THE DEVELOPMENT AND GROWTH OF TIKTOK CREATORS

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Abstract

Social media has become a pivotal resource for individuals to both express themselves, entertain others and stay up to date with the world around them. With the rise of short-video films, TikTok became an application heavily relied on by the younger generation; particularly throughout the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic. The focus of this study was to identify what affordances the application creators would use to develop their videos and grow their online presence. In order to do this, 10 creators were randomly selected and observed over the course of a month, with a total of 80 videos being collected by the researcher. With the data collected, the study discussed not only the habits of a creator but the ways in which they connect with their audience members. Additionally, it explains how the two creator groups, both male and female, use the application in corresponding yet, differing ways to their advantage. The results from this work allow future researchers to gain a better understanding of TikTok's premises and creative sensibilities for those wishing to create can do so in a way that represents them in an authentic way.

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Introduction

Within social media, there are three types of people, the creator, the participator, and the observer. Every account holder, on any platform, can likely fall into one or two of these categories but still blindly scroll without knowing the aftermath of their interactions. Most users tend to be those who are mindlessly passing time gaps throughout their day. On the other hand, some identify as content creators, taking a more serious approach to the online world with the intention of building their social standing. Citing Craig (2019), Arriagada and Ibáñez (2020) describe the term content creator "as something of a catch-all to describe digitally-enabled cultural producers who create and circulate content on social media platforms, driven by an entrepreneurial spirit and desire to generate their own "media brands" (p. 1) Working independently, these creators would ultimately use the tools provided by an application to accomplish their goals such as promoting healthy eating, workouts, their humoristic side, life updates, pets, small business and so on. The catch is that this "platform dependence that creators are beholden to [constantly] changes in the social media ecosystem, from technical features and algorithmic configuration to renewed terms of service and policy restrictions." (Arriagada & Ibáñez, p. 1) Therefore, a creator will always have to stay on top of any platform changes in functionality that could affect their overall experience as a producer of online media content.

Over the years, generations of users have had to adapt to several new platforms, from MySpace to Facebook, Facebook to Twitter, and Photobucket to Instagram, and the enjoyment of socializing online has continued to progress in a multitude of ways. However, after the rise and plateau of YouTube, users began searching for a way to provide entertaining videos that would fall within the short attention span of their followers. With a few decades and application modifications later, the formulation of TikTok, during the Covid-19 pandemic, became the rising

star in the online world. Creators would eventually be allotted a span of fifteen seconds to three minutes to produce audience-engaging video content, while also portraying who they are and what they represent as a creator. Furthermore, to be successful on an application such as TikTok, creators would want to consider the number of affordances available through the platform that could either hinder or accelerate their video's success.

Given that every social network has been inspired by one before its invention, it is no surprise that users of TikTok would have high expectations of developers after previously having used Vine and Musically. That being said, with every new online development comes new ideas and affordances that allow for these social giants to stay competitive with each other and that is exactly what TikTok had decided to do. Creators would now have access to hashtags, sound clips, voice changers, filters, funding, and more. The audience members would also have the more traditional functionalities of likes, comments, sharing, and visible view counts. There would be numerous ways a creator could edit their productions and just as many audience affordances that would give them an opportunity to interact with said productions, some that would ultimately begin a creator's thought process. Eventually after learning more about the application, how it works, and how their fellow creators or users participate alongside each other, creators might unknowingly begin to change their style or creation. Therefore, with the growing curiosity of content development and the popularity of TikTok, the following paper will examine how the male and female creators use the in-application tools to create and build their online following.

Literature Review

The following literature review will offer insights into prior research done in regards to social media applications, such as TikTok, and the overall developmental elements that an app itself might offer to content creation. To begin, there will be a discussion of TikTok's background to provide clarity on what may persuade an individual to produce a particular type of content. Following this, a layout of the various affordances that creators often use for video formation so that one would be able to consider what is available to change or enhance a video's content. To clarify, affordance is the ability to act and participate a certain way within the limitations of a certain environment or platform (Costa, 2018, p.3). Next, the viewpoint of a participant and observational user would be examined through their specific affordances and what that could mean for a creator. To elaborate, the three categories (creator, participator, and observer) can be better understood through the 90-9-1 Rule, first defined by bloggers Ben McConnell and Jackie Huba. They had stated that of a user's audience, 1% of users are creators, 9% of users are commenters and 90% of users are observers. Thus, showing a creator was only a portion of the overall audience that viewed their content only not through actual participation (Lee, 2014).

History of TikTok

As mentioned earlier, "TikTok, a short-video app featuring video content between 15 and [180] seconds long, has in the last few years become immensely popular around the world," (Zeng, Abidin, & Schäfer, 2021, p.1) but was not the first application of its kind. In 2017, Vine had become known as a very notorious short-video application permitting its users seven seconds to "post comedic videos, post their rants, or just talk to their fans" (Maxey, 2020, pg.1); but was short-lived as it eventually became a photo and video gallery alternative. Similarly, China had

begun to develop an application with the exact same concepts but with a focus more so on musical additions which would go on to be named Musical.ly. Musical.ly's

> "users, or *musers* as they are called, [would] share 15-second videos…. [where they] can select soundtracks from the extensive music database available on musical.ly, use songs they have on their phone, record live sound, or use sound from other musers' videos and skits" (Rettberg, 2017, p. 1).

A year later the same company that owned Musically, ByteDance, would take the app and evolve its basis into what would become known as TikTok. By doing this, the younger users of Musical.ly were automatically transferred to the new platform to get a feel for the platform and generate usage data that would be beneficial to the development of TikTok down the road (Zeng, Abidin, & Schäfer, 2021, p. 1-3).

Taking on an almost identical platform layout, developers at ByteDance realized that with TikTok they would have to do something different to maintain the budding popularity of what was once "Musical.ly" with the users they had inherited and those who would eventually create accounts. Rather than limiting its creators to already pre-recorded music, creators would now be allowed to "include songs, words from a movie/television show, political/cultural moment, or an original sound created by the user" (Zulli & Zulli, 2020, p. 2). Users would also be able to incorporate captions, hashtags, manipulate their voices, and apply filters and text to the videos with the only limitation being screen space and video length. Furthermore, TikTok's creators' content success has shifted from the overall popularity of a creator and now typically revolves around the individualistic notion of a single post. TikTok users typically aim for singular posts to amass a certain amount of 'engagements' from shares, views, and comments which TikTok

encourages with its ideological culture that endorses creators' developed content to be projected onto the For You Page of observers. (Abidin, 2021).

After using the app and following other users' accounts, an individual would be able to jump back and forth between who they are following and content suggested by the application's algorithm as content they would most likely enjoy, otherwise known as the FYP or "For You Page". While the "Following" page would allow these users to view content and creators' content they had approved of, the FYP would follow the already established algorithm to keep you on the application for as long as possible (Zeng, Abidin, & Schäfer, 2021, pp. 3-4). To make it onto the FYP, a user would be encouraged to participate in replicating comparable video concepts that immediately input observers in relation to others who have received extensive attention. Ergo, the opportunity for an ordinary user's video to be found increases when like sounds and visuals are used and linked to a previously popular video for observers to interact with. (Zulli & Zulli, 2020).

The Content Creator

It has been mentioned that there are various types of users on social media, but the idea of those who use the applications for their intended purpose is reserved for those described as content creators. As defined by David Craig (2019) but summarized by Arriagada & Ibáñez (2020), "the term "content creator" had emerged as something of a catch-all to describe digitally-enabled cultural producers who create and circulate content on social media platforms" (p. 1). There is no significant difference between the affordances offered to users but it is entirely up to the individual whether or not they want to participate in content creation which therefore creates a divide between those who consider themselves creators and those as audience members. However, while there may not be a contrast in what is available to users, there does seem to be

distinct motivators that urge individuals to engage in content creation. For some, it might be for personal use to update friends and family through a nice visual. For others, it could be to entertain a larger audience or connect with users who have similar interests. Additionally, there are even some who would like to use content creation as a career to make money solely through branding and partnering with companies to promote their products. Regardless, the success of these content creators is all based on the same thing, how well they use the tools the application provides them with.

