. Firstly, by enabling longer videos lengths up to 10 minutes, creators can go deeper into detail about news topic than they could when the video's where 15 – 60 seconds long (Cerullo, 2024). Secondly, the promotion of live streams has also driven news publishers toward the platform since it is becoming similar to other live-streaming platforms like Twitch, where users can pay for access to better content. These tactics pave the way for monetisation in the future, making the platform more attractive for professional organisations. Even though, news providers have become present on TikTok and it is a hotspot for newsgathering, this does not mean the news-based content is necessarily consumed from official news organisations as it often stems from influencers, activist, or ordinary users (Newman, 2022).

Other studies found that news topics, that are emotionally loaded generate a lot of engagement (Schreiner et al., 2021). Meaning that high-arousal videos, both positive and negative, are shared twice as often as non-arousal videos. High-arousal videos refer to topics evoking a strong emotional reaction. Indicating that news outlets would benefit from creating videos centralising news topics that evoke any sort of emotion to increase their audience engagement. Since most research regarding social media has strictly looked at older platforms such as Facebook and X/Twitter, this leaves room for new academic studies concerning TikTok (Hase et al., 2023).

The rise of TikTok has not only forced news media to use the platform as a new way to bring journalism closer to its users, but the occurrence also forces scholars to dedicate attention to the platform (Kaye et al., 2022; Vázquez-Herrero, Negreira-Rey, & López-García, 2022). This response to TikTok is part of a broader trend, "namely, that more journalism in the future will be consumed in new formats, using new technology, and within contexts that may seem unthinkable today" (Newman, 2022, p. 31). Therefore, this paper

explores the elements of TikTok posts that encourage users to engage with them. In doing so, the study aims to fill the gap on how news outlets should adapt their content to ensure their news-based videos will fit within the trending landscape of TikTok and resonate with the audience.

Firstly, a content analysis will identify which content elements and topics are implemented within the TikTok posts. 75 TikToks from the Dutch news organisations RTL Nieuws and NOS Stories will be analysed. Secondly, through ANOVA testing, the discovered topics will be compared to audience engagement variables, such as comments, likes and shares, to find how content elements and topics relate to this engagement. Hence, this study aims to answer the question: How does the type of content and topics of news-based TikToks impact audience engagement?

## **Literature Review**

### **News Must Be Trending**

News outlets have found themselves in a new infrastructure where they are in a continuous competition mode, battling all social media producers for the attention of a very fragmented audience (Dodds et al., 2023; Lamot, 2022). It is essential to understand that news only makes up a small part of all available content on social, making it non-exclusively as users are not restricted to solely consume news content. Social media is a mixture of personal social information, entertainment, and (political) news. This increases the difficulty of gaining audience engagement online and causes constant competition with every bit of information available on the platforms, whether its news, entertainment, or personal information. Users tend to habitually “snack” the news, always looking for something better to consume (Anter & Kümpel, 2023; Kümpel, 2022). Making it important for an online news channel, regardless of the platform, to get on the audience’s radar or, like they say on TikTok, become trending.

Social media sites rely on crowdsourced recommendations called “Trending Topics” to identify important events and news stories, which they then prominently display on their home pages to reach a large audience (Chakraborty et al., 2017). By pushing these Trending Topics to the audiences, the algorithm has become powerful in selecting and ordering the news topics. This also sparked discussion about the role of the algorithm as it might promote “fake news” online (Carlson, 2018). Making the audience target to find themselves in a “filter bubble,” resulting in an algorithm that decides what information the audience consumes (Ross Arguedas et al., 2022).

Traditionally, journalists and editors held the power to select and produce news. Their judgement regarding the newsworthiness of an event is subject to the journalist’s opinion. Their beliefs decide what news moves forward into the production and distribution processes (Russell, 2019; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). The gatekeeping theory can be defined as “the process of selecting, writing, editing, positioning, scheduling, repeating and otherwise massaging information to become news” (Shoemaker et al., 2008, p. 73). The theory suggests that journalists have full power. Nonetheless, the audience seems to directly influence the gatekeeping as journalists provide news they think the audience wants to consume (Tandoc, 2014). Chakraborty et al. (2017) note that social media users decide what the trends are due to the fact that their input influences the algorithm. Thus, affecting what topics become trending on the platforms. Additionally, users seem sensitive to popularity cues, as they

motivate them to read about current events. This results from their desire to interact and be exposed to information others share (Boczkowski et al., 2018). Users turn to social media to learn about their social environment based on what their friends and family interact with or what is recommended by popularity cues (Kümpel, 2022). The primary takeaway from this is that users decide what topics become trending. Their engagement behaviour (commenting, liking and sharing) decides what type of content and topics the algorithm prioritizes and determines what Trending Topics become featured on the homepages of social media platforms (Carlson, 2018).

Additionally, the concept of gatekeeping is connected to news values in the sense that they help journalists and editors determine when an event is newsworthy. Nevertheless, the meaning of news values have been affected by the upcoming of digital news (Park & Kaye, 2023, p. 636). Social media has created an environment in which some values matter more than others. In 2017, Harcup and O'Neill revisited these news values by adding social media into the mix. They found that news stories must follow the values "exclusivity, bad news, conflict, surprise, audio-visual, shareability, entertainment, drama, follow-up, the power elite, relevance, magnitude, celebrity, good news, and news organisation's agenda" (Harcup & O'Neill, 2017, p. 1482). Some news outlets and journalists adjust their content to the needs and wishes of the audience (Park & Kaye, 2023), and what is trending online reflects the audience's preference (Amoroso et al., 2018). Additionally, not every topic lends itself to gaining media attention as they influence the public agenda. The ones that do have a high level of shareability, due to their newsworthiness, rapidly diffuse through the social media networks, also known as "going viral". Not only do specific topics help a news item trend online, but news content that evokes high-arousal positive or negative emotions is also expected to go viral online (Park & Kaye, 2023).

When newsrooms are looking to become trending, they are not only restricted to dealing with Trending Topics and news values (Carlson, 2018; Chakraborty et al., 2017), but outlets also have to respond to the limited attention span of the users (An & Kwak, 2017). The average attention span is merely 2.38 days, according to An and Kwak (2017), meaning that what the audience finds important today is not trending anymore the day after tomorrow. The limited attention on social media forces news outlets to jump onto Trending Topics right away as if it triggers an "alarm" (Boydston, 2013). If not caught on time, they are too late to still be relevant or trending. It is no longer important to be the "first with the news". It had become fundamental to "make the news go viral" (Park & Kaye, 2023). Meaning it is not a question of breaking the news anymore but rather being part of that viral stream of information.

