

Current affairs on *TikTok*. Virality and entertainment for digital natives

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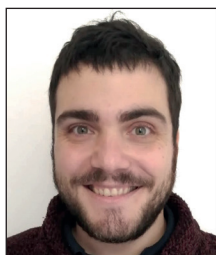
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Abstract

Since its appearance in 2018, *TikTok* has become one of the most popular social media platforms among digital natives because of its algorithm-based engagement strategies, a policy of public accounts, and a simple, colorful, and intuitive content interface. As happened in the past with other platforms such as *Facebook*, *Twitter*, and *Instagram*, various media are currently seeking ways to adapt to *TikTok* and its particular characteristics to attract a younger audience less accustomed to the consumption of journalistic material. Against this background, the aim of this study is to identify the presence of the media and journalists on *TikTok*, measure the virality and engagement of the content they generate, describe the communities created around them, and identify the presence of journalistic use of these accounts. For this, 23,174 videos from 143 accounts belonging to media from 25 countries were analyzed. The results indicate that, in general, the presence and impact of the media in this social network are low and that most of their content is oriented towards the creation of user communities based on viral content and entertainment. However, albeit with a lesser presence, one can also identify accounts and messages that adapt their content to the specific characteristics of *TikTok*. Their virality and engagement figures illustrate that there is indeed a niche for current affairs on this social network.

Keywords

TikTok; Virality; Entertainment; Journalism; Media; Journalists; Social networks; Social media; Engagement; Digital natives; News; Information.

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1. Introduction

The constant change and adaptation symbolized by the innovation paradigm are hallmarks of the social communication and journalism that are taught, researched, and practiced in the second decade of the twenty-first century. Various prior works have reiterated the constant change currently seen in journalism, especially since the emergence of digital and web technology (Wu; Tandoc; Salmon, 2019). Since the birth of the web, this development has been examined in studies focused on the narratives and content of digital media, including both the web versions of reference journalistic media and the media platforms that emerged in the heat of the so-called social web (Peña-Fernández; Lazkano-Arrillaga; García-González, 2016).

In this regard, the most recent contributions regarding the impact and implications of interactive narratives have focused their interest on those media with a majority native digital audience, specifically the so-called centennials or young people belonging to Generation Z, born from the middle of the 1990s to the early 2000s. These young audiences tend to consume news via mobile devices, considering it to be part of a whole or a constant and broader flow of content (Boczkowski; Mitchelstein; Matassi, 2018; Vector ITC, 2020). In general, in recent years, various works and studies have reported a general interest from all types of audiences in obtaining news information through social media (Shearer, 2018; Wang; Gu; Wang, 2019; Pew Research Center, 2021).

This type of consumption is represented by social platforms such as *YouTube*, *Facebook*, and *Instagram*, as well as other more recent ones, among which *TikTok* stands out. In this context, the media continue to experiment and innovate to adapt to the communicative logic of social platforms and be able to compete (or even survive) in a multi-broadcaster sector (Rashidian et al., 2020).

TikTok emerged in 2018 from the merger of the services *Douyin* and *Musical.ly* (Anderson, 2020) and has since become one of the most prominent social media platforms, being one of the applications preferred by the public aged 10–29 years, which represents 63.5% of users in countries such as the USA, where this platform reached 45.6 million active users in 2020 (Statista, 2020). In fact, coinciding with the global pandemic situation during the first quarter of 2020, this network was the second most downloaded social platform (Argintzóna, 2020; Vector ITC, 2020). According to data from January 2021, *TikTok* was ranked as the seventh social network in terms of worldwide users, ahead of platforms such as *Twitter*, *Telegram*, and *Snapchat* (Statista, 2021). By February 2021 *TikTok* surpassed one hundred million active monthly users.

The communicative features of *TikTok* are linked to the possibilities of generating greater engagement and interest in audiences through consumer experiences that embrace both the concrete (content, information, etc.) and abstract (personal narrative or storytelling, emotionality, etc.). Thanks to its policy of public accounts and a simple, colorful, and intuitive content interface, *TikTok* enables quick consumption and viewing of light-hearted videos. In general, it shares its main communicative features with other social platforms (Klinger, 2013): the possibility of sharing, categorizing, and viralization through tags or hashtags, searching, positioning through “likes,” audiovisualization, entertainment, etc.