Creator Affordances

No matter what the online network may be, there will always be a list of affordances that make the time spent engaging with content unique to every user. For a creator on TikTok, there seems to be a reliance on design functions that assist in holding the attention of their audience. Similarly, TikTok creators often become even more reliant on the audio clip incorporation as it allows them to participate in story-telling through the addition of lyrical meaning, rhythmic tone, or organized themes (Abidin, 2021, pp. 92-94). Essentially, with the use of the audio, textual and visual assistance provided by TikTok, a creator would be able to elaborate on a personal experience or articulate the story they believe their audience will become enamored with. The creators would eventually become aware that to gain the title of "influencer", they would need to take advantage of the tools or affordances offered to them (Hurley, 2019, p.3). Additionally, there is an understanding that not every video creation would be an original but "highly scripted, choreographed, staged, digitally manipulated processes, involving extensive architectures of digital labor" (Hurley, 2019, p.3) to satisfy their audience.

One of the most notable functions of this particular application is its assorted audio options. With the basis of TikTok coming from the ideas and fundamentals of Musical.ly, the

adaptation of audio clips for dance and replication purposes was able to expand due to the now wider selection made available by developers. Now on every video that a user would come across would be...

> a round rotating button on the bottom right-hand side, which clicks through to a catalog that pins to the top the original video that first debut the audio clip on TikTok; along with an option to "use this sound', and a viewable list of all the posts that had ever used the same clip. Clicking on 'use this sound' would enable users to create their video with the same background audio template (Abidin, 2021, p. 80).

Likewise, those creators who did not use a pre-made sound clip but opted to use their own original voice to create one would have the ability to either allow others to use it as well or keep it for themselves and remove reproduction permissions. While the popular route for a lot of creators would typically be to use sound clips from outside sources, there would still be ways that they could create an original without using their own voice by using voice filters found within the editing tools. After a creator had finished creating their video, they would be given the option of being able to apply "voice filters such as 'chipmunk', 'baritone', 'shake', 'electronic', 'echo' and more" (Williams, 2020). By using these sound clips of another's voice or by partaking in voice manipulations, followers would then be left questioning what the true voice is behind the videos they are watching. Despite identity markers becoming known as a creator's face, voice or distinctive look, if there is a limited amount of one being shown versus another, this too could be something a creator could use to pursue their creative intentions.

Like so many other social media attempts to forge the "ideal" appearance, TikTok had fallen prey to incorporating facial effects and video filters within its design elements. That being said, unlike other apps, TikTok would go one step further and allow audience members to see

which effects or filters a creator had used when editing rather than leaving it up to the viewer's imagination. Considering that creators could assume how popular an effect or filter may be based on pressing on the said links, one might see how from there, the actions of one creator's use of any filter could have an impact on the future use of them by other creators.

Moving on, more traditional application affordances like captions and hashtags would be given a staple presence on the platforms, just as it had in the past on competing platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. With the use of a caption, creators would be able to give additional meaning to their post that may not otherwise be mentioned within the video. With the use of a singular hashtag or multiple, creators would be able to draw attention to posts and videos quite easily and spark conversations among various users. Typically, "the hashtag serves [to be] a conduit for distributed individuals to locate, self-organize, and collectively contribute to the information streams on many SNSs resulting in issue and affective publics that converge around a topic or event" (Zulli & Zulli, 2020, p. 3). The app would go one step further to promote this idea of using a hashtag by having the most used hashtags shown in the "Discover" section of the application. By doing this, creators could pick and choose which hashtag they may want to use to gain fame as it had claimed to be "trending" based on the number of users who had already used it. Additionally, the hashtags used could present themselves "as a means of coordinating a distributed discussion among large numbers of users, who do not need to be connected through existing follower networks." (Bruns & Burgess, 2015, p. 2) As further discussed by Bruns and Burgess, using a hashtag within one's post can allow those who would consider themselves a part of the topic-based community to interact and communicate without needing to engage with their content through likes or a follower-based relationship. The point is that the content created would fall within a community-based topic and through the hashtag publics, these followers and

creators alike can limit the amount of content they view that is not of interest to them (Bruns & Burgess, 2015, p. 2).

As mentioned earlier, TikTok videos could be recorded at either a 15-second, 1-minute, or 3-minute limitation; the limitation being the topic the video may be discussing or the content being performed or acted out. For example, a television sound clip of a character monologue or talk with another character is typically recorded within a shorter amount of time. Whereas a chef showing a step-by-step demonstration of how to make a recipe or a Doctor talking about different medical conditions may exceed the entirety of the 3-minute allowance. On the other hand, there is a loop where "TikTok also offers social interaction between users and creators with the "Live Video" feature, in which users or accounts can film themselves live and have comments sent to them from fellow users during the recording" (Hayes et al., 2020, p. 3859). All things considered, creators have the ability to make the content they want since they have the time to do so but they would also need to consider if they can maintain the attention of their potential audience for the duration of the entire video. One way of appeasing the said "audience" would be to also incorporate the use of the categories option on an account profile. By doing this, creators give their viewers the option of looking at the category's themed title to distinguish what the content would include and whether or not that is what they are in the "mood" to view; rather than having to scroll through every single video on the creator profile page. Additionally, creators could also categorize their account biographies after successfully getting a viewer to their page.

Once the viewer had proceeded to a creator's account, they could read their biography and gain a sense of how the creator would like you to view or know them. In actuality, making it to their page would be the second interaction where a creator is encouraged to accurately

describe what their likes may be, what their content could include, and any other identifiers that would be deemed important for their potential followers to know. One way TikTok has also allowed for further audience engagement like this is by providing creators the ability to link their other social media platforms or add a link tree. It is no secret to platform creators that their users have more than just TikTok. For example, many users also have Twitter, Instagram, and other social media applications like it. By incorporating Linktree on your bio page, your followers can click the link that leads to a different page where you can include several links on (Smith, 2021).

For bloggers or general creators having these additional links could lead to building their follower bases on their other forms of social media or for businesses this could affect product popularity and purchases by attaching the company website. The ability to be put in direct contact with TikTok users and users from other platforms can prove beneficial for a creator in the long run especially if they can achieve creator funding status.

Gaining the ability to participate in the TikTok Creator Fund means that a creator has achieved the following as per the applications Tiktok Creator Fund Agreement: “have at least 10,000 followers have at least 100,000 video views in the last 30 days and be at least 18 years old” (TikTok, 2017). In light of what could appear to be a very hit-or-miss possibility, the idea of having a creator fund would give content creators a goal to work towards. Alongside the creator fund, some creators, after reaching a certain level of social standing on the app, would begin partnering with various companies and promote their products. Many creators could be tempted by the idea of turning creativity into an income, one research study even found that some “companies have reportedly paid TikTokers up to $20,000 per branded post (Influencer Marketing Hub 2020), and industry observers claim that a leaked TikTok pitch deck from June 2019 had price in-app advertising between $25,000 to $150,000 ” (Abidin, 2021, p. 77). Thus,

creators have the ability to turn creative and fun videos into a full-time job should they produce videos that align with things such as the creator fund or branding opportunities. After having reached this point in their TikTok career, it can likely be assumed that content would have a chance to remain the same or be created on behalf of maintaining such monetary achievements. However, these achievements are not simply based on the creator alone, their audience plays a role in their overall success as well.