All these elements of becoming trending, like Trending Topics, news values, and attention, are subject to the specific platform they utilise. This brings us to the concept of platformization of the news. Nowadays, leading international outlets have embraced their active presence on platforms, offering users tailored news content according to specific platform logic (Hendrickx, 2023; Anter, 2023). This means that news outlets select, adapt, and produce news to be pushed forward by the platforms (Hase et al., 2023). According to Hase et al. (2023), social media logic differs from the previously dominant mass media logic. While the latter spread the media's discourse outside of its own spaces, media must align with the logic of a platform to distribute their discourse (van Dijck & Poell, 2013). The concept of mass media logic assumes one cohesive media logic, that is adapted by every medium.

However, it is important to note that while some concepts of mass media logic apply to every medium, each has its own individual “code of interpretation, style, and grammar” (Tsurriel et al., 2021, p. 2). The two types of logic differ mainly in the way they utilise affordances on their news websites or social media platforms. Affordances refer to all possible actions (e.g. liking, commenting, following, posting, or sharing) or features of a platform (e.g. post’s format, algorithm, or in-app editing) (Bucher & Helmond, 2018).

Van Dijck and Poell (2013) characterised the concept of social media logic by four dimensions: connectivity, datafication, programmability, and popularity. They explain *connectivity* as link between users-activity, the content and advertisers (Tsurriel et al., 2021; van Dijck & Poell, 2013). *Datafication* refers to the use of metadata and data becoming a product that predicts user’s needs and wishes. Next, *programmability* explains the shift from the human editorial process with mass media logic, to an automatic process where algorithms decide which content is pushed to the user. Lastly, when considering *popularity*, the two strategies are less abrasive and rather complement each other. Both logics pursue the public’s attention but differ in their method to do so. According to Tsurriel et al. (2021) did mass media enjoy their “power to setting the public agenda”, whereas social media promises that “all users would be equally capable of engaging public attention” (Tsurriel et al., 2021, p. 4). As social media developed, they weaponised their capability to popularise the content whilst manipulating it at the same time, bringing the logic closer to that of mass media in the past. Because of this, van Dijck and Poell (2013) argue that the two logics are still intertwined regardless of their different ways of utilising affordances on their news websites or social media platforms (Hase et al., 2023; van Dijck & Poell, 2013; Tsurriel et al., 2021).

To complicate things further, social media logic in itself differs between platforms. The platforms Instagram and TikTok take advantage of visual content since the channels are centred around this type of content. Whereas Facebook is more algorithmically based. Overall, it can be said that distributing and producing visual content has a strategic advantage on social media (Hase et al., 2023). Journalists can, but are not restricted to, follow social media logic to adjust to platformization. This can be done either in the selection process or the adaptation process of the news. It is implied that this is done by the distribution of soft news on social media platforms. This entails journalists change existing stories to fit the platform’s logic (Hase et al., 2023). When they choose to do so, not only the content should be adapted, but also the topics discussed should fit what is trending on the platform (Carlson, 2018; Chakraborty et al., 2017).

In the past, specific types of news topics have always been an indicator of success online (García-Perdomo et al., 2018). Stories regarding human interest, conflict and controversy seem to be shared among audiences on both Facebook and X/Twitter. The idea that bad news generates more audience engagement is not born with the upbringing of social media platforms. Nevertheless, these types of topics do seem to have the effect of being more shareable on these platforms (Bright, 2016). Bright does elaborate on the fact that topic sharing is highly dependent on the platform. Topics regarding human interest are less popular on LinkedIn and GooglePlus than it is on Facebook, while the opposite is true for stories concerning professionalism, like economics. Additionally, stories concerning soft news seem to boost content on Facebook recommendations. Topic combinations of both hard and soft news are even more significant for Facebook, as these show a positive effect in engagement (García-Perdomo et al., 2018).

The way news content has been produced and consumed has always developed with technology. Where previously, the media products were adapted to fit cable television, we now adapt them to fit the wishes of the news consumer on social media. Online news consumers seem to prefer lighter news topics and ways of communication (Larsson, 2018; Hendrickx, 2023). Something that even differs per platform, as Facebook's feed is built around the recommendation of news and Instagram's is not. Since TikTok and Instagram are becoming more relevant for news consumption (Anter, 2023), it is essential to adapt to this development by applying these lighter methods of communication (Larsson, 2018). However, studies have also shown that this does not necessarily mean only discussing soft news, like what had been true for Facebook, but instead using different approaches per platform (Anter, 2023; García-Perdomo et al., 2018; Hendrickx, 2023). TikTok is believed to be hosting videos about celebrities, education, public health, and social news items. While on the contrary, users also desire information and are critical of the content, thus making the platform suitable for journalists (Negreira-Rey et al., 2022). Yet, making it unclear what type of topics thrive on the platform; are these news items regarding easy topics or do users prefer critical and informative items? Whether the production and distribution of soft news on TikTok is profitable or shows any effect is yet to be proven.

The trend towards platformization can be seen due to the active presence of news companies and their news distribution on one or more social media platforms (Verstappen & Opgenhaffen, 2023). With platformization, scholars acknowledged various problems. Not only does the trend make newsrooms depend on social media channels, but adapting news to fit the logic of a particular platform, also partly sacrifices journalistic routines, practices, and standards (Verstappen & Opgenhaffen, 2023; Anter, 2023). The impact of social media logic forces journalists and outlets to adapt their content and its presentation to the user's demands and requirements of individual platforms, pressuring them to promote themselves online (Degen et al., 2024). This interaction can best be achieved by adapting to the platform's logic. As stated before, trending elements and a platform's logic help newsroom create content that fits a specific platform and its audience (Carlson, 2018; Hase et al., 2023). This study will continue by focussing on TikTok and its most essential characteristics, namely the content and topics of a news item.

### **TikTok Logic Based on Content**

Hase et al. (2023) argue that research on the platformization of news has primarily focused on Facebook rather than other platforms, leaving a gap regarding the logic of newer platforms like Instagram and TikTok. These platforms both encounter high levels of visuality and revolve mainly around visuals, varying from Facebook. While Instagram is known chiefly for sharing photos and videos, TikTok's primary purpose is creating videos (Hase et al., 2023). Due to its merging with its no longer existing predecessor, Musical.ly, the characteristics of short videos and lip-syncing to music became vital in the popularity of TikTok (Kaye et al., 2022; Vázquez-Herrero, Negreira-Rey, & López-García, 2022). Additionally, TikTok's algorithmic curation is high, and its feed does not offer chronologically sorted videos. Instead, the platform presents videos personally curated for the individual user (Anter, 2023; Hase et al., 2023). The videos appear on the "For You" page, which can be navigated with a simple swipe. This consumption dynamic leads users to consume content for a lengthy period on the platform, similar to how the YouTube

recommendation algorithm extends user's viewing time (Van Es, 2020; Vázquez-Herrero, Negreira-Rey, & López-García, 2022).

