Study of the profiles on TikTok of *El Mundo, El País,* ac2alityespanol and *La Wikly* to analyze the informative opportunities of this social network for the young audience

Estudio de los perfiles en TikTok de El Mundo, El País, ac2alityespanol y La Wikly para analizar las oportunidades informativas de esta red social para la audiencia joven

Humberto Martínez-Fresneda

Francisco de Vitoria University. Spain. h.fresneda@ufv.es



Laura Zazo Correa

Francisco de Vitoria University. Spain. l.zazo.prof@ufv.es



How to cite this article / Standardized reference:

Martínez-Fresneda, Humberto, & Zazo-Correa, Laura. (2024). Study of the profiles on TikTok of El Mundo, El País, ac2alityespanol and La Wikly to analyze the informative opportunities of this social network for the young audience [Estudio de los perfiles en TikTok de El Mundo, El País, ac2alityespanol y La Wikly para analizar las oportunidades informativas de esta red social para la audiencia joven]. *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 82, 01-13. https://www.doi.org/10.4185/rlcs-2024-2180

Received Date: 07/07/2023 Acceptance Date: 24/08/2023 Publication Date: 22/01/2024

ABSTRACT

Introduction: This research addresses the informative use of TikTok, one of the social networks that has grown the most in number of users in 2023. Its display formula causes rapid and direct consumption, which means the viralization of its contents. This has caused the media to start working on the possibilities it has as an informative support. **Methodology:** In the first place, a descriptive study has been chosen through a survey with a non-probabilistic sample to find out the consumption habits of young people. And, secondly, we have carried out a content analysis of four TikTok profiles directly related to the dissemination of news: *El Mundo*, *El País*, ac2alityespanol and *La Wikly*. **Results:** 36% use this network for information and the majority of those

surveyed appreciate that the profile belongs to a young person. We also highlight that 89% affirm that TikTok is an adequate medium for transmitting information with medium credibility, with the brevity and immediacy of the message being the characteristic that they consider best defines this platform. It should be noted that most view TikTok as a network for entertainment. **Discussion and conclusions:** A large percentage of young people use TikTok for information and they do so both through native media profiles and traditional media. Regarding the content, it is observed that the specific production is much higher in the traditional media and, in both types of profiles, the main content that is addressed is information of an international nature.

Keywords: Information; Youth; Media; Communication; Social-networks; Journalism; TikTok.

RESUMEN

Introducción: Esta investigación aborda el uso informativo de TikTok, una de las redes sociales que más ha crecido en número de usuarios en 2023. Su fórmula de visualización provoca un consumo rápido y directo lo que supone la viralización de sus contenidos. Esto ha provocado que los medios de comunicación comiencen a trabajar las posibilidades que tiene como soporte informativo. Metodología: En primer lugar, se ha optado por un estudio descriptivo a través de una encuesta con una muestra no probabilística para conocer los hábitos de consumo de los jóvenes. Y, en segundo lugar, se ha llevado a cabo un análisis de contenido de cuatro perfiles de TikTok relacionados directamente con la difusión de noticias: El Mundo, El País, ac2alityespanol y La Wikly. Resultados: El 36% usa esta red para informarse y la mayoría valora que el perfil pertenezca a una persona joven. Asimismo, el 89% afirma que TikTok es un soporte adecuado para transmitir información con una credibilidad media, siendo la brevedad e inmediatez del mensaje las características que mejor definen esta plataforma. Hay que señalar que la mayoría contempla TikTok como una red para el entretenimiento. Discusión y conclusiones: Un amplio porcentaje de jóvenes usa TikTok para informarse, tanto a través de perfiles de medios nativos como de medios de comunicación tradicionales. Con respecto al contenido, la producción específica es mucho mayor en los medios tradicionales y, en ambos tipos de perfiles, el principal contenido que se aborda es información de carácter internacional.

Keywords: Information; Youth; Media; Comunication; Social-networks; Journalism; TikTok.

1. Introduction

Currently, the influence of the digital ecosystem, particularly social platforms, as access routes to information for young people is undeniable. They consider aspects such as easy access and a certain level of anonymity to be attractive and positive (Basch et al., 2022). Undoubtedly, society is evolving towards new forms of communication, as authors like Wang (2020) have referred to it as the fourth industrial revolution.

