#TikTokMadeMeBuyIt

A content analysis of TikTok to understand why product-related user-generated content goes viral.

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis has been written as the final step in our master's degree in International Business at the University of Agder Business School. The topic of the paper is TikTok, more specifically, how product-related UGC goes viral on the app, and what characterizes the content, product, and messenger of the video.

The writing process has been long and educational. However, most importantly we got the opportunity to use our previously acquired knowledge after five years of higher education at UiA. The sampling and research methods were relatively new and unexplored for us, which increased the learning outcome.

Writing about such an unexplored topic as TikTok, our motivation stems from our general interest in marketing, consumer behavior, and social media. TikTok is slowly growing as a marketing tool for individuals, influencers, and companies. Thus it was interesting to examine how user-generated content goes viral on the app, comparing the characteristics of product-related videos to determine what appeals best to the audience. Current research around TikTok and UGC is limited, which provides an opportunity for more and further research.

We would like to thank our supervisor Sangeeta Singh for her genuine interest in our topic. Writing this thesis under her supervision has been nothing but great, and the cooperation between us has been pleasant and effective. We highly value her time and effort in guiding us through this process.

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The main goal of this master thesis is to understand why product-related user-generated content (UGC) on social media goes viral by looking at the content-, messenger-, and product characteristics. The social media of interest for the purposes of our research is TikTok. It is important because TikTok is a relatively new social media, and gaining a more profound knowledge of it would be beneficial for both individuals, digital marketers, and brands to increase their reach on TikTok.

Problem statement: Why product-related UGC goes viral on TikTok, and what characteristics do the videos hold?

Design/methodology/approach: A mixed-method is used, which includes a qualitative and quantitative analysis. The dataset was made using a qualitative content analysis of 500 videos from TikTok. For the quantitative analysis, an ANOVA analysis in SPSS is performed to conclude whether or not the hypotheses can be supported.

Findings: Six out of ten hypotheses were confirmed. Two were rejected due to inconsistencies in the sample (skewed numbers). The main findings demonstrated that several characteristics are crucial for creating a viral video. Hypotheses in all three groups, content-, messenger-, and product characteristics, were supported. This demonstrates that numerous attributes in a video are critical for the virality on TikTok. It was found that when creating a TikTok video with the purpose of going viral, the video should be positive and include high-arousal emotions like amusement and curiosity. Also, the product displayed in the video should be unique or unusual, and solve a problem. Lastly, the creator should be entertaining or a good storyteller, and a high number of followers is helpful.

Practical implications: Marketers can use this thesis to create improved marketing strategies on TikTok, as well as on other social media. Additionally, gaining a better understanding of how existing and potential consumers react to material online can be helpful to improve and adjust existing social media marketing activities. It is essential for brands who use social media to market and sell their products.

Keywords: TikTok, User-generated content, social media, virality, Berger's STEPPS

SAMMENDRAG

Formål: Hovedmålet med denne masteroppgaven er å forstå hvorfor produktrelatert brukergenerert innhold på sosiale medier går viralt, ved å se på karakteristikkene til innholdet, avsenderen og produktet. Det sosiale mediet av interesse for vår forskning er TikTok. Det er viktig fordi TikTok er et relativt nytt sosialt medie, og å få en dypere kunnskap om det vil være fordelaktig for både enkeltpersoner, digitale markedsførere og bedrifter for å øke rekkevidden på TikTok.

Problemstilling: Hvorfor produktrelatert brukergenerert innhold går viralt på TikTok, og hvilke egenskaper inneholder videoene?

Design/metodikk/tilnærming: Det benyttes en blandingsmetode (mixed-methods) som inkluderer en kvalitativ og kvantitativ analyse. Datasettet ble laget ved hjelp av en kvalitativ innholdsanalyse av 500 videoer fra TikTok. For den kvantitative analysen utføres en ANOVA-analyse i SPSS for å konkludere om hypotesene kan støttes eller ikke.

Resultat: Seks av ti hypoteser ble bekreftet. To ble avvist på grunn av uoverensstemmelser i utvalget (ujevne tall). Hovedfunnene viste at flere egenskaper er avgjørende for å lage en viral video. Hypoteser i alle tre gruppene, innhold-, avsender- og produktegenskaper, ble støttet. Dette viser at mange karakteristikker i en video er avgjørende for viralitetsgraden på TikTok. Det ble funnet at når du lager en TikTok-video med den hensikt å gå viralt, bør videoen være positiv og inkludere følelser som gjør at videoen oppfattes som morsom eller vekker nysgjerrighet. Produktet som vises i videoen bør også være unikt eller uvanlig, og løse et problem. Til slutt bør skaperen være underholdende eller en god historieforteller, og et høyt antall følgere er nyttig.

Praktiske implikasjoner: Markedsførere kan bruke denne oppgaven til å lage forbedrede markedsføringsstrategier på TikTok, så vel som på andre sosiale medier. I tillegg kan de få en bedre forståelse av hvordan eksisterende og potensielle forbrukere reagerer på materiale på nettet, som også er nyttig for markedsføringen. Dette er viktig for bedrifter som bruker sosiale medier for å markedsføre seg, og for å selge produktene sine.

Nøkkelord: TikTok, brukergenerert innhold, sosiale medier, viralitet, Berger's STEPPS

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1. Introduction

You have probably heard about the TikTok mascara, the TikTok foundation, or the TikTok leggings? They have one thing in common; they are all viral products from videos created by users on the social media platform TikTok. Also, brands like The Ordinary, L'Oréal Paris, Dyson, and Maybelline New York have products that, for some reason, have become viral hits on the app. However, little is known about how and why they went viral. Why are they classified as viral, and what characteristics do they hold?

TikTok is a relatively new type of social network. The app is simple to use, and anyone and everything seems to have the potential to go viral (Greenwald, 2021). A fundamental component of the app is user-generated content (UGC), in which TikTok users make their own unique short looping videos (Ahlse, Nilsson, & Sandström, 2020). TikTok is different from other social media, as the first thing you see when you open the app is the "for you" page, which consists of content suggested for you based on an algorithm depending on what you have viewed, or engaged with (Anderson, 2020; Herrman, 2019; Klug, Qin, Evans, & Kaufman, 2021; Weimann & Masri, 2020). The total time spent on the app was nearly 70 billion hours in 2019 (Dean, 2022). It can be argued that TikTok changed the playing field of social media, as other apps have somewhat copied some of their features, e.g., Snapchat's "Spotlight" and Instagram's "Reels" (Carey, 2021; Saluja, 2020). The app is growing in popularity, yet marketers have not entirely grasped how it works, as little research has been done. Thus, we decided to research and write about TikTok.

In the large amounts of content being shared daily, some content catches on more than others. Content that is highly shared, liked, commented on, and even viewed, can be perceived as viral, usually because it contains valuable information (Berger & Milkman, 2010a). Virality as a marketing concept can be defined as "a large number of views in a short time period due to sharing (…). The degree of virality is intrinsically dependent on the degree of content sharing" (Tellis, MacInnis, Tirunillai, & Zhang, 2019, p. 2).

Virality in social networks is a phenomenon that has been researched extensively (e.g., Berger & Milkman, 2012; Berger & Milkman, 2013; Goel, Anderson, Hofman, & Watts, 2016; Mills, 2012; Tellis et al., 2019). Multiple studies have also been done looking at viral content on other social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube (see f.ex. Munaro,

Hüber Barcelos, Francisco Maffezzolli, Santos Rodrigues, & Cabrera Paraiso, 2021; Pressgrove, McKeever, & Jang, 2018; Xie & Kukla, 2012). However, only a few researchers have studied the degree of virality of UGC (Aswani, Kar, Aggarwal, & Vigneswara Ilavarsan, 2017; Deng, Lu, Ravichandran, & He, 2016; Khan & Vong, 2014; Colicev, Kumar, & O'Connor, 2019). Moreover, there are few studies about TikTok as a social media platform, studies that research TikTok in general, or how the app works, as the phenomenon is relatively new and unexplored. Additionally, only one study (Ling, Blackburn, Cristofaro, & Stringhini, 2021) is found connecting UGC, virality and TikTok. However, this study has not been reviewed and published in a journal. It focuses on the virality of TikTok videos in general, and not on product-related UGC, as our research will explore.

This thesis examines content-, product-, and messenger characteristics of videos to identify UGC with a higher potential of going viral on TikTok. Our research contributes to existing knowledge by using the well-cited work of Berger (2016) to demonstrate the characteristics of viral content on TikTok. The results are helpful for marketers or businesses trying to achieve attention on TikTok, build their brands or sell their products. Considering the application's popularity, especially over the past two years, marketers and businesses need to understand how it has changed today's competitive market. Moreover, as a marketer or business owner, you would preferably want your product to go viral because the larger the audience - the better chance of higher sales numbers. Therefore, it is interesting to look further into what makes something go viral on TikTok. Moreover, it is essential for marketers and businesses to keep up with the latest trends and developments.

The next chapter concerns the literature review. Existing literature regarding UGC, word-of-mouth (WOM), virality, viral marketing, and content-, product-, and messenger characteristics are elaborated on. In the third chapter, the methodology is found, including both the coding and analysis. The results of the analysis can be found in chapter four, while a discussion of the results with regards to content-, product-, and messenger characteristics can be found in chapter five, along with the conclusion. The sixth chapter includes implications, contributions, and limitations.

2. Literature review

In the first part of this chapter, user-generated content and word of mouth are defined and compared. In subchapter 2.2, virality and viral marketing are elaborated on. Afterwards, a section regarding content-, product-, and messenger characteristics can be found. Moreover, the framework presented by Berger, STEPPS, which includes social currency, triggers, emotion, public, practical value, stories is also included (Pressgrove et al., 2018). Content-, product-, and messenger characteristics, as well as Berger's STEPPS were used to develop the hypotheses.

2.1 User-generated content (UGC) and Word of Mouth (WOM)

There is no universally agreed definition of UGC (Christodoulides, Jevons, & Bonhomme, 2012; Daugherty, Eastin, & Bright, 2008; Naab & Sehl, 2017), and this might be because the field is still evolving and growing (Christodoulides et al., 2012). However, one of the most cited definitions of UGC defines it using these three characteristics; "content made publicly available over the Internet, content that reflects a certain amount of creative effort and content created outside professional routines and practices" (OECD, 2007, p. 61). Consumers use UGC to express their identity, communicate socially with other users or brands, receive or spread information, or simply to be entertained (Daughtery et al., 2008; Muntinga, Moorman, & Smit, 2011; Shao, 2009). Considering this, user-generated content can be about anything. It can be dance- or singing content, product reviews, blog posts, or any other way individuals express themselves on the Internet. However, in this thesis we will refer to UGC in the matter of product-related content.

The online information market continues to change, moving away from the publisher-centric approach to the user-centric approach (Daughtery et al., 2008). Conventional media is far from extinct, but trends are shifting in such a way that consumers have more power over their media consumption, and audiences can make their own media content choices rather than relying on traditional gatekeepers (McQuail, 2010). Time Magazine named "You" the "Person of the Year" in 2006, stating how individuals exercise power and influence in societies where internet communication is prevalent (Grossman, 2006). An issue concerning UGC is the marketer's inability to "manage" UGC sites, which is distinct from PGC, also known as producer-generated content (Cheong & Morrison, 2008). Multiple sources (Chen, 2018; Dover, 2019, in Djafarova & Bowes, 2021; Nash, 2019) claim that UGC from family

and friends is the primary influence for buying fashion items on Instagram. On the other hand, negative UGC can be damaging to a brand's ability to generate and maintain equity, a complicated problem as the readers of UGC may regard it as more legitimate than content created by the producer or brand (PGC) (Cheong & Morrison, 2008). The positive side is that UGC can beneficially impact loyalty and the brand's perceived quality (Roma & Aloini, 2019).

"User-generated content by consumers about products or services are the online version of traditional word-of-mouth" (Wyrwoll, 2014, p. 32). While some see UGC as impactful as traditional word of mouth (WOM), others argue that the source's anonymity made it too suspicious and untrustworthy for consumers (Hills & Cairncross, 2011). Word of mouth can be defined as "an informal mode of communication between private parties concerning the evaluation of goods and services" (Chung & Darke, 2006, p. 270). In the 1960s, word of mouth was researched as a topic within consumer behavior (Buttle, 1998; Cunningham, 1967, in Lutz & Reilly, 1974; Sheth & Venkatesan, 1968). Johan Arndt was one of the first academics to look at the impact of WOM marketing on consumer behavior (Buttle, 1998). He defined WOM as "oral, person-to-person communication between a receiver and a communicator whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial, regarding a brand, product or service" (Arndt, 1967, in Buttle, 1998, p. 242). According to Petrescu and Korgaonkar (2011), researchers have claimed that WOM, compared to traditional advertising or personal sales, has a more significant impact on information distribution, customer purchasing behavior, and the spread of information about new items (Bayus 1985; Cruz & Fill 2008; Datta, Chowdhury & Chakraborty 2005, in Petrescu & Korgaonkar, 2011; Derbaix & Vanhamme 2003; Hung & Li, 2007; Money, Gilly, & Graham 1998; Petrescu & Korgaonkar, 2011; Rogers, 1983;). Word of mouth is more likely to impact a customer's decision when the transaction is of significant value, according to Lutz and Reilly (1974).

WOM may occur throughout various time frames, for instance, one can divide it into immediate and ongoing WOM (Berger & Swartz, 2011). Immediate word of mouth occurs when consumers discover or encounter a new product for the first time. In contrast, ongoing WOM refers to product remarks that happen in the subsequent weeks or months after the first encounter. Moreover, WOM can have two dimensions (Moldovan, Goldenberg & Chattopadhyay, 2011). The first is the quantity, which describes how often individuals talk

and discuss the product or service, and the second is valence, the normative meaning of what they are about to say, which might be good or bad.

As mentioned above, user-generated content is like an online version of word of mouth. Traditional WOM is often spread face to face, while UGC is a form of WOM shared through social media. It has been proved that UGC can go viral and spread to everyone and everywhere, while WOM tends to stay more local, as traditional WOM is often spread to people you know. This is a difference from UGC that can be spread to anyone, anywhere, and at any time. Another difference is that UGC can be text, pictures, or videos, while traditional WOM generally consists of words only. Despite the differences, they also have a couple of similarities as they both can be used to share information, they are both a form of communication, everyone can do it, and spreading the two can affect other people's thoughts, actions, and behavior. However, the main difference is that WOM is usually spread to someone you know, while UGC can be spread to anyone, including people you do not know.

With the growth and expansion of the Internet and social media, a new type of WOM has emerged, namely electronic word of mouth, or eWOM (Huete-Alcocer, 2017). Today, eWOM can be regarded as one of the most important communication media used to share information amongst customers, companies, and the public. Customers now rely on eWOM for product- or service information when they traditionally relied on WOM from peers. Earlier studies within marketing have shown that increasing the amount of eWOM, user-generated ratings, and recommendations raises customer awareness and thus leads to more favorable assessments and purchase activities (Duan, Gu, & Whinston, 2008; Liu, 2006; Tirunillai & Tellis, 2012). Moreover, Kudeshia and Kumar (2017, p. 322) found "a direct and positive relationship between positive social eWOM, brand attitude, and purchase intention."