Unlike other platforms, TikTok's "For You" page is not only composed of users' personal preferences but also of trends, making its recommendation algorithm more intense. Where TikTok excels in the affordances of visuality and the algorithm, it lacks hypertextuality and interactivity (Hase et al., 2023). As we know, TikTok's main objective is to create short videos that stimulate a constant flow of content that resonates with users' personal taste (Newman, 2022). Unlike other platforms, TikTok does offer the option to implement hyperlinks in the videos or captions. Interactivity can only be achieved by using the like button, commenting, or privately saving and sharing. Dissimilar to Facebook, TikTok does not offer the option to share publicly due to copyright regulations (Kaye et al., 2022; Hase et al., 2023). Instead, users can "repost" a video through the creative feature Duet or Stitch. Duetting, which stems from musical.ly, gives users an innovative way to produce collaborative content and facilitates viral trends on the app (Kaye et al., 2022; Savic, 2021). Typically, by having two videos play simultaneously. With the Duet feature, users can not add audio to the original video they are duetting, thus minimizing the interactivity on the app. Along with this element, TikTok published the React feature, allowing users to add audio. This feature is later replaced by its new version: Stitch. A "stitched" video enables users to react to a specific part of a TikTok, placing it at the beginning of the video. Users can then add their own visual and audio content to someone else's video. This differs from sharing privately (to friends) or publicly like on your personal Facebook page. The Duet and Stitch features make co-creation another important aspect of the platform. Overall, TikTok's logic can best be described as "brand-building," where users can consume news in a (more) passive way. TikTok's algorithm pushes engaging (or trending) content toward the audience, increasing brand awareness and transferring users to the news media's website (Hase et al., 2023). However, users do not act entirely passive on the platform as their activities, such as liking, sharing, and commenting, shape their own algorithmic feed (Kaye et al., 2022). Audiences scroll through the "For You" and train the algorithm simply by pressing "like" on a video (Burgess & Kaye, 2021).

These elements of TikTok's logic, such as short videos, algorithmic recommendation feeds, or collaborative content creation, can be explained as essential affordances of the platform. The concept of affordances dates back to 1988 and has evolved to comprehend various interpretations and explanations over time (Bucher & Helmond, 2018). To define affordances for social media, Ronzhyn et al. (2023) analysed various definitions from Gibson's original concept in 1988 to classifications from the current century. By first established what affordances are and are not, they define the concept as: "Social media affordances are the perceived actual or imagined properties of social media, emerging through the relation of technological, social, and contextual, that enable and constrain specific uses of the platforms" (Ronzhyn et al., 2023, p. 3.178). With the rise of social media technology and the ubiquity of social network websites, the theory of affordances has proliferated with studies focussing on social media. Today, scholars utilise the concept as a theoretical framework for studying the effects of social media on society (Ronzhyn et al., 2023). The main reason for using the concept of affordances in social media studies is that it helps recognise and underline the role and actions of humans utilizing technology, making it

possible to research the effects of social media and how actors and their context shape it (Ronzhyn et al., 2023).

Schreiner et al. (2021) found that content characteristics have a positive relation to engagement. According to them “the appeal of a social media post and high media richness (e.g., the inclusion of components such as pictures or videos) can have a positive effect on engagement behaviours. Yet, these results are often not conclusive and highly context dependent” (Schreiner et al., 2021, p. 339). Content characteristics (or elements), including “distinctive size, shape, and emotional stimulation,” determine a user’s perception and attention (Yoon & Kim, 2019, p. 609). Bringing us to the influence of topics. Yoon and Kim (2019) argue that arousal images in a thumbnail, have a positive effect on the video selection. This implies that emotional topics and their images influence the actions of the user. Another content characteristic subject to research, is the content’s format. Which also influence the ways users interact with the content (Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021). For example, a “photo” will generate significantly more likes than comments. This makes it a less fitted format for news outlets looking for comments, feedback, or a conversation from the audience. It must be noted that the study looks at the photo format instead of videos, again leaving a gap for video content. Since TikTok is a video-sharing platform, this study will seek to find similar findings regarding videos. Lastly, Shahbaznezhad et al. (2021) state that engagement is highly platform-dependent. For instance, Facebook’s environment provokes users to actively engage by commenting on posts. Whereas Instagram users tend to like posts more due to the “double tap” feature. Not only does the type of engagement differ per platform, but the environments also influence either more positive comments (on Instagram) or negative engagement (on Facebook). What this means for TikTok is yet to be discovered, as the researcher only examined Facebook and Instagram (Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021).

Knowing this, the question of what specific elements move the audience to (likely) engage with this online news content arises. Considering content elements and topics, this paper will aim to find how these factors influence audience engagement on the social media platform TikTok. As expected, based on the literature discussed in this chapter, newsrooms change their content according to social media logic. However, no studies have examined whether this trend is relevant for TikTok. This research aims to find whether adapting online news content to TikTok logic impacts audience engagement as expected. The research question on hand is:

*RQ: How does the type of content and topics of news-based TikToks impact audience engagement?*

## **Method**

As Kaye et al. (2022) argued, TikTok’s mainstreaming by the news media forces scholars to research the platform. To find an answer to the research question at hand, a content analysis has been performed. This analysis was shaped based on previous research in similar studies, in doing so a matrix was created for this and another study, happening simultaneously at Leiden University (see <http://tiny.cc/ge06yz>). The matrix evaluated fourteen key elements, of which seven are divided into sixteen sub-elements, to determine the effects of the content elements on; audience engagement based on views, likes, comments,

saves and shares. Manual coding decided what elements could be identified in the content from two major Dutch news outlets. For this research, the term TikTok post is used to identify one TikTok video from the sample. This is because the term anticipates all different elements, subject to analysing, within the post where (archival) video content could be an element in itself. These elements include text, people, trends, news values, and background. Most of these are identified by the fact whether they are present or not. For the element news values, the values by Harcup and O'Neill (2017) were taken in account. The element was separated into a primary and secondary topic; these could be coded based on the news values, including exclusivity, conflict, follow-up, relevance, bad news, good news, surprise, shareability, entertainment, drama, the power elite, magnitude, celebrity, and news organisation's agenda (Harcup & O'Neill, 2017). The value of audiovisuals was left out since it is given that all TikTok products are audiovisual. An elaborate explanation of the coding aspects of all elements can be found in the explanatory matrix (see Appendix A). Not only did I gather data regarding the content and topic, but descriptive variables were collected. This means that data on audience engagement, as well as informative data, is listed. Here, I collected data on the amounts of likes, comments, views, saves, and shares. Not only that, but I also took notice of the length of posts, as well as the title and publication date. The latter two helped indicate the specific posts analysed for this research.