Notwithstanding, *TikTok*'s engagement strategies are somewhat more sophisticated, being based on the use of algorithms (artificial intelligence). This has led the network to launch personalized consumption offerings based on analysis of the content with the greatest changes of generating “likes,” comments, and views (Wang; Gu; Wang, 2019; Anderson, 2020). Unlike other social networks, the user selects this content in response to instant or intuitive decisions made live, rather than decisions based on recommendations from contacts (Asarch, 2018). *TikTok* thereby achieves a wider and more diverse audience than social media networks with the traditional, follower-based model.

The communicative experience promoted by *TikTok* fits well in the current context marked by the so-called affective turn in the social sciences (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2020). However, academic literature on the use of this platform has a limited track record. Studies published to date have focused on the so-called #challenges facing users, who are encouraged to create videos on certain topics (Alexander, 2019; Ahlse; Nilsson; Sandström, 2020; Sánchez-Castillo; Mercado-Sáez, 2021). In this regard, it is worth highlighting some studies related to health communication and, specifically, information generated in relation to Covid-19 (Ostrovsky; Chen, 2020; Sidorenko-Bautista; Herranz-de-la-Casa; Cantero-de-Julián, 2020), as well as political information (Medina-Serrano; Papakyriakopoulos; Hegelich, 2020; Cervi; Marín-Lladó, 2021) and advertising (Han, 2020).

The influence of *TikTok* has been felt in different social and cultural spheres (Herrman, 2019), so it is logical to consider that journalism will also be affected by this creative and distribution offering. As happened in the past with other platforms such as *Facebook*, *Twitter*, and *Instagram*, various media are currently looking for a way to adapt to *TikTok* using formulas different from those already used and known in social media. This adaptation is part of a strategy of innovation and continuous evolution of communication companies, although it has particular characteristics, given that it responds to very specific actions to attract the youngest audience that is less accustomed to the consumption of journalistic material.

In this sense and considering the above-mentioned characteristics of *TikTok*, it is interesting to analyze how the main media around the world have transferred their news activity to this social media platform. In fact, *TikTok* already exhibits innovative and creative practices that seem to represent an evolution, providing a new basis for an analysis and reflection on journalism as a concept and social practice.

2. State of the art

For more than a decade, various studies have reported on the development of a specific journalistic paradigm based on the expansion of the main social media brands on social networks, as well as the creation of specially adapted content to promote the integration of styles and narratives (Welbers; Opgenhaffen, 2019; Klinger, 2013). In this regard, one should highlight some recent works on the adaptation of content for *Twitter* (García-Avilés; Arias-Robles, 2016), *WhatsApp* and *Telegram* (Negreira-Rey; López-García; Lozano-Aguilar, 2017; Dodds, 2019; Boczek; Koppers, 2020), and *Instagram* (Vázquez-Herrero; Direito-Rebollal; López-García, 2019).

In terms of practice and routines as well as product messages, the profession is affected by different communication scenarios that are dependent on the various social networks that appear. This has been defined as “networked journalism,” which necessarily implies a consideration of the impact of social networks (Hermida, 2016; Pavlik, 2019; Zelizer, 2019).

Among the specific analyses regarding journalistic information on *TikTok*, the study by Vázquez-Herrero, Negreira-Rey, and López-García (2020) should be highlighted. According to that work, the studied media adapted to the logic of *TikTok* with a journalistic aim, which opened up new possibilities for the profession and responded to the objectives of journalistic companies: to report differently and position the brand. Likewise, Zaffarano’s interesting study from the middle of 2020 listed a total of 270 organizations, many of which have already begun to search for specialists on *TikTok*. Among them, *The Washington Post* has been one of the pioneering brands (Zaffarano, 2021). In view of this potential, the study by Henneman (2020) focused on the incorporation of *TikTok* as a tool for university education on journalism.

Considering the characteristics of journalistic narratives on *TikTok* and taking into account that higher levels of engagement imply more attentive and receptive audiences (Valerio *et al.*, 2015), recent analyses have focused on blurring the boundaries between information and entertainment as well as the direct influence of interactions on information. Beyond the tensions between traditional journalism and change, the media have also responded to the rise of *TikTok* since 2019 with different strategies and becoming subject to the dynamics of this platform, constructing new ways of bringing journalism closer to audiences (Vázquez-Herrero; Negreira-Rey; López-García, 2020).

Undoubtedly, technological advance has occurred alongside the concept of constant change in the field of social communication and journalism, along with other characteristic features of digitized communication content, such as hybridity (Chadwick, 2013). Meanwhile, multiplatform media (Rashidian *et al.*, 2020) offer new opportunities to produce and disseminate traditional messages (Spyridou *et al.*, 2013; Bell; Owen, 2017).