When analyzing these social networks, we can observe that in a very recent period of time, the presence of TikTok - a video platform created in 2016 by the Chinese company ByteDance and exclusively for mobile application use - has become increasingly common in informational environments and has become one of the most used networks by young people. Access to these new platforms is changing perspectives and models of behavior that have been developing for a long time (Gao et al., 2023).

The 2023 IAB Spain Annual Social Media Study reports that TikTok is one of the three networks, along with Telegram and LinkedIn, that has grown the most in users compared to 2022. TikTok is especially noteworthy, as it is the third consecutive year that it continues to gain followers. Thus, its suggested awareness has increased by 7 points, currently standing at 82%, and its usage has increased by 6 points, reaching 36%. In terms of preference, Instagram is ahead of Facebook and YouTube (after WhatsApp), and TikTok maintains its position among the top 5 preferred platforms for users. Furthermore, TikTok is the highest-rated social network (9.1/10), and, along with Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube, it has a satisfaction level above the average.

As mentioned by Olivares-García and Méndez (2020), according to a study published in November 2019 by the mobile app consulting firm Sensor Tower, TikTok ranked third in the list of most downloaded apps in the

social media sphere, with only WhatsApp and Messenger surpassing it (Chapple, 2019). This makes TikTok the platform with the fastest recorded growth to date. We are also dealing with the first globally significant social network whose creation is not linked to the United States (Kemp, 2019).

The notoriety of TikTok seems to lie in its viewing formula, which allows for very fast and direct consumption, as well as the type of content it offers. These factors also favor the rapid virality of content on this platform, another of its main defining characteristics. According to Olivares-García and Méndez (2020), the main reason for its success is virality among teenagers, with content that has a very limited narrative in terms of concepts but no limits in terms of content.

Studies conducted by authors like Giedinghagen (2023) warn of the danger of this virality, which has even led teenagers to imitate behaviors after viewing content posted on these platforms. The impact, whether positive or negative, depends on the consumed content, as shown by Joiner et al. (2023).

In this regard, it is important to highlight the phenomenon known as the "Challenge effect," a term of Anglo-Saxon origin that the Royal Spanish Academy defines as a "provocation or citation to a duel or challenge." Applied to social platforms, this effect refers to posts that invite users to accept challenges and, in turn, encourage them to share these challenges with their followers, explaining the popularity and virality of these types of posts

This effect is not new, but it can be noted that during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, such posts became popular on TikTok. The use of hashtags is essential to ensure their virality, and they can cover various topics, although dance, humor, sports, and cooking themes dominate.

When analyzing the type of consumption that users engage in on this platform, it is also essential to point out how TikTok encourages dependency on its content through the Skinner box model (Peirano, 2019). "The application of algorithms that personalize the type of content shown to each user, instead of expanding the knowledge and viewpoints of people participating in a social network, leads to the narrowing and radicalization of perspectives. The platform only shows content similar to our tastes and opinions, generating what Pariser (2011) called the 'filter bubble,' as the user ends up isolated from any ideology other than their own" (Olivares-García and Méndez, 2020).

Thus, Eli Pariser (2017) defines the "filter bubble" as a personalized information feed that reaches each user and encourages their consumption to be limited to a bubble that adapts to their preferences, making them very comfortable within it but also keeping them isolated from others.

Regarding the future, although the development of this social network is uncertain, we can observe how it is becoming a suitable platform for influencer marketing. Additionally, TikTok is emerging as a new medium of communication that seeks to connect with younger audiences through a narrative based on audiovisual entertainment.

In this regard, the emergence of TikTok in the field of communication is starting to be a subject of study for various authors. The role of the participants in the communication process changes with the appearance of the "prosumer," who is an agent that adopts the dual role of receiving and producing information while also developing their social and communication habits (Barrezueta-Cabrera et al., 2022). As Omar and Dequan (2020) assert, TikTok "satisfies self-expression, a sense of achievement, social interaction, and escapism."