Customers purchasing intentions have been demonstrated to be influenced by eWOM from different sources, such as social networking sites, discussion forums, and blogs, according to previous research (Bickart & Schindler, 2001; Chan & Ngai, 2011; Park, Lee & Han, 2007; See-To & Ho, 2014). Additionally, factors like information quality, perceived usefulness, source credibility, source trustworthiness and helpfulness, and behavior towards eWOM, have all been argued to have a significant impact on how users perceive and make use of eWOM (Cheung, Lee &, Rabjohn, 2008; Erkan & Evans, 2016; Onofrei, Filieri & Kennedy, 2022). Many studies have discovered that eWOM has a considerable impact on a variety of

outcomes on a personal level, for instance, an increased willingness to spend, increased retention and loyalty, and increased customer involvement (Algesheimer, Borle, Dholakia, & Singh, 2010; Awad & Ragowsky, 2008; Ba & Pavlou, 2002; Bickart & Schindler, 2001; Gauri, Bhatnagar, & Rao, 2008; Nambisan & Baron, 2007; Pavlou & Dimoka, 2006; Schau, 2002).

Consumers sharing their opinions regarding items or services with their friends and colleagues on social media sites allows for eWOM to occur amongst relatively anonymous users, as it might catch the attention of strangers at different times (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Erkan & Evans, 2018; Huete-Alcocer, 2017). Multiple studies have found how trust affects the perception of eWOM (Cheong & Morrison, 2008; Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Chiu, Hsieh, Kao, & Lee, 2007; Fan & Miao, 2012). Cheung and Thadani (2012) found that social media users place a higher value on anonymous customer evaluations than on the more traditional media. Fan and Miao (2012) claimed that trust is a crucial precursor of behavior, like taking advice from others, and thus, trust influences purchasing decisions. Moreover, Cheong and Morrison (2008) expressed that social media users assert a higher level of trust in eWOM conveyed by other customers, than in eWOM from producers. Lastly, Bashein and Markus' (1997) research demonstrated that users are more inclined to trust people like themselves than those who are not as similar.

User-generated content has often been compared to electronic word of mouth (eWOM) (Cheong & Morrison, 2008). Although the two have been closely associated, even sometimes mistaken for each other, in eWOM, the material is communicated by users, whereas in UGC, the material is created by users. Furthermore, just like positive and negative eWOM, user-generated content can also be positive and negative (Malthouse, Calder, Kim, & Vandenbosch, 2016). A similar problem, according to Cheong and Morrison, is marketing professionals' inability to "manage" sites that contain UGC, which is a distinct difference from producer-generated content (PGC) (Cheong & Morrison, 2008; Malthouse et al., 2016).

2.2 Virality and viral marketing

2.2.1 Virality and viral characteristics

People determine whether a piece of content, a viral message, or other data and news should be forwarded and to whom they should forward it to every time they come across it (Heimbach & Hinz, 2018). A new cornerstone in digital marketing is "viral" or "viral content" (Akpinar & Berger, 2017). Rather than relying on paid advertising, like paid digital marketing in social media, companies are increasingly focused on media exposure, where customers serve as the primary source of communication (Corcoran, 2009, in Akpinar & Berger, 2017). Unexpected, hilarious, and interesting content is considered to have a higher probability of being shared, and if an advertisement appears to be a blatant sales pitch, it is less probable to be shared (Tucker, 2015). Virality has been defined by Nahon & Hemsley (2013, p. 16) as:

> a social information flow process where many people simultaneously forward a specific information item, over a short period, within their social networks, and where the message spreads beyond their own [social] networks to different, often distant networks, resulting in a sharp acceleration in the number of people who are exposed to the message.

Moreover, "Virality is scalable: it can reach millions and it can reach hundreds" (Nahon & Hemsley, 2013, p. 28). Reach can be divided into two categories: first, the quantity, or numbers of reach, which is the number of individuals who have been introduced to a piece of content. Second, network reach, which is the extent to which information flows by linking numerous networks. With reach in terms of numbers, both the individuals who viewed the content, read the post, or in any other way consumed the information, then decided to share or not, are considered.

There are two main viral phenomena: buzzes and trending topics (Jansen, Hinz, Deusser & Strufe, 2021). Buzzes are unique posts, behaviors, or topics initially shared on social media and subsequently acquire unexpected and notable attention, resulting in a substantial number of views (Deusser, Jansen, Reubold, Schiller, Hinz, & Strufe, 2018). Moreover, according to Deusser et al. (2018), likes, comments, liked comments, and a lengthy debate time (in

comment sections), are all qualities that may be utilized to identify insignificant content from potentially viral content, or buzzes. These buzzes can significantly impact the public audience and may positively or negatively change the perceptions of goods, corporations, celebrities, and even ordinary people. Moreover, buzz marketing is considered viral marketing (Pell, 2019). However, it is more precise because it focuses on supporting an item service's viral possibilities to increase brand recognition.

Trending topics are another form of virality. According to Jansen et al. (2021), trending topics have the traits of urgency and intensity. Examples of urgency in trending topics can be sports debates and celebrity deaths, and within intensity, events that often recur over time, like the ALS ice bucket challenge or lotteries (Jansen et al., 2021; Pressgrove et al., 2018). The fundamental distinction between trending topics and buzzes is that trending topics may not always meet the criteria for being surprising. However, compared to buzzes, trending topics have been more researched, especially the systems to detect them (Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2011; Lau, Collier, & Baldwin, 2012; Mathioudakis & Koudas, 2010). Thus, to conclude, buzzes and trending topics are both types of viral phenomena, and the core difference between them is that trending topics are not always as unexpected as a buzz can be (Jansen et al., 2021).

Various academics have researched consumer buzz prior to a release (e.g., of movies, series, or products) (Houston, Kupfer, Hennig-Thurau, & Spann, 2018). The buzz generated in the months and days before a new item's commercial debut is frequently recognized as a significant success element. Researchers such as Divakaran, Palmer, Søndergaard, and Matkovskyy (2017), Broekhuizen, Delre, and Torres (2011), and Xiong and Bharadwaj (2014), have examined the curiosity and buzz around pre-releases and the predictions of potential consumption. Pre-release buzz indicates consumers' anticipation of upcoming items by talking about them on blogs and forums before release (Xiong & Bharadwaj, 2014). Divakaran et al. (2017) found that a "pre-release community buzz" (p. 25) can be utilized to create accurate market- and consumer forecasts before a launch, here in the movie industry. Broekhuizen et al., (2011) discovered that social power coming from other consumers' planned actions "(coordinated consumption effect)" has a more significant impact on market inequities than social power coming from other consumers' previous actions "(imitation effect)" (p. 204). Lastly, Xiong and Bharadwaj (2014) presented results regarding "pre-

release buzz evolution" (p. 401) and found that companies must keep track of pre-release buzz and how it changes over time.

2.2.2 Viral marketing

According to research, customer attention is distributed unevenly, with most material receiving few views and shares, while a smaller number receive considerable attention (Wu & Huberman, 2007). The practice of persuading users to send along a business' marketing content to their friends and family can be defined as viral marketing (Dobele, Lindgreen, Beverland, Vanhamme, & Van Wijk, 2007). Consumers are encouraged to share information about products through viral marketing using current social media (Leskovec, Adamic, & Huberman, 2007). Viral marketing aims to transmit product- and service information through customer-to-customer interactions rather than business-to-customer interactions (De Bruyn & Lillien, 2008). This customer-to-customer interaction can result in faster and more cost-efficient market acceptance.

A company may benefit from viral marketing in three ways (Dobele, Toleman, & Beverland, 2005). First, it is cost-efficient and cheap for businesses. Second, sharing marketing communications containing advertises is highly voluntary for customers. Third, the one who share the content will determine which friends, coworkers, or family members are more likely to share their interest and therefore read or watch it. Moreover, entertaining messages are more likely to be shared (Dobele et al., 2005). Thus, the crucial question is, what content is engaging? Social media users could be motivated to distribute ads freely if they; attract the customers' attention (e.g., by being exciting), are linked to an easy-to-use product or a highly noticeable product, or are specifically addressed to a specific consumer or market segment (Dobele et al., 2005).

A wide range of terms have been used in previous research to describe the phenomena of viral marketing (Cruz & Fill, 2008). Vilpponen, Winter, and Sundqvist (2006) highlighted several academics who attempted to define viral marketing. For instance, phrases like "interactive marketing," "viral marketing," "Internet communication," "Internet word-of-mouth and word-of-mouse," "online feedback mechanisms," "stealth marketing," "buzz marketing," "electronic word-of-mouth communication," "interactive or electronic word-of-mouth advertising," and "electronic referral marketing" have all been used to define it (Blattberg & Deighton, 1991; Bellman, Lohse & Johnson, 1999; Dellarocas, 2003; De Bruyn

& Lillien, 2004; Goldenberg, Libai & Muller, 2001; Kaikati & Kaikati, 2004; Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004; Montgomery, 2001; Phelps, Lewis, Mobilio, Perry, & Raman, 2004; Thomas Jr., 2004).

Viral marketing can be argued to have a significant impact on digital marketing and, more specifically, social media marketing. "Social media employ mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms via which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content" (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011, p. 241). Moreover, according to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social media can be described as a collection of web-based apps which allow users to create and share UGC based on the philosophical and technical basis of Web 2.0. As stated in the Social Media Marketing Industry Report (Stelzner, 2021), as much as 88 percent of surveyed marketers believe that marketing in social media has increased their company's exposure. Marketers used to regulate and administrate one-way communications with their clients. However, with the increased use of social media, communications have changed to a "multi-dimensional two-way peer-to-peer-communication reality" (Berthon, Pitt, & Campbell, 2008, in Hutter, Hautz, Dennhardt, & Fuller, 2013, p. 343). One could say that a brand is no more defined by what they tell the customers, but rather defined by what the customers tell one another (Roma & Aloini, 2019).

In Dolan, Conduit, and Fahy's (2015) research, six different forms of social media interaction behavior can be identified. These are "creating, contributing, destructing, consuming, dormancy, and detaching" (Dolan, Conduit, & Fahy, 2015, p. 106-107). By creating, social media users interact with companies and others on social media platforms by posting material. Contributing means that users enhance existing material on social media sites. When users consume content, they passively absorb the content without any participation. Dormancy is a transitory period of inert, passive interaction by people who could have engaged with the brand earlier. When people take steps to remove brand-related information from their social media- and newsfeeds, it is called detachment. Lastly, destruction means that users actively make negative contributions to available material on social media networks.

2.3 Social media

All social media can be argued to serve the same purpose, covering the need for connecting and sharing with other people (Asur & Huberman, 2010), but in different forms. In order to easily demonstrate similarities and differences between some of the most popular and important social media today, an overview in the form of a table is provided below.

	TikTok	Instagram	facebook	twitter	SnapChat	YouTube	Pinterest
App for	Short videos. Viewing, making, and sharing.	Sharing photos, videos, reels, and stories.	Share pictures, videos, or updates.	News and micro-blogging.	Share and view photos, videos messages and stories.	View and publish videos.	Gather creative ideas in the form of pictures.
Feed	Algorithm and following	Following and Algorithm	Friends and following	Following	Friends and following	Algorithm and Suggestions	Popular topics and algorithm
Age (US)	25 % - 10 to 19 years	33,5% - 25 to 34 years	26% - 25 to 34 years	42% - 8 to 29 years	48% - 15 to 25 years	77% - 15 to 25 years	24% - 30 to 39 years
Gender	61% female (US)	44% female (US)	55% female (US)	61% male (US)	54% female (global)	54% male (US)	78% female (US)
Monthly active users	1 billion	1,39 billion	2,89 billion	436 million	538 million	2,29 billion	444 million

Table 1: Overview of the different social medias

The table is made based on the following references: Ceci, 2022a; Ceci, 2022b; Herrman, 2019; Herrman, 2021; Statista Research Department, 2022a-2022p.

The reason for looking at these six specific social media is because they are ranked on the list of the best or most important social media today (Robinson, 2021; McCormick, 2022; Statista

Research Department, 2022o). Instagram allows you to communicate by sharing photos or stories, TikTok by making and sharing short videos, YouTube by creating and sharing longer videos, Twitter by short messages (tweets), Facebook with personal updates, and Snapchat with live updates in the form of pictures or short videos. LinkedIn is omitted because this platform is more used for business purposes (Medaglia, Rose, Nyvang & Sæbø, 2009; Van Dijck, 2013). Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, and WeChat are excluded as they are characterized as messaging apps (Statista Research Department, 2022q). Any other social media not included here is deliberately excluded, as it was not popular enough or did not have the characteristics suitable for this research. The justification for using statistics from the US to look at age and gender in this table is, first of all, that it was easier to find. Statistics also show that the United States is the country with the highest engagement on TikTok, measured in average daily minutes spent on the app (Bloomberg, n.d. & Sensor Tower, n.d., in Iqbal, 2022).

It can be argued that TikTok can be considered as "the new" social media to use. It's everywhere, people are talking about the products they saw on TikTok, and people are reposting videos from TikTok to other social media like Snapchat, Facebook, and Instagram. In other textual media (blogs, newspapers, magazines), clickbait used to be misleading headings to capture the viewer's attention. However, in video formats, the new clickbait has been argued to be suspense, awareness, and expectation (Keynejad, 2020). Statistics from Norway reveal that TikTok is the social media with most age groups in growth in daily use of the app, while Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram have a decline in everyday use (Ipsos, 2021). Although there has never been a lower number of young people using Facebook on a daily basis (Ipsos, 2021), only 4% of marketers intend to use TikTok, while Facebook is a definite priority for 89% (Allegro, 2022). This is interesting as TikTok is one of the most rapidly expanding social media sites.

In addition, TikTok has a far higher interaction rate than Instagram and YouTube, and is ranked in the top 10 in 124 of 141 countries where the app is available (Geyser, 2022). Due to political reasons, India banned the app in 2020, however, because people still were able to download the app, there were as many as 200 million users in the country. There were more downloads in India than in any other country between July 2019 and June 2020. In Norway, there are currently one million users on TikTok, where over 40% of these are younger than

15 years old (Allegro, 2022). Although TikTok has a 13-year-old age limit, the Norwegian Media Authority (2020) reports that 65 percent of all children and young people aged 9 to 18 use the app. However, TikTok is not only used by the younger generation; 11% of Norwegians aged between 50 and 59 years old are also using the app (Ipsos, 2021). Although other social platforms do not match YouTube or Facebook in terms of general reach, several other platforms have a significant follower base amongst young people (Auxier & Anderson, 2021). About half of Americans between 18- and 29-years old claim to use TikTok, and 55% are between 18 and 24. Altogether, as the app has received a lot of attention and is relatively new and unexplored, we chose to write about this specific social media.

