

#Beautytok going viral

A content analysis of TikTok beauty videos to understand why content goes viral.

Lise Amalie Henriksen Grure
Vilde Rasmussen

Supervisor
Sangeeta Singh

University of Agder, 2023

School of Business and Law

Department of International Business.

Preface and acknowledgements

We wrote this thesis as the last stage in earning our degree in international business from the University of Agder School of Business and Law. Our article focuses on TikTok, a social media network that is fast expanding and has gained popularity as a tool for people, influencers, and businesses to sell their goods and services. The qualities of the content, product, and messenger that contribute to its success were of special interest to us as we investigated how product-related user-generated content (UGC) spreads on the app.

The writing process was not only difficult and instructive, but also incredibly rewarding. We were able to put our prior learning to use and learn new research techniques, both of which we think will be beneficial in our future careers. We were also delighted to write about such an original topic as TikTok, to add to the limited resources already available on the platform and user generated content. Our overall interest in marketing, consumer behavior, and social media was the basis of our inspiration for the study. We were interested in the elements contributing to some UGC videos' success on TikTok and what draws users to them. We identified some important traits and trends that would be helpful for marketers and content producers on the platform by researching the content, product, and messenger of successful product-related UGC on TikTok.

Our supervisor, Sangeeta Singh, has our warmest gratitude for her leadership and assistance throughout the writing process. She was always accessible to respond to our inquiries and offer insightful criticism of our work. We appreciate the time and effort she invested in working with us, and we believe her knowledge and commitment were crucial in assisting us in producing a solid thesis.

Lise Amalie Grure

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Vilde Rasmussen

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Abstract

Purpose: The primary goal of this master's thesis is to examine the factors contributing to the virality of beauty product user-generated content (UGC) on TikTok. It is crucial since TikTok is a relatively new social media platform, and having a deeper understanding of it would help consumers, digital marketers, and brands expand their reach on TikTok.

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

Design/methodology/approach: It applies a mixed-method approach that combines qualitative and quantitative analysis. A qualitative content study of 350 TikTok videos is used to create the dataset. This was followed by a quantitative ANOVA analysis in SPSS to determine whether or not the hypotheses were supported.

Findings: Five out of nine hypotheses were confirmed. The main findings demonstrated that several characteristics are crucial for creating a viral video. Hypotheses in all three groups, content-, product- and messenger characteristics, were supported. This demonstrates that when creating a TikTok video to go viral, the product should be unique or unusual, be innovative, and solve a problem. Lastly, the messenger of the video should be an expert on the topic.

Practical implications: This thesis can be used by marketers to develop more effective marketing plans for TikTok and other social media platforms. Additionally, a deeper comprehension of how current and potential customers respond to online content can help improve and adapt current social media marketing initiatives. This is important for brands that apply social media to market and sell their products.

Keywords: TikTok, user-generated content, electronic word of mouth, social media, virality

Sammendrag

Formål: Hovedmålet med denne masteroppgaven er å undersøke faktorene som bidrar til viralitet for brukergenerert innhold relatert til skjønnhetsprodukter på TikTok. Dette er viktig ettersom TikTok er en relativt ny sosial medieplattform, og å ha en dypere forståelse av den ville hjelpe forbrukere, digitale markedsførere og merkevarer til å utvide sin rekkevidde på TikTok.

Problemstilling: Hvorfor går brukergenerert innhold relatert til skjønnhetsprodukter viralt på TikTok, og hvilke egenskaper har videoene?

Design/metodikk/tilnærming: Det anvendes en blandingsmetode som kombinerer en kvalitativ og kvantitativ analyse. En kvalitativ innholdsanalyse av 350 TikTok videoer ble brukt til å skape datasettet. For å avgjøre om hypotesene kunne støttes, ble en ANOVA analyse i SPSS utført for den kvantitative analysen.

Resultater: Fem av ni hypoteser ble bekreftet. De viktigste funnene viste at flere egenskaper er avgjørende for å skape en viral video. Hypotesene i alle tre gruppene, innhold-, produkt- og skaper-egenskaper, ble støttet. Dette viser at flere karakteristikk i en video er kritiske for viralitet på TikTok. Det ble funnet at når man lager en TikTok-video med formål om å bli viral, bør produktet være unikt eller uvanlig, innovativt og løse et problem. Til slutt bør skaperen av videoen være en ekspert på emnet.

Praktiske implikasjoner: Markedsførere kan bruke denne oppgaven til å utvikle mer effektive markedsføringsplaner for TikTok og andre sosiale medieplattformer. En dypere forståelse av hvordan nåværende og potensielle kunder reagerer på online-innhold kan også hjelpe til med å forbedre og tilpasse nåværende sosiale medie-markedsføringsinitiativer. Dette er viktig for merkevarer som bruker sosiale medier for å markedsføre og selge produktene sine.

Nøkkelord: TikTok, brukergenerert innhold, elektronisk «munn-til-munn» metoden, sosiale medier, viralitet.

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1. Introduction

Have you ever seen a TikTok video of a "viral beauty product"? Then you are not alone. Consumers worldwide have turned to platforms like TikTok for advice, entertainment, and inspiration. 52% of TikTok-users uses the platform to discover new beauty products, which has resulted in success for several brands and their products (Catalyst IQ, 2022). Several huge brands like Maybelline and The Ordinary have beauty products that have gone viral on the media application. However, more research needs to be done on why TikTok videos of products in general and beauty products, in particular, go viral and what characterizes these viral videos.

TikTok is a social media (SoMe) platform that allows users to create and share short videos. According to TikTok's official website, it is a "*destination for short-form mobile videos*" that "*makes it easy for you to discover and make your awesome videos by capturing funny and memorable moments to share with the world*" (Tiktok, 2023a). The media is a full-fledged video service, with content available for all types of viewers, and the app has been downloaded over three billion times (Shutsko, A., 2020). A widely known phenomenon in SoMe is when something "goes viral". There is no universal definition of the phenomenon at the moment. However, it is generally understood to occur when a SoMe post unexpectedly reaches a surprisingly large audience, enabled by many users sharing the content within their social networks (Han et al., 2020). User-generated content (UGC) is a fundamental component of TikTok, where users create their own unique videos for others to "view", "like", "comment", and "share" (Ahlse, J. et al., 2020). Scrolling on TikTok's "for you-page" has become a daily routine for people worldwide.

Many of the products that go viral are from the beauty industry, which encompasses skin care, makeup, color cosmetics, hair care, fragrances, and personal care (Marchessou & Spagnuolo, 2021). This industry continues to expand globally (Leung et al., 2019), and on TikTok, the hashtag "BeautyTok" has 6.9 billion views (Catalyst IQ, 2022).

Much research has been done on virality (e.g., Berger, 2013; Berger & Milkman, 2012; Cheng et al., 2021; Mills, A., 2012; Pressgrove et. al., 2018; Tellis et al., 2019). Further, research also considers different SoMe platforms with virality (Han et al., 2020). However, relatively little

research has been done on TikTok compared to its popularity (Kaye et al., 2022). Moreover, very little research has connected product-related UGC, virality, and TikTok. Thus, our thesis has the following research question:

Why do beauty product-related UGC videos go viral, and what characterizes them?

We will examine content-, product, and messenger characteristics in videos of beauty products to identify UGC with a higher potential to go viral on TikTok. Businesses and marketers must understand how TikTok and short videos have changed today's competitive market. A larger audience increases the chance of higher sales volumes. Our results are relevant for anyone trying to sell their products, build their brands or achieve attention.

Our thesis is outlined as follows; The second chapter concerns the literature review, where we elaborate on existing literature regarding virality, viral marketing, word-of-mouth (WOM), electronic WOM, UGC, social media, as well as content-, product- and messenger characteristics. The methodology is found in the third chapter, including both the coding and analysis. In chapter four, the results of the analysis can be found. Following in chapter five is the discussion of the results, and a conclusion. The last part of our thesis can be found in chapter six and includes implications, contributions, and limitations.

2. Literature review

2.1 Virality

Berger & Milkman (2012) describe virality as when a piece of content spreads rapidly and widely and reaches many people, while Tellis et al. (2019) define virality as "*achieving a large number of views in a short period of time, due to sharing*". In other words, the degree of virality is measured by the degree of content sharing (Tellis et al., 2019; Tucker, 2015).

Traditional virality refers to spreading information, ideas, or content through word of mouth, a personal recommendation, or other forms of offline communication (Berger, 2014; Tellis et al., 2019). This virality is often slower and less widespread than online virality, as it relies on people physically interacting with each other. On the other hand, online virality refers to the rapid spread of information, ideas, and content through SoMe, email, and messaging apps on digital channels (Berger & Milkman, 2012). Online virality happens much faster and reaches a larger audience than traditional virality, as information can be easily shared and amplified across different networks and platforms (Donthu et al., 2021).

The term virality has been used in the context of digitalization since the early days of the Internet. However, the rise of SoMe platforms in the early 2010s saw a significant increase in the use of the term. Today, SoMe and the Internet are usually at the center of both virality and viral marketing. The word has even developed the term "going viral", often used to describe this phenomenon on SoMe (Mills, A., 2012). However, even though there has been much talk about virality in recent years, research on why specific content goes viral is still too scarce (Berger & Milkman, 2012).

Many factors contribute to a piece of content going viral, including the characteristics such as the quality, the timing of the content, the platform the content is shared on, and the audience that the content is targeting (Berger & Milkman, 2012; West, 2011). One of the most important factors in virality is the characteristics of the content itself. There is no singular formula for predicting which content will go viral, but several characteristics have been identified as contributing to its potential virality (Berger, 2013). Some of these characteristics are that it usually must be interesting, informative, thought-provoking, evoke strong emotions, and/or entertaining enough to capture the attention of many people (Burgess, 2008; West, 2011).

Emotions play a crucial role in spreading content because they drive people to share, whether it is positive or negative (Botha & Reyneke, 2013). When people experience strong emotions, they can feel more motivated to share those emotions with others, resulting in sharing the content. Sharing content that evokes strong emotions also allows people to bond with others with similar experiences, values, and/or beliefs (Berger, 2013). Content that appeals to emotions can also be

seen as valuable because it provides the viewer with a sense of comfort, validation, or inspiration (Perez, 2018).

Virality can often depend on the timing of content because it is affected by its relevance to current events or trends (Gu & Wang, 2015). Both trends and virality are related concepts in the sense that both refer to the rapid spread of information or ideas (Gu & Wang, 2015; West, 2011). A trend refers to a popular or fashionable idea or behavior rapidly gaining popularity (Asur et al., 2021). Trends and viral content are interrelated in many cases, as viral content can potentially drive the spread of new trends (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). At the same time, popular trends can drive the spread of viral content.

The audience that a piece of content targets is also an important factor in virality. Content that is targeted to a specific group of people is more likely to be seen and shared by that group than content that is not targeted to that specific group (Berger & Milkman, 2012). SoMe design can play a big role in virality (West, 2011). Different SoMe can provide users with platforms to share content easily. For example, Hilderbrand (2007) has studied Youtube and found that the site's design makes it easy for people to browse many videos quickly. SoMe also allows users to share content with a bigger audience, sometimes by using, for example, hashtags (Perez, 2018).