It is important not to forget the crucial factors that have contributed to the emergence of this application in the world of communication (Pérez and Contreras, 2018). Among them, on the one hand, is the internet, which acted as an intermediary for media. Similarly, technological development, thanks to major IT companies like Apple or Microsoft, created significant broadband network infrastructures. Additionally, the advent of devices that integrate new functions (such as smartphones) or, as Navarro (2014) has pointed out, the existence of new digital consumers who are increasingly dependent on the capabilities of their devices.

"Ac2alityespanol has a much higher production rate than the other profiles." The essence of TikTok is video and images, to which, as mentioned earlier, the digitization of information and technological development have contributed. According to the Meeker report, "images are increasingly the means by which people communicate, as technological developments such as faster Wi-Fi and better phone cameras have encouraged an increase in image capture" (Pellicer, 2020)

However, this does not negate the existence of serious competition, and user satisfaction is related to the attractiveness of the content offered by the media. That's why certain authors call for an improvement in user satisfaction because "most users pay more attention to entertainment and do not have a strong sense of identification with the content" (Yanzhou et al., 2021). In this sense, it should take into account the different types of users who can consume content on TikTok and thus adapt and strengthen them to unify all their demands.

In line with this, the conclusions of a study on sources of medical information and the TikTok effect on the transgender population- who are more prone to medical distrust- were reached by Wang et al. (2023). They urge greater involvement of the medical community to provide quality information based on the type of consumer or use to improve oral skills among teenagers, as demonstrated by the study conducted by Herlisya and Wiratno (2022), which concludes that the use of TikTok as a learning medium is very useful due to its very positive reception among teenagers.

In a study conducted for physical education students, Liao (2021) concluded that to maximize "the characteristics of modern media, the use of extension, opportunity, and intuition of network technology methods not only improves the accuracy of communication teaching but also cultivates the ability to learn." This suggests that the characteristics of new platforms and the internet with the emergence of short videos and multimedia elements can provide greater interest and appeal in learning.

However, this does not prevent the acceptance of TikTok as a medium of communication from being questioned, posing a challenge between traditional and modern values of entertainment media (Gupta et al., 2021). In fact, TikTok has the advantage of rapid content transmission, which makes it suitable for both communicative and educational purposes (Pedrouzo and Krynski, 2023).

Regarding the media, TikTok's incorporation into the journalistic landscape has been relatively recent and gradual. In fact, until 2019, very few newspapers were present on this platform. The first to arrive and gain prestige were American media; specifically, the most notable case is that of The Washington Post, which was the first globally relevant media to be on TikTok, with its first video published in May 2019. As is customary on this social network, The Post covers a wide range of content (economic, cultural, sports, or even political) but always with a light and casual tone.

In Spain, the use of TikTok by the media is still very recent. Some began using the app in 2019, but it has really gained prominence in our country during the COVID-19 pandemic, both by users and companies. Currently, its use is still very irregular, and there are major mainstream media outlets that do not have a profile on the platform.

2. Objectives

This study is based on the consideration that TikTok is one of the three networks that has grown the most in users and is highly rated, along with Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube, as corroborated by the 2023 IAB Spain Annual Social Media Study mentioned earlier. As Gao et al. (2023) indicate, access to these platforms is changing perspectives and models of behavior that have been developing for a long time.

On the social network TikTok, a new type of communicator is beginning to emerge, significantly altering the narrative in the communication process. Therefore, this study aims to delve deeper, from a journalistic perspective, into the potential use of the TikTok platform by the population, specifically young people, who are the most receptive to new platforms.

In this context, it's essential to note that within the young population itself, there are still individuals who are more inclined toward traditional media, coexisting with digital natives. For this reason, it is crucial to understand the strengths of these platforms that can provide insights to the media industry, potentially transforming them into new communication avenues for the future.

Based on this framework, the objectives of this research are as follows:

- Analyze the emergence of TikTok as a medium of communication.
- Analyze the usage of the platform by young people aged between 18 and 25 years.
- Study the multimedia elements used by TikTok in its journalistic narrative.
- Assess the perception of the analyzed sample regarding the use of TikTok as a provider of informational content.