Since its launch (or merge with Musical.ly) in 2018, TikTok is relatively different from other social media like Facebook (launched in 2004), Twitter (launched in 2006), Instagram (launched in 2010), and Snapchat (launched in 2012), with its short video format and nearly no other type of content (McFadden, 2020; Routley, 2021; Smith, 2021; Wood, 2017). As mentioned before, TikTok's automated content selection on the for you page ignores users' peer networks and instead relies only on your own platform behavior (Rach, 2021; Herrman, 2019). Video creators have a plethora of tools at their disposal on TikTok, including Snapchat-style filters and the option to search for sounds to use as a soundtrack (Herrman, 2019). Hashtags also play an unexpectedly huge role. Twitter assumed that their users would swarm around hashtags in an endless series of beneficial pop-up mini-discourses. On TikTok, hashtags are mostly used for organizing popular things on the app, like different challenges, jokes, or other activities. It's like a version of Facebook that can fill your newsfeed before you even add a single friend.

Content will emerge on all the different social media platforms, and it will most likely never run out. UGC can be said to be a piece of material that has been developed and provided at no cost (Krogh, 2014). Also, one can argue that the great majority of UGC is made by what one can characterize as "nobodies" or non-professionals (e.g., influencers). In Thesaurus, there are antonyms for influencers such as amateur, beginner, newcomer, and novice (n.d.). However, in this thesis, they are referred to as nobodies, as they most likely did not have a large number of followers initially, but went viral through TikTok.

Moreover, one will also see producer-generated content (PGC) on social media. PGC is material created by professionals who have been explicitly contracted to produce content

(Krogh, 2014). As previously discussed, UGC may be perceived as more authentic and appealing by readers than PGC (Cheong and Morrison, 2008). Thus, one could say that product recommendations and other discussions around products and brands will be more well-received by viewers if they originated from "nobodies" or regular consumers.

The content of TikTok has not been thoroughly researched yet, explaining why some videos are more viral than others. Nevertheless, studies on content on other social media have been done over the last years. The results are demonstrated in Table 2.

Study	Social Media	Result
Munaro et al., 2021	YouTube	Using negative or low-arousal emotions in a video are more likely to promote an overall interest.
Nam, Son & Lee, 2011	Twitter	Tweets with personal opinions were more retweeted.
Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013	Twitter	Emotional tweets got reposted more frequently and faster than neutral tweets.
Hemsley, Garcia-Murillo, & Maclnnes, 2018	Twitter	Tweets with unique information are more popular and tweets with a strong emotional value attract new viewers.
Pressgrove et al., 2018	Twitter	Practical value was the only significant factor for retweets, meaning that people will only retweet things that are of practical value for themselves or their followers.
Heimbach, Schiller, Strufe, & Hinz, 2015	Twitter, Facebook, Google+	Articles including content that is interesting or evokes anger goes viral.
Xie & Kukla, 2012	Facebook	Content is more likely to go viral if it contains pictures and videos, making it more amusing and interesting.
Bakhshi, Shamma & Gilbert, 2014	Instagram	If the photo is of a face, there is 38% higher chance that it will receive likes, and 32% higher chances of getting comments.
Piwek & Joinson, 2016; Bayer, Ellinson,	SnapChat	Users primarily share content in the form of selfies.

Schoenebech, & Falk, 2016		
Hall & Zarro, 2012	Pinterest	Interior, DIY and food/drinks are the largest categories of content that are pinned or saved by users.

Table 2: Results from studies of viral content on social medias

2.4 Hypotheses development

2.4.1 Content characteristics

To understand why certain online material attracts more attention than others, multiple researchers focused on finding and analyzing characteristics that drive the distribution of content in social media (Akpinar & Berger, 2017; Heimbach et al., 2015; Heimbach & Hinz, 2016; Quesenberry & Coolsen, 2019a; Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013). For instance, Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan (2013) found that emotional tweets got reposted more frequently and faster than neutral tweets. However, Heimbach et al. (2015) claimed that emotions in the content are negatively associated with virality, meaning that content that does not include powerful emotions have a greater likelihood of being shared. Quesenberry and Coolsen (2019a) found that content with an entire story evolution was more viral than content with only a partial story evolution.

Research has been performed to propose models for detecting viral online content (Deusser et al., 2018; Rietveld, van Dolen, Mazloom & Worring, 2020; Szabo & Huberman, 2010; Tellis et al., 2019; Tsur & Rappoport, 2012). Tsur and Rappoport (2012) found that the contents and composition of a piece of content (e.g., hashtags and tweets) are crucial in determining whether or not the audience accepts it. In contrast, according to the research from Quesenberry and Coolsen (2019b), there is no magic recipe for viral success considering the content types such as photos, videos, or text. It is more important to pay attention to the message that goes along with the content type. In other words, increasing likes, comments and shares cannot be achieved solely through photos or videos; high-quality content is still required. Some viral video characteristics include not being highly advertised, conveying a narrative, having an emotional connection, and doing unusual things (Quinn, 2016). Other factors of viral content include that it is straightforward, surprising, tangible, and (emotionally) convincing (Kurichenko, 2020). Both Rietveld et al. (2020) and Tellis et al.

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(2019) imply that emotional appeals affect the engagement between consumers more than informal appeals, and the usage of information appeals has a considerable detrimental impact on social sharing.

Professor Jonah Berger outlined six aspects to explain why information is spread (Pressgrove et al., 2018). These are "social currency, triggers, emotion, practical value, public, and stories" (Pressgrove et al., 2018 p. 2), or STEPPS. His research has covered a wide range of subjects, including how different channels of communication influence what individuals speak about, the size of viewers and virality, as well as reasons for sharing in interactional situations, and the impact of quarrels in discussions (Akpinar & Berger, 2017; Barasch & Berger, 2014; Berger, 2014; Berger & Iyengar, 2012; Berger & Iyengar, 2013; Chen & Berger, 2013). The six aspects that comprise the STEPPS will be used to formulate the hypotheses of this study.

In general, positive content is more likely to be shared and go viral compared to negative content (Berger & Milkman, 2010a; Berger & Milkman, 2012; Tubenchlak, Faveri, Zanini, & Goldszmidt, 2015; Zhang, Zhang, & Law, 2014), because it reflects well on the sender and suggests future rewards, as well as making the receiver feel good (Berger & Milkman, 2010a). On the other hand, negative content has a survival value because it can alert people of things to avoid. Based on this, we suggest that:

H1: Positive UGC is more likely to go viral than non-positive UGC.

Some material is more popular than others among the massive volumes of content published regularly. Content that is widely shared often becomes viral because it includes valuable and helpful information (Berger & Milkman, 2010a). Moreover, it has been argued that one of the more important reasons for customers to use the Internet is to obtain various types of information (Maddox, 1998). Customers tend to engage in online brand communities to search and receive information about the brand (Muntinga et al., 2011; Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008). The desire to obtain information directly from brands motivates customers to utilize social media (Dholakia, Bagozzi, & Pearo, 2004; Lin & Lu, 2011; Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009). Viral marketing uses social media to encourage the customers to spread product information (Leskovec et al., 2007). Users find the internet safe to express their emotions, share their thoughts and experiences, and keep their family and friends up to date

on their latest information (Leung, 2009). Furthermore, consumers prefer to contribute with knowledge that they feel will benefit others by providing ideas and guidance (Pressgrove et al., 2018). As informational content seems to have such an impact on virality, we hypothesize that:

H2: Informational UGC is more likely to go viral than non-informational UGC.

Several studies suggest that eliciting emotions enhances the likelihood of videos being shared (Akpinar & Berger, 2017; Berger & Milkman, 2012; Goodrich, Schiller & Galletta, 2015; Heimbach & Hinz, 2016; Hsieh, Hsieh, & Tang, 2012; Nelson-Field, Riebe & Newstead, 2013). More specifically, a well-cited study from Berger and Milkman (2012) found that highly viral content tends to provoke "(...) high-arousal positive (awe) or negative (anger or anxiety) emotions" (p. 192). On the other hand, low-arousal or deactivating emotions such as sadness are less likely to go viral. Emotions differ not only in terms of whether they are positive or negative, but also in the level of psychological arousal or activity they generate (Smith & Ellsworth, 1985). Even though both emotions are negative, anger may improve transmission (because of its high activation), while sadness may inhibit transmission (because of deactivation or inactivity) (Berger & Milkman, 2012). Anger, anxiety, and sadness are all characterized as negative emotions, but sad content has proven to be less viral, and content triggering anger or anxiety is more viral.

One of the factors in STEPPS that can explain why something is widely shared is emotions (Pressgrove et al., 2018). For instance, Berger and Milkman (2010b) examined the behaviors of sharing articles from the newspaper New York Times. They discovered that emotions were strong determinants of why the information was being shared. Yet not all emotions will cause consumers to behave similarly (Pressgrove et al., 2018). People are more inclined to share information that is related to "high arousal" emotions (Berger, 2011, p. 891), which are emotions like adoration, inspiration, amazement, enthusiasm, humor, rage, or worry (Pressgrove et al., 2018).

A study by Rietveld et al. (2020) demonstrated that customers are engaged mainly by images evoking high-arousal positive and low-arousal negative emotions. Moreover, adding text on top of the video will also encourage video virality (Ling et al., 2021). People may exchange emotionally charged content to make sense of their experiences, decrease dissonance, or

strengthen social bonds (Festinger, Riecken & Schachter 1956; Peters & Kashima 2007; Rime, Mesquita, Boca & Philippot, 1991). Additionally, content which is surprising, interesting, or evokes awe or joy is more likely to be shared (Al-Rawi, 2019; Berger & Milkman, 2012; Dafonte-Gómez, 2015; Dobele et al., 2007; Dobele et al., 2005; Nikolinakou & King, 2018; Stieglitz & DangXuan, 2013; Teixeira, Wedel & Pieters, 2012; Tucker, 2015). According to Schwarz (2000), consumers are mainly influenced by their emotions when they don't have a specific purpose when browsing on social media.

Another component in Berger's STEPPS is triggers, or a "triggering event" (Pressgrove et al., 2018, p. 2). It can also be viewed as a motivational event, as it results in people taking actions based on their underlying potential (Center & Walsh, 1985, in Pressgrove et al., 2018). Additionally, according to Berger (2013), customer decision-making is mostly instinctive and occurs as an emotional response to environmental stimuli (Dijksterhuis, Smith, Van Baaren, & Wigboldus, 2005; Doyen, Klein, Simons, & Cleeremans, 2014). Triggers can be daily reminders in consumers' surroundings that they observe, read, or hear (Pressgrove et al., 2018). We proposed in *H1* that positive UGC is more viral, and the paragraphs above demonstrate that researchers have found high-arousal emotions to be dominating for virality. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis, because when compared to happiness, the feelings of amusement and curiosity are more high-arousal and surprising (Hijazi et al., 2016), resulting in more engagement from viewers:

H3: UGC evoking the feeling of amusement or curiosity is more likely to go viral than UGC that evokes happiness

One way to make the content more amusing is by adding a story to it, which is also a component in Berger's STEPPS (Pressgrove, et al., 2018). Stories may serve as both educational and entertaining tools for individuals to discuss when there are important issues. Moreover, individuals' stories can be viewed as more credible than commercials and thus more prone to sharing (Pressgrove et al., 2018; Berger, 2013). Therefore, we propose that:

H4: Entertaining UGC or one that tells a story/anecdote is more likely to go viral than one that is not/does not.

2.4.2 Product characteristics

Are certain products more likely to go viral than others? A study from Nguyen and Chaudhuri (2019) showed that innovative products tend to result in a larger volume of eWOM, however, shockingly less favorable sentiment is generated. Product innovativeness fosters virality by creating consumer excitement and a sense of danger or risk. Moldovan et al. (2011) found some of the same results; original products are likely to propagate more WOM, no matter how useful the product is. In this case, an original product is defined as something new, one-of-a-kind, and unlike anything else on the market. An original or new product is often viewed as more interesting and surprising to the customer compared to a product known from before (Derbaix & Vanhamme, 2003). In contrast, useful products foster a positive mindset and, as a result, may lead to a more positively valenced WOM (Moldovan et al., 2011). A similarly helpful product that is not original and hence not as fascinating to talk about will lead to less positively valenced WOM than a product that is both original and useful. In this example, product usefulness is rated on the ability to meet the customers' needs.

Another way to classify and compare products is to divide them into hedonic or utilitarian products (see for example: Babin, Darden, & Griffin, 1994; Chandon, Wansink, & Laurent, 2000). Utilitarian value is first and foremost instrumental and functional, and adds value by serving as means to a goal such as savings or product quality (Chandon et al., 2000). On the other hand, hedonic value results from more subjective and personal impulsive reactions (Babin et al., 1994). People may share useful products with others as they are motivated to help them and reduce their purchase risks. In contrast, hedonic products are shared with others because they wish to share their happiness or positive feelings (Walsh, Gwinner & Swanson, 2004). Schulze, Schöler, and Skiera (2014) argued that the type of product must fit the kind of social network it is promoted on so that it can meet the expectations from the consumers. For example, if a consumer logs into Facebook to have a good time or to feel some excitement, a viral marketing message of a utilitarian product is most likely not going to work for this consumer, as a utilitarian product does not meet their expectation of fun. A product is defined as interesting when it is novel or exciting (Bergen & Scwartz, 2011), and multiple studies argue that people in general love to talk about unusual and surprising things (Hughes, 2005; Rosen, 2006; Wojnicki & Godes, 2008).

Another part of Berger's STEPPS is social currency, and this is the belief that individuals want to appear attractive, intelligent, or informed around others, and uniqueness is an essential component of this (Pressgrove et al., 2018). Several factors might help make a statement more memorable or have social value. For instance, exaggeration and intensification of the message may be employed for reaching a bigger audience. Individuals change their stories to make them seem more uncommon or spectacular, as they feel the desire to impress. Additionally, a statement might be noteworthy if it deviates from the norm. For example, if a message is surprising, strange, or contentious, it will stand out among other statements around a comparable item or issue (Chen & Berger, 2013; Heath & Heath, 2007). This is the basis for the following hypothesis, proposing that:

H5: Unusual or unique products with an element of surprise are more likely to go viral.

The importance of practical value (as mentioned above), is also supported by Berger and included in his STEPPS as an aspect contributing to making content go viral (Pressgrove et al., 2018). Consumers want to share information they deem valuable to assist others by providing suggestions and guidance (Pressgrove et al., 2018). This interpretation of practical value can be based on the prospect theory by Kahneman and Tversky (1979; in Pressgrove et al., 2018). Prospect theory claims that "decision making is not always rational, but instead heuristics (e.g., reference points, comparisons) often guide the decision-maker to selecting options with the greatest perceived value" (Pressgrove et al., 2018, p. 3). The importance of practical value is also supported by Pressgrove et al.'s research (2018). As a product of practical value can help solve a problem, we suggest that:

H6: Products that help solve a problem are more likely to go viral.