This research aimed to examine the content elements that help trend a TikTok post. The method of content analysis helps scholars map content categories or themes in the information environment and uncover important content attributes. Like in content analysis concerning text, a visual content analysis helps researchers quantify patterns and coverage of content attributes, categories, or themes on a large scale (Peng et al., 2023). To research social media effects, a large scale description (see Appendix A) of the videos has been conducted. This allows "researchers to describe media use and exposure, identify components and features of visuals that may affect audiences, and detect patterns and generalize across visual contents" (Peng et al., 2023, pp. 3–4).

I also coded the main topics of the news item discussed in the post. This was done manually by identifying in detail what the post is about. After all main topics had been gathered, a second round of coding determined in what overarching theme the topics fit. These themes were created based on the first coded list of topics. In doing so, ten themes were categorised and elaborated upon by applying an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to find any significant between the themes and audience engagement (likes, comments, views, saves, and shares). In doing this, I aimed to find any correlation between the topics and audience engagement. Using the statistic program R, the data was analysed.

The sample consists of the most recent 40 (when available) TikTok posts published by NOS Stories and RTL Nieuws from the day of retrieval (April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2024). These two Dutch outlets were chosen for three reasons. Firstly, the news outlet NOS is a Dutch public news provider. This means NOS is broadcasted on the Nederlandse Publieke Omroep (NPO), the Dutch public television channels. RTL Nieuws is the news program from the commercial broadcaster RTL. Both the NPO and RTL are the two most-watched channels on Dutch television in 2023, according to the digital news report (Lauf & Schut, 2023). Meaning, that the content posted on the platform can be considered as news. I was also curious to see if the two differ based on the fact that one is a public channel, and the other is a commercial company. Since publishing on TikTok barely generates any revenue, their motives will likely

impact brand presence with the younger audience (Vázquez-Herrero, Negreira-Rey, & Sixto-García, 2022). Where the NOS does not need to generate revenue, RTL Nieuws is a commercial company and is thus looking to make a profit. However, does this impact the way they utilise TikTok or their strategy on the platform?

Since this research focused on TikTok posts (broadly visual content), the content was manually analysed and coded (Koetsenruijter & Van Hout, 2018). As mentioned before, the matrix has been built especially for this and another study conducted at Leiden University. Intercoder reliability (ICR) has guaranteed the validity and consistency of the method. This has been executed by two coders who individually analysed ten TikTok posts from NOS Stories and compared the results. ICR has revealed a 91,33% agreement, signifying that both coders perceived the exploratory matrix correctly.

## Results

A total of 75 TikTok posts have been analysed. Due to the lack of available TikToks on the retrieval day, April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2024, from RTL Nieuws, 43% ( $N=32$ ) of the data comes from this medium. The remaining 57% ( $N=43$ ) of the data from NOS Stories. This difference stems from the longevity of the accounts. All posts analysed have at least one number of interactions for each dependent variable (likes, comments, views, saves, and shares). The posts have been uploaded between November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2023, and to April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2024. The views vary between 1224 to 1,3 million, the number of likes lies between 45 and 85.900, and the comments range from 1 to 2776. Noticeably, commenting happens less frequently than liking and viewing. When it comes to saving videos on the platform, these numbers differ from 2 to 7836 times. Lastly, a post varies from 1 to 16,100 shares. Not only where these dependent variables were taken in account, but the length of the videos was also noted. These diverge from just 14 seconds up to 1 minute and 47 seconds. In general, all videos tend to be very short with even 40% being under 60 seconds. Overall, RTL has shorter videos (46,88%) than NOS, where 39,53% of the videos are below 60 seconds long. Next, I calculated the engagement rate for both media organisations. The formula below is used to find this rate.

$$Engagement\ Rate = \frac{Total\ Engagements}{Total\ Impressions} \times 100\%$$

To find the number of total engagements, I added the variables likes, comments, saves, and shared. This number was divided by the total amount of impressions (views). For RTL, this gives an engagement rate of 7,65%; for NOS, the rate is 6,66%. Finally, the videos all had a precise main topic. The main topics were divided into themes, because the large quantity of main topics complicated finding significance. In doing so, I aimed to find correlations between the themes and descriptive variables. An overview of the main topics, themes and an indicator to the specific TikTok have been visualised in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
*Theme and Topics Overview*

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Specific topics and TikTok indication codes</b>	<b>Coded when</b>
Lifestyle	Sport (R1, N25, N33), Physical health (R2), Events/party (R6, R9, R10, N10, N30), Series/movies (R31), Celebrity (N8, N11, N19, N43), Nutrition/food concerns (N16), Fashion (N23)	Coded Lifestyle when identifying topics that impact everyday activities or subjects.
Self-Health and Well-being	Physical health (R2), Substance-related (N3, N12), Sexual health (R19, N22), Mental health (R25), Nutrition/food concerns (N16), Health system (R13)	Coded Health and Well-being when identifying topics concerning physical and mental health issues, as well as nutrition-concerned topics.
News organization' s Agenda	Self-marketing (R3, R32)	Coded News organization' s Agenda when the posts promotes a news organisations' own products, like podcasts, television broadcasting or content other online platforms.
Safety and Security	Transport safety (R4, R8, N4, N7, N15, N21, N32, N41), Online safety (R14, R24, N5, N13), Terrorism (N6, N14), Safety Protocols (N20)	Coded Safety and Security when identifying topics concerning the physical and online safety of people.
Social and Political Issues	Harassment (R5, R7), Israel–Hamas war (R4, R26, N9, N42), Housing (R15, R27, N27, N40), War conflicts (R17, R20, R21), Human rights (N17, N35), Racism (N28), Governance and Civic Matters (R28, R29, R30, N31, N38)	Coded Social and Political Issues when the topic refers to situations in the world that receive attention from both/either society or politic parties.
Personal Development and Career	Educational concerns (R11, N1, N37), Employment concerns (R16, N2)	Coded Personal Development and Career when the topic refer to matters influencing the people' s personal lives, due to reasoning beyond their own actions like pay raises.
Legal and Law Enforcement	Legal and Enforcement Matters (R12, N26)	Coded Legal and Law Enforcement when topic refer to any matter regarding law enforcement, like police or court issues.
Financial Concerns	Financial concerns (R18, R23, N29, N34)	Coded Financial Concerns when the topic refers to any money related issues, this can be either in a positive or negative manner like inflation.
Natural Occurrences	Natural occurrences (R22, N24, N36, N39)	Coded Natural Occurrences when topics regarding natural happenings or disasters can be identified like a solar eclipse or hurricane.
Technology and Innovation	AI (N18)	Coded Technology and Innovation when topics can be identified that discuss innovations and technologies than influence the people' s (daily) lives.