Characteristics of the creator of the video (i.e., the individual who posts the content on SoMe) also clearly affect the likelihood of the content going viral (Han et al., 2020). There are objective creator features that are easily evident to a reader, similar to content features, such as numerical measures of followers or popularity (Suh et al., 2010; Li & Du, 2011; Goes et al., 2014). There are characteristics that are not easily visible, but can be known to their followers after a long time and results in generating reputation, certain expectations, and credibility (Han et al., 2020). Westerman et al. (2014) found that the longer a user has been exposed to a creator's post, the better that user can enhance credibility, as source credibility online is positively related to cognitive elaboration by users. Creator's expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness significantly impact virality (Liu, Z., et al., 2012), and past behavior can be used to measure user credibility (Abbasi & Liu, 2013). We classify these characteristics as "messenger characteristics".

Measuring virality can be a complex task as it involves understanding the spread of content across different platforms and populations. A way to measure virality in SoMe is through engagement, such as shares, likes, comments, and views. These elements can indicate how much a piece of content is being interacted with (Hoang & Lim, 2021).

2.1.1 Viral marketing

The term viral marketing was introduced in 1996 by Knight and referred to content or messages spreading like a virus through SoMe (Botha & Reyneke, 2013; Phelps et al., 2004). Viral marketing is *"the process of getting customers to pass along a company's marketing message to friends, family, and colleagues"* (Dobele et al., 2007; Traver, G. C. & Laudon, C. K., 2001). The term *"viral marketing"* aims to transmit product- and service information through customer-to-customer interactions rather than business-to-customer interactions. The term has gained much popularity with the introduction of SoMe, as they dramatically facilitate interconnections between potential buyers and companies (De Bruyn, A. & Lilien, G. L., 2004; Dobele et al., 2007). Dobele et al. (2007) identify that the success of a viral message depends upon capturing the imagination of the receiver and being cleverly targeted. Viral marketing is effective only if the message encourages consumers to act and pass along the message. Thus, the goal is twofold: consumption and forwarding behavior.

Schulze et al. (2014) found that previous research has characterized viral marketing communication with six dimensions: (1) the social position of the receiver and sender (Bampo 2008; Inz, 2011), (2) the sender-receiver relationship (Chiu et al., 2007; De Bruyn, A. & Lilien, G. L., 2004; Lee et. al., 2009; Leskovec et. al., 2007), (3) communication exclusivity (Aral & Walker, 2011; Phelps et al., 2004), (4) expressed interest (De Bruyn, A. & Lilien, G. L., 2004; Kalyanam et al., 2007), (5) message features (Bampo et al., 2008; De Bruyn, A. & Lilien, G. L., 2004; Hinz et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2009; Leskovec et al., 2007; van der Lans et al., 2010), and (6) message content (Chiu et al., 2007; Dobele et al., 2007; Teixeira et al., 2012). Botha & Reyneke (2013) looked at the relationship between emotions and content in viral videos and underlined the need for research to better understand the role of emotions in viral marketing. Dobele et al. (2007), among other authors, have explored the amount of variance that emotional

response accounts for in referral behavior and if it would cause them to forward a pass-along email. However, few have studied viral behavior about why videos go viral (Botha & Reyneke, 2013; Phelps et al., 2004).

According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), viral marketing significantly impacts digital marketing and, more specifically, SoMe marketing. Viral marketing can be described as a number of web-based applications that allow users to create and share UGC. SoMe allow firms to engage in direct end-consumer contact with low costs and higher levels of efficiency than can be achieved with traditional marketing- and communication tools, and is relevant for companies of all sizes (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). For example, analysis done by TikTok shows that TikTok drives positive ROAS and almost three times the offline sales efficiency (TikTok for Business, 2022). With the flourishing of SoMe, communications between the marketer and its client have become a "*multi-dimensional two-way peer-to-peer communication reality*" (Hutter et al., 2013, p. 343) in contrast to earlier, where marketers used to administrate and regulate one-way communication with its clients. Roma and Aloini (2019). state that a brand is defined by what the customers tell each other instead of what the brand tells the customer. Different researchers have referred to viral marketing as "word-of-mouth", "word-of-mouth marketing" (Borges-Tiago et al., 2019; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011), "peer-to-peer" and "customer-to-customer communication" (Bampo et al., 2008).

2.1.2 Word of mouth

Word-of-mouth (WOM) refers to informal communication between individuals, usually about a product or service (Cheung & Thadani, 2010). This type of communication can happen in person, over the phone, or online through SoMe platforms. WOM greatly impacts consumer behavior and is a powerful marketing tool (Godes & Mayzlin, 2004). Traditional WOM has long been regarded as a highly credible source of information, as people tend to trust recommendations and opinions from their networks (Cheng et al., 2021). Furthermore, consumers usually trust recommendations from their friends and family members over other forms of advertising. This high level of trust is attributed to the fact that people are likelier to share their honest opinions and experiences with those they know personally. In addition,

traditional WOM allows for personal interaction and the opportunity to ask questions and clarify information, further enhancing its credibility (Baker et al., 2016; Kozinets et al., 2010).

2.1.3 Electronic word of mouth

WOM on SoMe, often called eWOM, or electronic word of mouth, refers to the online sharing of opinions, recommendations, and experiences related to products, services, and brands on the Internet (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Cheung & Thadani (2010) defines eWOM as "*any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, and former customers about a product or a company which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet*" (Cheung & Thadani, 2010; Thureau, H., et al., 2004). EWOM and WOM, in general, can significantly impact customer decision-making and influence the success of a product or brand (Donthu et al., 2021).

EWOM communication can occur in a variety of contexts. For example, consumers can share their thoughts, feedback, and evaluations of products on platforms such as blogs, discussion forums, review websites, and social networking sites (Cheung & Thadani, 2010). Although eWOM communication shares some similarities with traditional WOM, it also has distinct characteristics that differ, which include the high speed of eWOM and the rapid exchange of information (Cheung & Thadani, 2010).

WOM is a good marketing tool seen as more trustworthy and credible than traditional advertising (Donthu et al., 2021). This is because the information comes from a personal source rather than a company. EWOM, on the other hand, is not that easy to judge credibility because the message comes through the Internet rather than in person (Cheung & Thadani, 2010; Donthu et al., 2021). Even though WOM is a powerful marketing tool, it is important to mention that it also can be negative. Negative reviews or complaints can quickly spread on social media and harm a brand's reputation.

Virality and WOM are related concepts in that both refer to the spread of information, ideas, or products from person to person (Berger & Milkman, 2012; Kozinets et al., 2010a). However,

WOM typically refers to the exchange of opinions between individuals, while virality refers to information spreading rapidly on a larger level (Berger & Milkman, 2012; Kozinets et al., 2010). Virality can be a type of WOM that spreads quickly through digital networks (Lake, 2019). Content that goes viral has the potential to reach a much larger audience in a shorter period of time than traditional WOM, due to the ease of sharing information online (Berger & Milkman, 2012; Cheung & Thadani, 2010; Godes & Mayzlin, 2004).

In traditional WOM, experts are often seen as a highly credible source of information due to their knowledge and expertise in a particular field (Cheng et al., 2021). However, in SoMe, credibility is often based on different factors. "Consumer-perceived credibility of eWOM is defined as the extent to which one perceives a recommendation or review as believable, true, or factual" (Fan et al., 2013). While expertise can still be a factor, SoMe users also look for other forms of credibility, such as the number of followers, engagement levels, and the perceived authenticity of the content. In SoMe, influencers and content creators with large followings are often seen as credible sources of information and can influence the opinions and behavior of their followers (Meinert & Krämer, 2022). This is due to the perceived authority and expertise they have developed through their content and interactions on SoMe. However, it is important to note that credibility can vary depending on the topic being discussed and the person watching the content (Fan et al., 2013).

2.2 User generated content (UGC)

There are several definitions of UGC. Kurian and John (2017) define UGC as "*content posted by users on social networking sites*" (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021; Kurian & John, 2017), whereas Vickery and Wunsch-Vincent define it as published content that is "*created outside of professional routines and practices*" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Vickery, G. & Wunsch-Vincent, S, 2007, p. 61). UGC is an important means through which consumers communicate with others and express themselves online (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Smith et al., 2012), and it can be about anything. However, the focus of this thesis will be product-related UGC. UGC is not identical with, but related to, eWOM. UGC is broader than eWOM, but the two overlap considerably when UGC is brand-related (Smith et al., 2012).

SoMe has become a platform for consumers to post content that revolves around their brand purchases to communicate their feelings and thoughts regarding the purchases to their online network (Ferreira et al., 2022; Duan & Dholakia, 2018). UGC on SoMe is connected with potential value for brand managers, and SoMe marketing has become a viable component of integrated marketing communication (Liu, X., et al., 2017; Keller, 2016; Lipsman et al., 2012). UGC takes on several forms, such as Facebook status updates, videos on YouTube, consumer-produced product reviews, and advertisements (Smith et al., 2012; Dhar & Chang, 2009; Muñiz, Jr. & Schau, 2007). Ordinary consumers have a potentially strong influence on brand reputation as SoMe enable consumers to create and spread brand-related content easily (Kim & Song, 2018). The platform TikTok enables UGC in terms of short videos (Qiyang, Z. & Jung, H., 2019), and importantly for marketers, UGC is brand-related and has the potential to shape consumer brand perceptions (Smith et al., 2012). Thus, the increased use of SoMe has reduced brands' control over the content created and shared about their brand (Ferreira, C, 2016; Ferreira et al., 2022; Kietzmann et al., 2011; Poch & Martin, 2015; Pongpaew et al., 2017).

With the increase of brand-related UGC, marketers have begun incorporating UGC into the part of WOM marketing within the marketing mix (Kim & Song, 2018). The number of companies encouraging customers to spread brand-related content by compensating consumers for sponsored posts is increasing (Kozinets et al., 2010a). Sponsored brand-related UGC has advantages, such as little disruption to users' SoMe experience. However, it involves risk as increasing the salience of manipulative intent or activating consumer persuasion knowledge and can undermine the effectiveness of WOM marketing (Boerman & Kruikemeier, 2016). Research reveals that organic (natural and unpaid) brand-related UGC induces fewer inferences of manipulative content and more favorable responses than sponsored (paid) UGC (Kim & Song, 2018; Anghelcev, 2015; Boerman & Kruikemeier, 2016; Tuk et. al., 2009; Wood & Burkhalter, 2014; Wei et al., 2008). However, our thesis revolves around product-related UGC, not sponsored.

2.3 Social media

SoMe refers to websites and applications that enable users to create and share content, connect with others, and participate in social networking (Dewing, 2010; Mayfield, 2008). It typically

involves the use of UGC and encourages interaction and collaboration among its users (Luca, 2015). As defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary, SoMe is "*forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages and other content (such as videos)*" (Merriam-Webster, 2023).

As of January 2023, there were approximately 4,76 billion active SoMe users worldwide. This represents about 59% of the world's population. Moreover, SoMe users have been steadily increasing, with an additional 450 million users added in the past year alone (Chaffey, 2023). The growth in SoMe users could be driven by increased Internet and mobile device penetration and the popularity of social platforms for communication, entertainment, and information-sharing purposes.