3. Methodology

The methodology used in this research is twofold. On one hand, a descriptive study was conducted through a survey to understand the consumption habits of young people. This technique, as described by Blanco (2011, p. 75), is a scientific method of data collection that is quantitative in nature, allowing for the collection of information about opinions, beliefs, and attitudes and exploring various topics, such as behavior or consumption patterns (Marradi et al., 2010), which is the aspect of interest in this research.

The sample consisted of 518 participants residing in Spain, with 58% women and 42% men, notably, 83% of them were between the ages of 18 and 21. Another 14% were aged between 22 and 25, making up a total of 97% of the sample falling within the young population category. According to the United Nations, young people are defined as those aged between 15 and 24, as per the definition developed in the context of preparations for the International Youth Year (1985) and approved by the General Assembly in its resolution 36/28 of 1981.

This is a non-representative sample, also known as non-probabilistic, primarily for exploratory purposes, as the aim was to have a sample that was accessible (Wimmer and Dominick, 1996) and met the research needs by quota (Miquel et al., 1997). For the same reason, a structured questionnaire with standardized and formalized questions (Miquel et al., 1997) was chosen.

Based on these premises, 21 questions were designed to first understand the respondents' consumption habits on TikTok, specifically, their informational use of the platform. In this sense, the questionnaire focuses on analyzing the journalistic use of this social network compared to other informational channels, such as print media, digital newspapers, or other media or social networks.

Lastly, it centers on the use and evaluation of TikTok as an information medium, emphasizing the type of profiles preferred by the respondents and the characteristics they value most in terms of informational quality and credibility. Before conducting the survey, a small group of young people was given the questionnaire to analyze if the variables were appropriate. After confirming that it met the research objectives, it was distributed to the selected sample through a Jotform questionnaire.

Secondly, a content analysis was conducted on four profiles on this social network directly related to the dissemination of news: El Mundo, El País, ac2alityespanol, and La Wikly. This method was chosen because content analysis is a procedure (Holsti, 1968) that allows for the analysis and quantification of the nature of

discourse. Similarly, Berelson (1952, p. 18) notes that it is a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the study object.

We selected these accounts because, in addition to having the highest number of followers at the time of the study (El Mundo, 948,700 followers; El País, 293,500; Ac2alityespanol, 4,300,000; and La Wikly, 82,700 followers), they represent two very different types of profiles that we consider essential to understand the informational use of this platform: El Mundo and El País are profiles belonging to traditional media that originated in print but now have a digital presence as well.

On the other hand, the other two accounts analyzed are native profiles of this social network, not backed by a media outlet and managed by young individuals. Ac2alityespanol was created in 2018 by four friends, none of whom are journalists, and La Wikly was also created by several young individuals, although in this case, its founders are journalists.

For the content analysis, we selected the month of November 2022 to avoid any information bias. The goal was to analyze a period during which the flow of information was regular, without any extraordinary events that could alter the nature of the posts.

Although there are different methods for content analysis, we focused on the semantic level, where classical content analysis methods are located, which "revolve around thematic analysis, generally implemented through categorical schemes" (Delgado and Gutiérrez, 1999, p. 199). This methodology allows for extrapolating categories and can be used in future research to draw more extensive conclusions.

All the videos published by the selected accounts during November 2022 were analyzed without exception, and the same form was applied to all of them to establish a comparison and understand both the nature of the message and the elements that compose it. In total, 257 posts were analyzed.

The analysis categories were designed to understand the narrative used in each post. The first category determines whether the video is self-produced or from an external source, meaning whether the audiovisual material used was produced by the account itself or if external content was used to create the video. In general, on TikTok, profiles belonging to a media outlet tend to publish videos with their own content, while independent native TikTok profiles often need external content to create their posts, as they do not have their own material.

After determining whether the video is self-produced or utilizes content from other accounts, we focused on identifying the type of content (information, entertainment, and opinion) and its theme. Subsequently, the analysis categories focus on the nature of the message (use of audio, subtitles, emoticons, or hashtags). Finally, the interaction generated by the post among users was quantified, including the number of likes, comments, favorites, and shares.