Imagined Audiences

There are a multitude of users on every social media platform. As of September 2021, TikTok alone stated "it [had] 1 billion active global users, indicating steady growth of the short-form video app" (Bursztynsky, 2021). That being said, there are a lot of viewers with very unique and specific interests that a content creator will try to engage. The problem is that with the possibility of a very large audience, no one can ever truly know who their audience actually is. In reality, they are essentially creating and posting to what is otherwise known as the "imagined audience". This imagined audience is what can be described by some as the idea of who they think they are communicating with and how it represents what we believe the "people" want to see in one's online presence. (Litt & Hargittai, 2016, pp. 1-2).

> Depending on the imagined audience to help navigate through a situation, the difficulty is that on the other side of the screen, there are actual people forming impressions—and the imagined audience may not always align with the actual audience. (Litt, & Hargittai, 2016, p.13)

Due to this, creators should take into consideration that they are only making this specialized content for a portion of the audience, not every viewer will like or support their ideas.

On the other hand, creators can create a sense of what this smaller yet influential portion of their audience does like by looking at the likes, comments, and feedback given.

Audience Affordances

For any performer, the goal should be to captivate the audience so much so that their gaze remains solely on the performance, and they are deterred from being distracted by anything or anyone. Content creators play the role of an online performer, and if they want to be seen or heard they must realize the importance of the audience that they are performing to and how the actions of this said "audience" will affect their future content creation. On an app that is known for having a large following as TikTok does, a creator would be unaware of how many other users their content will reach until after it has been posted. Additionally, they would be unable to process or gauge what the viewer's reaction is until view counts grew, likes accumulated and comments were typed. Over time, if successful, a creator would inherit followers and with that understand how, "money now flows *along with* attention, or, to put this in more general terms, when there is a transition between economies, the old kind of wealth easily flows to the holders of the new" (Goldhaber, 1997). In other words, Goldhaber had explained, "that in the new realities of information overload, human concentration is limited, and attention is a form of cumulative wealth. Therefore 'getting attention' requires one to 'build on the stock you have every time you get any, and the larger your audience at one time, the larger your potential audience in the future" (Abidin, 2021, p. 78). Furthermore, a creator would have to build their follower base, acquire credibility, and from there, could become noticed by not only their followers but their follower's followers and others who begin to acknowledge their creations. Thus, leading to an audience bigger than they once had. Regardless if the audience is big or small, audience feedback would become valuable to a creator when moving forward with future

productions because they would have been acknowledged for what they feel is their creative style. One study concluded that through the use of social identity theory,

> a person derives an identity of self (social identity) from his or her membership in social groups, such as being a woman, or a caucasian [Tajfel and Turner, 1979]. One predicted effect of social identity is that it creates in-group favoritism: people make choices that favor their in-group members and have higher opinions of their in-group members than those out-group (Jian & MacKie-Mason, 2012, p. 12).

In any event, the idea that a person is "doing something right" can lead to satisfying the need to be applauded and heard. Once the creator has gained the approval of their following base that what they are doing is something they should continue to do, their content can then become associated with how a creator perceives their online self. Generally speaking, positive or negative interaction could alter the way a creator perceives themself and their content.

To distinguish between positive and negative interactions, most online networks have incorporated the use of likes, comments, shares, and in the case of video inclusive content, view count visibility. The more likes, shares, and views a user gets on their post the greater the assumption builds that people are liking their content. However, within the comments is where viewers can voice their thoughts and opinions. Using uses and gratifications theory, one study observed how their use of TikTok over time would satisfy their needs for being gratified. (Montag, Yang, & Elhai, 2021, pp.2-3) Vaterlaus and Winter (2021) analyzed five previous studies, where the uses and gratifications theory had been applied, to acknowledge what needs were being met for the viewers through TikTok. The authors determined that "entertainment, escapism, social interaction, and browsing/variety-seeking were key motivators identified for TikTok use" (p. 15). It was also concluded that some users were also using the application in

hopes of portraying self-expressions but not very many. However, one thing that was clear across both studies was people enjoyed this application so much because it provided them an escape from reality with the ability to have fun and engage with others. The unique aspect of TikTok bringing together users through music showed that engagement was not only on the app but could eventually lead to in-person interactions as well, “particularly the virality of sound trends/challenges on the app expanded the community to the in-person public sphere where people could hear a song in public, start doing the dance, and turn strangers (who are also doing sound trend/dance) into friends (Vaterlaus & Winter, 2021, p. 14). Thus, not only meeting the certain needs of individuals online but in the real world as well by bringing users together regardless if they are strangers or not.

Affordances & Social Impact Theory

After having discussed both creator and audience affordances, it can be seen how the two differences in affordances can essentially go hand in hand. This virtual concept of “affordance" starts from a simple premise that the world interacts with us just as much as we interact with it (Gibson, 2014; Norman, 2008). An affordance is what the world around us “affords” us to do with it (Matei, 2020, p. 3). TikTok allows creators to show off their creations and receive recognition from their followers. Whereas for the audience, they can watch content that entertains them and save the videos through the use of liking them to rewatch and relive those feelings of enjoyment. These affordances

> compel use, and people are conditioned at the level of perception by the form, substance, or texture of the objects. In other words, objects have intrinsic, precognitive meanings; they speak a language of their own, shaped by what they can do for us. Humans

> recognize those meanings in use, rather than adding to them meanings demanded by thought-out plans. (Matei, 2020, p. 4)

A creator wants to be liked and recognized at the moment, and the viewer wants to be satisfied with some sort of feeling through the videos presented to them. There is not necessarily always a long-term end goal for either of the parties, it is a satisfaction and fulfillment in the short term for both parties that induce future use for the same reactions.

Using the Social Impact Theory or SIT, one research group made the connection that people have a strong influence on other individuals and how they present themselves online. (Montag, Yang, & Elhai, 2021, p.3) From the viewpoint of the creator, "the theory means how important is the influencer to the target audience, immediacy is in terms of proximity in time between the two, and numbers stand for the number of the influencers themselves" (Torossian, 2020). To make an impact on such a large audience would be done if a user has already been deemed influential but this could also dictate the actions of a creator working to get to that status of being an "influencer". If one creator has become popular by doing one thing, then it will have an impact on all of their viewers who are also trying to reach that similar level of visibility within the community. Thus, impacting the decisions made by their followers or fellow influencers and what content they choose to create in the future. Additionally, social impact theory can be used to determine the social norms, complicity, and conformity of a platform. Authors Perez-Vega, Waite, and O'Gorman (2016) define the three terms as such;

> Social Norms: Custom or "the way we do things"
>
> Compliance: The action to consent to a certain request, and all the motivations surrounding this behavior.
>
> Conformity: The act of changing one's behavior to match the responses of others.(p. 12)

All of the following definitions apply to what is demonstrated on any social media but within the parameters of TikTok, they are seen as heavily influential based on the actions made by users. There is a social norm of how to interact with each other, complying with what is deemed okay or not okay provokes what is posted or not, and conforming with the "appropriate" response to such ideas being based on what a user thinks will be the reaction of their audience.

TikTok Culture: Algorithms and Communities

To keep users engaged and active on their platforms, companies often use algorithmic formulas with additional features to make the content seem individualistic to each user. More times than not

> The order of posts on a user feed is not determined randomly or chronologically but using an artificial intelligence algorithm that shows users the content they are most likely to be interested in. This leads to the fact that not all users who follow a user will be exposed to his or her content (Haenlein et al., 2020, p. 23).