Editing is a critical component of creating compelling videos on SoMe, and it can significantly increase the likelihood of a video going viral. Editing helps to capture the viewer's attention. With the average attention span of SoMe users getting shorter, it is essential to grab their attention quickly. Editing can help create engaging visuals and transitions that keep the viewers engaged from the start. Editing can enhance the story being told and communicate a story or message better. Editing can also help improve the quality of a video by adding effects, color, and sound and making it more visually appealing. Furthermore, editing can optimize a video to fit in different social media platforms, such as creating shorter, attention-grabbing, or longer videos.

Comparison of social media platforms







	 Facebook	 Instagram	 Snapchat	 Twitter	 YouTube	 TikTok
Released	2004	2010	2011	2006	2005	2016
Age reach	All	Young +	Young and middle-aged	Young and middle-aged	All	Young
Number of users	2,95 mil	2,0 mil	635 k	556 k	2,51 mil	1,05 mil
Type of content	Post to friends, groups, events	Pictures and videos	Pictures and videos, the message disappears	Posts to followers, tags	Longer videos	Short videos
Interaction/user behavior	Friends, likes, comments and share	Followers, likes, comments	Friends, communication with pictures	Followers, likes and comments	Subscribers, likes, comments	Followers, likes and comments
Content creation	Life updates, connecting with friends, sharing news	Lifestyle	Real-time updates to friends in	Realtime updates, short messages with ex. News or humor	Lifestyle, blogging, gaming, reviews	Reviews, humor, lifestyle
Ease of sharing	Easy	Easy	Moderate	Easy	Moderate/hard	Easy

Table 1: Comparison of social media platforms

Different social media differ from TikTok in several factors:

Age:

Most TikTok users are aged between 18 and 29, making it a platform that is especially popular with the younger audience. Conversely, Facebook has a much wider age range, with a significant user base across all age groups. Twitter has a slightly younger user base, with most users between 18 and 39. Both Instagram and Snapchat have big user bases in the 18-29 age group. Meanwhile, YouTube has the broadest age range of any of the SoMe platforms, with users of all ages from all over the world (Statista.com, 2022).

User behavior:

TikTok's unique algorithm and focus on short videos have created distinct user behavior on the platform. TikTok users are likelier to engage with short, entertaining videos that use humor, music, and other creative elements to capture their attention (Wu, 2020). In contrast, Instagram and Snapchat focus more on visual storytelling and sharing experiences through photos and longer videos (Kasakowskij et al., 2018; Meshi et al., 2020). Facebook is primarily used for connecting with friends and family, sharing news and information, and discovering content through pages and groups (Buccafurri et al., 2015). Twitter is known for its real-time updates, breaking news, and short-form content and is often used as a platform for discussion and debate (Buccafurri et al., 2015). Finally, YouTube is a video-sharing platform with a massive library of content, ranging from UGC videos to professional content from media companies (Khan, M., L., 2017).

Content creation:

TikTok focus on UGC and is a very active creator community. Many TikTok users enjoy creating and sharing their content, which has helped fuel the platform's viral trends and challenges (TikTok, 2023c). Instagram and Snapchat also emphasize UGC but are less pronounced. While TikTok has an active creator community focused on UGC, Facebook, and Twitter have more of a mix of UGC and professional content (Known et al., 2014). Many Facebook users share photos, videos, and links to articles and new stories, while Twitter users often share their thoughts and opinions on current events. YouTube is often used to share long videos.

Social influence:

TikTok has created a new generation of social media influencers who are famous primarily for their presence on the platform. These influencers have built a large following by creating entertaining or informative content. Each platform has its community of influencers, with many focusing on specific topics and niches. Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter have been around longer than TikTok, Snapchat, and Instagram and have well-established influencer communities. On YouTube, influencers are often known for their longer videos, such as tutorials, vlogs, and product reviews. Instagram and Snapchat also have well-established influencer communities, but the influencers are often more mature and less reliant on a single platform.

TikTok

TikTok's videos are typically 15 to 60 seconds long and often feature music, dancing, reviews, humor, and other forms of creative expression. The app has gained immense popularity worldwide, particularly among younger generations (Yeung et al., 2022; Tiktok, 2023a).

TikTok can be compared to other SoMe platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube. While all these platforms involve sharing content, they have some differences. One of the main differences between TikTok and other social media platforms is the focus on short-form videos (Hruska & Maresova, 2020; Tiktok, 2023a). As mentioned earlier, TikTok videos are typically 15-60 seconds long, whereas videos on both YouTube and Instagram can be much longer (Nandagiri & Phillip, 2018). Also, in contrast, both Youtube and Instagram mainly rely on followers and subscribers. Additionally, the focus on music and dancing in TikTok videos sets it apart from platforms like Facebook and Twitter, where the primary focus is text-based content (Kwon et al., 2014). Another big difference between TikTok and other social media platforms is how content is discovered and shared. TikTok has a unique algorithm that curates content based on user interests and engagement, which can help videos go viral more quickly than on other platforms.

Different SoMe platforms have different features that make it easy to share content, and what works best for some may not work for others. It depends on what type of content each person

wants to share. However, some social media platforms are generally easier to share content on than others, such as Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram.

TikTok's algorithm is designed to serve users personalized content based on their behavior, interests, and interactions with the platform (Zhang & Liu, 2021). The algorithm uses a combination of machine learning, user data, and content analysis to suggest videos that are likely to be relevant and engaging to the user (Zhao, 2021). Several factors influence TikTok's algorithm. The first factor which influences the algorithm is user interaction. TikTok tracks the type of videos users like, comment on, and share. The more positive interactions a user has with certain types of content, the more likely TikTok is to show similar videos again. The second is video information which comprehends that TikTok analyzes the content of a video, including the caption, hashtags, sounds, and visual elements. This allows the algorithm to identify common themes and suggest related content to the users. Thirdly the algorithm takes into account the device and account settings that influence things like language preferences, location, and so on. Lastly, TikTok promotes popular trends and challenges to users based on their interests and past behavior (Zhao, 2021).

TikTok's algorithm is not the first of its kind, but it does have unique features that set it apart from other social media platforms. Recommendation algorithms have been used by many SoMe platforms for years, including Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. These algorithms use similar techniques to personalize content and recommend relevant videos, posts, and ads to users based on their past behavior and interests. However, TikTok's algorithm is distinctive in a few ways. For example, it prioritizes short-form video content and is designed to promote new and lesser-known creators, which encourages a more diverse range of content on the platform (Zhang & Liu, 2021). Additionally, TikTok's algorithm is designed to quickly identify engaging content and promote it to a wider audience, which can result in viral trends and challenges that spread rapidly through the platform (Zhang & Liu, 2021). Other SoMe platforms have taken notice of TikTok's success and started incorporating similar features into their recommendation algorithms. For example, Instagram's "Reels" feature directly competes with TikTok. Youtube has also introduced a "Shorts" feature that promotes short-form video content to users based on their viewing history.

Hashtags are a way to categorize content on SoMe platforms and can be used to help users find posts related to a specific topic and make them more discoverable (Burgess, 2008). TikTok, especially hashtags, are often used to participate in challenges or make content more accessible to a wider audience. As TikTok explains, "*Adding relevant hashtags to your videos and sounds can help new followers find your content and even help your videos go viral*" (TikTok, 2023b).

2.4 Hypothesis development

2.4.1 Content characteristics

Several content characteristics can contribute to the virality of UGC videos about beauty products. Beauty brands that understand these characteristics and use them to their advantage can increase their chances of going viral on TikTok. Videos that provide practical value by offering tutorials, how-to guides, or product reviews can be highly sharable. Informational content provides valuable information to viewers by teaching them how to use different beauty products properly. People often seek improvement, so this content gives them advice and guidance. This type of content can also be seen as "solving a problem" for the viewer. If the viewer finds the information helpful, they are likelier to share it with others (Berger & Milkman, 2012).

H1: Tutorials/informative content are more likely to go viral than non-informative content.

Editing can play a significant role in helping beauty products go viral. The first few seconds of a video are crucial in capturing a viewer's attention. Editing can make these opening seconds more visually engaging and attention-grabbing, encouraging viewers to keep watching and share the video. Editing can help control the pace of a video, ensuring that it moves at a speed that keeps viewers engaged. Slow-paced videos are more likely to lose viewers, while fast-paced videos can be overwhelming. Thus, editing can find the right balance between the two. By adding graphics, text, and special effects, editing can make a video more visually appealing and memorable. By changing video, audio, and text in a way that communicates a story, editing can also create a fascinating story. Lastly, editing can support branding by incorporating logos, colors, and other

visual components that are in line with a brand's identity (Berger & Milkman, 2012). A video's overall quality can be improved with effective editing. Thus, why we hypothesize:

H2: UGC with high quality are more likely to go viral than UGC with poor quality.

The third content characteristic is uniqueness. Unique videos stand out from the content people are used to seeing. They capture people's attention and create a sense of curiosity and intrigue. These types of content are often more memorable and can leave a lasting impression on the viewers. This can increase engagement, such as comments, likes, and shares. Furthermore, unique content can be more entertaining, which is a major factor in going viral in general. When viewers are entertained, they are likely to watch the video in it entirely and share it with others (Berger & Milkman, 2012). This can also lead to a "snowball" effect where more users share. In relation to beauty products, content that shows a product creatively or uniquely can create a sense of trust and credibility with the audience leading to more engagement and shares (Berger & Milkman, 2012).

H3: UGC with unique or unexpected content is more likely to go viral than UGC with ordinary or expected content.

2.4.2 Product characteristics

Several product characteristics can contribute to the virality of UGC about beauty products on TikTok. One of the most important product characteristics that can make a beauty product go viral is its uniqueness (Pressgrove et al., 2018). A product with a unique feature immediately captures users' attention, and a statement might stand out if it deviates from the norm (Chen & Berger, 2013). A common intuition is that more controversy generates more buzz. In addition, products with unusual textures or colors or multi-functional tend to get more attention. For example, the Boscia Charcoal Jelly Ball Cleanser is a unique product that went viral because of its jelly-like texture and unique packaging.

H4: UGC of a unique or unusual product that have an element of surprise are likelier to go viral than UGC with ordinary products.

A products' innovativeness can contribute to virality on social media. The foundation of new product development and an attractive consumer feature is rooted in innovation (Calantone et al., 2006). An innovative product is a new or improved product that provides a unique solution to a customer's problem or fulfills a need in a way that has not been done before. This product can be based on a new technology, a new design, or a new way of delivering value to the customer (Nguyen & Chaudhuri, 2019). The main difference between an innovative- and a unique product is that while a unique product may not necessarily be new or innovative, an innovative product must provide a new way of solving a problem or fulfilling a need. Based on this, we hypothesize that:

H5: UGC with a highly innovative product are more likely to go viral than UGC with a less innovative product.

Another product characteristic that can contribute to virality is its effectiveness or the ability to solve a problem. When a product works well, users are likelier to recommend it to others, leading to more views and shares. Pressgrove et al. (2018) mention the importance of practical value as an aspect contributing to making content go viral, as consumers want to provide the information they think other people will find useful so they can offer advice and recommendations. Products within the beauty industry have various long-term or instant effects. For example, the Ordinary's AHA 30% + BHA 2% Peeling Solution is a exfoliating treatment that went viral on TikTok because it improves skin texture and clarity over time. In contrast, products that have an instant effect are, for example, the Maybelline sky-high mascara, where one can clearly see the effect instantly on a video. There is a clear difference in these products. Thus, we propose that:

H6: UGC with products that visually solves a problem go more viral than the products that do not solve a problem.