2.4.3 Messenger Characteristics

Multiple studies have looked at how the impression of eWOM is influenced by trust (Cheong & Morrison, 2008; Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Chiu et al., 2007; Fan & Miao, 2012). For example, if you trust the person, it can lead to purchase intention (Fan & Miao, 2012). People are more likely to trust customers than producers (Cheong & Morrison, 2008) or persons similar to themselves (Bashein & Markus, 1997). According to several academics, trustworthy spokespersons increase the persuasiveness of a message (Baker & Churchill,

1977; Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Patzer, 1983). If the information comes from an interpersonal source, a friend, or a family member, the information will substantially influence you (Chiu et al., 2007; Phelps et al., 2004). This is supported by Bansal and Voyer (2000), demonstrating that the stronger the link between sender and receiver, the higher the impact on the purchasing choice. Well-connected people are more likely to engage in viral marketing as they have a greater reach and a more extensive network. However, their influence on their peers is not more significant than the influence of people with fewer connections (Hinz, Skiera, Barrot, & Becker, 2011).

People who influence others' ideas, attitudes, beliefs, motives, and actions are known as opinion leaders (Valente & Pumpuang, 2007). In social systems, opinion leaders are the most powerful group, according to Rogers (1983). As a summary of previous research on opinion leaders, Lyons and Henderson (2005) explained that:

> Compared with consumers who seek their advice, opinion leaders frequently possess more experience or expertise with the product category, have been exposed to or acquired more information about the product, exhibit more exploratory and innovative behaviour and display higher levels of involvement with the product category (p. 320).

In contrast, a highly cited study conducted by Watts and Dodds (2007) found that large quantities of influence are driven by a critical mass of highly or easily persuaded individuals, rather than being caused by an opinion leader. Either way, in some cases, it is proven that opinion leaders who can create clear messages can influence their followers' views, and help them accept the information they were given, affecting their decision to buy reviewed products (Nunes, Ferreira, Freitas & Ramos, 2018). Ling et al.'s study on TikTok (2021) found that the most accurate measure of a video's level of virality is the number of followers the creator has. Moreover, if the creator has over 10 000 followers, they are more likely to produce a viral video than others with less than 10 000 followers. A more recent term is key opinion leader or KOL (Scher & Schett, 2021). A KOL's primary role is to operate as an influencer instead of a rational thinker, as a result, the KOL is mainly and inherently a marketing entity.

The creator of the viral TikTok mascara video, Jessica Eid, made the video as an advertisement for Maybelline, and it resulted in over 54 million views and sold-out mascaras worldwide (Licius, 2021). She can be referred to as an opinion leader or key opinion leader as her video was made in collaboration with Maybelline and affected numerous people to the extent that the mascara sold out everywhere. This can also be connected to "public" in Berger's STEPPS. This is explained as what is easily viewed and exceedingly visible (Pressgrove, et al., 2018). According to Berger (2016), highly visual items sell themselves, and public exposure fosters replication and groupthink. This is caused by the fact that when individuals are unclear of how to go about something, they will instinctively search for social cues from someone else (Pressgrove et al., 2018). As people tend to look at others, we suggest that:

H7: UGC of creators with a higher number of followers will be more viral than those with fewer followers.

Additionally, as an opinion leader is defined as one that has more expertise within the product category (Lyons & Henderson, 2005), we further propose that:

H8: UGC of creators who are perceived as an "expert" on the content/topic in the video is more likely to go viral.

In addition to proposing that the video itself is more likely to go viral if it is entertaining or tells a story, we would also like to suggest that:

H9: UGC of creators who are perceived as entertaining or good storytellers will be more viral than those who are not as entertaining.

Lastly, we suggest that virality is linked to the feeling of relatability because social media users place higher reliability towards a well-known person online who portrays themselves as a regular person, than someone of great position and money (Wiley, 2014). Moreover, it has been proven that people are more willing to trust someone similar to themselves (Bashein & Markus, 1997), thus, it can be suggested that it can be easier to relate to them. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

H10: People are more likely to trust the UGC if they can relate to the creator/video/situation/product/elements/feelings compared to UGC that they cannot relate to.

3. Methodology

The aim of research, broadly defined, is to find solutions to questions and gain knowledge (Marczyk, DeMatteo, & Festinger, 2010). In practically all fields of science, research is the main instrument for expanding the boundaries of knowledge.

3.1 Research design

A research design is a plan that outlines how a study will go from the research purpose/questions to the outcomes, which helps to guide the research process (Abutabenjeh & Jaradat, 2018). It is a detailed planning procedure for gathering and analyzing data to comprehend a topic better. The research method is divided into three stages: offering a topic for investigation, collecting data to answer the question, and delivering a solution to the question.

The content analysis methodology might be the most powerful instrument in the researcher's toolkit in the age of "big data" (Stemler, 2015). Textual-, visual-, and audio data can be analyzed using a content analysis. The practice of content analysis seems to be on the verge of a comeback, given the tremendous growth of permanent, stored textual, photographic, video, and audio data resulting from the development of technology. Content analysis is a research approach for inferring context from repeatable and accurate data (Krippendorff, 2018).

Our analysis will consist of a mixed-method, as it combines qualitative and quantitative approaches (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007). First, we created the dataset using a qualitative content analysis of videos from TikTok. The content analysis is better explained in subchapter 3.3 Coding. Afterwards, we conducted a quantitative analysis of the data set in SPSS, comparing the means using an ANOVA analysis. The analysis will be elaborated on in subchapter 3.5 Analysis.

3.2 Data

In total, 500 videos were collected from TikTok. The videos in the sample were retrieved between January and April of 2022. Moreover, to limit the sampling size, the collected content was made and published between January 2021 and April 2022. Views, likes, comments, and shares, were measures used to evaluate the virality of a video. Using the search bar in discover mode on TikTok allows you to search for users, hashtags, videos, and sounds, and from there, sort the results on top liked, relevance, date posted, and if you already have watched the video or not.

Various tools were used to find relevant videos for our research, like exploring hashtags in discover mode. For example, the hashtags "#TikTokmademebuyit," "#ThingsTikTokmademebuy," and "#TikTokmademebuythis," were explored. In total, the hashtags had a collective total of over 10 billion views [10.03.2022] (TikTok, n.d.a; TikTok, n.d.b; TikTok, n.d.c). Moreover, search terms and related hashtags like "viral products," "Amazon finds," "products you need," "product review," as well as "bathroom finds," "living room finds," and "kitchen finds" were used to find relevant material. As some creators do not use hashtags, we also searched for specific products known to be viral because of TikTok, like the Sky-High Mascara, and The Pink Stuff. A criterion was that the video had to be product-related. Thus, videos of recipes and how-to (DIY) were excluded unless they contained a new way of using or showcasing a product. Another criterion was that the video should be posted by personal users rather than brands, as we examined UGC, not PGC.

3.2.1 What is the threshold for a video to be called viral?

TikTok videos are relatively short and capture the viewer's attention within seconds. If the content is of interest, viewers will continue watching, and if not, they will continue scrolling through other content. The app does not estimate the total views required to be declared viral (Tabassum, n.d.). Besides views, shares, likes, and comments, an essential aspect of content success is "video completion" (Chen, 2020). Video completion is whether users have watched the entire video (from start to end). If a user watches 5 seconds or more, it will result in one view, and if the video is looped or replayed, it will result in multiple views.

There is little to no academic unanimity on how many views a piece of content needs to be categorized as viral. According to Nahon and Hemsley (2013), virality can be identified and

measured based on "the speed of the spread," "the reach in terms of the number of people exposed to the content," and "the reach in terms of distance the information travels by bridging multiple networks" (p. 16). Moreover, because virality is a "process of diffusion," how a piece of content is spread ("many-to-many communication") is more important than the total number of users who view it (p. 28). As one of the few academics who has attempted to quantify it, Boynton (2009) claimed that with a high average of views, every video that has been seen 100 000+ times is considered viral.

TikTok distributes new videos to 300 and 500 randomly selected individuals, depending on both hashtags and content you have already published or watched (Chen, 2020; Patterson & Donovan, 2020). The users can be perceived as those who judge your content, essentially determining whether your content will go viral or not. There is little consistency in research regarding the number of views and virality. Tabassum (n.d.) argues that viral content must receive a minimum of 500 completed views or more within 30 minutes. However, viral TikTok users typically gain between 1,000 and 2,000 views on their content in under an hour. It is important to note that the environment and ways in which content is shared impact whether users will be attentive, and what kind of influence the content has (Nahon & Hemsley, 2013). Christian (2022) claimed that when a piece of content has received at least half a million views, it can be considered viral. A little over a decade ago, Kevin Nalty claimed that a viral [YouTube] video reached over 5 million views within three to seven days after posting (Wynne, 2018). Moreover, a survey performed by Feed Company in 2008 revealed that 27.8 percent of advertising executives surveyed agreed that a piece of content must have at least 1 million views to be regarded viral. However, 22.2 percent of respondents agreed that between 100 and 500 thousand views are enough to be categorized as viral.

As described in the previous paragraph, there is no set definition of how many views needed to categorize as a viral video. Some claim 500 views within 30 minutes, while others argue that it requires at least 500,000 views (Christian, 2022; Tabassum, n.d.). Professor Jonah Berger stated that "there is no hard and fast definition." Thus, he is more interested in contagiousness or the likelihood of anything being shared after their first encounter (Wynne, 2018). Additionally, there are few statistics available for others than the publisher of a video, showing how many views the content reached within 30 minutes or 14 days. It is therefore hard to define the criteria as scholars and websites claim differently.

Due to the inconsistency in literature and the high number of active users on the app, only videos with 100 000 or more likes were included in the analysis. Using the number of likes would provide us with insight into the most viral videos, as liking a video requires an action, compared to only viewing the video. In addition, a minimum requirement of 1 million views or more was set for the video to be included. Moreover, we also looked at the total number of shares the video had. A suggestion is that the higher the number of likes, the higher the number of shares. However, this is hard to know as there is no way of sorting the videos on the number of shares. Therefore, no limit of shares or comments was set as a requirement to be included. In conclusion, we looked at videos with a minimum of one million views and one hundred thousand likes.

3.3 Coding

Each video was watched by both the researchers and coded along the criteria described below. The coding was then compared, and any discrepancies were resolved either by discussion between the two primary researchers or by bringing in a third coder familiar with the coding system. The videos were broadly coded within three categories; the content, the product, and the messenger. The video was further coded within these categories: UGC Valence, UGC Style, UGC Tone, UGC Entertainment Value, Product Uniqueness, Product Problem-Solving Ability, Number of Followers, Expertise of Creator, Creator Entertainment, and Creator Relatability. When coding the videos, the number of views, shares, likes, and comments are round up when exceeding 10k, as we do not have access to the exact numbers.

UGC Valence

UGC can be both positive or negative, or in some cases, neutral (Christodoulides et al., 2012). If the video creator focused on the positive sides of the product or the video itself was positive, it was coded as "positive" and vice versa "negative." We focused on the overall valence of the video, so if the creator mentioned both positive sides and negative sides, it was coded "positive" if they mentioned more positive than negative ones. If it was difficult to determine whether it was more positive or negative, it was coded as "both", and if there was no specific opinion, it was coded as "neutral". The whole video, including the visual and the audio, was considered. However, we did not look at the text in the caption of the video or the comments, as we wanted the analysis to be based on our impression of the video only and

thus not affected by the comments. The decided codes were not based on our opinion of the product but rather on the creators' opinion demonstrated through the video.

UGC Style

In this case, the video was coded "emotional" if it contained emotional content, meaning "themes or characteristics of feelings that tend to elicit strong emotions (…)" (American Psychological Association, n.d., p.1). For example, someone talking about their sick grandmother or struggling with bad acne for years. In contrast, the video was considered "informational" if it contained some information about the product, like how to use it, price, or benefits/disadvantages. Moreover, if the video had both emotional and informational aspects, it was coded as "both", and "neutral" if no specific emotion were present.

UGC Tone

For the hypothesis looking at the UGC tone, we made one category per emotion, which gave us seven categories. These specific emotions were chosen as these were the most common emotions in the literature. In the following, the different emotions have been defined and explained.

While younger individuals associate happiness with excitement, enthusiasm, and high levels of arousal, older adults associate happiness with calm, peacefulness, and low levels of arousal (Mogilner, Kamvar, & Aaker, 2011; Scheibe, English, Tsai, & Carstensen, 2013). Awe is a self-transcendence emotion defined by feeling a sense of admiration and elevation in the presence of something bigger than oneself (Berger & Milkman, 2010a). The feeling can appear when things you consider to be not possible are possible, like finding a cure to AIDS or a hockey goalkeeper who continues to play even though he has brain cancer. Furthermore, curiosity is described as a desire for knowledge in the presence of an extrinsic reward (Markey & Loewenstein, 2014) and was used for videos where we were left with the feeling of wanting to know more or a bit of confusion. Amusement is described as "the feeling that you have when you enjoy something that is funny" (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, n.d.a, p.1).

For negative emotions, anger is defined in the Cambridge Dictionary as: "a strong feeling that makes you want to hurt someone or be unpleasant because of something unfair or unkind that has happened" (n.d.a, p.1). Rage is defined as a "violent and uncontrolled anger" (Merriam-

Webster, n.d.a, p.1), and sadness is defined as feeling a bit lost and powerless (Lazarus, 1991). Furthermore, the video was coded according to the emotion being present in the video; "happiness", "awe", "curiosity", "amusement", "anger", "rage", or "sadness". If multiple feelings were present, we chose the overall emotion we were left with in the end.

UGC Entertainment Value

If the UGC is entertaining, it is something "that you enjoy watching, listening to, doing or experiencing" (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, n.d.b, p.1). It can also be synonymous with words like funny, amusing, and interesting. In this case, if the video was entertaining it was coded correspondingly. If the creator was telling some kind of story in the video, it was marked as "story". This could, for instance, be a story about the reason for buying this specific product or a story about how they have always struggled to clean the shower properly. If we found that the video was entertaining and told a story, it was coded with "both", and if neither was present, it was marked as "none".

Product Uniqueness

The term "unusual" is used for products that are "not usual, uncommon or rare" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.b, p.1), and "unique" describe products that are "able to be distinguished from all others of its class or type" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.c, p.1). "An element of surprise" is used for "the unexpected or surprising character of something" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.d, p.1). Moreover, a video was coded as "unusual" if it contained a product that is not common, stands out from similar products, or had something unexpected to it. If there were no element of surprise and no uniqueness to the product, "usual" was used.

Product Problem-Solving Ability

Products that help solve a problem, like a skincare product for helping acne skin or a cleaning product for difficult stains, were coded "solve", and products that did not solve a problem were coded "no solve".

Number of Followers

According to statistics, 20% of US users on TikTok have between 20 000 and 100 000 followers (Ceci, 2022c). The video was coded "high" if the creator had over 100 000 followers and "low" if they had less than 100 000 followers.

Expertise of Creator

An expert is defined as "a person with a high level of knowledge or skill relating to a particular subject or activity" (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.b). We also looked at the creator's other videos and made our decision based on that. For instance, if the creator was talking about a skincare product, we checked their feed for similar videos. If there were other videos about skincare products, the creator was considered an expert on the topic, hence coded "expert". If the person was not considered an expert, "novice" was used.