If these developers were to show users content that they believed they "did not like" based off of the content they do or do not engage with, it could lead them to believe that there would be less time spent on the application. However, when looking at TikTok, algorithms can be developed based on the creators a user follows, the theme the creator's content follows, what videos they are rewatching or sharing, and what types of engagements such as likes, are using. From the creator's perspective, algorithms can have a significant influence on who sees their content and what content they will eventually create. In the article "Black box measure? How to study people's algorithm skills", researchers allude to the idea of how algorithms can play a role in the content that users come across and the content they then, in turn, start to create. The authors then go on to make a statement claiming that we know virtually nothing about whether or

not more diverse groups are familiar with the concept of algorithms, how these groups may view and feel about algorithms, and if they understand how algorithms might influence their actions and how those actions may influence an algorithm to meet specific needs. (Hargittai et al., 2020)

While algorithms seemingly help creators and their respective participants in seeing content that is perceived by the formula to be "relevant", both parties are also privy to being unaware of the content and communities they are missing out on. All of which could in turn change the interests of a user and change the algorithm for them together.

As mentioned above, algorithms can also open consumers up to large communities who find enjoyment through things of similar interest. During the growth of its fame, TikTok has developed some notable communities such as FoodTok where users share recipes and their love for all things food. Cottage core, otherwise known for being the "romanticized domestic aesthetic with seven billion views that involve images of freshly-baked cookies, upcycled white flowy dresses, and corsets, and the fantasizing about leaving your life behind to live in the countryside" (Chadha, 2021). "BookTok" where people can observe "creators share short recommendation videos and provide snappy reviews, but they are also creating all sorts of moving, inspirational content where they read out quotes from their favorite books, and in turn, glorify the act of reading" (Chadha, 2021). Even more recently, found under the Spirituality community a sub-genre called "#WitchTok: the home of modern witchcraft that has garnered 16.8 billion views. On this hashtag, we are being met with users chanting spells, performing tarot card readings, sharing crystal reviews, and 'communicating' with spirits" (Chadha, 2021). All of the mentioned communities are spaces for mutual conversations to happen amongst users all available through clicking on the hashtag associated with the community. Creators associated with a community/communities might be persuaded to create content that would contribute to

their fellow community members and in the same breath be hesitant to create anything that might contribute to a different community or theme. Accordingly, the study will pursue the following research question:

RQ: How do male and female creators use TikTok affordances to develop and grow on the platform?

Methodology

For this research, a sample of 10 TikTok accounts and their videos was examined with the use of thorough content analysis. Of those 10 accounts, five creators were male and the remaining five were female. Any video content collected was inclusive of the creator's face so that researchers could determine the tools that might have been used to alter their appearance or enhance video effects. From there, any account that had shown to fall primarily within one topic or video creation style was not considered for selection. For example, an account that had stated the content would only have a paragraph of text showing, with music playing for the entire duration of the video. While there could be changes in music type and or text content, the research focused on content that is based on the creator themselves and content that shows a creator's style and or personality associated with their appearance and identity.

To eliminate any possibility of bias or application specification to a specific user, the researcher created a new blank TikTok account. By doing this, any algorithm personalization that would have already been in place with a personal account would be eliminated. After new account creation, the researcher used the account to select creators and data in a raw environment similar to that of a first-time user. As a result, the "For You Page" generated videos for a "new user" and from there the first five male and five female accounts shown were selected, permitting they fit the following criteria: a minimum of 100,000 followers and actively showing to produce content 1-2 times per week. There are five categories in which creators' videos can be sorted. These categories are Entertainment, Lifestyle, Social, Self-Expression, and Informational. How codebook categories were selected is discussed later in the chapter. Considering the multiple categories offered to creators, the researcher decided to use a "yes" or "no" system to determine the category or categories used by a creator. Although a creator can utilize more than one video

category, a yes or no system can help identify what category the video lies in. So, if the researcher determined that a video was not part of a certain category, the researcher would mark it down as no. For example, if a creator's video can be categorized under entertainment but not the other categories, the researcher would mark them down as follows. See Table 1 below.

Entertainment	Yes
Lifestyle	No
Social	No
Self-Expression	No
Informational	No

Table 1: Category Usage With Yes or No System

Intercoder Reliability

Before data collection could commence, the researcher tested the reliability of the initial codebook. To do this, the researcher outsourced an individual that was not associated with the study or university and trained them in how to use the codebook. After training, the researcher provided the codebook tester with two videos from each creator, the first one collected (W1,V1) and the last one (W4, V8). While watching the videos, the tester evaluated which category they felt the video best fell into as outlined by the codebook. Once completed, the researcher determined the reliability of the codebook. The codebook reliability was strong. Results demonstrated that the codebook had 90% agreement with a Krippendorff's Alpha rating of 0.793.

Content Collection

Since the objective was to observe the development and growth of a creator's content, videos were selected at various points during their time creating in January 2022. Each week within the month were broken down as W1, W2, W3 & W4. From there, a video from the beginning of each week and closer to the ending of each week was selected, totaling at 8 videos per 10 content creator accounts. This allowed the researcher the ability to assess how a creator uses the available developmental tools afforded to them from the platform and how their videos would progress from week to week. Additionally, it allowed for audiences to engage with the videos, providing possible suggestions and or feedback that could be used in future productions.

Content Analysis

Given there are various viewpoints of a TikTok user, researchers used a codebook specifically created for the female and male creators selected with a focus on the affordances that had been made available for their content creation; and the use of those tools. Looking at this codebook, recent research was used to determine how a video on TikTok could fall into a generalized category that would give an idea to viewers what theme a creator's content could fall into and if it is maintained consistent.

Two previous studies were influential for creating the codebook. The first study analyzed a total of 5 previous works, 2 from the United States and 3 from China, and helped to determine applicable content categories. As per their findings, the following categories were distinguished and consistent across the studies: entertainment and escapism, self-expression, lifestyle, sociality or social interactions, informational or knowledge-seeking, and commercial/monetary (Vaterlaus, & Winter, 2021, pp. 6-9). Given the following findings, the above categories were useful in the

creation of both the creator and audience codebooks used to analyze the content that will be collected in this study.

The second study, looked at what type of content creators were developing and what category that content would fall under; while also sorting this information between female and male creators. For their research, the author implemented a list of 28 different categories that a video would be able to fall under. After conducting their analysis, Shutsko (2020) determined that a lot of the content fell under the category "Comedy and Joke," primarily with male creators and less so with female creators. Additionally, the following categories deemed "popular" amongst creators were musical performance, DIY & Tutorials & Dance to name a few (pp. 115-118). The difference between this research and the research question that is presently being investigated is that they allowed for content that did not show the creator themself. However, the categories identified proved useful in the formation of the creator codebook.

The Creator Codebook

Looking at the codebook below (Table 2), the researcher broke down the specific categories when analyzing the content posted by the selected creators. The following categories determined by researchers being: Informational, Lifestyle, Social, Self-Expression, and Entertainment. The importance of this codebook is that the content analyzed falls within one category and if on the edge of being one or the other could be easily placed by a researcher or interpreter according to the defining characteristics as seen in their definitions. Additionally, it was the hope of the researcher that should content stray outside the boundaries of these categories for any reason, they would be able to notate it with the ability to apply it to future research studies.

TikTok Creator Codebook	
Content Categories:	Definition:
Informational	A video providing extensive steps or knowledge about a particular topic. Some of these may include self-care, DIY's or tutorials, etc.
Lifestyle	A video that is inclusive of what a creator's daily activities/routine/home or work life may be like. Examples of this may include: family dynamics, pets, children, cooking, cleaning, job, travel, etc.
Social	A video that showcases 2 or more people participating in a gathered event, such as celebration, party, or concert.
Self-Expression	A video showcasing an individual using any form of art as a way to highlight talent to a larger audience. Examples: Singing, Painting, Drawing, Writing, Dancing, Acting, etc
Entertainment	A video designed to provide entertainment through comedy, voice-over acting, or emotional triggering content.