Finally, the product affordability can play a role in its virality. Affordable products are more accessible to a wider audience and are more likely to be recommended and shared. Sharing such information also places the sharer in the position of one concerned about the recipient's welfare, thus enhancing the self (Tellis et al., 2019). For example, the Elf Cosmetics Poreless Putty

Primer went viral because of its low price point and effectiveness in smoothing the skin. Based on this, we suggest that:

H7: Products that are affordable are more likely to go viral than expensive products.

2.4.3 Messenger characteristics

WOM significantly influences consumers' decision-making process, especially when they look for information about products or brands (Nguyen & Chaudhuri, 2019). Several studies have researched how trust influences eWOM (Meinert & Krämer, 2022). Consumers trust product information created by other consumers more than information generated by manufacturers (Cheong & Morrison, 2008) and consumers with the same amount of knowledge as themselves (Brooks, 1957). The sender-receiver relationship affects the content's WOM (Chiu et al., 2007; De Bruyn, A. & Lilien, G. L., 2004; Lee et al., 2009; Leskovec et al., 2007). People consumers talk to every day are the most influential sources in terms of behaviors and opinions, and the most effective form of WOM is provided by personal contacts (Brooks, 1957), i.e., a friend or family member (Chiu et al., 2007; Phelps et al., 2004). Katz and Lazarsfeld (2017) found that interpersonal relationships are much more influential than mass media when examining the relationships between opinion leaders and their followers. The stronger the sender-receiver relationship is, the higher the impact on the purchasing choice (Bansal & Voyer, 2000).

Opinion leaders are defined as those individuals who are interested in new issues and tend to spread their opinions about them to others (Lazarsfeld, P. et al., 1948). For marketers that seek to harness the power of UGC, opinion leaders greatly matter because "*consumer opinions, once expressed online, can be long-lasting and far-reaching, and these opinions have been shown to affect purchase choice*" (Graham & Havlena, 2007, p. 428). However, research find that instead of being caused by an opinion leader, the motivation for many influencers stems from a critical mass of individuals who are either highly or easily influenced (Watts & Dodds, 2007). Either way, Cheung and Morrison (2008) suggest that marketers can leverage media to influence opinion leaders and indirectly influence consumers who rely on opinion leaders for things like product recommendations and information. Another term that has emerged recently is "key

opinion leader", or KOL, as described by Scher and Schett in 2021. KOLs primarily operate as influencers rather than rational thinkers, making them marketing entities.

The Elf Cosmetics Poreless Putty Primer on TikTok is an example of the platform's ability to elevate lesser-known brands and products through UGC. By showcasing the product relatable and engagingly, Madi Bernard helped to spark a trend that ultimately led to increased sales and visibility for Elf Cosmetics. Overall, the viral success of the Elf Cosmetics Poreless Putty Primer on TikTok can be attributed in part to the influence of beauty influencer Madi Bernard, who used her platform to showcase the product and share her enthusiasm for it with her followers. By establishing herself as an opinion leader in the beauty industry, Bernard has helped to shape the conversation around new products and trends on TikTok and beyond.

According to Ling et al.'s research on TikTok in 2021, the most reliable indicator of a video's virality is the creator's number of followers. Additionally, creators with over 10,000 followers are more likely to produce viral content than those with fewer than 10,000 followers (Ling et al., 2021). We, therefore, suggest that:

H8: UGC of messengers with a high number of followers are more likely to go viral than those with fewer followers.

Creator's expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness have a significant impact on virality (Z. Liu et al., 2012). If the creator is perceived to have knowledge about the subject, people are more likely to listen and pass the knowledge on (Meinert & Krämer, 2022). We further propose that:

H9: UGC is more likely to go viral if the creator is perceived as and "expert" on the topic.

3. Methodology

The research aims to systematically investigate and acquire new knowledge, insights, and understanding about a particular topic or phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Therefore, a clear methodology outline is needed to explain why product-related UGC goes viral on TikTok.

3.1 Research Design

A research design is a comprehensive plan or strategy that guides the entire research process, from the research questions or objectives to the outcomes (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Its primary aim is to outline the steps that will be taken to collect and analyze data systematically to gain a better understanding of a particular topic or phenomenon. Typically, a research design consists of three key stages: (1) defining the research question or topic of interest, (2) collecting relevant data to answer the research question, and (3) interpreting the findings and delivering a solution to the research question.

Content analysis is a research methodology used to systematically analyze and interpret the meaning of qualitative data, such as texts, images, and audio or video recordings (Krippendorff, K., 2018). It involves the process of identifying patterns, themes, and categories within the data by counting and coding the occurrence of specific words, phrases, or concepts. Content analysis can be used to explore a wide range of research questions, including attitudes, opinions, values, and behaviors of individuals or groups (Neuendorf, K. A., 2017).

This paper will conduct a mixed-method analysis, as it combines qualitative and quantitative approaches (Bougie & Sekaran, 2020). First, a definition of the chosen research design will be presented in subchapter 3.1 Research Design. Subsequently, we will present the data in subchapter 3.2 Data and explain the content analysis in subchapter 3.3 Coding. The measures for the quantitative analysis is presented in subchapter 3.4 Measures, and lastly, the data analysis including an ANOVA is presented in subchapter 3.5 Data analysis.

3.2 Data

We collected, in total, 350 videos from TikTok. The videos in the sample were retrieved in March of 2023. Additionally, to limit the sampling size, the content was created and published between September 2022 and March 2023. The number of the video's views, likes, comments, and shares were the measures used to decide the video's virality. On TikTok, you may search for people, hashtags, videos, and noises using the search bar in discover mode. You can then sort the results according to the top likes, relevancy, date posted, and whether you have already viewed the video. There were two criteria for collecting the videos: (1) the video must be beauty

product-related, and (2) the video must have been published by an individual user rather than a brand, as our research examines UGC.

To find relevant videos for our dataset, we used various tools by searching with hashtags in the search-bar. For example, the hashtags "#beautyproducts", "#beautytok", and "#makeupproducts" were first used to explore. Further, we searched for product groups, for example, "#moisturizers", "#perfumes", and "#eyeshadow". Additionally, to find enough relevant material, we searched for specific brands such as "#elisabetharden" and "#elfcostmetics".

3.2.1 At what point can a video be classified as viral?

The term "viral" describes the content that spreads rapidly and widely through online platforms, typically through social media sharing (Berger & Milkman, 2012). No fixed view count or engagement metric defines when a video can be classified as "viral", as it depends on various factors such as the audience size, the platform, and the timeframe. However, generally speaking, content can be considered "viral" if it gets a significant number of views and engagement within a short period of time (Tellis et al., 2019; Tucker, 2015). Additionally, not all videos are created to go viral, and some may become popular gradually over time instead of through a sudden surge of views.

No single person chooses what goes viral. The popularity of online content is primarily determined by multiple views, likes, shares, and comments. When users engage with the content, TikTok's algorithms take note of these interactions and may recommend the content to others, leading to further engagement and potential virality (Zhang & Liu, 2021). While content creators can take steps to optimize their chances of creating viral content, ultimately, the virality of the content is largely dependent on the actions of the users and the algorithms.

Few people have tried to find a definition for what is viral. For example, Boyton (2009) claimed that a video seen over 100 000 times could be considered viral, while Eastwood (2022) said that content needed at least 500 000 views to be considered viral.

Due to the varying research results, we only included videos with 100.000 likes or more in our analysis. Liking a video requires action beyond just watching, therefore we chose to analyze the number of likes. In our analysis, we also set a minimum requirement for the number of views per video. We chose to only analyze videos with 1 million views or more. We did not limit the number of shares due to the difficulty sorting the videos. Ultimately, our analysis only included videos with a minimum of 1 million views and 100.000 likes. Lastly, only videos from the last six months were included.

3.3 Coding

Both researchers watched each video and applied the criteria described below for coding. The resulting coding were compared, and any differences were resolved through a discussion between the two researchers or by involving a third coder, familiar with the coding system. The videos were broadly categorized into three groups based on content, product, and messenger. Additionally, the videos were coded within these categories; informative/tutorial-like content, content quality, content uniqueness, product uniqueness, product innovation, product problem-solving, product affordability, number of followers, and messenger expertise. Finally, when coding the videos, any views, shares, likes, and comments exceeding 10 000 were rounded up, as the exact numbers were not accessible.

Informative/tutorial-like content

Informative content is any content that gives the viewer valuable information about a product. For example, content that shows the viewer how to use the product in a tutorial-like way and gives information by demonstrating the use. It can also be if the content creator tells the viewer facts about a product. If the content informs the view somehow, it is coded as "informative"; if it is not, it is coded as "not informative".

Content quality

Several elements in the video judge the quality of the content. First, the video quality comprehends the quality of the device capturing the video and the clarity. The second is editing which includes clipping the video. This should be done to make the video look more professional. Thirdly is sound, which is if the video has music that betters the quality, and lastly,

the texting in the video to further reinforces the message in the content. If the content has two or more of these four quality elements, it is coded as "high quality"; if it does not, it is coded as "poor quality". After conducting the ANOVA and reviewing the results, we changed the criteria for high quality. Many videos did not show the use of the reviewed product and were therefore perceived as low quality. Videos that did not show the use of the product were coded with poor quality. Thus, we recoded the videos and conducted a new analysis.

Content uniqueness

Unusual content is any content that is unexpected, surprising or deviates from normal. It can take many forms, including creative videos, bizarre stories, unique perspectives, and unconventional approaches. The video can, for example, have an element of surprise. The purpose of this type of content is to capture the audience's attention and generate interest. If the content has something unusual or surprising, it is coded as "unusual content"; if it does not, it is coded as "usual content".

Product uniqueness

The terms unusual and unique involves that the product is not common, has something unexpected to it, or it stands out from similar products. If the video contains a unique, unusual product or have an element of a surprise, it is coded as an "unusual product". The "usual product" is used if the product is ordinary or not special.

Product innovation

"Product innovation" is a new product or an improvement to an existing one (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.-b). If a product is an improvement is based on whether a traditional product gives a result and if this is a new product achieving the same results. For instance, hair rolls or curling iron are original products to achieve curls in your hair. However, recently, new innovative products like specific hairbands to sleep with have become popular to achieve beautiful curls without heat damage. If the product is traditional, it is coded as "traditional", whereas if the product is original or an improvement of an existing product, it is coded as "innovative".

Product problem-solving

"Effectiveness" is the degree to which something is visually solving a problem and the ability to be successful and produce the intended results (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.-a). In the short video, we will categorize the product based on whether the product's result is obviously visualized. For example, the reviewed mascara works clearly on the eyelashes and is therefore coded as "solves", whereas a skin-care product usually needs several treatments and thus is coded "not solves". If the video does not show results, we code it with "unknown".