### Content Is Not King

From the posts collected, all have at least one content element and a main topic identified. The least frequent content element in the sample is the use of emojis in the video, which only occurred once (1,33%) in a video from RTL Nieuws and never in the videos of NOS. The same is true for the use of act/humour. However, emojis are used more frequently in the caption of a video. This appeared in 14,67% of the posts, in 9,38% of the TikToks from RTL emojis were found in the caption and in 18,60% of the NOS posts. Another content element that was noticed is the use of trends. RTL only used trends in 15,63% of the posts; 6,25% of the videos have visual trends, and 9,38% have audio trends. For NOS, the use is lower, as they never applied visual trends and audio trends appeared in 6,98% of their posts.

On the contrary, some elements were frequently present. Starting with the use of music, in 90,67% of the posts, the news organisations used music in the background. In regard to the trending audience discussed before, this type of music was notable when discussing a news item revolving around celebrities. An example is the use of Joost Klein's song Europapa in various videos from RTL (see *videos R9* and *R10*); the song was both the news item as a trending audio on TikTok at the time of posting. Overall, RTL used music in 84,38% of their posts, while NOS used it in 95,35% of the TikToks. The next frequent content element was the use of hashtags in the caption. Both media make use of hashtags in all (with one exception for RTL) posts. The same is true for text in the captions. Potentially, signifying that their only strategy is to vastly make use of captions.

Both used a presenter; however, RTL visually placed the presenter in the video (87,5%), while NOS mainly used voice-over (95,35%) for their TikToks. They often used other people in their posts. RTL used experts in 40,63% of their TikToks, and NOS showed experts in 44,19%. Voxpop/layman appeared in half of the RTL posts, while NOS presented them only in 29,91%.

Even though the media organisations overlap quite a bit, the two differed in the use of visual effects (RTL 71,88%, NOS 32,56%) and archival images (RTL 46,88%, NOS 93%). Secondly, the use of Call to Action vary. Where RTL used it in 25% of their videos, NOS only applied the element in 4,65% of their posts. Lastly, RTL used more text in their videos (90,63%) than NOS (25,58%), and they utilised memes/stickers (71,88%) a lot more than NOS (4,65%). Altogether, I can state that while content elements could be identified in all TikToks analysed during this study, no structure in the use or significant strategy can be acknowledged.

### Statistically Not Significant

After the qualitative analysis, the TikToks have been categorised based on their specific topic rather than their news value to better understand of the effects of topics on audience engagement. While the topic has often been an indicator of success in older platforms, this does not seem true for TikTok. The very detailed topics have been divided into ten themes indicating the type of news item discussed in the TikTok video. After the second coding round had been conducted, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was executed. In this, I aimed to find variation between the dependent variables (likes, comments, views, saves, and shares) and the independent variable (themes). Tests were run to analyse the entire sample, as well as RTL's and NOS's individual samples. None of the tests indicating any significant variation between the variables. In these ANOVA tests, I considered the F-value in regard to the P-value to find any statistically significant difference between the group means.

The F-value is the ratio that tells us whether the means of the groups are significantly different from each other. The P-value presents the likelihood of observing the data given that the null hypothesis is true. While analysing the results, I took in account that a small P-value ( $< 0.05$ ) reveals strong evidence against the null hypothesis. Meaning there is a statistically significant difference. A large P-value ( $> 0.05$ ) signifies weak evidence, thus finding no statistical significance.

### **Full Sample**

The results of the several ANOVA tests performed on the full sample of TikToks demonstrate no significant impact. Firstly, the difference between *likes* and *topics*. Here, the test shows an F-value of 0.894 with a P-value of 0.544, indicating no statistically significant between *likes* across different *topics*. Also, no statistical significance was found between comments across the different topics, seeing that the test expresses an F-value of 0.335 and a P-value of 0.968. The same was true for *views* ( $F= 1.122, P= 0.36$ ), *saves* ( $F= 0.673, P= 0.745$ ), and *shares* ( $F= 1.095, P= 0.379$ ) indicating these three groups have no statistical significance across the different topics. Altogether, based on these tests, I can state that the topics have no significant impact on audience engagement.

**Table 2**

*Full Sample ANOVA Table*

Source	Df	Sum Sq	Mean Sq	F-value	P-value
Likes	10	2.814e+09	281440574	0.894	0.544
Comments	10	1163905	116391	0.335	0.968
Views	10	9.50e+11	9.500e+10	1.122	0.36
Saves	10	15132850	1513285	0.673	0.745
Share	10	67716529	6771653	1.095	0.379

### **RTL Nieuws**

To find if the news media's individual used topics have an impact on audience engagement, more ANOVA-tests were run. For RTL, this means that there were eight topics ( $Df= 8$ ) analysed in this test. Like before, I ran tests to find the difference between *likes* and *topics* from the RTL sample. Here, the F-value is 0.591, and the P-value is 0.775. Revealing weak evidence and indicating no significance. Comparable to the results with the full sample, these ANOVA tests also disclose no statistically significant differences as the other dependent variables show no strong evidence against the null hypothesis. For *comments*, the F-value is 0.374 and the P-value is 0.924, again the same is noticeable with *views* ( $F= 0.616, P= 0.756$ ), *saves* ( $F= 0.588, P= 0.778$ ), and *shares* ( $F= 0.617, P= 0.754$ ). Confirming the notion that no significance can be found.

**Table 3**

*RTL Nieuws ANOVA Table*

Source	Df	Sum Sq	Mean Sq	F-value	P-value
Likes	8	2.504e+08	31297266	0.591	0.775
Comments	8	41440	5180	0.374	0.924
Views	8	2.468e+10	3.085e+09	0.616	0.756
Saves	8	7257613	907202	0.588	0.778
Share	8	115797	14475	0.617	0.754

### *NOS Stories*

Lastly, ANOVA tests were run to understand the sample of NOS individually. Again, eight topics ( $Df= 8$ ) were analysed. Again, there have been no indications of a significant difference found in this sample. The tests showed that *likes* ( $F= 0.746, P= 0.651$ ), *comments* ( $F= 0.610, P= 0.736$ ), *views* ( $F= 1.319, P= 0.268$ ) as well as *saves* ( $F= 0.885, P= 0.539$ ) and *shares* ( $F= 1.391, P= 0.236$ ), all exceed the P-value of 0.05 and thus indicating no statistically significant difference. This again proves the topics of NOS Stories do not impact audience engagement. Leaving major implications to be discussed.