Creator Entertainment

For this category, the same definition of entertainment used under "UGC Entertainment Value" was used to determine if the creator should be classified as "entertaining" or "unentertaining". If we enjoyed watching and listening to the creator and they told an enjoyable story, it was marked as "entertaining". If neither of these were present, it was coded "unentertaining". If the creator was not present in the video but used their voice, this was used to make the decision. Suppose they were using regular text-to-speech on the video. In that case, this was not included in the decision of this category (as it is not their own voice), but rather an effect for the entertainment of the video (UGC Entertainment Value).

Creator Relatability

To relate to something is defined as "show or make a connection between two or more things" (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, n.d.c, p.1). Therefore, the video was coded as "relatable" if we felt like a majority of the audience could relate to the creator, the situation in the video, the product they were talking about, the elements, or the feelings in the video. If there was nothing relatable in the video, it was marked as "unrelatable". For instance, if the electric outlet is located behind the sofa, and a product makes it easier to reach, it was marked as "relatable" as this is a common problem people can relate to.

Other

Three other categories were also included in the coding but not hypothesized: brand mention, text with video, and gender. Brand mention was labeled "yes" if the creator specifically named the brand of the product and "no" if they did not mention it. However, when we checked the coding, we realized that the coding had been performed differently on brand mentions and products from Amazon. Amazon is not a brand but an online shopping site, so

if they mentioned they bought it from Amazon, it was coded "no". This resulted in an additional review of all the videos and re-coding those who initially were coded wrong. Moreover, it could not be coded as "yes" even though we knew the product was bought on Amazon because if we searched for the product on Amazon, it was hard to tell from which merchant they purchased it from. Additionally, the video was labeled as "no" if the video was a reply to a comment and the comment was present on the video. It was only coded "yes" if the creator told what the brand was or wrote it themselves. Also, it did not count if the creator showed us the product without explicitly telling or writing the brand. To sum up, showing the product visually, or replying to a comment/duet - labeled "no", specifically mentioning it, or texting it in the video - "yes".

Text with video was labeled "yes" if the creator used text-to-speech or had other text elements in the video. However, auto-generated captions, comments in the video, text from a duet video, and the video caption were labeled "no".

Lastly, gender was coded as "female" if the creator of the video was female and "male" if the creator was male. However, when it was difficult to judge whether the creator was female or male, for instance when only their hands were shown in the video, we looked at the rest of the videos from the creator to make a judgment.

Example

To demonstrate how the coding was performed, we can use the video featuring the L'oreal Paris Infallible 24-hour Fresh Wear Liquid Foundation from @Kkmichellebeauty (see appendix). First, the video was coded "positive" as no negative sides were mentioned to the product. There was information about the product in the video, where she demonstrated how covering it was and how good it smelled, thus coded as "informational". The video was coded "happiness", as the creator was excited and enthusiastic about the product, and we were left with a feeling of happiness after watching it. The creator made a video that was "both" entertaining and told a story, and the product was solving a problem, covering the redness of her skin, hence the code "solve". As we have seen a foundation multiple times before, there was nothing special or unique to the product, therefore marked as "usual". The creator had 1.3 million followers, resulting in the code "high", and her feed was filled up with other videos of makeup, which made us define her as an "expert". We thought the creator was entertaining, and we felt like many people could relate to the story she was telling, hence the

codes "entertaining" and "relatable". The creator mentioned the brand name, thus coded "yes" on brand mention. Moreover, it did not contain any text, resulting in a "no" on text with video. Lastly, the creator was "female".

3.4 Measures

A variable is something that can take on different or changeable values. The values can change over time for the same thing or person, or they might change at the same moment for different objects or people (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The dependent variable is the one that the researcher is most interested in. The researcher's purpose is to comprehend and describe the dependent variable and explain and anticipate its variability. In other words, it is the primary variable that lends itself to research as a valid element. It should be possible to identify answers or solutions to the problem by analyzing the dependent variable (i.e., determining what variables impact it).

The four dependent variables in our analysis were likes, shares, views, and comments. These were ranked 1, 2, 3, etc., based on the level of user engagement. The most critical variables for virality are rewatch- and completion rate, which will award the creator the most (Keynejad, 2020). However, numbers on TikTok videos that was rewatched and completed were excluded because no information is available to anybody other than the creator. The third most important is shares, according to Keynejad (2020), and comments are ranked as number four. Likes also award the creator, but to a smaller degree than shares and comments. Literature concerning views was diffuse, thus placed last, as it does not require any action or engagement from the user. From this, we decided the order to be 1. shares, 2. comments, 3. likes, and 4. views. Shares and comments have lower numbers than likes and views, as it requires more action than a double-tap (like). However, if the content is interesting enough, it will receive comments or shares. Lastly, views will always have higher numbers than the three other measures.

An independent variable is typically thought to positively or negatively affect the dependent variable (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). As both the independent and the dependent are present simultaneously, if there is an increase or decrease in the independent variable, the dependent will increase or decrease accordingly. The independent variable accounts for the variance in the dependent variable. The independent variables were UGC Valence, UGC Style, UGC

Tone, UGC Entertainment Value, Product Uniqueness, Product Problem-Solving Ability, Number of Followers, Expertise of Creator, Creator Entertainment, and Creator Relatability, which are the categories we created for each hypothesis.

3.5 Data analysis

An ANOVA analysis was used in SPSS to evaluate the data collected in the sample. ANOVA is an analysis of variance and is used for analyzing three or more independent groups, checking for statistical differences in the means (Qualtrics, n.d.). Variance and sample size are combined to produce an F-value. The F-value can be examined to determine if the difference in the samples is "statistically significant (p-value)" (Qualtrics, n.d., paragraph 2). Additionally, suppose the P-value is lower than the significance level, there is enough evidence to state that minimum one of the mean values in the sample differs from the other (Zach, 2019).

The ANOVA analysis can be used to understand how the independent variables are linked to the dependent variables (Qualtrics, n.d.). Although an ANOVA test helps identify the significance levels, it does not inform us which categories are distinct from one another (Zach, 2019). It merely indicates that some means in the collection might differ. Thus, a post hoc test was performed on the groups with more than two variables to determine which groups varied. A post hoc test allows researchers to investigate the differences in several group means (Zach, 2019). Tukey's test was also implemented to "make every possible pairwise comparison" (Zach, 2019, paragraph 3).

In social science research, a 95 percent confidence level means that there is only a 5% chance that the findings are incorrect. This is considered standard and is referred to as a significance level of 0.05 (p = 0.05) (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). A significance level of 0.1 and 0.01 is also common (Yale Statistics, n.d.). Our analyses were performed using a significance level of α =.05 and 95% confidence intervals, but we also considered a significance level of α =0.1 in some hypotheses. However, as the chance of concluding with the wrong result is higher with a significant level of α = 0.1, we mainly tried to use 0.05 as the boundary.

4. Results

This chapter will present the results from the quantitative analysis run in SPSS. We will explain the results from each hypothesis and argue why it is accepted or rejected. Moreover, we will explain the changes we made and why they were made. Lastly, a summary table of the hypotheses and if they are accepted or rejected is presented.

H1: Positive UGC is more likely to go viral than non-positive UGC.

For this hypothesis, we coded the content into four categories, "positive", "negative", "neutral", and "both". After the initial ANOVA analysis, we discovered that the "negative" and "neutral" numbers were relatively low compared to "positive". Thus, we added them into one category – "non-positive", and discarded the "both" category. This left us with two main categories, "positive" and "non-positive", and the following results:

Dependent variable	P-value	F-value	Means	
			Positive	*Non-positive*
Shares	**0.001***	10.965	24116.96	13133.74
Comments	0.571	0.322	4299.68	3955.72
Likes	0.332	0.944	867822.07	769125.00
Views	0.918	0.011	7684615.38	7765425.53

*Table 3: Results from H1. *Significance level = 0.05*

According to shares, which previously was argued to be the highest level of engagement for this thesis, *H1* can be confirmed.

H2: Informational UGC is more likely to go viral than non-informational UGC.

In the second hypothesis, we encountered the same problem as in H1. We started with the categories "informational", "emotional", "neutral", and "both", but with less than 10 videos coded "emotional", we chose to add "emotional" and "neutral" together, naming it "non-informational". Also, we excluded the "both" group consisting of 30 videos. This left us with a differently worded hypothesis and a new analysis, where we went from emotional vs. informational to informational vs. non-informational. Although we had a new group with a higher number of videos, the numbers were still too uneven to get an accurate result. However, the results can be demonstrated below.

Dependent variable	P-value	F-value	Means	
			Informational	*Non-informational*
Shares	0.326	0.967	19581.56	14927.84
Comments	0.158	1.998	3778.05	4961.50
Likes	0.692	0.158	775331.86	838985.48
Views	0.871	0.026	7450735.29	7629032.26

Table 4: Results from H2.

H2 was rejected or not valid due to the skewed numbers in the data collection.

H3: UGC evoking the feeling of amusement or curiosity is more likely to go viral than UGC that evokes happiness.

For this hypothesis, we coded the content into seven categories, depending on the emotion we were left with. We quickly realized that three of the emotions were most common, "happiness", "amusement", and "curiosity". These were separated out from the others, and an ANOVA was conducted based on these three only. We excluded the negative emotions

"sadness", "rage", "anger", as well as "awe" due to low numbers (less than 15 videos in each category). The results from the ANOVA were as follows:

Dependent variable	P-value	F-value	Means		
			Happiness	*Amusement*	*Curiosity*
Shares	0.742	0.299	20129.65	22349.15	18598.04
Comments	**0.003***	5.876	3521.02	6193.27	4141.90
Likes	0.119	2.142	754126.17	1009628.72	902292.59
Views	0.172	1.764	7194531.25	8925531.91	8362222.22

*Table 5: Results from H3. *Significance level = 0.05*

As displayed, comments are the only significant dependent variable with α = 0.003. Thus, a post hoc test was performed to examine where the difference was within the groups. The significant difference was found between happiness and amusement (α = 0.002). The significance value between curiosity and amusement (α = 0.056) can also be considered significant at the 0.1 level, meaning that it is marginally supported. Because it was argued that comments were the second-best predictor for virality, *H3* was accepted.

H4: Entertaining UGC or one that tells a story/anecdote is more likely to go viral than one that is not/does not.

For the fourth hypothesis, we coded the videos into one of four categories, "entertaining", "story", "both", and "none". After the first ANOVA analysis, we realized that the hypothesis was worded differently from how we coded it. Therefore, we combined "entertaining", "story" and "both", and compared it with "none", making it into two categories; "entertaining" and "non-entertaining". However, "entertaining" had a much higher frequency (n=409) compared to "non-entertaining" (n=91). Nonetheless, an ANOVA was performed:

Dependent variable	P-value	F-value	Means	
			Entertaining	*Non-entertaining*
Shares	0.320	0.993	18851.89	23005.44
Comments	0.619	0.248	4100.11	4477.57
Likes	0.256	1.292	808831.14	953342.70
Views	**0.068****	3.344	7425790.75	9228089.89

Table 6: Results from H4. **Significance level = 0.1

As illustrated in the table, views had an α = 0.068, which can be considered significant at the 0.1 level. However, as it is not within the 0.05 level and views were argued to be the least important indicator of virality, we concluded that this hypothesis was rejected as the numbers were not valid.

H5: Unusual or unique products with an element of surprise are more likely to go viral.

Regarding H5, the videos were coded into two categories, "usual" and "unusual". An ANOVA analysis was performed, which gave us these results:

Dependent variable	P-value	F-value	Means	
			Unusual	*Usual*
Shares	**0.000***	12.508	23275.76	11155.58
Comments	**0.006***	7.644	4693.02	2963.66
Likes	**0.020***	5.484	909520.98	662919.74
Views	**0.006***	7.552	8428448.28	6185526.32

*Table 7: Results from H5. *Significance level = 0.05*

As all the dependent variables were significant at the 0.05 level, *H5* can be confirmed with confidence.

H6: Products that help solve a problem are more likely to go viral.

As for the sixth hypothesis, there were two categories; "solve", and "no solve". After running an ANOVA analysis, we were presented with these results:

Dependent variable	P-value	F-value	Means	
			Solve	*No Solve*
Shares	**0.061****	3.522	22048.56	15966.03
Comments	0.502	0.451	4007.04	4403.71
Likes	0.411	0.676	801614.09	883149.01
Views	0.526	0.402	7943959.73	7455445.54

Table 8: Results from H6. **Significance level = 0.1

According to shares ($\alpha = 0.061$), which requires the highest level of engagement, H6 is marginally supported within the 0.1 significance level, thus confirmed.

H7: UGC of creators with a higher number of followers will be more viral than those with fewer followers.

Connected to messenger characteristics, H7 included two categories: "high" and "low". This was used to see how many followers the content creators had and whether it was significant for the virality of a video. With an ANOVA test, the following results were presented:

Dependent variable	P-value	F-value	Means	
			High	*Low*
Shares	**0.003***	8.633	23308.74	13776.64
Comments	**0.019***	5.574	4711.57	3316.00
Likes	**0.000***	14.283	979662.95	607589.23
Views	**0.000***	13.125	8828196.72	6054871.79

*Table 9: Results from H7. *Significance level = 0.05*

All four dependent variables were significant at the 0.05 level; thus, H7 was confirmed.

H8: UGC of creators who are perceived as an "expert" on the content/topic in the video is more likely to go viral.

This hypothesis was also linked to messenger characteristics and the videos were coded into "expert" or "novice", depending on previous content made by the creator. Performing an ANOVA analysis on this hypothesis gave us these results:

Dependent variable	P-value	F-value	Means	
			Expert	*Novice*
Shares	0.356	0.852	20409.40	16942.55
Comments	0.343	0.903	4014.35	4662.42
Likes	**0.075****	3.184	882699.74	678693.22
Views	**0.057****	3.632	8145811.52	6454237.29

Table 10: Results from H8. **Significance level = 0.1

This hypothesis can be argued to be confirmed as views (α = 0.057) and likes (α = 0.075) are marginally supported within the 0.1 significance level. However, as views and likes require the least amount of engagement from the viewer, and they are not within the 0.05 level, H8 has been rejected.

H9: UGC of creators who are perceived as entertaining or good storytellers will be more viral than those who are not as entertaining.

Regarding this hypothesis, the videos were coded "entertaining" or "unentertaining", depending on the degree of entertainment of the messenger. An ANOVA was run for this hypothesis as well, which presented these results:

Dependent variable	P-value	F-value	Means	
			Entertaining	*Unentertaining*
Shares	**0.004***	8.392	23655.34	14418.71
Comments	0.399	0.714	4384.28	3891.13
Likes	0.151	2.067	896496.79	755718.18
Views	0.957	0.003	7764642.86	7723636.36

Table 11: Results from H9. * *Significance level = 0.05

The result from the ANOVA shows that shares (α = 0.004), which require the highest amount of engagement from the viewer, are within the 0.05 significance level and thus confirming the hypothesis.

H10: People are more likely to trust UGC if they can relate to the video/situation/products/elements/feelings compared to UGC that they cannot relate to.