Product affordability

If something is affordable, it means that its price is reasonable and can be afforded by most consumers (Market Business News, n.d.). For this categorization, we look for if the brand has high-end or drug-store pricing. Both researchers use their knowledge about the brand, and if there is no knowledge or we are unsure, we search the brand and code it with "affordable" or "expensive". For instance, products from Dior were coded "expensive", and products from Maybelline were coded "affordable".

Number of followers

Based on statistics, 20% of TikTok users in the US have follower counts ranging from 20,000 to 100,000 (Ceci, L., 2022). Therefore, videos were categorized as "high" if the creator had more than 100,000 followers and "low" if they had less than 100,000 followers.

Expertise of messenger

An expert has extensive knowledge, skill, and experience in a particular field or subject matter (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). We look at the profile of the messenger to see if they created several videos about a similar product. If they have, they are characterized as "expert". If they have not, they are characterized as "novice".

Example

An example to demonstrate the coding of the 350 videos is the Jeffree Star's video featuring the Jimmy Choo Lipgloss. First, the video was coded "informational" as he shows lipgloss usage and reviews the taste, smell, and quality. Further, the quality of the video was good as the creator used professional tools and editing, hence the code "high quality". Second, Jeffree Star is a beauty

influencer with a large audience, and he has his way of talking, being brutally honest, and using body language. Thus, his content stood out from the crowd and was coded as "unusual content". Third, the product reviewed was a lipgloss with no special features and was coded "usual product", nor is it a new product or an improvement to an existing product and coded "traditional". Finally, the lipgloss was coded "solve", as it clearly can be seen on the lips. Fourth, Jimmy Choo is a high-end brand, and the lipgloss costs 62\$, hence the code "expensive". Finally, the code "high" was used as Jeffree Star has 4,5 million followers on TikTok and "expert" as he posts many videos about beauty.

3.4 Measures

A variable is something that has multiple possible values or is changeable. According to Bougie and Sekaran (2020), values may change over time for the same thing or person or simultaneously for other things or persons. The researcher is primarily interested in the dependent variable. The researcher's goals are to understand, describe, and explain the dependent variable, as well as foresee its fluctuation. More specifically, the main variable makes for a good research component. By examining the dependent variable (i.e., figuring out what factors influence it), it should be possible to find answers or solutions to the problem.

Our analysis's four dependent variables were likes, shares, views, and comments. Based on the degree of engagement from users, these were ranked 1, 2, 3, and more. Rewatch- and completion rates, which will give the inventor the most rewards, are the most important factors for virality (TikTok, n.d.). However, as no information is available to anyone besides the creator, the numbers on TikTok videos that were rewatched and finished were disregarded. Shares are the third most significant factor, and comments are the fourth (TikTok, n.d.). Similar to shares and comments, likes also give the creator credit. The literature on perspectives was poorly defined. Thus, it was listed last because it does not call for the user's participation or action.

According to Bougie and Sekaran (2020), an independent variable is often believed to positively or negatively impact the dependent variable. Since the independent and dependent variables are both present at the same time, if the independent variable increases or decreases, the dependent variable will also change accordingly. The independent variable explains the dependent

variable's variance. The categories we developed for each hypothesis were the independent variables and included informative/tutorial-like UGC, UGC quality, UGC uniqueness, product uniqueness, product innovation, product problem-solving, product affordability, number of followers, and messenger expertise.

3.5 Data Analysis

The collected data in the sample was evaluated using ANOVA analysis in SPSS. ANOVA is a variance analysis used to analyze three or more independent groups and check for statistical mean differences (Bougie & Sekaran, 2020). The F-value is produced by combining variance and sample size, which can be examined to determine if the difference in samples is "statistically significant (p-value)" (Bougie & Sekaran, 2020). If the P-value is lower than the significance level, there is enough evidence to conclude that at least one mean value in the sample differs from the other values (Zach, 2019).

The ANOVA analysis can be used to understand how the independent variables are linked to the dependent variables (Bougie & Sekaran, 2020). However, the ANOVA test does not inform us which categories are distinct from one another (Zach, 2019), but it helps identify the significance levels. Therefore, a post hoc test was conducted on 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, and Tukey's test was also implemented to make every possible pairwise comparison (Zach, 2019).

In social science research, a 95% confidence level means 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 ($p = 0.05$) (Bougie & Sekaran, 2020). A significance level of 0.1 and 0.01 is also common (Yale Statistics, n.d.). The analyses were performed using a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ and 95% confidence intervals, but a significance level of $\alpha = 0.1$ was also considered in some hypotheses. However, as the chance of concluding with the wrong result is higher with a significance level of $\alpha = 0.1$, $\alpha = 0.05$ was primarily used as the boundary.

4. Results

The outcomes from the quantitative analysis performed in SPSS will be presented in this chapter. We will discuss the findings from each hypothesis and make a case for or against it. We will also describe the alterations we made and the reasoning behind them. A summary table with the approved and rejected hypotheses can be found at the end.

H1: Tutorials/informative content are more likely to go viral than non-informative content.

For this hypothesis, we coded the content into two categories, “Informative” and “Not informative”. The results from the ANOVA were as follows:

Dependent variable	F-value	P-value	Means	
			<i>Informative</i>	<i>Not informative</i>
Shares	0.021	0.884	5.076	5.045
Comments	0.187	0.666	4.278	4.394
Likes	0.064	0.801	3.439	3.375
Views	0.258	0.612	7.424	7.190

Table 2: Results from H1.

H1 was rejected or not valid due to the skewed numbers in the dataset.

H2: UGC with high quality are more likely to go viral than UGC with poor quality.

For hypothesis H2, we coded the content into two categories, “High quality” and “Poor quality”. The ANOVA result were:

Dependent variable	F-value	P-value	Means	
			High quality	Poor quality
Shares	0.434	0.510	5.130	5.025
Comments	0.018	0.893	4.359	4.386
Likes	0.331	0.565	3.527	3.420
Views	2.284	0.132	7.661	7.144

Table 3: Results from H2.

Based on the results, there was no statistically significant difference in shares, comments, likes, and shares between high quality and poor quality content ($p > 0.05$).

H3: UGC with unique or unexpected content is more likely to go viral than UGC with ordinary or expected content.

In the third hypothesis we coded the content into “Unusual” and “Usual”. The results are shown below.

Dependent variable	F-value	P-value	Means	
			Unusual UGC	Usual UGC
Shares	0.056	0.401	5.158	4.962
Comments	5.098	0.808	4.557	4.114
Likes	0.923	0.598	3.633	3.180
Views	1.566	**0.107	7.629	6.985

Table 4: Results from H3. ****Significance level = 0.1**

H3 were accepted as there was a statistically significant difference in views between unusual and usual UGC ($p < 0.1$).

H4: UGC of a unique or unusual product that have an element of surprise are more likely to go viral than UGC with ordinary products.

As for H4, we coded the content into two categories, “Unusual” and “Usual”. The test results can be seen below:

Dependent variable	F-value	P-value	Means	
			<i>Unusual product</i>	<i>Usual product</i>
Shares	0.862	0.354	5.040	5.081
Comments	2.847	**0.092	4.584	4.087
Likes	3.362	**0.068	3.506	3.308
Views	2.029	0.155	7.544	7.070

Table 5: Results from H4. **Significance level = 0.1

H04 is accepted on two dependent variables, comments and likes.

H5. UGC with a highly innovative product are more likely to go viral than UGC with a less innovative product.

For this hypothesis, we coded the content into two categories, “Informative” and “Not informative”. The results from the ANOVA were as follows:

Dependent variable	F-value	P-value	Means	
			<i>Traditional</i>	<i>Innovative</i>
Shares	5.362	*0.021	5.402	4.718
Comments	5.975	0.161	4.594	4.077
Likes	0.356	0.551	3.510	3.304
Views	2.472	**0.115	7.805	6.809

Table 6: Results from H5. Significance level = *0.05 and **0.1

As two of the dependent variables were significant at the 0.05 and 0.1 level, H05 can be confirmed.

H6: UGC with products that visually solves a problem go more viral than the products that do not solve a problem.

Regarding H6, we initially coded the content into two categories, “Solves” and “No solve”. However, after analyzing 35 videos, we recognized that a lot of videos did not visualize the use of the product. Thus, we added one more category “Unknown” for our analysis of H06 to be as thoroughly as possible. This left us with three categories, and the following results:

Dependent variable	F-value	P-value	Means		
			<i>Unknown</i>	<i>Solves</i>	<i>No solve</i>
Shares	1.025	0.360	5.251	4.996	4.934
Comments	0.882	0.415	4.112	4.445	4.150
Likes	1.096	0.307	3.519	3.498	3.204
Views	2.296	**0.103	7.518	7.601	6.802

Table 7: Results from H6. **Significance level = 0.1

H6 show a significant different between views on product that show their effectiveness. Hypothesis 6 was accepted.

H7: Products that are affordable are more likely to go viral than expensive products.

For H7 we chose to code using “Affordable” and “Expensive” as our categories. You can see the result from the ANOVA test bellow:

Dependent variable	F-value	P-value	Means	
			<i>Affordable</i>	<i>Expensive</i>

Shares	0.335	0.716	4.701	4.715
Comments	1.383	0.252	3.810	4.075
Likes	0.578	0.561	3.095	3.257
Views	1.605	0.202	5.815	6.144

Table 8: Results from H7.

This hypothesis is rejected because none of the numbers were significant.

H8: UGC of messengers with a high number of followers are more likely to go viral than those with fewer followers.

For H8, we coded the content into two categories, “High” and “Low”. The results is displayed in the table below:

Dependent variable	F-value	P-value	Means	
			<i>High</i>	<i>Low</i>
Shares	0.035	0.852	5.075	5.046
Comments	0.770	0.381	4.419	4.252
Likes	0.298	0.586	3.456	3.358
Views	0.046	0.829	7.342	7.272

Table 9: Results from H8.

As none of the p-values are within the 0.05 Significance-level, H8 is rejected and marked as not valid.

H9: UGC is more likely to go viral if the creator is perceived as and “expert” on the topic.

For the last hypothesis, we coded using “Expert” and “Novice” as our categories. The result from the ANOVA test was as follows:

Dependent variable	F-value	P-value	Means	
			Expert	Novice
Shares	1.367	0.243	4.878	5.243
Comments	1.743	0.188	4.079	4.593
Likes	2.145	**0.117	3.139	3.675
Views	0.667	0.415	7.033	7.581

Table 10: Results from H9. **Significance level = 0.1

This hypothesis finds that there is a significant different between likes on videos who are created by experts versus novice. H9 was accepted.

A table was made to summarize the results from the analysis and easily demonstrate which hypothesis were supported or not:

Hypothesis	Accepted/Rejected
H1: Tutorials/informative content are more likely to go viral than non-informative content.	Rejected.
H2: UGC with high quality are more likely to go viral than UGC with poor quality.	Rejected.
H3: UGC with unique or unexpected content is more likely to go viral than UGC with ordinary or expected content.	Accepted.
H4: UGC of a unique or unusual product that have an element of surprise are more likely to go viral than UGC with ordinary products.	Accepted.
H5. UGC with a highly innovative product are more likely to go viral than UGC with a less innovative product.	Accepted.