Thanks to mobile technology, the nexus of different types of platforms has contributed to the transfer of journalistic information to channels beyond traditional media (Rashidian *et al.*, 2020; Carlson, 2020), and it is these very media that are now attempting to position themselves in these spaces. All of this highlights the tensions that emerge because of the shift from traditional to digital journalism (Eldridge *et al.*, 2019; Wu; Tandoc; Salmon, 2019).

News stopped being a prerogative of the mainstream media several years ago. Authors such as Steensen and Westlund (2020) refer to various interdependent factors, such as the loss of trust in or reliability of this type of media and the difficulties in both implementing innovations at different levels and addressing audiences with different information consumption cultures. Not surprisingly, younger audiences show less interest in conducting active searches for journalistic content (Sveningsson, 2015; Boczkowski; Mitchelstein; Matassi, 2018) while also showing a greater preference for entertainment content.

In short, for more than a decade, social media platforms have provided a spur for conventional media brands, which seek to develop current affairs formulas adapted to these channels. Almost 20 years ago, social networks such as *YouTube*, *Facebook*, and *Twitter* introduced significant changes in how the major press, radio, and television brands generated and distributed content. With the successive emergence of further social media platforms such as *Instagram*, social communication studies have delved into the consequences for journalism as a discipline and profession, indicating changes in paradigm, goals, and values. As they are not accustomed to consuming news, the youngest audiences tend to do so in a little planned or premeditated way today. Such consumption is not sought but somewhat accidental, not being limited by loyalty toward certain brands (Ahmadi; Wohn, 2018; Sveningsson, 2015).

For all these reasons, *TikTok* stands out among recent social platforms because of its nature as a “creative medium” on which messages are oriented towards entertainment (Anderson, 2020; BBC, 2020). The journalistic narratives disseminated on *TikTok* thus seem to represent “entertainment journalism” (Labio-Bernal, 2008) that responds well to the philosophy of fast consumption of content, or so-called fast content (Ballesteros-Herencia, 2020).

In this context, the objective of this study is to investigate how the media uses *TikTok* to connect with younger audiences. Based on these challenges and the research opportunities that *TikTok* offers in the communication field, this study focuses on audiovisual narratives of a journalistic nature. To do so, we study the general presence of the media on *TikTok* (RQ1) and the virality and engagement achieved by the content they generate (RQ2). Based on these data, we then analyze the characteristics of the follower communities created around the content generated by media and journalists (RQ3) and the specific following of current affairs content (RQ4).

3. Methodology

To analyze the current affairs content created by media and journalists on *TikTok*, we start from the catalog prepared by **Zaffarano** (2021), which includes 271 accounts that publish current affairs information in 25 countries. Among these, the 143 accounts belonging to media (120) or journalists (23) were selected. In these cases, the metadata associated with each user was processed, including biography, number of followers, number of “likes,” and the language of the publications (RQ1).

For the empirical analysis, the usual variables applied to measure the engagement and viralization of messages were used. The data were captured using web scrapping techniques with the help of *BrightData*, which supplied between 30 and 312 entries for a total of 143 users. In total, 23,174 publications were analyzed.

The data collected to determine the virality and engagement of the messages created by media and journalists on *TikTok* (RQ2) included the number of “likes” (*diggs*), the number of shares, the comments, and the views.

To analyze and describe the communities created around the content produced by media and journalists (RQ3), Louvain’s multilevel algorithm, commonly known as “modularity” (**Blondel et al.**, 2008), was applied at 1-point resolution (**Lambiotte; Delvenne; Barahona**, 2009). The data were analyzed and processed based on the labels applied by the authors, also linking them to their engagement level. To do this, the tags used by the users in each post were first identified and an adjacency table was constructed in which each user was paired with each tag they used. Next, the adjacency table was interpreted as a bipartite (two-mode) graph, in which the nodes of mode 1 are the users and those of mode 2 are the labels. In this graph, the nodes are linked in a directed, unidirectional way, with links passing from the users to the labels. The last step was to project the two-mode graph onto a one-mode graph (Fig. 1).

This process, carried out using the *NetworkX* library for *Python3* (**Hagberg; Swart; S. Chult**, 2008), produced a network of linked tags based on the users who applied them in combination. In this study, connections between labels with a value less than 2 were rejected; that is, we analyzed links between labels established by at least two users. We also removed from the sample groups of labels that were used little and were unlinked from the others.

The synthesized graph has a total of 5,638 nodes and 318,986 unique links, representing up to 790,599 weighted links between labels. All the metrics were calculated by using *Gephi* network analysis software.