**Table 4**

*NOS Stories ANOVA Table*

<i>Source</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>Sum Sq</i>	<i>Mean Sq</i>	<i>F-value</i>	<i>P-value</i>
<i>Likes</i>	8	2.246e+09	280806103	0.746	0.651
<i>Comments</i>	8	2107571	263446	0.610	0.763
<i>Views</i>	8	9.825e+11	1.228e+11	1.319	0.268
<i>Saves</i>	8	16233863	2029233	0.885	0.539
<i>Share</i>	8	100178974	12522372	1.391	0.236

### **Discussion**

This study explored the potential correlations between the content and topics of a TikTok post and its audience engagement. Since the platform is growing to become the newest online hotspot for journalists and newsrooms (Newman, 2022), it is of great importance that we apprehend its working. Nevertheless, research focused solely on TikTok is scarce and rarely centres on content and topics of a news item. This study aimed to fill the gap on how news-based TikToks should apply content and topics to obtain any form of impact on audience engagement. After analysing various correlations between the descriptive variables, such as likes, comments, views, shares, and saves, and the topics of the TikTok posts no correlations can be detected. Based on the sample of this study, it is affirmed that audience engagement on TikTok posts concerning journalistic content from the Dutch news organisations RTL Nieuws and NOS Stories does not depend on content elements or specific topics.

While other scholars claim that newsrooms adapt their journalistic content to fit the logic and affordances of TikTok (Vázquez-Herrero, Negreira-Rey, & López-García, 2022), this research has provided no such evidence. The results rather showed that both RTL Nieuws and NOS Stories used no significant strategy on TikTok, as they casually used content elements for their TikTok posts. Both newsrooms consistently used hashtags and text in the captions of the TikToks as well as a presenter, either on screen or as a voice-over. These were the only content elements structurally used by both media. However, whether this is done intentionally or because it is standard practice is subject to further investigation. Based on these results, I suggest that future research should find the reasoning of media professionals.

Others have also pointed to the fact that the adaption of specific types of topics has been a proven success indicator for ‘older’ social media platforms, at least for Facebook (Lischka, 2021). Suggesting that professionals have a sweet spot for soft news on the platform and adding to the idea that professionals in the field take into account the wishes of the audiences or at least those that they assume the audience has (García-Perdomo et al., 2018). For Facebook, previous research showed that topics regarding human interest, conflict

and controversy are shared more often. Meanwhile, stories about human interest do not resonate on other platforms like LinkedIn. Indicating that topics are very dependent on the platform where the stories are published (Bright, 2016). This study suggests the last statement to be true since no specific topic is statistically significant in relation to audience engagement on TikTok, meaning that the topics found in the analysis do not predict any type of engagement success. While researchers believe that the audience on TikTok wants to consume information on the platform and is critical of it (Negreira-Rey et al., 2022), the results do not support this idea. Neither ‘soft’ themes like lifestyle and personal development nor ‘hard’ themes like social and political issues predict success in any way for Dutch news organisations. This is also denying the notion that TikTok hosts a place for discussing “educational, social, public health, or celebrity videos” (Negreira-Rey et al., 2022, p. 148). While these topics are identified in the research, none of these presumed popular topics show any significance. Which raises the question that if previous literature shows that most online journalism is topic-driven per platform (Anter, 2023; Bright, 2016; García-Perdomo et al., 2018; Hendrickx, 2023), why is TikTok the exception? As we know, various topics drive engagement differently per platform, but does this suggest that the matter is a platform issue? Future studies could explore why topics are not an indicator of success on TikTok.

Additionally, we see that the platform is mainly used by young people (Hendrickx, 2023; Verstappen & Opgenhaffen, 2023). This could also suggest a generational issue, as young people, seek other methods of consuming. Like with other technologies, news content has always adapted to its current innovations (Larsson, 2018). It is possible that with these new social media platforms, online news content must follow along. Whether this assumption is true needs to be investigated in future research.

Lastly, this study carries implications for the future of online journalism. If TikTok is setting new standards in what news items or videos become trending, it is of utter importance that we find what the standards are. In contrast to what I believed, content and topics do not seem to be the “secret recipe” for becoming trending on the platform. There is a chance that the success could be predicted by the characteristics of the account, like the number of followers, moment of publishing or popularity of the organisation outside of the platform. Another possible predictor could be the algorithm of the platform. However, based on the results in this study I can solely say that it is not content, nor topic and further investigation should dive into the accounts’ characteristics and role of the algorithm as indicators of success.

Not only more people but also more news organizations are joining the platform every day, making it the place to be (Dodds et al., 2023). As Newman (2022) noted, this is only a part of a broader trend. Even if TikTok ceases to exist, other platforms, formats and technologies will follow and try to recreate their success. This likely forecast, based on the ban of the platform in the United States (Fung, 2024), forces professionals in journalism to prepare for what is next. The unknowing of the workings and technology behind the platform, as well as its unpredictable character could possibly create professional anxiety in the future. Thus, making research even more urgent at this stage.

This study is not without limitations. Due to the longevity of the RTL Nieuws account, a limited sample could be collected, although a larger sample from NOS Stories has been gathered to account for this. Additionally, because of the many daily uploads from NOS Stories, the data collected comprises approximately one week of news items, increasing the

likelihood of repeating topics. This has been solved by dividing all the main topics into themes.

Based on the results of this study and the following research question: How does the type of content and topics of news-based TikToks impact audience engagement? I can conclude that the type of content and topic do not impact audience engagement on the platform for RTL Nieuws and NOS Stories. What impacts it, or whether the engagement stems from randomness, is subject to further investigation. These results contribute to a better understanding of the workings of TikTok, as we know little about the platform's technology. Nevertheless, other questions remain unanswered and need further investigation. With these results, I can essentially state that content and topics are no predictor of becoming trending on TikTok.

## Conclusion

TikTok is becoming the go-to place for news consumption. Not only young people are active on the platform, but older generations are increasingly joining. In this research, I aimed to find correlations between the use of content elements and topics of a news item on TikTok with audience engagement. I was also looking to find what it is that makes a post trending on the platform and predict success in engagement.

In this study, 75 TikTok posts from the Dutch news organizations RTL Nieuws and NOS Stories have been analysed through a content analysis. Various content elements, as well as topics and descriptive variables of the news have been collected using a matrix created especially for this research. These results were analysed by combining qualitative and quantitative methods. To find any significance between the dependent variables (likes, comments, views, saves, and shares) and the themes found, ANOVA testing has provided insight into the workings of TikTok.