H6: UGC with products that visually solves a problem go more viral than the products that do not solve a problem.	Accepted.
H7: Products that are affordable are more likely to go viral than expensive products.	Rejected.
H8: UGC of messengers with a high number of followers are more likely to go viral than those with fewer followers.	Rejected.
H9: UGC is more likely to go viral if the creator is perceived as and “expert” on the topic.	Accepted.

Table 11: Summary of the results from the data analysis.

5. Discussion

The major objective of this study was to examine the content, messenger, and product features of a chosen data collection consisting of 350 viral TikTok videos to understand why product-related UGC goes viral. We will discuss the findings from our analysis in this chapter.

5.1 Content characteristics

Hypothesis 1 shows that the P-values are relatively high for all four variables, ranging from 0.612 to 0.884. This suggests that there is no statistically significant difference in engagement between the informative and non-informative videos. The means for each variable appear to be relatively similar across the board, proving that the hypothesis was rejected.

There are several reasons why there could be no difference in engagement between informative and not informative content. Firstly, how we categorized our data as informative or not information may not have been done accurately. The criteria used to determine whether a video was informative may have been clearly defined or objective enough. Flanagan (2022) suggests that informative content is supposed to educate the audience and give them your expertise. We categorized content as informative if it gave the viewer valuable information about the product or

demonstrated how to use it (tutorial). For future research, we would recommend having more specific criteria for analyzing informative and non-informative content.

Secondly, the audience may not have been particularly interested in informative content. For example, if the target was a younger audience more interested in entertainment and humor, informative videos may not have engaged them.

Lastly, it is important to take TikTok's algorithm into account. TikTok's algorithm is designed to provide users with personalized content tailored to their interests, behavior, and engagement with the platform. By leveraging machine learning, user data, and content analysis, the algorithm suggests videos that are likely to be both relevant and engaging to each individual user (Zhao, 2021). If the content is what the viewer is interested in, it may not make a difference if the content is informative or not.

For hypothesis 2, the variables, shares, likes, and comments indicate that there is no statistically significant difference between high-quality videos and poor-quality videos. However, for views, the P-value is 0.132, which suggests that there might be a statistically significant difference in this variable. The number is higher than the significance level of 0.1, which means that the hypothesis is rejected but we need to look further into this. To be more specific the mean is 7.661 for high quality content and 7.144 for low quality content.

Content with editing, music, good picture clarity, and content showing how to use the product was coded as high-quality in our analysis. One possible reason for the lack of difference in engagement between high and low-quality content could be due to the subjective nature of quality. It is possible that what we see as good quality is not the same for every person. Additionally, engagement is influenced by more than just the quality of the video. Further, it is possible that the videos analyzed were not enough to get the right results. It is also worth mentioning that as many as 96 videos we analyzed did not show the product in use, just under 1/3 of the data. The viewers may appreciate being shown how to use it and see how the product performs instead of just someone talking about the product. As the analysis suggests, there may

be a significant difference in views between high- and poor-quality content. This difference could be higher if we analyzed more videos.

As mentioned, we coded content with more than basic editing as high-quality. After our analysis, we found that a lot of content had been edited, such as clipping and music. We, therefore, understood that the criteria for high-quality content were not difficult to meet as clipping and adding music to the video has been done by most creators. Furthermore, it is possible that some content could have gone viral without having to focus on quality at all. For example, when posting an already viral product such as the Clinique black honey lipstick, people may engage despite the content being poor-quality and because the product is already viral in the real world.

Based on the results for hypothesis 3, there was a statistically significant difference in the number of comments between unusual and usual UGC. However, there was no difference regarding shares, likes, and views (comments: the means for unusual UGC is 7.629, and the mean for usual UGC is 6,985). Therefore, H3 was only partially supported, as there was a significant difference in comments but not the other variables.

We coded unique content if the video had something unusual or extra compared to other content. Most videos were common, with a person explaining or using a product. An example we found, which we coded as unique content, was a video setting fire to different heat protectors for hair. We can argue that this unique approach is eye-catching and has generated more engagement and, in this case, comments. We also saw that the messenger personality could make the content unique. This is discussed further in 5.3 Messenger characteristics.

5.2 Product characteristics

H4 suggests that UGC of a unique or unusual product is more likely to go viral than UGC with ordinary products. This hypothesis was accepted, and there is a statistically significant difference in both comments and likes between usual and unusual products (Comments: means for the unusual product is 4.584 and means the usual product is 4.087. Likes: means for the unusual product is 3.506 and means for the usual product is 3.308).

Several factors could be at play when determining whether unusual items are more likely than ordinary ones to increase engagement and virality. First, the likelihood that uncommon or distinctive products will stand out and create conversation on SoMe can be increased, according to Pressgrove et al. (2018). It is commonly believed that more controversy equals a greater amount of attention. Multi-functional products have distinctive textures or colors, or both tend to attract greater attention. These products are fundamentally more fascinating and attention-grabbing than standard ones. People may be more likely to spread content about odd products to display their distinctive tastes or interests on their social networks (Chen & Berger, 2013). It may be argued that sharing content about an odd product is a method to express one's uniqueness and stand out from the crowd. Furthermore, it is also possible that the difference in virality between unusual and usual products results from the fact that unique products generate less UGC in general. In other words, since there is less content available, people may be more inspired to develop and distribute information regarding uncommon things because it will be simpler for their content to stand out and encourage engagement.

One barrier in our research was that before and during our analysis, we had to thoroughly discuss product uniqueness and innovation. Our criteria for a unique product were that it stands out from similar products, whereas a product innovation had to be a new product or an improvement to an existing one. One example that we discussed was the Black Honey Lipstick from Clarins. We concluded that it is a usual product as it is a lipstick to color the lips of the consumer, but because of its special formula that creates a unique color for whoever is using it, it was innovative. If different researchers had analyzed the videos or if we were a larger team, maybe the results would have been different. Hence our analysis is partially biased.

H05 proposed that UGC with a highly innovative product were more likely to go viral than UGC with a less innovative product. The result revealed that there was a significant difference between sharing and viewing traditional and innovative products (Shares: means for traditional is 5.402 and means innovative is 4.718. Views: means for traditional is 7.805 and means for innovative is 6.809). These findings suggest that the traditional and innovative products differ significantly in their viewing and sharing behavior on social media, but not in their commenting- or liking behavior.

As Nguyen and Chadhury (2019) state, innovative products have a higher likelihood of going viral, which implies that they have a better chance of attracting a lot of attention and causing reactions on social media. In addition, Calantone et al. (2006) promote that innovation is the cornerstone of new product creation and an appealing feature for consumers. The findings potentially impact companies and marketers who want to use social media to advertise innovative products. It's important to note, however, our results found that traditional products go more viral than innovative products.

The results also indicate that there was no discernible difference in commenting or like behavior between traditional and innovative products. This suggests that while cutting-edge items may be more likely to be shared and watched on social media, audience engagement, and interaction may not necessarily increase as a result. These results demonstrate the significance of considering a product's distinctive qualities when creating a social media marketing plan. To maximize the results of their marketing efforts, companies and marketers should be aware of the potential for innovative goods to attract more attention and buzz on social media. However, they should also concentrate on providing interactive and engaging content.

H06 proposed that UGC with products that visually solve a problem go more viral than those that do not solve a problem. The analysis found that views are statistically significant with product effectiveness, which implies that if a product works well, its effectiveness can be seen in UGC and is more likely to go viral (Views: means for unknown is 7.518, means for solves is 7.601 and means no solve is 6.802).

The statement also cites Pressgrove's (2018) research, which found that if a product works well, consumers are more likely to recommend it to others. This suggests that UGC showcasing a product's effectiveness can be a powerful tool for driving word-of-mouth recommendations and generating buzz on social media. For example, one of the products was the GHD Hair-Straightener, and the content showed that the person's hair went from curly to straight. On the other hand, a product coded as ineffective was the CeraVe Hydrating Cleanser, as there were no clear effects, and the goal of the product (clear skin) was achieved over a long time. In addition,

72 of the viral videos we went through were analyzed as ineffective, and 96 of the 350 did not even show the usage of the product.

H7 suggested that affordable products go more viral than expensive products. From the findings there were not any statistically significant evidence, and the hypothesis was therefore rejected. These findings were unexpected as we know that affordable products are more accessible to a wider audience, meaning they may be more likely to resonate with more people and lead to consumer engagement. Consumers may be more likely to share affordable products with their social networks, as they may feel that the product is a good value for the price. Affordable products may be more likely to fit into current trends and fads, making them more appealing to younger, trend-focused audiences on social media. Additionally, if a product is priced competitively and offers good value, this could be a unique selling point that sets it apart from other products in the market. This could make it more attractive to consumers and increase its chances of going viral on social media. However, we can discuss from our results that high-end brands may have a well-established reputation for quality and prestige, which can make their products more appealing to consumers. This reputation can be built over time through a combination of marketing efforts, brand recognition, and customer loyalty.

One thing to consider in our findings is that we did not code USG based on positive- or negative reviews. Several videos concerning high-end products were reviewed with the opinion that the product "is not worth the hype and price", i.e., the Jimmy Choo Lipgloss. On the contrary, many low-end products had positive reviews as the value, surprisingly, exceeded the price of the product and was "worth the hype", for example, the Elf Cosmetics Setting Spray. Even though expensive products can seem appealing and go viral, it does not necessarily correlate to increased sales as it does with affordable products. Several of our videos are consumers looking in stores for affordable viral products, i.e., the viral Elf Cosmetics Power Grip Primer.

One last thought is that we had 205 expensive products and 145 affordable products in our dataset that were found based on searching with hashtags. One can argue that if our dataset contained random viral videos instead of selected videos, our findings would have differed, and we would have collected more affordable products than we originally did.

5.3 Messenger characteristics

Hypothesis 8 shows that none of the P-values are less than 0.1, indicating that there are no significant differences between engagement on videos with high and low numbers of followers. Therefore, H8 was rejected and marked as not valid.

In our dataset, there were 205 videos coded as having a messenger with "high following" and 145 with "low following". There could be many reasons for no significant difference between engagement on videos created by people with high and low followings. One possibility can be that the algorithm used by the platform to distribute content may not be favoring creators with a higher following. On the other hand, it could also be that the content created by both high and low-following creators is being targeted toward similar audiences with similar preferences and interests, leading to a similar level of engagement.

In Table 10, the results show that the P-value for likes is 0.117, which is significant in our study (For likes: the mean is 3.139 for experts and 3.675 for novices). Therefore we can conclude that there is a statistically significant difference in the number of likes between videos created by experts and those who were created by novices. Therefore, we conclude that hypothesis 9 was accepted. However, there were no differences in shares, comments, and views, and the expertise level did not impact these variables.

Burgman et al. (2011) explain that an expert is a person who has advanced knowledge, skills, and experience in a particular field, topic, or subject. It is important to note that we did not include the number of followers when we perceived a messenger as an expert. However, if a content creator had posted multiple videos in the same category, in our case, beauty, we coded them as an expert. Since our criteria for being an expert were relatively low, we ended up having most of our data coded as an expert. Burgman et al. (2011) also said that an expert might be recognized as credible in their specific area of expertise. This can indicate why both people with a high and a low following got engagement.