Finally, the community most directly linked to current affairs (RQ4) was characterized based on the label use frequency.

4. Results

4.1. General characteristics

Media outlets and journalists exhibit a limited presence among the main accounts on *TikTok* (RQ1). None of the analyzed accounts was among the 100 accounts with the greater number of followers on this social network (*Socialblade*, 2021), although two sports channels (@espn and @overtime) approach this position with approximately 20 million subscribers. These are followed by three television channels aimed at children and young people: @nickelodeon, @mtv, and @inverse, being specialized in science, culture, and technology. The first account corresponding to a generalist communication medium is @dailymail. Journalists and communicators achieve more modest numbers, and only Owen Conflenti, a presenter on the Texan TV station *KPRC2*, reaches more than one million followers (Table 1).

In the same way as the media cannot make any headway among the accounts with the most followers, general news content also does not achieve a prominent presence on these channels. Curious or viral content with a light tone monopolizes the largest number of publications, representing work that is complementary to the main activity of the media, as demonstrated by the @dailymail account itself.

There are, however, some examples of accounts that offer current journalistic information adapted to the characteristics of the *TikTok* language. A good example of this is the @washingtonpost newspaper, which has more than a million followers and whose content switches between political satire and material with a didactic tone, but always with an informal and fresh tone (**González-Guerra**, 2020).

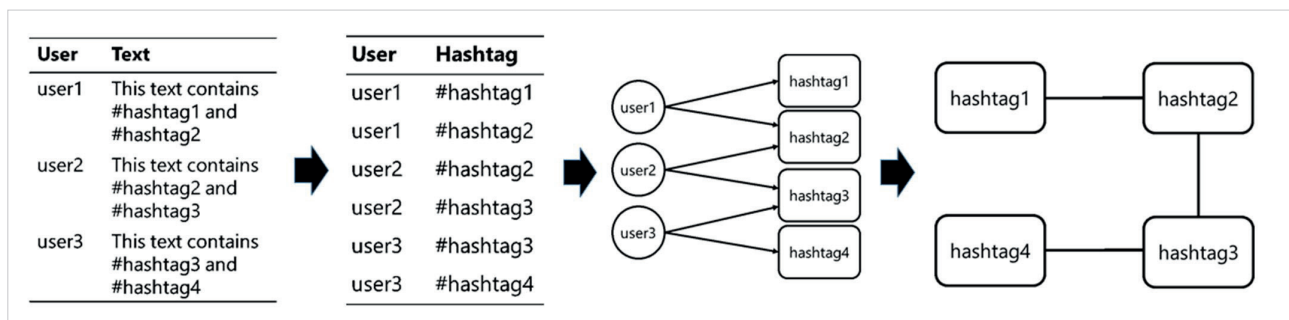


Figure 1. Analysis of labels and graphs

Table 1. *TikTok* accounts with the most followers

Top 10 media outlets with more followers			Top 10 journalists with more followers		
User	Followers (million)	Average engagements	User	Followers (thousand)	Average engagements
espn	20.2	1,768,355	conflenti	1,100	85,496
overtime	18.4	1,627,041	taylorlorenz	482	708,981
nickelodeon	12.2	245,269.87	maxfosterenn	422	758,135
mtv	7.7	2,612,924	lilia.rebrik	288	453,309
inverse	7.0	391,157	sophiasmithgaler	282	158,843
whistle	4.4	451,497	lizplank	111	76,888
tnt_online	3.7	1,362,000	hannahleenews	89	91,415
seventeen	3.3	185,983	justemmawithacamera	46	133,959
dailymail	3.2	304,944	capoema	32	9,617
ac2alitiespanol	2.9	360,692	aquintano	31	39,478

Regarding the languages used, notwithstanding the limitations caused by the sampling, the undisputed leadership of English is clear. Indeed, the accounts that produce content in this language have twenty times more followers than those that use Spanish or Russian (Table 2). In addition to its quantitative dominance, content in English demonstrates high numbers of subscribers, twice that of other languages.