4. Results

4.1. Content analysis of the TikTok accounts Ac2alityespanol, La Wikly, El País, and El Mundo

For this research, the content published on TikTok during the month of November 2022 by Ac2alityespanol, La Wikly, El País, and El Mundo has been analyzed. The first two accounts will be referred to as native, as they were born on TikTok and are not backed by any media outlet, both managed by young individuals. In contrast, the profiles of El País and El Mundo belong to two traditional media outlets with a presence on almost all social networks.

After analyzing the content published by these four accounts, we can affirm that Ac2alityespanol has a much higher production rate than the other profiles, with a total of 143 posts, compared to 56 from El Mundo, 38 from El País, and 20 from La Wikly. Regarding production, only 58% of the content is self-produced. In La Wikly's case,

all of its content is self-produced; for Ac2alityespanol, it's 45%, and for the traditional media outlets, it ranges from 42% for El País to 91% for El Mundo.

In terms of the nature of the content, 95% of the posts are about information, leaving a small margin for pure entertainment, except in the case of El País, where such posts make up 15% of the total. In the case of Ac2alityespanol, it doesn't reach 2%, while El Mundo and La Wikly are around 5%.

Focusing on the thematic content, the majority of the content is related to International topics. For the native media profiles, posts in this category make up 51%. La Wikly has 95% of its content in this category, with the remaining 5% covering Culture. Ac2alityespanol's content distribution includes International at 45%, along with other themes like National (17%), Culture (16%), or Sports (13%). In the case of traditional media profiles, the presence of International content accounts for 25% of their posts, surpassed only by Sports and Culture, both at 27%. The rest of the sections have minimal representation.

All the analyzed posts use audio, with percentages exceeding 93% for native media profiles and almost 98% for traditional ones. It's worth noting that in all of La Wikly's posts, there is always a young person explaining the news, which is another differentiating characteristic of their posts on this social network. They aim not only to inform about a news event but also to explain it so that their users can understand it. This is important because the TikTok community is composed of young people who have distanced themselves from traditional media outlets and may lack the foundation to understand current events. Therefore, these accounts make an effort to provide context and explanations to facilitate comprehension.

The use of subtitles is also prevalent, appearing in 97% of posts from native accounts and 88% in traditional ones. When analyzing the use of hashtags, similar results are found: ac2alityespanol and La Wikly use them in 91% of their content, while El País and El Mundo use them in almost 97%. However, the use of emojis is not as consistent: ac2alityespanol uses them in 45% of its posts, La Wikly in 30%, El País in 31%, but El Mundo only in 2% of its content.

Regarding user responses, it can be observed that native accounts receive significantly more feedback than traditional ones. While ac2alityespanol and La Wikly posts have received over 10,000,000 likes, El Mundo and El País have received just over 2,600,000. In terms of comments, a similar trend is observed, with 97,000 for native accounts and 30,500 for traditional ones. The same pattern is seen in favorites, with 460,000 for native accounts and 122,000 for traditional ones. In terms of themes, the sections generating the most attraction are International for native accounts and Sports for traditional ones, which makes sense as these are the primary topics covered by these profiles.

4.2. Results of the survey

77% of the respondents declare themselves as TikTok users, and 30% spend more than one hour on this platform. Another 28% dedicate between half an hour and one hour to it, meaning that the surveyed young individuals acknowledge that they spend at least 30 minutes on this platform daily. Notably, 20% dedicate more than 2 hours per day to it.

When asked about the informational quality of TikTok (see Figure 1), it's worth noting that nearly 70% of the respondents recognize it as having either high or moderate informational quality. Close to 40% of them use it for getting informed. In 2023, the majority of the respondents claim that the primary media they used for getting informed before TikTok existed were mainly digital newspapers and television. They also value consuming information through Twitter and Instagram.

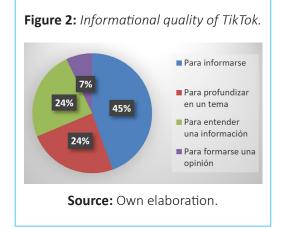
Figure 1: Informational quality of TikTok.

Alta
Baja
Media

Source: Own elaboration.

Furthermore, 83% of them state that the existence of TikTok has not deterred them from using these channels they used regularly.