Table 2: Researcher's TikTok Creator Codebook

Results

The following research study set out to determine if the social media application, TikTok, could play a significant role in the development of a creator's videos. Conducting to the overall goal, the researcher collected the data over the course of a month, then proceeded to analyze the findings for further evaluations. Given the multitude of videos collected, the researcher divided the findings into comparative gender charts to showcase the similarities or differences the randomized creators ultimately demonstrated with the content they uploaded. To gain a better understanding of the significance these creators have within the world of TikTok, Table 3 identifies each individual's follower count, average view, like, comment, and share counts based on the videos obtained for this study.

Creator	Gender	# of Followers	Avg. View Count	Avg. Likes Per Video	Avg. Comments Per Video	Avg. Shares Per Videos
@ashyizzle	Female	2.8M	4.2M	870.36k	2.5k	3.3k
@drewafualo	Female	7M	7.82M	1.6M	19.9k	8.3k
@mimiermakeup	Female	14.8M	6.37M	1.2M	3.9k	837
@lenabenapt.2	Female	481.4k	294.53k	43.3k	318	1.3k
@toppawk9s	Female	676.7k	187.63k	70.9k	314	1.3k
@basii_17	Male	4.8M	436.85k	212.1k	1.5k	6.1k
@brobeingbasic	Male	147.6k	62.97k	4k	56	178.1
@jackmorrisontv	Male	1.1M	219.05k	259.1k	751.6	4.4k
@vicblends	Male	11.6M	116.48k	669.1k	2.6k	11.4k
@therealrahulrai	Male	4.2M	305.28k	33.5k	342.5	379

Table 3: TikTok Creator Statistics

In Figure 1, the researcher examined the main focus of the study, video category consistency. It was in this portion of the dataset the findings revealed how frequent one of the video categories such as: Entertainment, Social, Lifestyle, Informational, or Self-Expression, as seen in the codebook, was used amongst the creators. Additionally, they were able to see if the creators would stay consistent with one category or explore different category options within their TikToks. Looking firstly at the videos created by male content creators, it was found that 80% of the total videos recorded were deemed to be represented as Entertainment, 7.5% Self-Expression, and 6% as Lifestyle. Of those male creators, 92.5% of the overall videos were consistent with a certain category. To be specific, 100% of videos by @basii_17, @brobeingbasic, @therealrahulrai and @jackmorrisontv were categorized as Entertainment.

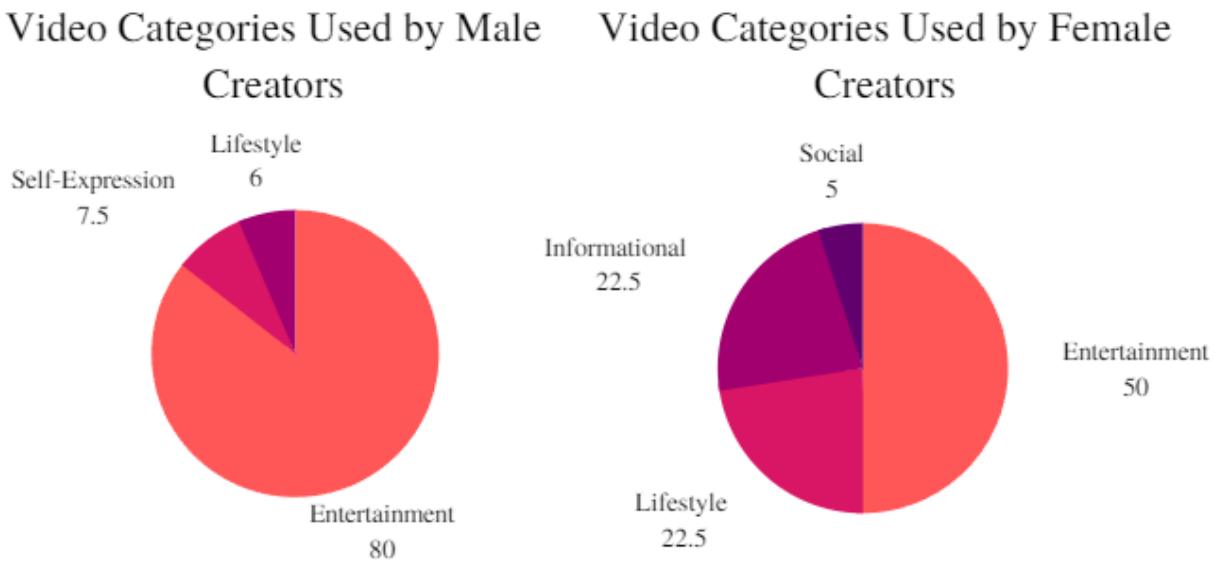

Figure 1: Video Categories Used

62.5% (⅝) of @vicblends were categorized as Lifestyle and the remaining were Self-Expression. Lastly, of the 5 categories available for videos to be sorted into, 2 remained unused by these creators, Informational and Social.

Within the range of female creator videos, the data showed that 4 out of the 5 categories were used: Entertainment, Social, Lifestyle, and Informational. Of those, Entertainment ranked the highest with 50% of the videos being categorized as such, 22.5% as Lifestyle, 22.5% as Informational, and the remaining 5% as Social. Breaking it down further, category consistency was also examined and found that each creator's work could be sorted as such: 87.5% of @asyizzle's videos were categorized as Entertainment with the odd one being Informational; 100% of @drewafaulo's as Entertainment, 87.5% of @mimiermakeup's as Entertainment with the odd one being Informational, @Lenabenapt.2 going between 3 different categories Entertainment 62.5%, 25% Social and 12.5% as Lifestyle; and @toppawk9s with 87.5% of her videos being Entertainment and the remaining one being Lifestyle.

The next information that became valuable was the location or environment in which the videos were filmed. In Figure 2 below, it can be seen within the range of 0-100% where analyzed TikTok videos identified four locations: home, outside, in a car, or other (somewhere else differing from those three locations). The following statistics discovered for each location were as follows with the total percentage being the combination of both male and female creators: filmed at home for both groups, was the primary filming location which accounted for 60% of the 80 videos, outside 16.25%, in a car 10% and other (gym, restaurants, etc) at 13.75%. For informative purposes, the 40 videos collected for male creators sectioned off at 55% being filmed at home, 20% outside, 7.5% in a car, and 17.5% somewhere else. Additionally, from the 40 videos collected for female creators, 62.5% of the videos being filmed at home, 12.5% outside, 12.5% in a car, and the remaining 10% somewhere else.