While content elements are often adapted by both news organisations, my results show they do not occur in a clear strategy. The results indicate that these content elements are either based on coincidences or assumptions from professionals in the field. Newsrooms do not take into account the elements that supposedly make TikToks go viral, like trending audio and video formats. Instead, they mainly use text and hashtags in the captions of their posts, a strategy that likely stems from other platforms, but which does not impact engagement on TikTok in any way.

Additionally, the topic of a news item also does not impact audience engagement. This has been a factor of success in past research but seems irrelevant for TikTok. Neither RTL Nieuws' nor NOS Stories' news topics are statistically significant, meaning that they do not influence the dependent variables (likes, comments, views, saves, and shares) of this study. In context, both content elements as topics do not impact audience engagement in any way. While, this has been true for older platforms, TikTok is resetting the standards for online news distribution. It also creates important implications for the future of online journalism.

Future researchers should focus on implications concerning the influence of the platform on news distribution in the future. If success cannot be predicted based on content and topics, then what does predict it? Other research questions that arise include: If topics have always been an indicator of success, why is TikTok the exception? Is this a platform issue? Does the difference between other platforms stem from a generational problem? As we do not fully understand the technology and workings of TikTok, the platform should be an important subject for scholars. Even if TikTok perishes, we need to prepare professionals in

the field for potential similar new platforms trying to reconstruct their success. The unknowing of the workings and unpredictable character of TikTok, possibly creates professional anxiety with journalists and urges scholars to invest in research concerning the platform.

Despite the valuable implications of this paper, it should be noted that this paper focused solely on the two biggest Dutch news broadcasters making the sample limited. Nevertheless, do the results show no possible correlations and no clear strategy adapted by the two organisations, indicating that a bigger sample will give similar results as additional TikTok posts will also not use a strategy.

The research question, “How does the type of content and topics of news-based TikToks impact audience engagement?” can simply be answered by the statement; content and topic do not impact audience engagement on TikTok. No strategy or significant correlations were detected leaving room for major implications regarding the future of online journalism.

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**Appendix A**  
**Explanatory Matrix**

**Table 5**  
*Content Analysis Explanatory Matrix*

Key element	Sub element	Variables	Explanation	Coded when	Specific example (when needed)
<b>Music</b>	Background	Dichotomic	Background music is used by mainstream media as a strategy to express inner thoughts and enhance the communication effect and infectiousness of the content. To reach this effect, symbolic implications and emotional expressions of music are important factors (Li, 2023).	Coded when music is used in the background including music from the TikTok library, original music, and themed music.	
<b>Sound</b>	Sound effect	Dichotomic	Usage of sound effects guide the audience’s attention and feelings (Nicolaou et al., 2019). Since audio is a major element on TikTok (Kaye et al., 2022), ambient sound and sound effects can serve as sources of	Coded when identifying any sound that is not part of the original audio of the video, of the voiceover or of the music. Meaning any sound that was manually added such as cheering, booing, booms, applause, etc.	



<p><b>Filters</b></p>		<p>Dichotomic</p>	<p>Filters are a creative feature that allows users to create a variety of content. These filters can be categorized in various themes. Whereas other platforms offered filters to change appearances, TikTok offers more types and interactivity regarding the filters (Kaye et al., 2022). Filters can also change the colors, saturation, or brightness of the video.</p>	<p>Coded when a filter can be identified as added onto the video during the edit.</p>	 <p>An example of how a filter is used by news media, retrieved from The Washing Post on TikTok, (see <a href="https://vm.tiktok.com/ZIJnxEpvk/">https://vm.tiktok.com/ZIJnxEpvk/</a>).</p>
<p><b>Visual effects</b></p>		<p>Dichotomic</p>	<p>TikTok offers various different edit tools within the app that users can use to add visual effects into their videos. There is the option to change backgrounds with the greenscreen feature , one can insert pictures, stickers, text, subtitles or effects like flashes, fireworks, glitters, etc. in the</p>	<p>Coded when any of the given examples (see explanation) can be identified.</p>	 <p>The greenscreen feature in used this example, retrieved from RTL Nieuws on TikTok (see</p>

			<p>video. There are “duet” and “stitch” features that allows users to react to or incorporate other users’ videos within their own video and there is an option for the user to clone themselves in the video (Kaye et al., 2022).</p>		<p><a href="https://vm.tiktok.com/ZIJnQAYjw/">https://vm.tiktok.com/ZIJnQAYjw/</a>).</p>
<p><b>Hashtags</b></p>		<p>Dichotomic</p>	<p>Hashtags are important factors for visibility and virality of content. They are a way of positioning content and reaching higher levels of circulation (Kaye et al., 2022; Vázquez-Herrero, Negreira-Rey, &amp; López-García, 2022).</p>	<p>Coded when identifying any text with the # symbol in front of it.</p>	 <p>See the blue text in this caption section from NOS Stories on TikTok (see <a href="https://vm.tiktok.com/ZIJnQjP19/">https://vm.tiktok.com/ZIJnQjP19/</a>).</p>

<p><b>Memes/stickers/gifs</b></p>		<p>Dichotomic</p>	<p>Internet memes are explained “as units of popular culture that are circulated, imitated, and transformed by individual Internet users, creating a shared cultural experience in the process” (Shifman, 2013, p. 367).</p>	<p>Coded when an image/short video pops up that is not native to the video but rather edited later. This image is often recognized by the audience as pop culture. It is not necessary for the story or context of the video but rather used to showcase a reaction or emotion.</p>	 <p>In this example of a meme/sticker/gif a loading image is edited on this girls head while thinking, retrieved from onbeschoft_live on TikTok (see <a href="https://vm.tiktok.com/ZIJnQFJgs/">https://vm.tiktok.com/ZIJnQFJgs/</a>).</p>
<p><b>Act/humour</b></p>		<p>Dichotomic</p>	<p>u can increase online engagement. The positive effect of humour on communication engagement has been proven for various fields like health information or communication about climate change. According to Xiao and Yu (2022) humour has a positive effect on</p>	<p>Coded when the presenter(s) or people in the post play a sort of role/character in order to either explain a news item or to reenact a happening. At times this can appear with humor or the presenter(s) and/or people play themselves in a humours manner.</p>	 <p>In this example the presenter plays an act, impersonating a judge in the</p>