The last hypothesis proved to be a challenge. We first ran the ANOVA analysis after coding the videos as "relatable" and "unrelatable". Then we realized that trust is hard to measure using these categories only, and since we did not have enough time to change the hypothesis and re-code the 500 videos, we decided that H10 cannot be supported. However, the table below includes the results from the ANOVA analysis:

Dependent variable	P-value	F-value	Means	
			Relatable	*Unrelatable*
Shares	0.217	1.531	21070.02	16962.26
Comments	0.477	0.508	4012.47	4442.54
Likes	0.565	0.331	813544.37	871905.00
Views	0.862	0.030	7697187.50	7834444.44

Table 12: Results from H10.

For H10, no dependent variables were within either the 0.05 or 0.1 significance level. Thus, this hypothesis was rejected and marked as not valid.

To summarize the results from the analysis, a table was made to easily demonstrate which hypotheses were supported and not:

Hypothesis	Accepted/Rejected
H1: Positive UGC is more likely to go viral than non-positive UGC.	Accepted.
H2: Informational UGC is more likely to go viral than non-informational UGC.	Rejected/not valid.
H3: UGC evoking the feeling of amusement or curiosity is more likely to go viral than UGC that evokes happiness.	Accepted.
H4: Entertaining UGC or one that tells a story/anecdote is more likely to go viral than one that is not/does not.	Rejected/not valid.
H5: Unusual or unique products with an element of surprise are more likely to go viral.	Accepted.
H6: Products that help solve a problem are more likely to go viral.	Accepted.
H7: UGC of creators with a higher number of followers will be more viral than those with fewer followers.	Accepted.
H8: UGC of creators who are perceived as an "expert" on the content/topic in the video is more likely to go viral.	Rejected.
H9: UGC of creators who are perceived as entertaining or good storytellers will be more viral than those who are not as entertaining.	Accepted.
H10: People are more likely to trust the UGC if they can relate to the creator/video/situation/product/elements/feelings compared to UGC that they cannot relate to.	Rejected.

Table 13: Summary of the results from the data analysis

5. Discussion and conclusions

5.1 Discussion

The main goal of this study was to understand why product-related UGC goes viral by looking at content-, messenger-, and product characteristics of a selected data collection consisting of 500 viral TikTok videos. In this content analysis we also collected some additional data besides the data needed for the hypotheses. This will be briefly explained and discussed, as some of the results were quite intriguing. A conclusion of the discussion can be found in subchapter 5.2.

Gender

In our study, we discovered that most creators of videos were female (n=375), and a smaller portion was marked as male (n=125). As previously mentioned, 61 percent of US users are female; however, according to statistics from August 2021, TikTok content creators consisted of 46% male and 54% female (Ceci, 2022d). It is rather difficult to understand why so many female videos go viral on the app when it is nearly a 50/50 split between the genders. One argument may be that male content creators post about different things than female content creators. For instance, women might be more inclined to go shopping and then post product-related reviews on their profiles. If we had performed a content analysis of viral videos in general, not limited to product videos, the gender distribution could have been different.

Brand mention

Regarding brand mention, a relatively low number of content creators have explicitly mentioned the brand of the product they were talking about (n=131). Even though they might not directly say the brand name, many have adequately shown the product, or its logo in the video or mentioned it in the comments or caption. What has been considered in this study, is if they directly say the brand name. If they do not mention the brand name, the creator often mentions the product's name, making it easier to find, possibly by a google search or by recognizing it in other videos. Although many do not mention the brand name (n=369), the videos still can go viral as they provide additional information making it easy for the viewer to look up. Thus, it appears that brand mention is not crucial for the potential virality of content, as information is easily available anyway.

Text with video

In this section, we have looked at the text the creator has added to the video. Content creators often use the speech-to-text function, creating text as they speak, but this is not always used. In "recent times", more awareness has been brought to the hearing impaired, who can now use the app on an equal footing due to these captions. One can also argue that people have become more concerned with equality and that everyone should be able to use the app; thus, using text on the video will contribute to equality. Additionally, some might use the app with their phone volume turned off , meaning captions or text will help them understand more of what is going on. Lastly, based on our results, it seems like text overlay is often present on viral videos (n=334). This is also supported by the recent study from Ling et al. (2021).

5.1.1 Content characteristics

H1 proposed that positive UGC is more likely to go viral than non-positive UGC. Our findings supported the research from (Berger & Milkman, 2010a; Berger & Milkman, 2012; Tubenchlak et al.,2015; Zhang et al, 2014) and proved that positive UGC, in fact has a higher chance of going viral. This can be explained by the attractiveness of positive content, and the desire to be left with a positive, or good feeling, for both the sender and receiver (Berger & Milkman, 2010a). One can argue that both positive and negative UGC captures the viewers' attention. However, positive product-related UGC might lead to a higher engagement, as viewers would want to get a positive input rather than a negative. Most people do not want to watch or continue watching something they dislike or perhaps disagree with. As visiting the app might be considered a break in everyday life, users would possibly prefer watching something fun or surprising, or something that makes you laugh. Moreover, one can argue that a larger part of online communities, like TikTok, is about cheering each other on, supporting, and helping each other. For instance, it could be beneficial to share a positive product-related video with a friend or acquaintance, which could help them with a purchase decision.

H2 proposed that informational UGC is more likely to go viral than non-informational UGC. Although multiple researchers support this hypothesis (Berger & Milkman, 2010a; Maddox, 1998; Muntinga et al., 2011; Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008; Pressgrove et al., 2018), it was rejected in this thesis due to skewed numbers between the groups. However, it is still interesting to discuss why over 400 videos were marked as "informational" out of the 500

videos which were analyzed in total. When talking about a product or showing a product in a video, it is often natural to include some information about the product, by either talking about the price, usage possibilities, or where it was bought. If there is a lack of information in the video, people start to ask questions, and everybody might be curious about the same thing. Today, large amounts of videos contain information, and people tend to be more open and interested in information than before. Many people like to do research before buying products, and this can be explained by how easy it is to access everything online. In the past, people had to visit the physical stores to obtain information about products, while now, a quick google search can give you everything you need. This allows you to prepare yourself before going to the store to buy the product, to make sure that it covers your needs and that you will make the best deal. Through UGC, information is presented right in front of you, even the information you did not need or want, influencing you to buy new products.

It can also be argued that an informational video can lead to a feeling of curiosity, which again triggers you to look for more information. Searching for more information will create an engagement from the consumer. For example, when browsing through TikTok, you could come across a video promoting a product that you want to learn more about. This might cause you to look at the creator's feed and browse through some of their other videos. If something has received your attention, it is natural to want to know more about it. This does not only apply to product-related content, but also in general. And since everything is so easily available today, why not look further into it? More information can be found in just a few seconds or minutes, and it does not require much of you or your time to do it.

H3 suggested that UGC evoking the feeling of amusement or curiosity is more likely to go viral than UGC that evokes happiness, and our findings supported this hypothesis. Based on previous studies, emotional content has a higher chance of going viral (Akpinar & Berger, 2017; Berger & Milkman, 2012; Goodrich et al., 2015; Heimbach & Hinz, 2016; Hsieh et al., 2012; Nelson-Field et al., 2013). Regarding emotional responses to viral videos, as a content creator, you want the viewers to be left with an emotion. This emotion should be powerful enough for the viewer to share it with friends or others who can relate to it to give them the same experience.

As previously mentioned, amusement, curiosity, and happiness are all high-arousal feelings, proven to be more viral (Berger & Milkman, 2012; Berger, 2011; Pressgrove et al., 2018; Rietveld et al., 2020). However, amusement and curiosity are considered more high-arousal than happiness (Hijazi et al., 2016). Happiness may be a more diffuse or neutral feeling and hard to grasp. It can then be argued that when you are left with a stronger and more specific emotion like curiosity or amusement, it will make you engage more with the content, and search for similar content. Moreover, one can say that with those emotions, you will crave more, which again results in higher engagement. One might be more inclined to share something that is surprising, funny, or makes you curious. For instance, viewing an amusing video may result in you visiting the page to discover similar videos or sharing it with a friend. Lastly, watching a video that "only" makes you feel good, might not make you feel strongly enough to want to share it or in any other way interact with it.

Berger also agrees that people are more likely to share videos that are associated with "high arousal" feelings (Berger, 2011, p. 891). Based on our results, higher emotionally engaging content can be argued to be more viral. Curiosity can be an interest in a product(s), where you are left with a feeling of wanting to know more. Additionally, something surprising or funny could also make you want to search for more information. Therefore, it creates more engagement and could be triggering, as explained in Berger's six STEPPS for virality.

H4 suggested that entertaining UGC or one that tells a story/anecdote is more likely to go viral than one that is not/does not. This suggestion is supported by Berger, as stories can be perceived as a tool for entertainment (Pressgrove et al., 2018). However, our analysis and findings could not support this hypothesis as the numbers between the groups were uneven; thus, the hypothesis was rejected. However, over 80% of the videos were marked as "entertaining". The large number of videos within the "entertaining" category could be explained by the many elements in a video. Some videos are entertaining because of the music, others are entertaining because of the content, the product, the filter and so on. In other words, "entertaining" can come in various forms.

It can also be argued that TikTok was created with the purpose of trying to make videos more entertaining. The app allows you to add effects, filters, and soundtracks to the video, which could help make it more entertaining for the viewers. Also, TikTok has a time limit for the video, and the app is known for consisting of short videos. Short videos can be perceived as

more entertaining as the viewers' attention span is limited. Videos with a longer length and too much information can be perceived as boring as the viewer will lose their attention at some point. If the analysis had been run on other social media, the results might have been more 50/50 as to what is entertaining or not. For example, on YouTube you can find a much larger variety of video lengths than on TikTok. A YouTube video can be minutes or hours long, which arguably could have resulted in more even numbers between the two groups (entertaining vs. non-entertaining). For a higher chance of virality, a high entertainment value is essential. If the video is not entertaining enough, the viewer will get bored and keep on scrolling to other videos instead. Entertaining videos in general will "always" create more engagement, and receive more shares, comments, and likes, as no one will bother to share or even keep on watching a video they consider to be boring.

5.1.2 Product characteristics

H5 suggested that unusual or unique products with an element of surprise are more likely to go viral. This hypothesis has been accepted, and one can consider unique to be surprising, which, as argued in *H3*, may lead to more engagement than ordinary or mundane products. It is easier to persuade people to share a product that is unexpected rather than one that is dull and overused. Several studies claim that individuals, in general, like to discuss uncommon and unexpected topics (Hughes, 2005; Rosen, 2006; Wojnicki & Godes, 2008). Product innovativeness can also explain this; research has shown that innovative or new-to-market products are more attractive (Nguyen & Chaudhury, 2019; Derbaix & Vanhamme, 2003; Moldovan et al., 2011). Further, it can be argued that new products often contain some kind of unique feature.

It can also be argued that unique products are more enjoyable than those you see everywhere. Additionally, one may claim that people want to stand out in the crowd. This is also supported by Berger (STEPPS), as social currency is the concept where people desire to appear attractive, smart, or informed in the presence of others, and uniqueness is an essential component (Pressgrove et al., 2018). This may be problematic as viral content can result in empty store shelves for weeks and months due to product popularity. Furthermore, the product can quickly become usual due to its success and may not be considered unique anymore. Yet, if there is some uniqueness to a product, possible consumers may want to know more about it, as argued and coherent with *H2*. One might also say that humans are

curious by nature, which can lead to higher engagement. Moreover, you may be surprised by unexpected uses for products you are acquainted with, which you were previously unaware of. Uniqueness and surprising products can also be linked to *H3*, where unique products might be amusing or lead to increased curiosity.

H6 proposed that products that help solve a problem are more likely to go viral. Our findings supported this, demonstrating that products with a problem-solving ability engage more people than those who do not have that ability. Usually, if someone you know has a problem, and you find a video recommending a product that solves this, you are likely to share it. As useful products are more probable to be shared, as suggested by Walsh et al. (2004), consumers want to share content they consider to be helpful to others (Pressgrove et al., 2018). If the product does not work for you, you may not receive anything in return for purchasing it. It is more logical to spend money on one single product that you genuinely want to solve a problem rather than anything unnecessary, as this might be considered a "waste" of money.

The findings of *H6* is supported by Berger's "practical value" in his STEPPS framework. Practical value is, as previously argued, based on the prospect theory by Kahneman and Tversky (1979), stating that consumers tend to select the option based on the greatest perceived value (Pressgrove et al., 2018). Moreover, if you face a problem, you want to solve it in the best way possible, and sometimes you do not even know about the problem until you found the solution to it. In other words, you may take inspiration from UGC and seek more information, as argued in *H2*. If you are faced with an issue, minimal activity is necessary to solve it as there is such a large amount of information available just a few keystrokes away.

5.1.3 Messenger characteristics

H7 suggested that UGC of creators with a higher number of followers will be more viral than those with fewer followers. This hypothesis was supported, which can be explained by the fact that users with many followers will automatically experience a higher engagement from the followers, as the followers have already decided that they want to follow the creator to watch more from them. According to Berger's STEPPS, public is related to something that is clearly recognized and very noticeable (Pressgrove et al., 2018). Moreover, when people are unsure how to proceed with something, they will intuitively seek social cues from others.

Our results showed that out of the 500 videos, over 60% of the creators were marked with a "high" number of followers, where the limit was set at 100 000 followers. Although we chose to only mark videos with over 100k followers as "high", one must remember that videos marked with "low" followers can reach up to 99k followers. However, we do not know if the creator received large amounts of followers before or after the viral video we analyzed, as those numbers are not publicly available.

In today's society, we know that anyone has the potential to go viral, but in most cases, it will be easier for creators with many followers. These creators can be viewed as trustworthy spokespersons or opinion leaders, and they are capable of influencing their viewers to a higher degree (Baker & Churchill, 1977; Hovland & Weiss, 1951, Nunes et al., 2018; Patzer, 1983). Multiple factors can explain virality for users with a high number of followers; if the creator has many followers, the initial reach will be higher than others with fewer followers. Also, people have already decided to follow this person, meaning that the followers might want to watch the videos regardless of the content, as they have already decided that they like the person making the videos. One can also argue that some of the creators with a large follower base on TikTok knows how to make a video viral, or at least they will know how to make a video that engages their existing followers. Ling et al.'s study on TikTok (2021) found that the most accurate measure of a video's level of virality is the number of followers the creator has. However, we have not considered followers for our research, as we were uncertain of the number of followers the creator had before the viral video we analyzed. Based on the literature, we have concluded that shares, comments, and likes are a better indicator of virality than the number of followers.

In sum, because of the vast number of followers, one could imagine that the creator has already made videos with high engagement, and thus they know how to reach their followers when creating videos. In this case, it will be easier, and it will require less from a creator with many followers to make a viral video, compared to a creator with fewer followers.