Regarding the usage of this platform (see Figure 2), 44% of young people use TikTok for staying informed, while 24% admit to using it to clarify and understand information, and another 24% use it to delve deeper into topics. Likewise, almost 50% use TikTok to check profiles daily, with 32% doing so once a day and 17% between two and three times a day. These profiles are divided almost evenly between native influencer profiles (51%) and profiles of traditional media (49%).



In terms of familiarity with traditional and new media, they are more aware of traditional media (El Mundo, Antena 3 TV, 77%)

than native influencers (La Wikly, ac2alityespanol, 22%), and they prefer profiles of young people of similar age (82%) to those of different age groups (18%). It's worth noting that 89% believe that TikTok is a suitable platform for conveying information, and nearly 70% consider this platform a form of media from a journalistic perspective.

Regarding the advantages of TikTok, most young respondents appreciate TikTok for its brevity and immediacy (23%), but they also value other characteristics of the platform, such as the dynamic style of posts (use of gifs, music, and videos, 21%), the visual nature of posts (19%), the informal tone (17%), and the explanatory nature (11%).

In terms of credibility, 85% perceive it as moderate, and 6% consider it high, although the majority (65%) believe that TikTok is not more credible than other platforms. Only 9% consider the credibility to be low. Nevertheless, most (65%) do not view TikTok as more credible than other social media, even though they acknowledge that brevity and immediacy are its most popular features compared to other platforms. They also mention that subjectivity can lead to falsehoods and fake news as limitations.

5. Discussion

TikTok has been one of the fastest-growing social media platforms in recent years, with a significant increase in user engagement. Since 2021, there has been a noticeable rise in its use as a communication tool, with users spending more time on TikTok compared to more traditional media like digital newspapers or television. This suggests that in the near future, TikTok users will increasingly turn to the platform for information consumption. Moreover, users are already perceiving TikTok as a form of media.

In this regard, traditional media outlets will need to make efforts to adapt to this new platform if they want to retain their target audience, especially among young people. This adaptation should also include efforts to emphasize objectivity to enhance credibility. It will require creative thinking on how to convey information in new formats that will undoubtedly gain traction among the population.

As mentioned earlier, the brevity of content, quick consumption, and virality are some of the characteristics that explain TikTok's popularity and also contribute to what Pariser (2017) referred to as the "filter bubble." However, in the face of these negative consequences, we believe that the presence of traditional media on this social network can help mitigate them.

Since user satisfaction is related to the appeal of the content, if traditional media can establish a strong presence on TikTok, given its generalist nature, their content could help counter the effects of the filter bubble. Users would have less personalized content and a more diverse range of topics to consume.

It's also worth noting the unique nature of informational content on TikTok, where media outlets not only aim to inform but also to explain the news. In this sense, we support the thesis of Herlisya and Wiratno (2022) and believe that this didactic approach to current events can have a very positive impact on young people. The narrative style of this platform is attractive and engaging for them. This aligns with Liao's (2021) observations, emphasizing that the concise and multimedia nature of TikTok content facilitates learning.

Furthermore, this communicative use of TikTok, where explanation is valued over just providing information, is significant. Many users prefer news to be explained in a simple, approachable, concise, and immediate manner, rather than just presenting raw facts. This shift in how information is approached is related to the user profile, where native influencers are becoming more prominent compared to profiles of traditional media outlets. However, there is still a need for promoting these new media sources to reach a wider audience.

6. Conclusions

Publications on TikTok follow a similar structure, placing importance on audio, subtitles, and hashtags. Furthermore, the platform's narrative, based on info-entertainment with a strong audiovisual character, is highly attractive to young audiences. They seek to get informed through this platform to access news events presented with more multimedia elements than other media outlets, such as newspapers, making them less appealing. According to the Digital News Report 2023 by the Reuters Institute at the University of Oxford, the consumption of traditional media like television and print continues to decline, while the consumption of TikTok and video-based social networks is on the rise.

On the other hand, it can be interpreted that the way of delivering news through TikTok is going to revolutionize the field of communication. Traditional journalistic genres will give way to new ways of informing, where text won't be the primary focus. Instead, images, audio, and video will take center stage, emphasizing the visual aspect of publications over textual content.