In WOM, experts are generally seen as a highly credible source of information due to their knowledge and expertise in a particular field (Cheng et al., 2021). However, in social media,

credibility is often based on different factors, such as the number of followers, engagement levels, and the perceived authenticity of the content (Fan et al., 2013; Meinert & Krämer, 2022). We could argue that on TikTok, viewers appreciate more authenticity than the number of followers due to novices getting more likes than experts.

The type of messenger is shown to impact engagement on content greatly (Chiu et al., 2007; Dobele et al., 2007; Teixeira et al., 2012). We can argue that even if the other factor, such as quality of the content, price of the product, and innovation or not – content created by unique messengers, can still go viral. An example of a messenger with a unique personality can be @JeffreeStarr. He has 4,5 million followers on TikTok and is considered an expert and an opinion leader in our study. He uses, for example, exaggeration, brutal honesty, cusswords, and a lot of drama in his content. Because of this messenger's characteristics, we can argue that he captures the viewers' attention regardless of the other factors in the study. When a messenger has a unique approach, they can capture people's attention and create a sense of curiosity and intrigue. These types of messengers are often more memorable and can leave a lasting impression on the viewers and can result in consumer engagement.

5.4 Conclusion

Opening TikTok is like stepping into a spiral of endless entertainment, where one can easily lose track of time and get swept away by a never-ending stream of videos. This master thesis aimed to uncover the key factors contributing to the virality of beauty product-related user-generated content on TikTok. Our mixed-method study of 350 TikTok videos revealed that content-, product-and-messenger characteristics play crucial roles in the degree of virality. The accepted hypotheses (3, 4, 5, 6, and 9) indicate that a combination of all three groups of characteristics can significantly contribute to a video's virality. Our findings demonstrate that when creating a video to go viral on TikTok, the content needs to be unique or unexpected. Further, the product should be unique or unusual, be innovative, and solve a problem. Lastly, the messenger delivering the content can be more important than the product itself and should be an expert on the topic. Our research highlights the importance of understanding how specific characteristics can influence online virality and provides practical guidelines for creating successful social media content and strategies.

6. Implications, contributions, and limitations

6.1 Implications for marketers

The findings in this study hold a particular significance for people or businesses looking to promote their brands or products on social media. A strong presence can be essential for success for businesses that aspire to have high visibility on social media. Therefore, small and large businesses should consider incorporating the characteristics identified in our research into their viral marketing campaigns. In addition, businesses can allocate more resources to specific aspects of their marketing strategy by identifying what content works best on their social media channels.

Our research findings apply to TikTok and other social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat, where users and brands create and share video content. In addition, UGC featuring beauty products can be found across all social media, making our results relevant and transferable to other platforms as well. Note that although our research focused on UGC, our findings can be valuable to brands seeking inspiration to create producer-generated content (PGC). Lastly, UGC, which does not feature a product, can benefit from our findings.

Our research findings have implications beyond social media marketing and can be valuable in enhancing business customer retention. To increase their social media presence and promote their products or brand, it is essential for companies to understand their consumer's preferences and interests, as this knowledge can help them attract new and potential customers. By identifying specific video characteristics with a higher potential for making content go viral, our findings can serve as a guide or source of inspiration for businesses to create engaging content online. Incorporating these characteristics into their content strategy can help them reach a broader audience and increase customer loyalty.

While numerous studies have been conducted on established social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, and Instagram, TikTok has received comparatively less attention as it is a relatively new platform. However, given the platform's growing popularity, marketers must stay informed of the latest trends. Moreover, TikTok has unique features that distinguish it

from other social media platforms and operates differently. As such, it is crucial to understand how TikTok functions and how to optimize content for maximum impact, and our study can serve as a guide to understanding the app.

6.2 Contributions

Our study explores a relatively new and unexplored area that provides the groundwork for future research. While virality has been studied extensively (Berger & Milkman, 2013; Goel et al., 2016; Mills, 2012; Tellis et al., 2019), there are only a few studies that have researched the relationship between UGC and virality on TikTok and no one is specific to beauty products.

Our study found that UGC featuring unusual and innovative products is more likely to go viral. Moreover, the study also found that content where you visually see the product solving a problem/being effective goes more viral. Important to note that we saw evidence that the messenger could contribute to the viral content more than the product shown in the video. It has been found in other studies that innovative and unique products are more likely to go viral due to being more interesting for the viewer. In our study, we had a hypothesis for both unique and innovative products. Both were accepted and approved. Furthermore, it has been looked at before that informative or tutorial-like content is more shared, which our study also proved.

6.3 Limitations and suggestions for further research

Some of our work's limitations might be the foundation for future research. For example, due to the same interests and age of the two authors, the content analysis may be more subjective than objective. We have, nonetheless, tried to be as unbiased and objective as possible. Furthermore, the results might have been different if another person—an individual who is older or had a different background—had done the coding.

We believed the videos we collected for our database would be biased because of the TikTok algorithm. However, we tested it and found that it is the same videos for everyone because of the filters used. We searched with the same hashtags and used the filters "number of likes" and "published within the last six months", – and the videos listed were identical.

It was easy to decide whether a video was high quality (H02) as the criteria we set were not difficult to meet, and clipping and adding music to the video had been done by most creators. The same situation happened with deciding whether a messenger was an expert (H09). Almost everyone met our criteria, so the reasoning for being an expert should be stricter and more well-thought for further research. Also, what was coded as "unusual content" (H03) and "unusual product" (H04), might not be unusual for others, although we tried to stay objective. However, it was attempted to consider what most people would think.

It would not have been possible to include age as a variable because no information is available on the viewers on TikTok. Thus, therefore we are not able to see if age made a difference in the level of engagement toward different kinds of content. For future research, we would add age to the analysis.

For future research, we recommend further investigation of TikTok, as there are few studies on this social media platform despite its growing popularity. Another avenue to explore would be building on one of our hypotheses. Additionally, researchers could address video selection by studying random videos, such as those featuring mascaras, rather than selecting already-viral videos, as we did. This will allow for comparing viral and non-viral videos to see if our findings hold up. Lastly, our research could be expanded by examining other factors or investigating the impact of viral videos on purchasing behavior.

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Appendix

Appendix 1:

Screenshots of the video used in the example in chapter 3.3. Created by @Jeffreestar, about the Jimmy Choo Lipgloss.



Presentation of the thesis

Our thesis aimed to investigate the factors behind the virality of content on TikTok, with a specific focus on user-generated content related to products. We sought to understand how an average user could create a viral video featuring a product. To conduct the study, we collected 350 viral videos about beauty products from TikTok and performed an analysis. To qualify as viral, a video had to have a minimum of 1 million views and 100,000 likes. Previous research has explored the reasons why certain content attracts more attention on various social media platforms (e.g., Han et al., 2019; Berger, 2013; Berger & Milkman, 2012; Cheng et al., 2021; Mills, A., 2012; Pressgrove et. al., 2018; Tellis et al., 2019). However, due to TikTok being a relatively new and less explored social media platform, we decided to focus our research on this particular platform.

In our thesis, we categorized the literature into three main areas: content characteristics, product characteristics, and messenger characteristics, all contributing to virality. We examined the content elements that had a higher potential for virality, the types of products involved, and the role of the video creators or messengers. Based on these three categories, we formulated nine hypotheses. We then coded each video according to these hypotheses and analyzed the results using an ANOVA analysis in SPSS. Our findings show that five out of nine 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)

A crucial aspect of our thesis revolved around user-generated content (UGC), which refers to "content made publicly available over the Internet, reflecting a certain degree of creative effort and created outside professional routines and practices" (OECD, 2007, p. 61). UGC encompasses a wide range of topics, such as dancing, product reviews, food recipes, or any other form of self-expression. The online information market, which used to be primarily controlled by publishers, has now shifted to be largely driven by users (Daugherty et al., 2008). As a result, consumers wield more influence and play an active role in shaping new trends. Businesses, in turn, must adapt and keep up with these trends to remain relevant in the market.

Word of mouth (WOM) is defined as the exchange of information between individuals for the purpose of evaluating products and services (Chung & Darke, 2006). Today, UGC can be considered as the online counterpart of WOM (Wyroll, 2014), with the key distinction that WOM is solely communicated, while UGC is created by the users themselves. In the past, people relied on WOM from friends and family when making decisions, such as whether to purchase a particular product. However, with the rise of the Internet and social media, the dynamics have shifted, and individuals now seek and trust the opinions of strangers from around the world. Research has also demonstrated that social media users are more inclined to trust online WOM from fellow users rather than from producers or brands (Cheong & Morrison, 2008). This can be

attributed, for instance, to the tendency of individuals to trust those who are similar to themselves (Donthu et al., 2021). Furthermore, trust can significantly influence purchasing decisions.

In today's digital age, people spend hours scrolling through social media platforms, immersing themselves in the recommendations and purchases of others. The landscape has shifted, altering the criteria for trust. Consumers no longer rely solely on the opinions of their friends and family; instead, they are drawn to following trends and heeding the advice of fellow online users, be they influencers or ordinary individuals. It was this observation that sparked the idea for our thesis. We observed that viral videos on TikTok had the power to cause products to sell out worldwide. A notable example was the "TikTok mascara" phenomenon. A video created by an American girl went viral on TikTok, leading to a global shortage of Maybelline mascara. This showcases the rapid dissemination of a video across international borders and how global trends can influence people in different countries to purchase a particular product. Online videos create a sense of trust in the creators, compelling viewers to buy the recommended products, even if they have no personal connection to the individuals involved.

An integral aspect of our thesis focused on the concept of virality, which we defined as the rapid dissemination and widespread sharing of information within a short timeframe (Nahon & Hemsley, 2013). Virality often intertwines with international trends, where a single viral

video can ignite a global phenomenon. Consider a trend originating in China that becomes the "next big thing" in Sweden within a day. Users play a critical role in driving virality, as they decide what content they want to consume, like, and share with others (Heimbach & Hinz, 2018).

Virality and viral marketing

In parallel with the shift from word of mouth (WOM) to user-generated content (UGC), businesses have also had to adapt their marketing strategies, placing greater emphasis on viral marketing. Viral marketing involves persuading consumers to share a company's marketing content with their friends and family (Dobele et al., 2007). Through social media platforms, consumers are encouraged to disseminate product information, marking a transition from traditional business-to-customer communication to customer-to-customer communication (De Bruyn & Lillien, 2008). This shift can prove advantageous for brands, considering that, as previously mentioned, people now place greater trust in fellow users on social media rather than the brands themselves. Furthermore, leveraging regular users as brand advocates can be more cost-effective for companies, as these individuals effectively help market their products. In other words, individuals become brand ambassadors. Additionally, advertising on social media tends to be less expensive compared to other available options, such as traditional media (Lyfe Marketing, n.d.). Lastly, brands can capitalize on the rapid speed at which products can go viral in today's interconnected world.

One could argue that it is easier to place trust in advertising from "regular" users, as we can relate to them more easily and perceive them as being similar to ourselves. With user-generated content (UGC), consumers have the opportunity to witness a "normal" person trying a product

and often providing their genuine opinion. In most cases, these users create videos not with the intent of persuading people to buy the product, but rather to genuinely test it and share their honest feedback. As a result, such content is perceived as more trustworthy and authentic. Furthermore, as one individual begins creating videos showcasing the products they try, it sparks the interest of others who also want to give them a try. The video creator's influence then affects the purchase intentions of these viewers. From there, a rapid chain of events unfolds. As more people are influenced to purchase the product, more individuals start creating videos testing it, which, in turn, leads to even more people buying it, and so on. This process precisely illustrates how trends emerge and spread internationally through the power of social media.