			<p>online engagement when the crisis severity is low. It is important to note that topics about severe crisis have a negative effect in the risk perception of the public and thus “triggering less protective actions”(Xiao &amp; Yu, 2022, p. 1)</p>		<p>Trump trials. Source: The Washington Post on TikTok (see <a href="https://vm.tiktok.com/ZIJngJoSb/">https://vm.tiktok.com/ZIJngJoSb/</a>).</p>
<p><b>Text</b></p>	<p>In video</p>	<p>Dichotomic</p>	<p>Text that is used in TikTok videos are usually adapted to fit the format of the platform and are often narrated or conducted by journalist. Meaning that the text provides journalistic information regarding the topic of the video. Additionally, text provides the users to understand the context</p>	<p>Coded when text can be identified in the video. Not valid when the text is an automatic subtitles.</p>	 <p>Source: NOS Stories on TikTok (see <a href="https://vm.tiktok.com/ZIJnxLSpc/">https://vm.tiktok.com/ZIJnxLSpc/</a>).</p>

	<p>In caption</p>	<p>Dichotomic of the video even when they watch it with the sound off, making text an important asset of the video content (Vázquez-Herrero, Negreira-Rey, &amp; Sixto-García, 2022). TikTok videos are also accompanied by a caption. This usually works as a hook without detailed information to create expectation for the audience. It is often accompanied by hashtags (Vázquez-Herrero, Negreira-Rey, &amp; López-García, 2022).</p>	<p>Coded when identifying any type of text in the caption of the video including regular text, hashtags, or @'s</p>	 <p>Source: NOS Stories on TikTok (see <a href="https://vm.tiktok.com/ZIJnQjP19/">https://vm.tiktok.com/ZIJnQjP19/</a>).</p>
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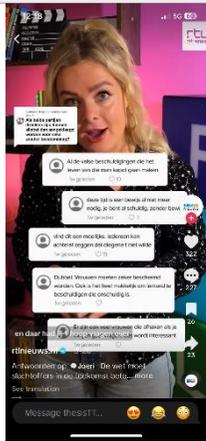
<b>People</b>	Presenter	Dichotomic	Targeting a younger Gen Z audience determines the characteristics of news presentation on TikTok, one aspect to speak more to Gen Z could be having young anchors and fast presenting style (Klug & Autenrieth, 2022).	Coded when identifying a presenter that can be seen and heard speaking in the video.	
	Experts	Dichotomic	News items containing an expert providing information are perceived as being more trustworthy than a voxpop (Beckers, 2022).	Coded when somebody who is an expert in the field, be it a scholar, somebody who works in the field or has experience with the topic in a different way can be identified.	

Source: NOS Stories on TikTok (see <https://vm.tiktok.com/ZIJnxLSpc/>).

This shows an example of how an expert is presented in a TikTok video, retrieved from NOS Stories on TikTok (see

					<a href="https://vm.tiktok.com/ZIJnQ2GF4/">https://vm.tiktok.com/ZIJnQ2GF4/</a> ).
	Voxpop/layman	Dichotomic	Consumers' personal opinions are more strongly influenced by vox pop statements than by information given by an expert (Beckers, 2022).	Coded when interviews with random people who do not have a specific connection to the topic but represent the general opinion are identified.	 <p>An example of a voxpop/layman in a TikTok video is displayed in this picture, retrieved from RTL Nieuws on TikTok (see <a href="https://vm.tiktok.com/ZIJnQS3EY/">https://vm.tiktok.com/ZIJnQS3EY/</a>).</p>
<b>Trends</b>	Visual trends	Dichotomic	“The mobile application (app) has a ‘For You’ page that personalizes content based on previous videos you have watched, and a ‘Discover’ page that presents the same popular videos that have been trending to all users. Trends refer to similarly themed	Coded when doing a dance or action or editing the video with a filter that is going viral and that many people are doing/using. Often but not always accompanied with a hashtag.	Examples of visual trends are likely mentioned on TikTok’s business page (see <a href="http://tiny.cc/69xjxz">http://tiny.cc/69xjxz</a> ).
	Audio trends	Dichotomic		Coded when using a song or audio excerpt that is going viral and that many people are	Examples of audio trends are likely mentioned on TikTok’s business page (see <a href="http://tiny.cc/79xjxz">http://tiny.cc/79xjxz</a> ).

			videos” (Kriegel et al., 2021, p. 2). Trends can either be based on specific video content or audio fragments.	using. Often but not always accompanied with a hashtag.	
<b>News values</b>	Primary	Category	Researchers argue that social media might call for “softer” news, like news about celebrities or entertainment and that there might be fewer news about more “serious” topics such as conflicts or politics (Anter, 2023; Hendrickx, 2023).	Coded when the type of news value of the video’s topic including “exclusivity, bad news, conflict, surprise, audiovisuals, shareability, entertainment, drama, follow-up, the power elite, relevance, magnitude, celebrity, good news, and news organization’s agenda” (Harcup & O’Neill, 2017, p. 1482). Excluding the value audiovisual, because every single item analyzed will be a video and thus will fit with the topic audiovisual.	
	Secondary	Category			
<b>Background (information)</b>	History	Dichotomic	“Short videos do create constraints in terms of depth” (Newman, 2022, p. 12). Based on this	Coded when the background of a certain news topic is elaborated going beyond the news fact	

	<p>Archival images</p>	<p>Dichotomic</p>	<p>statement it is assumed that the short-videos lack depth in terms of informative news, which partly results in sacrificing journalistic routines, practices and standards (Anter, 2023; Verstappen &amp; Opgenhaffen, 2023). Newsrooms can also choose to give this background information through an image (video or photo).</p>	<p>presented in the post. Coded when archived images including pictures and videos are identifiable in the post including B-roll footage.</p>	 <p>With the greenscreen feature an archival image has been used in the given example, retrieved from RTLNieuws.nl on TikTok (see <a href="https://vm.tiktok.com/ZIJnQAYjw/">https://vm.tiktok.com/ZIJnQAYjw/</a>).</p>
<p><b>Call to action</b></p>		<p>Dichotomic</p>	<p>When looking for engagement, professionals can either call for online engagement which indicates the public’s willingness to join the conversation of the news item. This can be done through computer-mediated actions like “positive E-Word-Of-Mouth” and affordances of the platforms such as</p>	<p>Coded when the presenter(s) or text in the post asks the public to do something or say something regarding the topic.</p>	 <p>In this example, the presenter asked the public what they want to know about ‘sexual haressment’ thus asking</p>

			likes, comments, and shares (Xiao & Yu, 2022, p. 5). Call to Actions can also be triggered for offline engagement, for example by face-to-face communication or taking protective actions.		them for a Call to Action. Source: RTL Nieuws on TikTok (see <a href="https://vm.tiktok.com/ZIJnbK98q/">https://vm.tiktok.com/ZIJnbK98q/</a> ).
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