H8 suggested that UGC of creators who are perceived as an "expert" on the content/topic in the video is more likely to go viral. Due to only getting a significance level on views and the marginal significance level of likes in this hypothesis, H8 was rejected. People might perceive other individuals, or opinion leaders, as experts when they have more knowledge than themselves about a product or brand (Lyons & Henderson, 2005). Some may not be

experts, but it appears that way because they previously have published content on the specific topic. If you have limited knowledge yourself, it is natural to search for those who might have more knowledge. Furthermore, in recent years, people have become more trusting of the Internet (Cheong & Morrison, 2008; Cheud & Thadani, 2012). Previously, WOM from friends and peers was the "information to trust", but as argued in chapter 2, people now trust eWOM and UGC from strangers. Thus, *H8* was rejected because "everyone" can be perceived as experts within some topic.

H9 proposed that UGC of creators who are perceived as entertaining or good storytellers is going to be more viral than those who are not as entertaining. Based on the results from the analysis, the hypothesis was accepted, as one could argue that you do not bother to spend time on unentertaining creators. When someone or something is unentertaining, it is usually not engaging; thus, you do not bother to share, or in any other way engage with the video. As described in *H4*, entertaining content has a better possibility of virality than uninteresting ones. Therefore, it is vital that the content they share is engaging. The same goes for *H9*, but here, the creator was in focus rather than the content itself. It is difficult to understand TikTok's algorithm and challenging to say whether the content will go viral or not. Furthermore, as entertainment and creativity can be linked to each other, one can also say that a creative content creator could be argued to be more viral than a non-creative.

H10 proposed that people are more likely to trust UGC if they can relate to the creator/video/situation/product/elements/feelings compared to UGC that they cannot relate to. This hypothesis proved to be a challenge, as it is difficult to prove and document internet trust because this is highly individual and may be influenced by various factors. Thus, it was rejected. Moreover, there are multiple elements in a video that you can relate to, from product functionality, to common problems, tips and tricks, things that don't work like it is supposed to do, and so on. Additionally, according to Bashein and Markus' research (1997), people are more likely to trust someone similar to themselves. In general, relatable videos will often go viral; if you can relate to the individual, video, or feelings, or you can relate to the situation. One could also argue that humans are social animals, and therefore it is natural for us to want to be a part of something bigger, like a group or a society. However, as trust is hard to measure, it was decided to reject the hypothesis due to a weakness in the wording of the hypothesis and the coding.

5.2 Conclusion

Opening TikTok can result in hours of scrolling. It is possible to get completely absorbed in it as you are pulled into a universe that provides you with unlimited content. The main goal of this thesis was to figure out what characteristics make a product-related user-generated TikTok video go viral. By performing a mixed-method study of 500 TikTok videos, we demonstrated how content-, product-, and messenger characteristics can affect the degree of virality. Our findings demonstrated that when creating a video that you want to go viral on social media, particularly TikTok, you should make a positive video that includes high-arousal emotions like amusement and curiosity. Moreover, it should contain an unusual or unique product that solves a problem. Lastly, as a creator, you should be entertaining or tell a story, and it is beneficial to have a high number of followers.

Our results can be summarized as follows; *H1* and *H3* (content characteristics), *H5* and *H6* (product characteristics), and *H7* and *H9* (messenger characteristics) were accepted. Thus, we can with confidence claim that there is proof that content-, product-, and messenger characteristics are critical to the virality of a video on TikTok. A combination of the three groups can all contribute to a viral video. These findings emphasize the importance of understanding how specific characteristics affect online virality. The results also provide guidelines on how to advantageously create online content and set up strategies to achieve higher success in social media.

6. Implications, contributions, and limitations

6.1 Implications for marketers

The results of this study are especially important for those trying to market themselves as a brand, or marketing for businesses/brands on social media. In today's society, high visuality for businesses in social media can be considered a "make it or break it". More prominent brands might have a larger market share and thus more customers, and as a smaller brand, high visuality on social media is crucial for success. Hence, both large and small brands should consider implementing the characteristics exhibited in our research in their viral marketing campaigns. If a marketer notices a trending product, they should take advantage of it and advertise it if the product is in their product line. Lately, it has been observed that companies in general have included the phrase "TikTok-products" or "this product is trending on TikTok" in recent marketing campaigns. Businesses may dedicate more resources to specific parts of their marketing strategy once they know what material is working on their social media channels.

The results of our research can also be implemented on other social media platforms, like Instagram or Facebook, or other social media where users or brands express themselves through videos. You can find UGC across all social media; thus, product-related videos can be found everywhere. Consequently, our results might be translated to other platforms as well. Even though we have looked at UGC, the results may be just as relevant and valuable for brands as they can acquire inspiration and create producer-generated content (PGC) based on this. Non-product-related UGC can also go viral, thus, the video does not necessarily need to include a product to make use of our findings.

More generally, our results can be important for increasing customer retention for businesses. If the goal is to grow on social media or bring more attention to a product or brand, it is crucial for companies to be aware of their customers' needs and wants, as it will help them reach new and potential customers. Our findings can contribute to this by proving that certain video characteristics have a higher potential of making content go viral. These characteristics may be used as guidelines or inspiration for producing content online

Many studies are available of more well-established social media platforms, like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. However, only a handful of studies concern TikTok, as it is a relatively new platform. Although new, it is not insignificant, as marketers always must stay on track with trends. Moreover, TikTok has other features than alternative social media, and it also works considerably differently. Therefore, it is vital to understand how TikTok works and how to get the best results from the (posted) content, and our study can provide a fundamental basis for understanding the app.

6.2 Contributions

Our research considers something relatively new and unexplored, and this can lay the foundation for further study. In general, virality has been researched thoroughly (e.g., Berger & Milkman, 2012; Berger & Milkman, 2013; Goel et al., 2016; Mills, 2012; Tellis et al., 2019), and viral content has been a topic in several other studies (e.g., Munaro et al., 2021; Pressgrove et al., 2018; Xie et al., 2012). However, only a few studies have considered both UGC and virality, and little research is done on TikTok and how the app works. Further, as far as we know, we are the first ones to consider virality, products, and UGC in the same study.

The first hypothesis proved that positive UGC are more viral, which was supported by multiple previous studies. However, our study contributes to the field with new findings building on existing literature. For instance, we proved that curiosity and amusement are more viral than other emotions. It was previously known that innovative and new products are more attractive, and our study demonstrated that they are also more viral. Moreover, it was formerly demonstrated that useful products were more shared, and our study proved that they are also more viral. Our findings also showed that having a higher number of followers can be helpful to make a viral video. Lastly, our findings proved that entertaining creators or creators who tells a story are more viral, and this contributes to the field as we could not find other studies proving this. Thus, we can contribute to the field by demonstrating how several content-, product-, and messenger characteristics affect the virality of videos.

6.3 Limitations and suggestions for further research

Our work includes limitations, and some of them could provide a basis for further research. As both the authors are the same age and have similar interests, the content analysis may be somewhat subjective rather than objective, e.g., what we find amusing, might not be amusing to everyone. However, we have tried to stay as objective and unbiased as possible. Furthermore, if someone else were to perform the coding, say someone older or with a different background, the results might have been different.

Additionally, as the algorithm on TikTok is personalized, the video selection might have become biased in favor of the authors. If we had created a new user on TikTok without any personalization, the algorithm would have turned out differently. This was especially noticeable when exploring the hashtags, as we (the authors) got different videos, in different order, in our search. Furthermore, the algorithm is rather challenging to understand, and it is hard to untangle which ones are a direct result of your algorithm and which ones are suggestions based on what other users similar to you have liked. The videos are interconnected and thus hard to separate.

Deciding whether or not a video contained a story was complicated (*H4)* because it was hard to set a boundary as to what should be categorized as a story or not. Also, what was marked as "entertaining", might not be entertaining for others, although we tried to stay objective. For *H10*, it could be the case that something we marked as "relatable" was not relatable for others and vice versa. In other words, something we could relate to may not be relevant to everyone else. However, it was attempted to consider what the majority of people would think. Thus, as this was difficult, the hypothesis was rejected.

Moreover, as this is the first time for us performing a content analysis with coding and using SPSS, there were many insecurities. First, there might be typing errors in the coding, and second, as we are not experts in SPSS, our confidence in analyzing using the statistical software was low.

For further research, we suggest that TikTok should be investigated further as there are few studies on the social media, despite its growing popularity. Also, one could try to build on one of our hypotheses, especially those rejected or not valid in our study. Moreover, the video

selection can be addressed, for example, considering one of our limitations (age, interests, algorithm). Lastly, our current research can be expanded, by for example, using other factors or looking at purchasing behavior as a result of viral videos.

7. References

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Screenshots of the video used in the example in chapter 3.3. Created by @Kkmichellebeauty, about the L'Oréal Infallible foundation.

Appendix 2: Discussion paper

Discussion paper: International **Amalie Nilsen**

Master thesis presentation.

The topic of our master's thesis is UGC and virality. The thesis' goal was to get a greater understanding of what characteristics viral user-generated content (UGC) holds. In other words, it is a content analysis where we have sampled and analyzed over 500 videos from the video-sharing app TikTok, in order to examine which product-related videos are more viral and see which characteristics they hold. More specifically we will look at the message, messenger, and product characteristics, and these three categories have been further broken down into ten sub-categories for coding. Our findings show that six out of ten hypotheses in our thesis were accepted. This means that it is important to consider how the content is presented, what product is presented, and how you as a messenger appears to the audience.

User-generated content (UGC) and Word-of-mouth (WOM)
User-generated content (UGC) is digital material developed or published by the public instead of qualified professionals and mostly shared over the Internet (Daugherty, Eastin, & Bright, 2008). Another widely used definition has been presented by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD); "content made publicly available over the Internet, content that reflects a certain amount of creative effort and content created outside professional routines and practices" (2007, p. 61). User-generated content (UGC) can be utilized by online users to represent their own identities, engage socially with other individuals or companies, receive or disseminate information, or simply to be entertained (Daughtery et al., 2008; Muntiga, Moorman & Smit, 2011; Shao, 2009).

Moreover, while conventional media struggles under the pressure of greater specialization, the digital environment has the potential to profit on this segmented market by creating unique channels that allow consumers to have a say in the middle of the vast number of data and marketing (Daugherty et al., 2008) In the modern age, these specialized media sectors are increasingly being driven by user-generated content (UGC) rather than marketers and corporations.

Among many, a definition of word of mouth (WOM) is "an informal mode of communication between private parties concerning the evaluation of goods and services" (Chung & Darke, 2006, p. 270). Word-of-mouth usually happens between individuals, talking about products, services, trips, etc. (Buttle, 1998). According to Lutz and Reilly (1974), when someone is faced with a purchase which is of considerable value, WOM is more likely to affect a customer's decision of whether to get it or not, and/or where to purchase it. Where consumers used to rely on individual WOM to gain more information about a product or service, they now turn to electronic word of mouth (eWOM) (Huete-Alcocer, 2017). Electronic word-of-mouth is one of the most significant informal channels of communication for business, consumers, and the general public. UGC may be regarded as the electronic version of WOM. While word of mouth may be considered as more "local" and shared between peers, UGC has the potential of going viral, spreading both nationally and internationally.

Virality and viral marketing
"**Virality** (...) is a type of marketing technique that is based on, and at the same time encourages people to, pass from one marketing message to another, by the well-known system of word of mouth (or email or social network messages)" (Arimetrics, n.d., First paragraph). Virality can be related to increased exposure for a piece of content, either published by a business, or a person. An example is Kony 2012 produced by the business Invisible Children, which by Time Magazine was labelled "the most viral video ever made", and which reached over 110 million views in six days (Carbone, 2012; Fan, 2021). Another early viral video was Susan Boyle's audition on Britain's Got Talent in 2009, which received over 100 million views on YouTube (Holmwood, 2009). Multiple studies have researched virality in social media, and what content actually goes viral (Berger & Milkman, 2012; Mills, 2012; Pressgrove, McKeever, & Jang, 2018, Tellis, MacInnis, Tirunillai, & Zhang, 2019; Xie & Kukla, 2012).

Viral marketing takes advantage of modern social media, where consumers are urged to spread product information (Leskovec, Adamic & Huberman, 2007). The major goal is to persuade customers and potential consumers to connect with one another, rather than for companies to interact with the consumers. In viral marketing it is important that the content captures the attention of the viewer, and that it is engaging enough for him/her to share it (Dobele, Toleman, & Beverland, 2005).

Virality and UGC, and how it can be related to international trends and forces

Social media

From the first social network called Six Degrees launched in 1997, to TikTok which were launched in 2018, social media platforms can be argued to be one of the more important aspects of international trends (Ngak, 2011; Tidy & Galer, 2020). Not only were they platforms for personal utterances and networking, it also resulted in better and more international communication. Social media has made us more interconnected, but also enlightened about what is going on all around the world. Not only can it be argued that UGC has revolutionized the marketing field, but it can also be argued that as we have gotten to know social media this decade, we place more trust in people we know, and don't (Capala, 2021).

Viral videos affecting purchasing patterns

With increased exposure of user generated content, or more specifically product- and brand-related content, international trade and purchasing behaviors have changed. Where people once deliberately sought information, like on review websites, blogs, or from friends and family, product and brand information will be available either you want it or not. It may appear on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter or TikTok, but you can also see it on other websites like news sites, YouTube, and blogs. Also, on platforms with personalized algorithms like Instagram and TikTok small business have got a chance to compete with "the big guys". However, this is not only positive as there has been multiple examples of bigger brands stealing design of small businesses (Lieber, 2018). Viral product-related videos have resulted in both trends and fads. A trend is a significant growth or chance in circumstances, in how individuals behave, while a fad is fashion, pastime activities, or interests that is highly desired in a brief period (Crane, 2020). An example is one specific dress from Zara, where from June 2019, brand mentions increased by an astounding 1392 percent. Thus, people worldwide were shown a video, photo, or a news source promoting the dress, resulting in a short-lived fad in the fashion world.

Although, one of the strengths of TikTok is that it gives off a feeling of being unprofessional (Herrman, 2021). People post videos about everything, and one can argue that it makes it more casual. When individuals are doing a sales-pitch, their communications may come off

as more genuine and heartfelt, compared to sponsored posts. When social media exposes people from all around the world to what is available, items may go viral on a never-before-seen scale. When someone is scrolling through social media, they might scroll pass UGC about products one might not need, or that they have never seen before, they may be intrigued and wanting to know more. This can lead to an increase in the search for information on the internet, in other UGC. It can also lead to them purchasing the product in order to see if they live up to their reputation (e.g., from UGC about product reviews).

Taking an example from the beauty industry, due to a viral TikTok video, the Maybelline Sky High Mascara was sold out at ULTA Beauty stores as many as four times, in the span of 14 days (Spruch-Feiner, 2021). Because the product is relatively affordable, people may have felt a "need" to try it out, in order to see if it was worth the hype, and also post an honest review on social media. The video that first went viral did not come off as a sales pitch, which lead to over 500 million views under the hashtag #skyhighmascara on TikTok, and with those results, one can say that the reach and degree of virality is extreme. This is coherent with the results of our study, as the Sky High Mascara video can be marked positive, informational, sparks curiosity, and the expertise of the creator is high. This means that the *sponsored* video posted, although it was not considered a sales pitch by many, as the results from the application was great, it went viral, and led to empty store shelves.