Table 2. Languages used by the accounts

Top 10 languages used by media outlets			Top 10 languages used by journalists		
User	Followers (million)	Average engagements	User	Followers (thousand)	Average engagements
English	112.77	314,225	English	115,341	287,886
Russian	6.58	622,047	Russian	6,582	622,047
Spanish	6.18	243,409	Spanish	6,182	243,409
German	3.65	139,662	German	3,652	139,662
Portuguese	1.93	143,434	Portuguese	1,932	143,434
French	1.59	187,303	French	1,606	163,223
Italian	1.07	73,102	Italian	1,098	63,948
Arabic	0.24	256,148	Arabic	497	182,148
Ukrainian	0.21	29,468	Ukrainian	240	256,148
Polish	0.01	21,174	Polish	8	21,174

4.2. Virality and engagement

Secondly, the analysis of the content generated by journalists and media on *TikTok* illustrates the great capacity of this social network to make content go viral and generate engagement among users (RQ2). During the analyzed period, the 23,174 videos shared by the 143 analyzed accounts accumulated more than 500 million “likes” (*diggs*), were shared 12.5 million times, and generated 6.7 million comments. In total, the videos were viewed more than 5,400 billion times.

On average, each video in the sample achieved an average of 233,800 views, 21,640 “likes,” 538 shares, and 291 comments. By type of account, the media obtained twice the number of views and “likes” as those of journalists, and were also shared twice as often, albeit receiving fewer comments.

Considering the media with the greatest virality and engagement, note that @espn and @overtime (both specialized in sports) stand out in all categories. This is also observed for accounts specialized in music, youth entertainment, or political news such as @mtv, @tnt_online, @nowthispolitics, and @nbcnews. Accounts related to video games and cooking recipes such as @ign and @foodnetwork also appear in the first positions.

Table 3. Virality and engagement by account type

User type	Diggs	Shares	Comments	Plays
Media outlet	22,855	575	301	250,483
Journalist	12,754	263	219	111,766

Table 4. Virality and engagement of the main media

5 media outlets with more diggs per post		5 media outlets with more shares per post		5 media outlets with more comments per post		5 media outlets with more plays per post	
User	Diggs	User	Shares	User	Comments	User	Plays
espn	193,198	overtime	1,351	nbcnews	2,277	mtv	597,117
mtv	152,931	foodnetwork	847	nowthispolitics	2,058	espn	405,496
overtime	144,174	nowthispolitics	835	overtime	1,712	tnt_online	322,953
tnt_online	92,810	espn	581	mtv	1,327	overtime	283,031
ign	78,528	tnt_online	564	espn	1,214	nbcnews	163,925

In the case of journalists (Table 3), three stand out in all categories: @taylorlorenz from *The New York Times*, @maxfostercnn from *CNN*, and @sophiasmithgaler from *VICE*. Also noteworthy are @hannahleenews from *Up & Coming Weekly* (North Carolina, USA) and @liliia.rebrik, a presenter on Ukrainian television. Also, @lizplank (*Vox Media* and *NBC News*), @aquintano (photographer, *NBC News*, *Recode*, and *Honolulu CB*), and @capoema (an Italian freelance journalist) achieve prominent positions.

Table 5. Virality and engagement of the main journalists

5 journalists with more diggs per post		5 journalists with more shares per post		5 journalists with more comments per post		5 journalists with more plays per post	
User	Diggs	User	Shares	User	Comments	User	Plays
taylorlorenz	99,938	maxfostercnn	339,192	maxfostercnn	2,149	maxfostercnn	113,471
maxfostercnn	74,490	sophiasmithgaler	101,922	taylorlorenz	472	liliia.rebrik	53,804
liliia.rebrik	22,639	taylorlorenz	86,686	sophiasmithgaler	402	taylorlorenz	43,122
sophiasmithgaler	19,311	lizplank	59,316	capoema	137	sophiasmithgaler	26,333
hannahleenews	12,079	aquintano	38,212	hannahleenews	118	hannahleenews	19,781

Source: Produced with *PowerBI*

In general terms, the media with the most followers in turn generate the most virality and engagement. The sports channels @espn and @overtime, the music channel @mtv, and @tnt_online, a Russian channel specialized in young audiences, stand out well above their competitors. Among the accounts with a lower correspondence between followers and active following, one can mention @nickelodeon (a medium offering children’s and youth content), @inverse (specialized in science and aimed at a young audience), @whistle (specialized in sports and entertainment), @seventeen (a magazine for teenagers), @dailymail (a generalist tabloid), and @ac2alityespanol (a project of the *2btube* company focused on “translating” newspaper news for a teenage audience).

The professionals’ accounts generally have a lower average number of followers than the media, although communicators with a significant impact can still be found on *TikTok*. Thus, @taylorlorenz, @maxfostercnn, and @liliiarebrik achieve substantial levels of virality and engagement.

4.3. Hashtag communities

To analyze the user communities created on *TikTok*, a graph with a total of 5,638 nodes and 318,986 unique links was synthesized, representing up to 790,599 weighted links between tags (Fig. 2). The average degree of the network is 113,275, reflecting the average number of neighbors of each node without considering the weight of the edges. If we take weight into consideration, the weighted average degree amounts to 280,750.