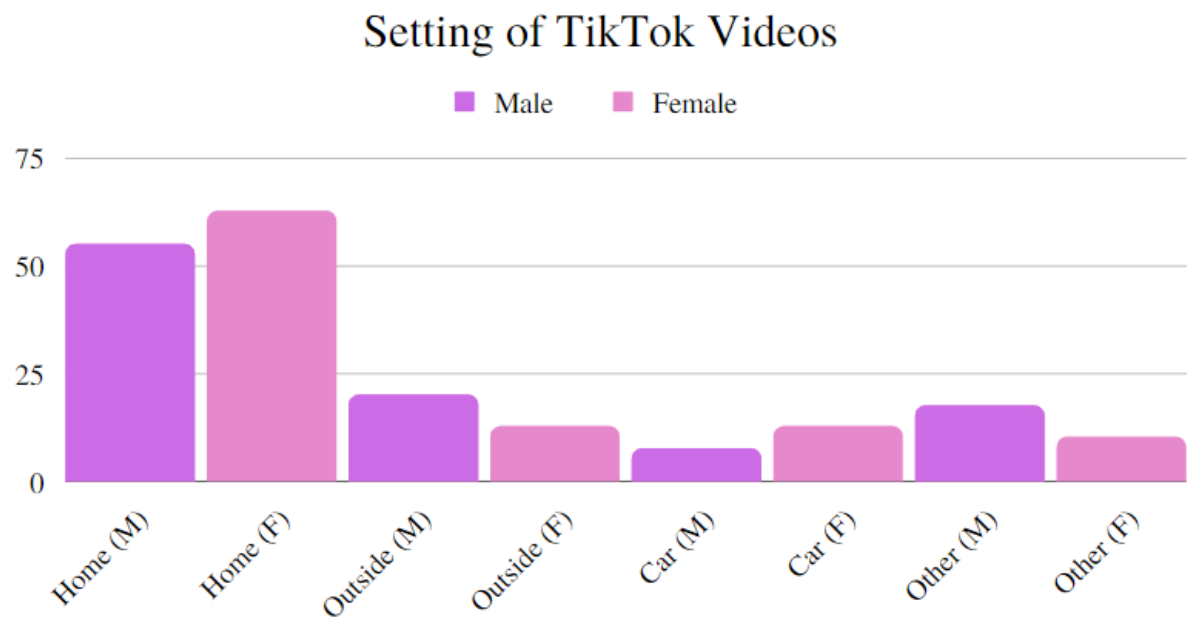

Figure 2: Setting of TikTok Videos

In the next section, the study determined which specific functionalities and tools creators were using within the video editing software to evolve their productions. While there were a large variety of tools for use, creators opted to use only a small fraction of what was initially offered by the application. The following explanation of the data in Figure 3 was split into the main categories used throughout both groups and further explanation of the "Additional Features" categories in Figure 4 and Figure 5. Looking strictly at Figure 3, there were four main tools used: hashtags, subtitles, in-video text, and additional features (features that are used scarcely from creator to creator). Hashtags were found to be in 100% of the videos created by men and in 77% of those created by females; subtitles had a lesser presence but still allotted for 10% of videos by men and 20% of females; in video text in 90% of men's videos and 52.5% in female, and additional features used within 12.5% of male and 55% of female video content.

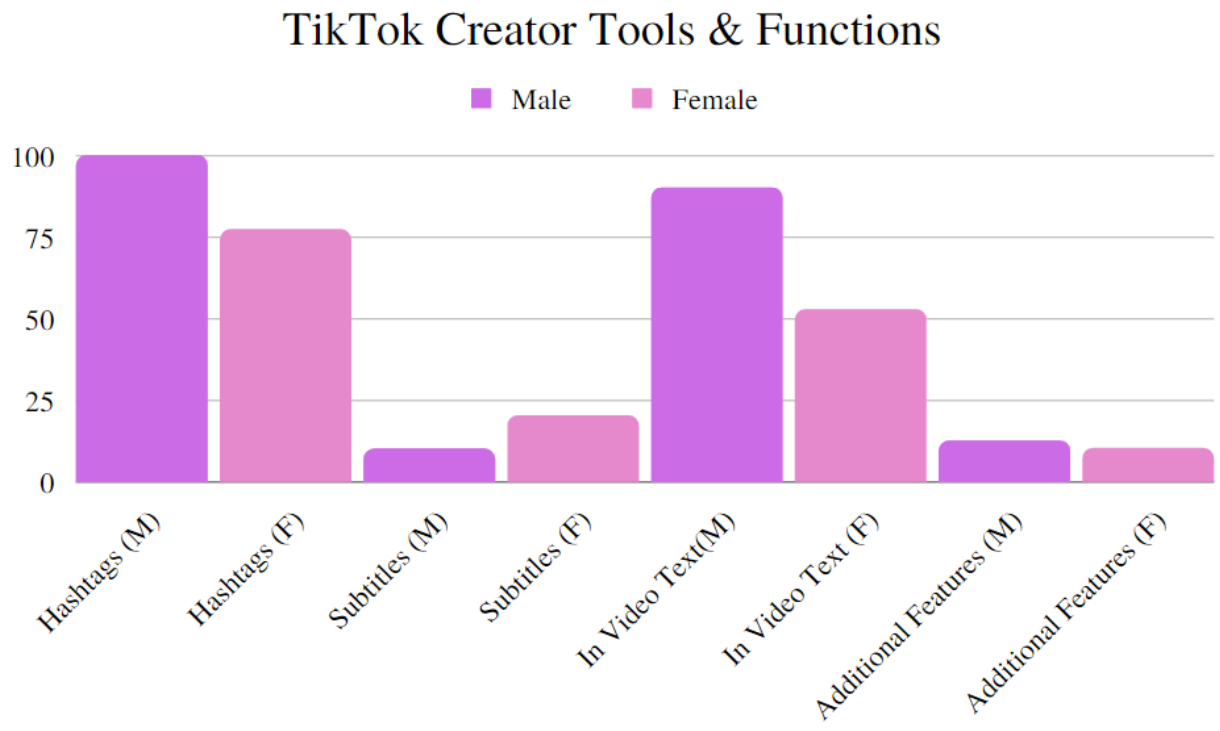

Figure 3: TikTok Creator Tools and Functions

With the high involvement of additional features in both groups, the study inquired further into the additional features included as they were similar, yet still slightly

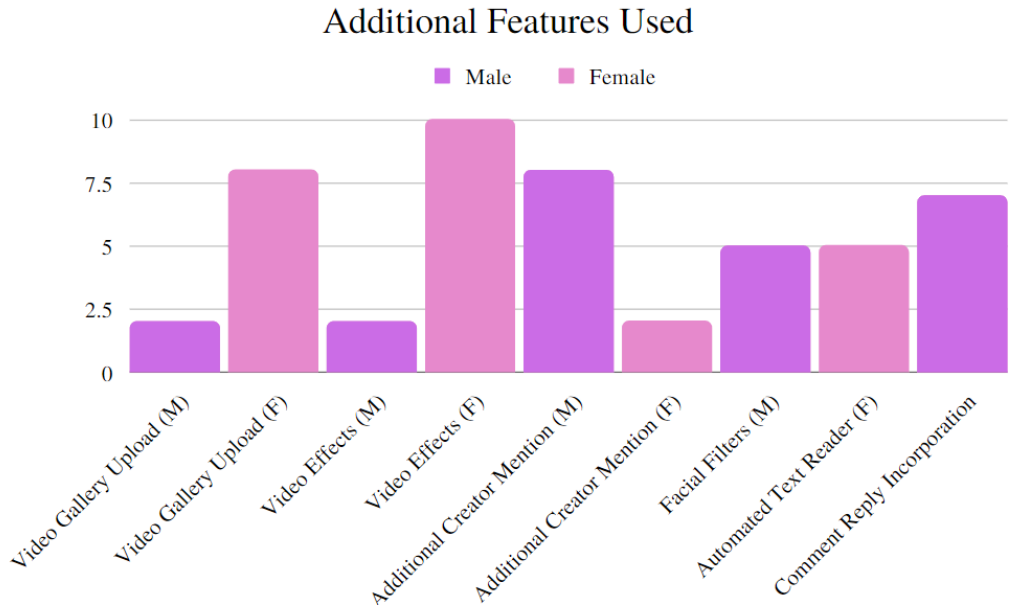

Figure 4: Additional Features Used

different from each other. Similar categories were labeled: video gallery upload, video effects and additional creator mentions. Separate from the female creator data, males only had one added feature they used which was facial filters as seen in Figure 4. On the flip side, female creators used two other features: the automated text reader and a view comment reply incorporation as seen in Figure 4.

Upon further analysis, researchers wanted to examine one of the more notable features that TikTok has to offer, sound clips. As mentioned earlier, sound clips were inclusive of both pre-uploaded/available by TikTok or an original sound clip recorded by the creator themself with their own voice. After reviewing the collection of videos from this study, the researcher was able to pull not only two but four categories that the audio aspects of these videos could fall into: original sound clip, TikTok sound clip, a mix of the two, and videos that had had their sound clips removed. The following data can be found in Figure 5 below.