International trends and forces

According to the Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.a), "international" refers to something involving two or more countries. Additionally, if a subject, trend, problem, or any other matter encompasses multiple countries, it can be categorized as international. In our thesis, the concept of internationality holds immense significance as we explore TikTok, a social media network that facilitates connections among people from all corners of the world. This global interaction, made possible by today's technology, is not limited to TikTok alone but is a characteristic shared by other social media platforms.

For business owners and marketers, staying updated on the latest trends is of paramount importance. This is closely tied to the ongoing process of globalization, where accessible goods, services, and social and cultural influences are rapidly converging across different regions of the world (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.b). Consequently, it becomes crucial to stay informed about international trends and forces. A trend can be defined as a general development or change in a situation or in people's behaviors (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.c, p.1). Moreover, a trend that originates in one country can swiftly evolve and expand to other countries within a short period of time, thanks to the ease of sharing information online. Therefore, it is essential for brands to be well-prepared, leverage these trends to their advantage, and avoid being left outdated and unprepared.

Let's consider an alternative example to illustrate the impact of user-generated content (UGC) on consumer trust and purchase behavior. Imagine a popular video on social media showcasing a new skincare product that promises remarkable results. The video is created by an everyday user who genuinely wants to share their experience with the product. Unlike traditional advertisements that often appear perfect and unrealistic, this UGC video provides an authentic and relatable perspective. The user demonstrates the application of the skincare product without any special effects or scripted lines, making it feel genuine and trustworthy. As the video gains traction and viewership, it sparks curiosity and captures the attention of other social media users. People become intrigued by the positive effects showcased in the video and are influenced by the user's honest opinion. They start purchasing the product and sharing their own experiences through UGC. This domino effect results in more people making videos, which in turn encourages additional consumers to try the product, leading to a widespread trend. It's important to note that while the example above may involve a collaboration between the video creator and the skincare brand, most product-related UGC on social media is driven by individuals genuinely interested in trying and sharing their experiences with the products they find compelling. This

dynamic highlights the significance of UGC in building consumer trust. Rather than relying solely on polished advertisements, consumers are drawn to content created by fellow users who provide relatable perspectives and authentic experiences. Through UGC, trends can emerge and spread rapidly across different countries, demonstrating the influential power of social media in shaping consumer behavior and brand perception.

Findings

Our research demonstrate that when creating a video to go viral on TikTok, the content needs to be unique or unexpected. Further, the product should be unique or unusual, be innovative, and solve a problem. Lastly, the messenger delivering the content can be more important than the product itself and should be an expert on the topic. The findings presented in our thesis are derived from a comprehensive analysis of viral videos in general, without focusing on specific countries. Our collected sample comprises creators from various regions around the world, including the United States and Europe. As a result, our analyses encompass a diverse range of countries, thereby allowing the implications of our findings to extend internationally.

These findings hold relevance not only for individuals seeking to create viral videos, but also for businesses and brands aiming to capture the attention of their followers and consumers. Given that our analysis includes videos from creators in multiple countries and features products that have gained popularity or become trends in several regions, it is reasonable to assert that our thesis carries international significance. Furthermore, this research can be of great importance to marketers and businesses across different parts of the world. For instance, a video created by a Norwegian user has the potential to go viral, leading to an American brand experiencing a surge in product demand. Consequently, brands must be attentive to international trends to remain current in the market and effectively leverage their resources.

Conclusion

The emergence of international trends and the pervasive influence of social media have brought about a significant shift in consumer trust and purchase behavior. Rather than relying on recommendations from friends and family, consumers now prioritize following online trends and influences. Consequently, businesses have been compelled to adapt their strategies accordingly. Traditional trust in brands has waned, prompting the need for brands to actively engage consumers in creating and sharing content about their products or services. In today's rapidly evolving and interconnected world, staying attuned to international trends is not just important but essential for remaining relevant and competitive.

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Presentation of the masters' theses

Our master's thesis focuses on the relationship between user-generated content (UGC) and virality. Our thesis aimed to better understand the characteristics behind viral UGC featuring beauty products. To achieve this, we conducted a content analysis by selecting and analyzing 350 videos from the popular video-sharing platform TikTok. Only UGC with over one million views and 100.000 likes were included in the study. Our aim was to identify which product-related videos have a higher tendency to go viral and determine the characteristics associated with their virality. We especially examined each video's content, product, and messenger characteristics.

After finding all our videos we coded them and analyzed the result in an ANOVA test in SPSS. Our findings confirmed five out of nine hypotheses proposed in our thesis. The result of our analysis shows that content, product, and messenger characteristics have an impact in virality.

Virality and viral marketing

Virality can be described as when a piece of content spreads rapidly and widely and reaches many people in a short period of time and is measured by the degree of sharing (Berger & Milkman, 2012; Tellis et al., 2019; Tucker, 2015). Numerous factors can play a role in the viral success of content, such as its quality, timing, platform, and target audience. These elements collectively contribute to the likelihood of content achieving widespread popularity (Berger & Milkman, 2012; West, 2011). As the world shifts to a more digital focus and more people use social media platforms it becomes more important for businesses to use this to their advantage. Virality can lead to increased exposure to content, whether created by businesses or individuals. Many studies have researched the concept of virality in social media, however not many have focused specifically on TikTok as it is a relatively new platform (Berger & Milkman, 2012; Tellis et al., 2019; West, 2011).

Viral marketing is the process of getting customers to pass along a company's marketing message to others (Dobele et al., 2007; Traver, G. C. & Laudon, C. K., 2001). Together with the term virality, viral marketing has gained more popularity in the growth after the rise of social media. (De Bruyn, A. & Lilien, G. L., 2004). In viral marketing, the key emphasis lies in creating content that captivates the viewer and is compelling enough for them to actively share it. Both virality and viral marketing are highly dependent on following starting trends to further spread the message.

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

One definition of word of mouth (WOM) is described as informal communication between individuals, typically centered around discussions or recommendations related to a product or service (Cheung & Thadani, 2010). According to Chueng et al. when individuals face significant purchasing decisions, word of mouth is more likely to influence their choice of whether to make

the purchase and where to obtain it. While customers previously relied on personal WOM for gathering information about products or services, they now seek the information online, through electronic word of mouth (eWOM) (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). eWOM has become a crucial informal communication channel for businesses, consumers, and the public. UGC can be seen as the electronic version of traditional WOM. While WOM tends to be more localized and shared among peers, UGC has the potential to go viral quicker, spreading both nationally and internationally.

UGC refers to digital material that is created or published by the general public rather than qualified professionals and is shared over the Internet (Kurian & John, 2017). Online users harness UGC for various purposes, such as entertainment, social engagement with individuals or companies or information (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Smith et al., 2012).

Social media

As of January 2023, there were approximately 4,76 billion active SoMe users worldwide which represents about 59% of the world's population (Chaffey, 2023). These social media platforms have served as avenues for personal expression and networking and fostered improved and more extensive international communication. SoMe has interconnected us and provided us with a broader understanding of events worldwide. It can be argued that UGC has revolutionized the marketing industry, and, in this digital age, we tend to place greater trust in both familiar and unfamiliar individuals as we use SoMe more.

One of the notable strengths of TikTok is its inherent sense of informality. The platform encompasses a wide range of content, with users freely sharing videos on various topics, creating a more casual atmosphere. In the realm of sales pitches, this informality can lend itself to a perception of authenticity and sincerity, distinguishing it from sponsored posts. (Abbasi & Liu, 2013; Cheng et al., 2021). Credibility can be defined "*the extent to which one perceives a recommendation or review as believable, true, or factual*" (Fan et al., 2013)

International trends and forces

Our master's thesis is highly relevant to the international topic as it involves TikTok, which is a platform used all over the world, and beauty products which also exist and is sold globally.

Trends refer to the general direction in which something is developing or changing over time. In the context of international affairs, trends can indicate patterns or shifts in various aspects of global dynamics, such as politics, economics, culture, technology, or social issues (Arthur Rooney, 1995; Asur et al., 2021). Understanding these trends is important because they can have significant implications for countries, societies, and individuals on an international scale. Trends and viral content often go hand in hand, as they can influence and amplify each other's reach. Viral content has the potential to fuel the dissemination of new trends, while popular trends can contribute to the spread of viral content (Gu & Wang, 2015; Mangold & Faulds, 2009)

Trends are crucial for retailers all over the world, which also includes the beauty sector. Following trends helps retailers understand what consumers are interested in and what products

they are likely to purchase. The beauty industry is highly competitive, and staying ahead of trends can give retailers a competitive edge. Trends provide valuable insights into consumer preferences, allowing retailers to develop new products or modify existing ones to meet customer demands. Trends can guide retailers in developing effective marketing strategies. By aligning their advertising and promotional efforts with current beauty trends, retailers can better engage their target customers and communicate the value of their products. This can include utilizing social media and TikTok in our case. Following these trends can help retailers connect with customers on a deeper level, which can be done on SoMe. Lastly, trends can offer insights into the future direction of the beauty industry. By analyzing and predicting trends, retailers can make informed decisions about inventory management, assortment planning, and strategic partnerships.

Retail stores have embraced the influence of TikTok by displaying so-called TikTok products and have effectively integrated it into their marketing strategies. This approach allows them to leverage the success of others to boost their own product sales. Remarkably, it appears to be effective in capturing people's interest, enticing them to try these products even if they have not encountered them on the app or have never come across them before.

The rise of UGC, particularly content related to products and brands, has greatly impacted international trade and consumer behavior. In the past, people actively sought information from sources like review websites, blogs, or personal connections when making purchasing decisions. However, today, product and brand information are available whether desired or not. It can be found on various platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok, as well as other websites like news sites, YouTube, Snapchat, and blogs. The presence of personalized algorithms on platforms like Instagram and TikTok has provided small businesses with an opportunity to compete with larger corporations, leveling the playing field to some extent.

In our research, we found that five out of nine hypotheses were accepted. Whereas our thesis analysis only included content from TikTok which already had gone viral it can be considered an international analysis because it includes content from all over the world. Our findings are relevant for anyone looking to promote products or brands on SoMe. TikTok was the basis of our study, however, the findings can be used on other SoMe platforms as well.

Conclusion

In the digital world, with its great use of UGC and the growing of social media, has a significant influence on individuals' purchasing preferences, choices of retailers, and timing of purchases. Moreover, customers now have access to extensive product information, including personal reviews, empowering them, and shifting the balance of power towards consumer-driven decision-making. Consumers' trust in brands has undergone a transformation, with a decrease in reliance on brand reputation alone. Consequently, it has become crucial for brands to foster UGC, encouraging their customers to create and share experiences related to the brand. This helps build trust and loyalty in an era where consumer trust in brands is not taken for granted.

Furthermore, the influence of international trends and the rise of SoMe have reshaped consumer trust and purchasing patterns. Brands must actively engage consumers through content creation and sharing, while also staying informed about international trends to thrive in the business.

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