These figures suggest a high interconnection between the tags, which must be understood as a high tendency for users to use tags together on *TikTok*, which in turn can be interpreted as a symptom of the similarity between the different topics dealt with by users. An analysis of the network distance metrics suggests similar interpretations of the data. On average, the nodes in the network are separated by 2.19 hops, while the maximum distance is 6 hops. All these data suggest high cohesion and high interconnection in the network, reinforcing the notion of similarity.

A total of eleven communities were identified with a partition coefficient of 0.295. This low value suggests that the identified communities are quite similar, although one can distinguish their main attributes, as described below (RQ3). Of the eleven communities detected, only eight account for more than 1% of the nodes. The other three, which represent 0.11% of the nodes, are not considered herein.

The largest community in terms of the number of users, accounting for 31.8% of the total analyzed, shares tags that are very popular on *TikTok* such as #fyp or #foryourpage, used by content creators to appear in the “For You” section of the platform and that allows them to achieve higher numbers of visits and engagement. In addition to those who seek virality on the platform, the themes that shape this community are very generic, such as #halloween or #christmas festivi-

ties, or other broad subjects such as #food, #learnontiktok, #music, or #dance. In this community, the most popular accounts are @nickelodeon, @inverse, or @seventeen, all of which have a large number of followers but lower engagement figures. The weak differentiation of such content may explain this lower virality.

The second community, which accounts for 22.51% of the interactions, is the one most clearly linked to current affairs. Topics related to the pandemic such as #covid19, #covid, or #vaccine share the limelight here, along with other tags such as #news or #climatechange. The main reference channels for this community are @ac2alityespanol, @nowthispolitics, and @yahoonews. These results reveal a significant number of followers of accounts that try to use *TikTok* as a channel to disseminate journalistic content adapted to the medium in a differentiated way or, at least, linked to the most popular parts of the platform. This community therefore reflects the existence of at least a small niche for following current affairs on *TikTok*.

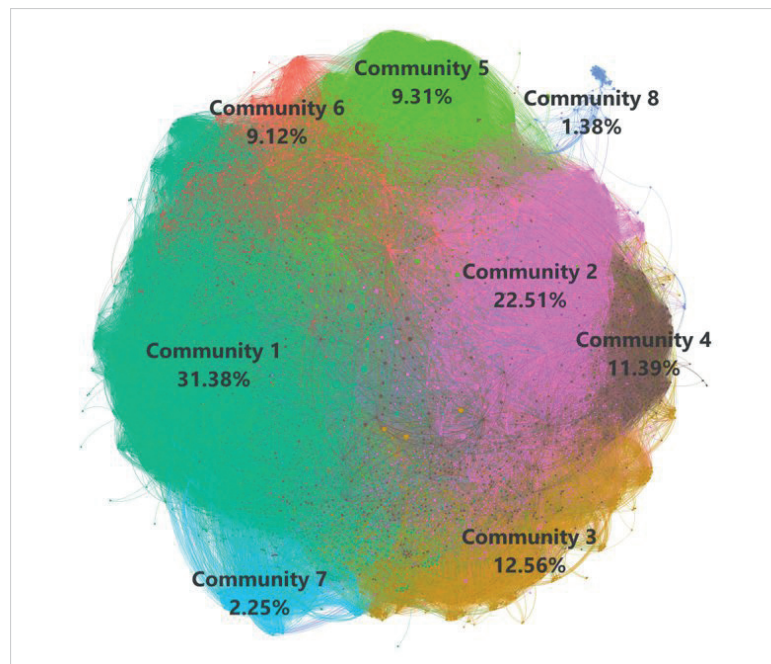


Figure 2. User communities on *TikTok* based on tag use
Source: produced with *Gephi*

Somewhat similar to the findings for community 1, the third community (12.56%) includes very popular tags that users expressly apply to make their content go viral, such as #foryou, #fy, #tiktok, and #viral, or generic themes that refer to content of various kinds from Covid-19 (#corona or #test) to #blackfriday, #winter, #party, and #lgbt. The fact that the accounts with most followers from this community include media such as @tagesschau, @sport1news, and @jornalda-record, all of them generating content in languages other than English, illustrates the common feature of undifferentiated themes in languages different from English, similarly to the first case.