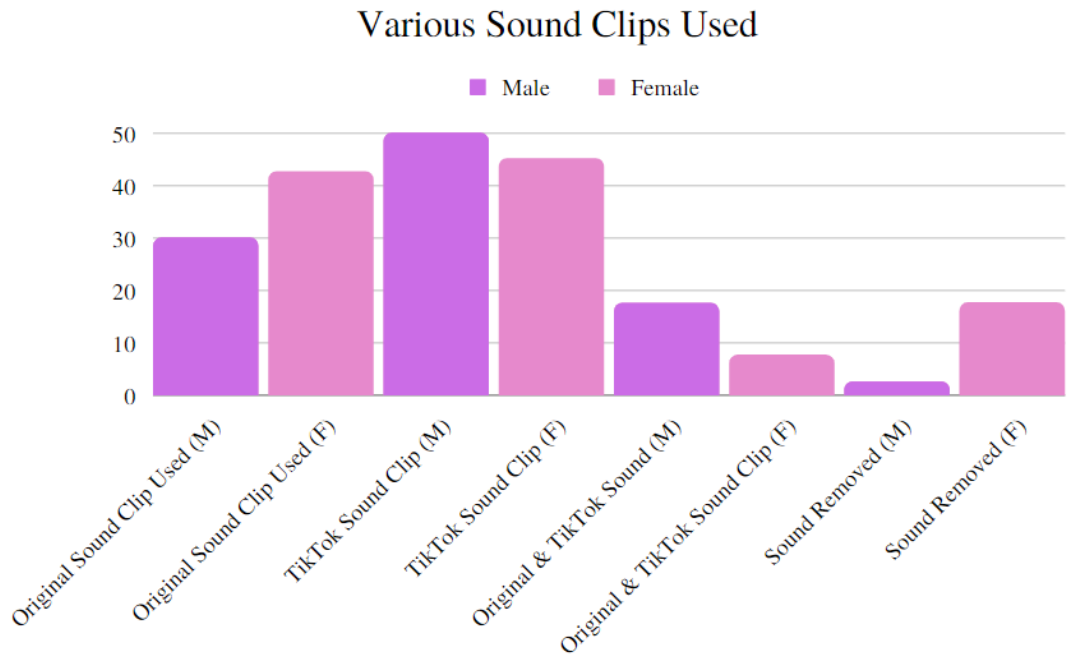

Figure 5: TikTok Sound Clips Used

Looking at the results, male creators primarily were seen using pre-recorded audios provided by TikTok with 50% of their overall videos using this type of sound clip. This was followed by 30% of the videos using an original sound clip, 17.5% with a mix of both, and 2.5% of the videos showing that the audio had been removed altogether. Whereas female content creators showed to have a high volume of their content either with the TikTok pre-recorded audio at 45% or 42.5% of them using an original sound. With that, the remaining data showed that 7.5% of videos had used a mix of the two options and 17.5% of the videos had had their sound completely removed.

Taking into consideration the involvement of the TikTok tools used to formulate these video creations, the last thing to s determine was how long a typical video

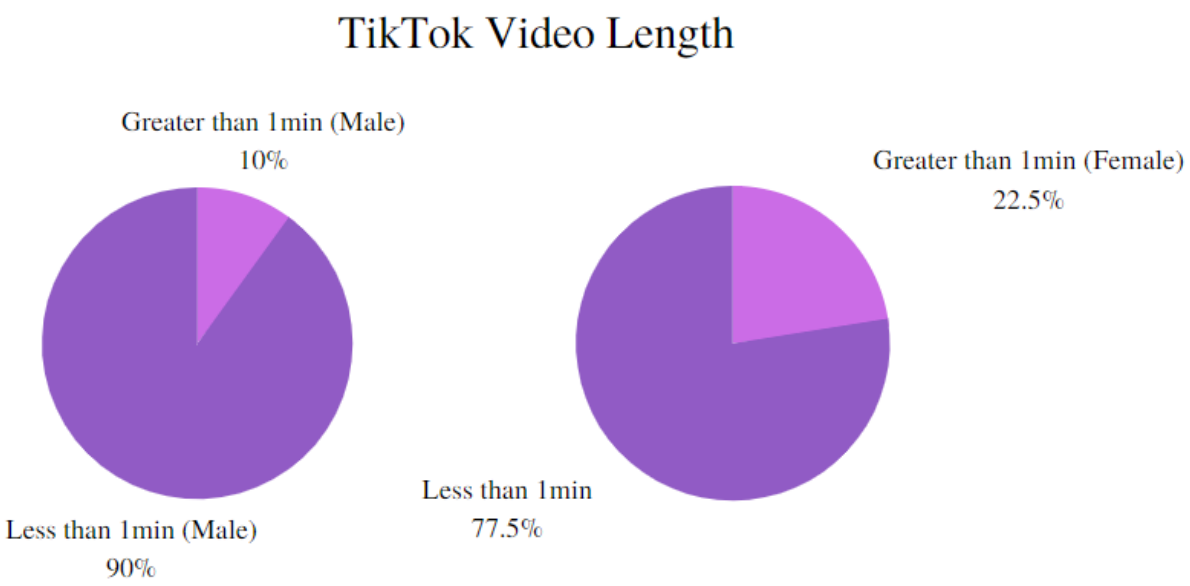

Figure 6: TikTok Video Length

would last. Given that the maximum time allotted to creators would be three minutes,

the researcher made sure to record the exact time lengths. However, no videos showed to be more than slightly under two minutes. See Figure 6 above. With that being said, the length of time videos from this study were sorted into were either: > l minute or < 1 minute. Of the 40 videos produced by the male creators, 90% of them showed to be less than one minute and only 10% greater than one minute. With female creators, 77.5% of their videos were less than one minute and 22.5% were over 1 minute long.

Discussion

The following study was conducted in hopes of uncovering how individuals use the affordances offered to them by TikTok. I had assumed that there would be a heavy reliance on the application to help visually please creator audiences but to my surprise the use of the features with the ability to do that was minimal. I had additional assumptions that suggested the originality or authenticity of creators would be masked by the trending themes within the application but again proved to be quite the opposite. While these creators did use the affordances offered to them by the application to improve and grow their creations, they did so in very individualistic ways that were distinctively different from their TikTok counterparts. One thing however that the study relayed was that there are categories that all the content studied would be able to fall into whether that be apparent to a creator or not. From the formulated codebook, I was able to prove that once a creator began to create within the boundaries of a particular category, they rarely strayed from producing content that differed from what they deemed as successful for them or content that appropriately depicted their creation style.

Video Category Findings

Any video that has been uploaded to TikTok or the internet in general, tends to have a theme associated with it. With the use of the creator codebook, I determined that the videos being observed within the application could fall into one of the five categories: Entertainment, Lifestyle, Social, Self-Expression, or Informational. With that being said, 65% of the 80 videos collected were classified as Entertainment. Amongst the 40 male creator-based profilesalone, 90% of them fell under the category of Entertainment, with one out the five creators choosing to film with a different theme altogether. Therefore, four of the five creators stayed consistent with the Entertainment theme. One possible explanation could be that creators had tested other

categories and decided that one was better than another for their creation style. Another idea was that maybe Entertainment became the popular choice due to their observations before becoming a creator; being able to see what type of videos gain the most attention and what they consisted of. In contrast, females did happen to have a higher volume of video within the Entertainment category as well but strayed away here and there to test different themes.