Moreover, signs in stores now say "trending on TikTok", or "get the popular TikTok product", and they are also incorporating it in their marketing campaigns. Thus, benefiting of other people's success, in order to sell more products. One could say that it works, as it might intrigue people to try these products although they might have never seen it on the app, or just never seen it before. Also, according to Torkington (2021), the loyalty of customers is at an all-time low, with purchasers moving between brands at an extraordinary pace. Due to more enlightened consumers, they might now be more aware of multiple stores carrying the product, and therefore doing research before the final purchase, in order to get the best offer.

In all, as many as 75 percent of North-American customers have attempted a new buying behavior, and more than one third of those tried out new products or brands. This can also be a result of viral videos bringing more awareness of more regular products, as well as new ones. Alternative usage, or just enlightenment of these products can lead to frustrated

customers already aware of these products, and happy vendors selling more of these 'non-popular' products which now are in high demand.

Covid-19

With lockdowns worldwide, there was clear patterns in spending, more specifically *what* people spent their money on. Figure 1 shows the changes in China, France, Germany, United Kingdom, and the US (Remes et al. 2021).
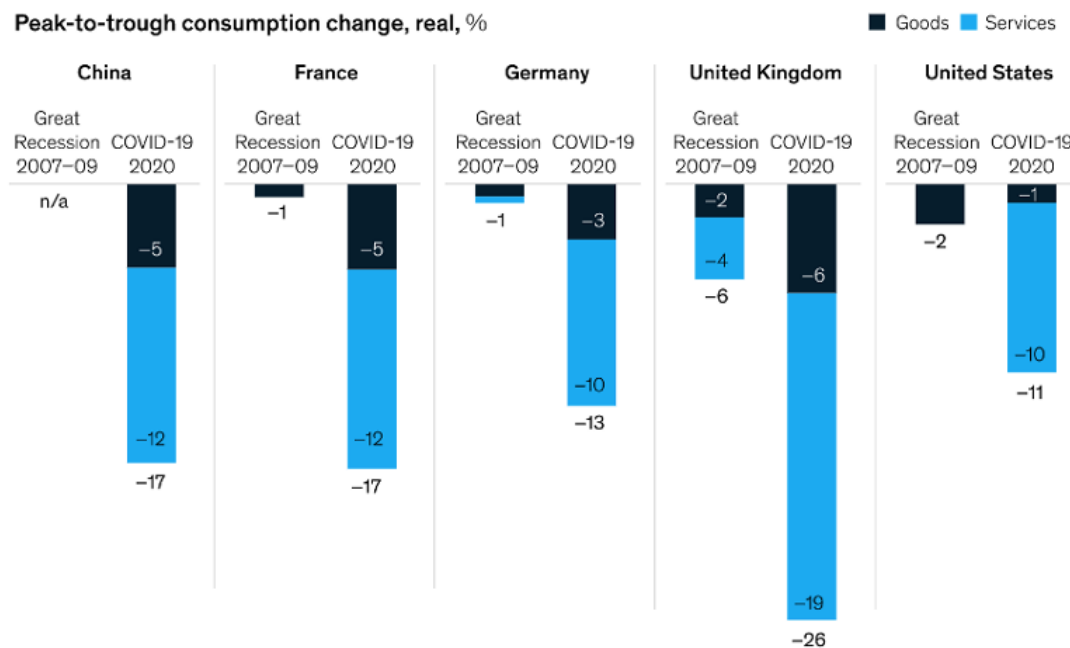

Figure 1: Peak-to-though consumption change, real, %. Retrieved from: Remes et al., 2021.

What one can conclude from this exhibition, is that in all the countries, the spending patterns on both goods and services decreased during the 2020 part of the pandemic. However, purchasing patterns related to services is substantially higher than goods, naturally due to the fact the world was in mid-lockdown. Cuts in spending and stimulus payouts increased the accumulated spending in the US to tree million dollars, which is a doubling from 2019. However, due to money saved on e.g., eating in instead of dining out, this was spent elsewhere.

During the pandemic, screen time has risen with over 70 percent (Flockett, n.d.). This includes screen time spent on phones, computers, television, and tablets. One can argue that

more time at home resulted in a higher need for communication due to the fact that countries shut down, and people spent more time at home. One can also argue that it increased the search for electronic stimuli. Not only did the screen time increase, but also the amount UGC on social media, as a direct result of people spending more time at home, with more time to spare.

As a result of the pandemic, internet shopping in all markets and in all product categories increased (JP Morgan, 2020). Consumers searched the internet for anything, from hand disinfectants, to food, cosmetics, housekeeping products. Moreover, according to a PwC report, the move from brick-and-mortar shops to online shopping and digital channels will continue beyond Covid-19 and its restrictions (Torkington, 2021). Consumers that previously preferred physical shopping was forced to shop online for the goods they wanted, thus they might have figured out the simplicity of it, and continued shopping from their own home.

Conclusion

With increased creation and consumption of user-generated content, and social medias on the rise, the digital environment has a great influence on *what* individuals want to purchase, *where* to purchase it from, and *when* to purchase it. As UGC goes viral, one can say that a demand for the specific product is created, based on wants – not needs, which also results in increased expenditures.

Due to the fact that customers now have the access to more information about products or brands, and with personal reviews, it has resulted in more consumer-driven power. Increased online shopping has also resulted in a higher product-demand. During peak pandemic, the demand was on the rise for multiple products, both more important ones like groceries and hand sanitizer, or less important like skincare and entertainment products. Although there was a lockdown, businesses still proved that their adaptability is good, and delivered their goods. Some proved a lack of adaptability, leading to lost customers, by them switching to other brands with similar/the same products.

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Appendix 3: Discussion paper

Discussion paper: International**Emma Kvia**

Brief presentation of the thesis

The goal for our thesis was to understand why some content goes viral on TikTok. More specifically, we looked at product-related user-generated content. Said in other words, how a "regular" user of the app can make a viral video of a product. For the study, 500 viral videos were collected from TikTok and then analyzed. In order to classify as a viral video, there had to be minimum 1 million views and 100 000 likes on the video. Previously, many researchers have explored why some content attract more attention online on different social media (see f.ex Munaro, Hüber Barcelos, Francisco Maffezzolli, Santos Rodrigues, & Cabrera Paraiso, 2021; Pressgrove, McKeever, & Jang, 2018; Xie & Kukla, 2012). The most well-known and cited study is performed by Professor Jonah Berger, and contains six aspects called STEPPS (social currency, triggers, emotion, practical value, public and stories), explaining how information is spreading online (Pressgrove, McKeever & Jang, 2018). However, as TikTok is one of the newer social media and also quite unexplored, we decided that this was the social media we wanted to focus on.

In our thesis, we have used the work of Berger, as well as adding other researchers' studies, which lead us to dividing the literature into three main categories for virality: content characteristics, product characteristics and messenger characteristics. This means that we had to look at what content in the video had higher potential of going viral, what products and what messenger, or creator of the video. Based on these three categories, we created some hypotheses for each, leaving us with 10 hypotheses in total. After coding each video according to the hypotheses, we analyzed the results using an ANOVA analysis in SPSS. The results of the study will be elaborated on later in this discussion paper.

International trends and forces

International is defined as something that involves two or more countries (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.a). Moreover, if a topic, trend, problem etc. involves more than one country, it can be considered as international. Our thesis is highly relevant for the concept of international, as we are exploring TikTok, a social media network that allows people to connect from all over

the world. Like other social media, the app allows you to interact with people from all over the globe, which would not be possible without today's technology.

As a business owner or marketer, it is very important to stay updated on the latest trends. This can be linked to the globalization that we are experiencing today, meaning that in different parts of the world, accessible goods and services, as well as social and cultural influences, are rapidly becoming similar (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.b). Because of this, it is crucial to stay updated to international trends and forces. A trend is defined as "a general development or change in a situation or in the way that people are behaving." (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.c, p.1). Moreover, a trend starting in one country can develop and expand to other countries within a short period of time, as it is so easy to share things online. Therefore, it is important for brands to be prepared, take advantage of the trends, and avoid being outdated and unprepared.

User-generated content (UGC) and Word of Mouth (WOM)

An important part of our thesis was user-generated content, which is defined as "content made publicly available over the Internet, content that reflects a certain amount of creative effort and content created outside professional routines and practices" (OECD, 2007, p. 61). UGC can be about anything; dancing, product reviews, food recipes or any other way an individual would like to express himself/herself. The online information market used to be mainly publisher-centric but has now shifted over to be dominated by the users (Daugherty et al, 2008). This means that the consumers have more power than they used to have. Consumers are now part of making new trends. Moreover, businesses have to follow these in order to stay updated in the market.

Word of mouth is defined as informational communication between individuals for the purpose of evaluating products and services (Chung & Darke, 2006). Today, UGC can be defined as the online version of WOM (Wyroll, 2014), and the main difference is that WOM is only communicated, whereas UGC is something created by the user. In the past, people relied on WOM from friends and family when making decisions. For example, when deciding whether or not buy a product. However, with the growth of the Internet and social media, the trends have shifted, and people are not relying on and trusting completely strangers from all over the world. Also, research have proven that users of social media are more likely to trust online WOM from other users, compared to online WOM from the producers or brands themselves (Cheong & Morrison, 2008). This can for example be explained by the fact that many people find it easier to trust people similar to themselves

(Bashein & Markus, 1997). Moreover, trust can influence you to make purchase decisions (Fan & Miao, 2012).

People are scrolling through social medias several hours a day, looking at what other people have bought and recommended. The world has changed, and who we choose to trust has also changed. Consumers are no longer dependent on their friends and family, and their recommendations. They are more concerned with following the trends and listening to other users online, whether it is an opinion leader/influencer or just a regular user. This is where our idea for the thesis came up, as we noticed that viral videos on TikTok resulted in sold-out products worldwide. One of the first examples was the "TikTok mascara". The original video was created by an American girl, and as the video went viral on TikTok, the Maybelline mascara sold out everywhere in the world. This demonstrates how quickly a video can spread internationally, and how international trends can influence people in other countries to buy the product as well. Videos online make you want to trust the creator and buy the product that he or she is recommending, even though you have no idea who the person is. Like in the "TikTok mascara" video, people where so fascinated with the results the creator got after applying mascara to her lashes, that everybody were talking about it. Moreover, everyone bought it and made the product sell out several times.

Virality and viral marketing

Another important part of our thesis concerned virality, which we defined as information that is forwarded and spread quickly within a short period of time (Nahon & Hemsley, 2013). Virality can be closely linked to international trends, as simply one viral video can start an international trend. Imagine a new trend starting in China, and the next day it could be the "big thing" in Sweden. Virality is caused by users, as they decide what they want to view, like or share with others (Heimbach & Hinz, 2018).

In the same way as people have changed from listening to WOM to UGC, businesses have also needed to change their marketing strategies, and are now more focused on viral marketing. Viral marketing is the process of convincing consumers to share a company's marketing content to their friends and family (Dobele, Lindgreen, Beverland, Vanhamme, & Van Wijk, 2007). With the use of social media, consumers are encouraged to spread product information (Leskovec, Adamic, & Huberman, 2000), which makes a shift from traditional business-to-customer communication to more customer-to-customer communication (De Bruyn & Lillien, 2008). This can be smart for the business, as like mentioned above, people

are now trusting other users more than the brands themselves on social media. Moreover, this can be more cost-effective for the brands, as regular users can "do the job" for them. In other words, individuals can help market the brands. Also, advertising on social media is less expensive than any other kind of currently accessible advertising, like traditional media (Lyfe Marketing, n.d.). Lastly, the brand can take advantage of the rapid speed of how products can go viral today.

To use the same example as above, the creator of the famous "TikTok mascara" video, probably achieved more attention than Maybelline would be capable of doing themselves through using their own advertising. One of the reasons for this could be that when brands are making advertising for their product, the advertisement is often edited to make it look perfect and thus, in some cases fake. Often as a consumer, you know that the advertising is fake and maybe "too good to be true", which makes you not want to try the product. The models are often perfect, and you know that you will never look the same way as the model anyway, as the advertise is using airbrush and other fake effect. Therefore, it can be argued that it is easier to trust advertising from "regular" users, as it is easier to relate to them and they are more similar to yourself. Through UGC, consumers are able to watch a "normal" person trying the product, and they will often give you their honest opinion. Also, in most cases, the user is not making the video with the purpose of convincing people to buy the product, but rather to try the product and give their honest opinion. Thus, it will be perceived as more trustworthy and real. Moreover, as one person starts making videos of products they try, other people will want to try them as well, and their purchase intention is influenced by the video creator. From there, everything can happen quickly. The more people influenced to buy the product, the more people making videos testing it, which again makes more people buy it etc. This is exactly how trends develop and spread internationally, using social media.

However, it must be mentioned that the viral "TikTok mascara" video was made as a collaboration between the creator of the video and Maybelline. Meaning that the creator might have been a bit more than just a "regular" person. In spite of that, her reaction of the product felt "real" and the way the video was made was not perceived as trying to make everyone buy the product. Instead, it was a down-to-earth video without any effects or rehearsed lines. The reason why the video is so persuasive is most probably because of the "wow-effect" the mascara had when trying it on. Also, even though this video was made as a collaboration, most of the product-related UGC on social media are not in collaborations with

brands, but rather made because the creator is genuinely interested in the product and want to try it.

Findings

In our thesis, we found partial support for the hypotheses, whereas 6 out of 10 were supported. To shortly summarize, we proved that viral videos on TikTok tend to have content which is positive and includes high-arousal emotions like curiosity and amusement. The product in the video should be somewhat unique and should be able to solve a problem. Further, the creator of the video should be entertaining or tell a story, and it is beneficial to have a high number of followers.

The findings in our thesis are based on viral videos in general, meaning that we had not identified specific countries we wanted to look at. The collected sample of videos consists of creators from different parts of the world, like the US and Europe. Thus, the analyses are based on a sample from multiple countries and therefore the findings can be implicated internationally.

The findings are relevant for not only regular users that want to make viral videos, but also businesses or brands that are trying to receive attention from their followers or consumers. As we have analyzed videos from creators from various countries, consisting of products that we know were popular or trending in several countries, it is fair to say that our thesis will have an international relevance. Moreover, it could be important for marketers or businesses in different parts of the world. In example, one video created by a Norwegian user could potentially go viral causing an American brand to sell out all their products. This forces brands to pay attention to international trends, in order to stay updated in the market and to utilize their resources in the best way possible.

Conclusion

With the influence of international trends and social media, the world has seen a shift from where the trust of the consumer lies and from whom consumers purchase intentions are influenced by. Consumers are no longer dependent on their friends and family as following trends online are more important and influential. At the same time, businesses have had to change their way of doing things as well. Consumers do not trust brands to the same extent as before. Thus, it is important and crucial for brands to make their consumers create and share

content about their brand. Lastly, to stay updated in today's globalized and rapid changing world, paying attention to international trends is vital.

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