Meanwhile, entertainment and audiovisual content form the backbone of the fourth community, which accounts for 11.56% of the nodes. Tags related to audiovisual products, technology, or video games are dominant here: #netflix, #duet, #gaming, #tv, #starwars, #tech, or #apple. The media most followed by this community include, e.g., @ign, @chip_de, and @brutofficial, all of them specialized channels, with some also sharing content in languages other than English.

Entertainment, but in this case linked to sports, shapes the fifth community (9.31%). In this case, tags such as #football, #sports, or #basketball are the distinctive elements that stand out among more generic tags associated with viral content. The accounts most followed by this community, i.e., @espn, @overtime, and @whistle, correspond to media with a clearly defined, limited, and differentiated niche, which exhibited the highest relative engagement figures in this study.

The sixth community (9.12%) features North American musical stars for adolescent audiences such as #travisscott, #britneyspears, #taylorswift, #drake, or #billieeilish, or the South Korean band #bts. These tags are accompanied by other references to showbusiness such as #metgala, #disney, #movie, or #couple. The reference channels of this community of followers of the most commercial music include @mtv, @enews, and @telemundo, all with a very well-defined niche and differentiated communication. Also, as in the case of community 5, specialized content is linked to higher engagement and virality figures.

Community 7 is very small (2.25%) and shows moderately weighted figures. In this community, general references to cinema such as #hollywood or #actress are prominent, particularly Indian cinema with hashtags such as #dehli, #bollywood, #deepikapadukone, and #priyankachopra. In this cluster, we also find generic hashtags such as #trending, used with the intention of going viral, as well as references to the Indian version of the program *Big Brother* (i.e., #biggboss and #biggboss13). It is thus not surprising to find only two Indian media outlets in this community, i.e., @indianexpress and @tims.delhitimes, which publish content essentially similar to the previous cluster but for India. This is a very small and well-differentiated cluster. The presence of this community is undoubtedly affected by the fact that India is the country with the second most Internet users, after China, which has its own version of this social network.

“ At least so far, there has not been a generalized commitment by news companies or professionals to generate journalistic or current affairs content on *TikTok* ”

Finally, for the eighth community, which is even smaller than the previous one (1.38%) and has even lower weighted figures, we only highlight the first eight labels. All of them are written in the Cyrillic alphabet and in Russian. Translated, these mean #recomendations, its abbreviation “#rec” (used above all to recommend audiovisual content), the teenage idols #DanyaMilokhin, #Kagramanov, and references to television formats such as #Roasting or the comedy #StandUp or the black comedy program #QuéPasaráLuego? This community is oriented towards content about popular Russian artists, in which the reference accounts are @tnt_online, @fridaytv, and @1plus1_official. Although these media have differentiated targets, all of them are committed to entertainment based on artists and in television formats based on talent contests.

4.4. The place of current affairs

As seen based on these results, of the eight communities identified, which together account for more than 1% of the nodes, the first and third have a high number of publications but lower levels of virality and engagement (Table 6). Their general and nonspecialized themes seem to hinder their ability to be distributed through the network, which translates into below-average figures for all indicators, i.e., average number of views, “likes,” comments, and shared content.

Meanwhile, three communities associated with entertainment content were identified, linked to audiovisual content and technology, sports, and youth music, respectively. Especially in the latter two cases, these content niches are rewarded with very high numbers of virality and engagement for their content, even tripling the average. Although smaller in size, they are characterized by a high level of activity among their followers. Such well-defined niches therefore fit perfectly with the characteristics of *TikTok*.

The sample is completed by two local communities (7 and 8, corresponding to India and Russia), also related to cinema, television, and entertainment, which account for more than 1% of the nodes and reach distinct levels of virality and engagement, being very high in the second case.

And what is the place of general current affairs in the case of media and journalist accounts on *TikTok*? Secondary, but significant (RQ4). Inspection of the results for community 2 reveals that it is the second largest with 22.51% of the nodes. In comparison, if we consider the larger communities created in this social network around the accounts of the media and journalists, we observe that the sum of the two communities that address very generalist or eminently viral issues reaches 43.94%, while the remaining five, whose content lies in the fields of leisure, entertainment, and showbusiness, together include 33.45% of the nodes.

If, in contrast, we consider the capacity of news content to generate virality and engagement, we note that these publications obtain fewer views and “likes” than the average, although they are commented on and shared slightly more (Table 6).