A special mention should be made of television, which, in its inception, brought a visual impact that forced newspapers to put significant effort into visualizing their content better. Readers transitioned to a medium that created a certain magnetism. With them went advertising revenue, resulting in economic losses that prompted this effort. This led to the introduction of color publications, table of contents, Sunday supplements, and graphics.

Television will need to undergo a similar process to continue being an informative medium for new generations. To achieve this, the medium will need to adapt to digital technology, use the medium for entertainment, distribute content, and interact with the audience. In terms of content, it can be affirmed that the primary themes addressed by the accounts analyzed on TikTok are international, followed by sports and culture.

Furthermore, we can identify several limitations that need to be considered for future studies. Firstly, we limited the data collection period to one month to control for the impact of temporal variables, but for future research, it would be valuable to extend this period. Additionally, as a prospective approach, it seems relevant to expand the analysis to other media outlets to obtain richer conclusions and use a larger sample to make it more representative.

The next limitation pertains to ac2alityespanol, which is a profile that doesn't create its own videos but relies on content from other media sources. This can make it challenging to compare with traditional media, whose information is usually self-produced. Expanding the number of media outlets that are more similar in terms of content will allow for a more comprehensive study of user behavior.

Finally, considering the significance of TikTok among young people, it is necessary to continue researching the evolution of this social network and the involvement of media outlets on the platform to better assess its impact in the field

That native accounts receive significantly more feedback than traditional ones.

of communication and journalism. We are unquestionably in uncharted territory, and further research is essential to properly gauge the value of this platform as a means of communication. In this regard, our upcoming research will aim to establish the communicative role TikTok may assume in the near future and how it might affect other media outlets.

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AUTHORS CONTRIBUTIONS, FUNDING, AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Author's contributions:

Conceptualization: Martínez-Fresneda, Humberto, and Zazo, Laura. Validation: Martínez-Fresneda, Humberto. Formal Analysis: Martínez-Fresneda, Humberto, and Zazo, Laura. Data Curation: Martínez-Fresneda, Humberto, and Zazo, Laura. Original Draft Preparation: Zazo, Laura. Writing, Review, and Editing: Martínez-Fresneda, Humberto. Visualization: Zazo, Laura. Supervision: Martínez-Fresneda, Humberto. Project Administration: Martínez-Fresneda, Humberto. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript: Martínez-Fresneda, Humberto, and Zazo, Laura.

Funding: This research received no external funding

AUTHORS:

Humberto Martínez-Fresneda Osorio

University Francisco de Vitoria. Spain.

Ph.D. in Communication Sciences and Master in Professional Journalism from the Complutense University of Madrid. Associate Professor of Information Technology in the Faculty of Communication Sciences at the University Francisco de Vitoria, where he teaches various courses. Director of the Journalism Degree Program in the Faculty of Communication at the University Francisco de Vitoria. Coordinator of the established research group: Observatory of Journalistic Messages. POSITIVE evaluation of the research period 2002-2010 (1 six-year term). Director of the scientific journal "Comunicación y Hombre" (2004-2012). h.fresneda@ufv.es

H-index: 9

Orcid ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2467-0458

Google Scholar: https://scholar.google.es/citations?user=FUOC_akAAAAJ&hl=es&oi=ao

ResearchGate: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/A-8064-2015

Laura Zazo Correa

University Francisco de Vitoria. Spain.

Ph.D. in Journalism from the Complutense University of Madrid (2019), Master's in Professional Multimedia Journalism from the Complutense University of Madrid (2015), Master's in Educational Support from the University Francisco de Vitoria (2019), and Master's in Humanities from the University Francisco de Vitoria (2021). Professor of Journalistic Writing and Current Affairs and the area of Multimedia Journalism at the University Francisco de Vitoria. Member of the Research Group 'Imagination and Possible Worlds' and participation in various research projects.

l.zazo.prof@ufv.es

H-index: 2

Orcid ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2742-8811

Google Scholar: https://scholar.google.es/citations?user=UaYWXd4AAAAJ&hl=es



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