Table 6. Virality and engagement in the communities

Total engagement by community					
Pseudo	Posts	Diggs	Shares	Comments	Plays
1	6,946	90,396,738	3,172,690	1,004,558	1,067,920,610
2	5,257	98,104,604	3,012,691	2,568,283	863,775,660
3	4,078	37,698,358	1,421,229	806,535	451,391,012
4	2,191	44,564,240	844,749	599,153	391,153,131
5	1,319	92,355,355	2,257,450	781,055	910,222,597
6	2,157	100,251,415	1,063,835	781,935	1,206,710,035
7	241	2,547,425	13,436	6,090	48,011,237
8	985	35,564,525	670,999	193,698	478,907,942
Total	23,174	501,482,660	12,457,079	6,741,307	5,418,092,224

Mean engagements by community				
Pseudo	Diggs	Shares	Comments	Plays
1	13,014	457	145	153,746
2	18,662	573	489	164,310
3	9,244	349	198	110,689
4	20,340	386	274	178,527
5	70,019	1,712	592	690,085
6	46,477	493	363	559,439
7	10,570	56	25	199,217
8	36,106	681	197	486,201
Total	21,640	538	291	233,801

5. Conclusions and discussion

This analysis of the accounts of the media and journalists on *TikTok* reveals firstly a very limited presence of the main media outlets on this social network. At least so far, there has not been a generalized commitment by news companies or professionals to generate journalistic or current affairs content on *TikTok*.

This low implantation may be associated with several factors. On the one hand, the visual nature of the platform, based on very short videos and a highly specific language, makes it more difficult for media and journalists to transfer content they have generated for other platforms. In contrast to the typical use of social networks as platforms for the redistribution of informative content (Krumsvik, 2018), *TikTok* combines various

“ The consumption of short videos, viewed in a scattered and usually fleeting way, represents a challenge for the media, which face a greater challenge in making the leap to *TikTok* than that posed by their adaptation to other platforms in the past ”

idiosyncrasies that demand the creation of unique content adapted to its characteristics. Despite this, some media that prioritize the occupation of a virtual space on the platform as a strategy still include simple edited audiovisual fragments of their own programming, or even limit themselves to playing external viral videos on their accounts.

On the other hand, the presentation of content on the platform, posed as a continuous flow of content that is consumed in a combined, fast, and hyperfragmented way, also makes it difficult for media titles to rely on current affairs content. In certain regards, *TikTok* constitutes an antithetical model to the common news activity of the media that is characterized by a large amount of daily news, neutral language, and typically a textual structure. Thus, the consumption of short videos, viewed in a scattered and usually fleeting way, and using colloquial language, represents a challenge for the media, which face a greater challenge in making the leap to *TikTok* than that posed by their adaptation to other platforms in the past.

Second, *TikTok* is a platform on which the search for virality and engagement, especially with young audiences, plays a prominent role. It can be observed that the use of generic labels that seek to promote content to be shared and redistributed is a general practice also in the media, which resort to viral campaigns and memes on the web. All this results in a high rate of “likes” and of shared and commented content (Vázquez-Herrero; Negreira-Rey; Rodríguez-Vázquez, 2021).

This search for virality and presence in the continuous video streams viewed by users results in the primacy of the trivial, even in accounts belonging to media or journalists, in which brief news content coexists with content curious or challenges without journalistic value (Vázquez-Herrero; Negreira-Rey; López-García, 2020). The objective, in many cases, is more oriented toward the creation of a community of followers than the distribution of news content.

The analysis of the labels used by the media and journalists on *TikTok* confirms the association of this social network with content mainly related to entertainment, especially aimed at young audiences (Ballesteros-Herencia, 2020). Subjects such as sports, youth music, entertainment, movies, celebrities, and television shows find a successful niche on *TikTok*.

Despite this, the data obtained seem to indicate that content specialization is the key to success in this regard, since in comparison with the success of specialized accounts on specific topics, media and journalists who focus excessively on the generation of virality with an undifferentiated discourse are penalized. The consumption patterns on this platform, based on offering related content, favor specialization over generic and undefined profiles.

Finally, the data that can be extracted from the community generated around current affairs content are also interesting. On the one hand, even in the content produced by media and journalists, current affairs does not represent the majority and also does not correspond to the community with the greatest engagement capacity on this social network. However, these videos are shared slightly more and receive more comments than average, and do not lag much in terms of the views or number of “likes” they achieve.

These data suggest that there is also space on *TikTok* for the generation of current affairs information adapted to the characteristics of the language of this social network, which does not necessarily resort to thematic specialization or entertainment niches. A greater commitment to content created specifically for this platform may be the route to access digital natives, who usually do not expressly consume current affairs but are nevertheless exposed to a constant and broader flow of content via social networks.

“ On *TikTok*, the search for virality and presence in the continuous video streams viewed by users results in the primacy of the trivial ”

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