Looking solely at female creator content, only 50% of their videos were labeled as Entertainment-based, leaving the remaining 50% of videos to be a mix of Lifestyle, Informational and Social. Why is this? Perhaps it is because they have not been able to determine what theme works best for their production style. Out of the five female creators, only one stayed 100% consistent with all videos falling into the same category, Entertainment. The remaining four creators did manage to come close to being just as consistent but, chose to stray into different categories here and there. I had questioned if this was possibly an experiment for the creators to see if what they were currently doing was working or if they could be successful venturing into a new type of creation. Another idea was that these creators were trying to showcase how versatile they could be with their content and that the inconsistencies were not inconsistent at all, but rather what the creator wanted to produce regardless of how the audience might interpret it.

Setting of TikTok

Now, when one begins to ponder about the world of social media, one concept tends to stand out, the social aspect of connecting with others. For extroverts this could be a fairly comfortable thing to do sharing their life accomplishments on a large platform, but for introverts not so much. Taking into consideration that to use social media all you need to do is have a phone or online recording device of some sort, where these recordings could take place are

limitless because it can be done anywhere, at any time. Social media can be seen as a safe haven for some individuals who consider themselves introverts because they never have to leave their home or communicate with anyone face to face, they can simply exist as they want to. These same individuals might also see using TikTok as a way to show a greater audience who they really are and what they enjoy. This ability to essentially be themselves within the confines of their safe space wherever that may be. Now, regardless of whether someone is an introvert or not, the data proved that a large portion of the entire TikTok selection group preferred to record their videos at home. Being able to record in a home setting might bring a sense of comfort without the eyes that would be watching if recorded in public. Another aspect of this is that maybe these creators chose to film at home in an attempt to be more relatable with their audience. Makeup tutorials, situational experiences with family and friends, and pets are all things that a general audience can say "yes, I have been there before" or "I can relate I have been in a similar situation". Relatable content could be a way to show a creator's viewers that they understand them and that they are not very different from each other. Additionally, 70% or 56 out of 80 of the total videos were filmed in what most viewers might consider a personal space such as at home or in a car.

TikTok Creator Tools & Functions

The beauty of online social applications is that newsfeeds, however, they may appear, will have differing content as a user scrolls. Nevertheless, the factor that is ever-changing is what tools are used to create the content. Some platforms have tools that are familiar with corresponding platforms such as hashtags. Others have specialized features specific to the application that make them unique such as video editing, facial features and alterations, and more. For TikTok, the main descriptors used are in-video text, captions, hashtags, and subtitles.

Furthermore, this platform offers hundreds of additional features that could be used to improve the videos in a creative way.

Hashtags

Beginning with what seems to be the most universal functionality amongst applications, hashtags can be used to bring the attention of viewers to a video that is within their particular interests or to provide additional descriptors that may otherwise go unnoticed without their presence. Of the 10 creators I observed, 9 of them used hashtags for every single video they posted to their account page. Furthermore, 7 of those creators used a set list that looked as though to become repetitive from video to video varying only a word or two if that, from the set list of two to seven or more hashtags they chose to include. Interestingly enough, both groups had an instance where one of their creators created a personalized hashtag that would be used for viewers to identify that it was their content, as well as content that they were involved with or tagged in. For the male group of creators, @jackmorrisontv created a self-identified hashtag that wrote #meghanandjack, Meghan being his fiance. One reason this may be is due to the fact that she appears in a large portion of his content. Amid female creators, @lenabenapt.2 varied between two self-made hashtags, #woodaxlena and @lenadaviss, with the same concept being a direct recognition of the relationship between herself and her boyfriend. Again, a person who often appeared in her content. However, an alternative theory to why these particular hashtags came into existence is to provide comfort and reassurance to the respective partners of said creators given the multitude of viewers they tend to incur.

Subtitles

With a primary goal for the majority of content creators being to reach as many viewers as possible, many would think that these individuals would do whatever they could to seem

inclusive and welcoming to their page. Unlike in-video text that provides additional meaning, subtitles correlate with what is exactly being vocalized by the creator in the video word for word on screen by the creator. As of right now, subtitles on TikTok are not an automatic function that turns on for viewers but has to instead be turned on by the creator. While this may seem to be a valuable tool in recruiting viewers, the study found that many of the TikToker's observed neglected to use this affordance provided by the app. It is not uncommon for an individual to have a hearing impairment, and yet, so many of these creators neglected to include subtitles thus showing these potential viewers that they are not as inclusive as they may claim to be. To be specific, only a total of 12 out of 80 videos collected had been activated to include subtitles.

In-Video Text

Similar to subtitles, in-video text appears on the screen of a video for a specific duration set by the creator and the text can change what it says throughout the video with either some or no relevance to what the creator may actually be saying; assuming they are speaking at all. The main theory researchers leaned towards, in regards to why a creator would use this tool, is to provide a deeper meaning to their videos than what a sound clip or their actions might suggest. Accompanied by the automated in-text voice-over, creator @ashyizzle used the in-text feature to act as her "inner thoughts" about the context of her video that she potentially would refrain from saying out loud in a conversation or as the main viewpoint for her video. Other creators may use the in-text option as a way to tell a more specific story that without an original audio clip, the video may not be able to appropriately depict.

Additional Features

In the creation of any application, a database of special features to make it unique against its competitors is crucial. In TikTok's case, the database of these additional features is so big and

yet the creators selected only used a handful of the multitude of ones available to them. Of the five TikTok effects (features) I selected, both groups used video effects such as trending video filters, video gallery uploads, and additional creation mentions, however, what is more interesting are the tools they used that differed from each other. One early stipulation that the study had made was that there would be a heavy use of filters to alter the appearance of a creator given their attempts to be seen by larger audiences. Surprisingly this was not the case at all, only one out of the ten creators showed to have an altered appearance with the use of a different program altogether. This creator uses the change in their appearance as a way to appear as a different character, in his case his mother, to relay different mother and son scenarios that would happen between the two of them without directly involving her within the video. Neither group used any TikTok effects to improve their physical appearance in any way and opted to instead show their audience who they look like on a daily basis. Thus, producing a sense of confidence in self that the social media community would typically stray away from supporting, and would rather promote the idea of always presenting your best self.

Another feature chosen by female creators to be implemented into their videos included the automated in-video text reader. This automated voice would allow for creators to pick and choose what additional text seen in the video they would like to essentially “read” out loud to their audience without using their own voice. One thought as to why some creators would want to do this was to provide an insight into the “inner thoughts” they may have about what the audience is viewing in their video. In other words, this automated in-video text could provide audience members with a sense of additional meaning to their content that otherwise actions, sound clips, and any other writing features might provide.

The last feature used by female creators a few times was the incorporation of comments left by their observers. Should the creator choose to allow their comment section to be turned on, viewers could leave critiques, praises, or suggest future content ideas that the creator would be able to take into consideration. I had once thought about what a creator does with the engagement from their audience and, in this study, an example of the actions one might take were showcased. In this instance, a few of the creators decided that of the hundreds of comments left, they would select one and base one of their video creations around it. While this can be seen as a way to include one's audience, this can also be seen as a possible reliance on this said audience to give the creator ideas rather than coming up with ideas of their own, which directly relates back to the social impact theory previously discussed in the literature review. The theory states that the people within a similar environment as someone, could ultimately end up having an influence on the actions that they take or the decisions they make. With what was observed within this study, it appears that some of the audience comments drove what content a creator would produce. Thus, showing the overall impact that the audience or the "environment" of TikTok could have on a creator.

TikTok Sound Clips

If there is anything that allows TikTok to stand out amongst the rest is its endless library of both pre-recorded voice or music audio and original audio from creators who have given permission to their fellow creators to use at their own discretion. These two significant audio options were used almost equally throughout the female creators' videos. While some may have found it easier to use the pre-recorded audio for their content, others used their imagination to create an original piece that would appear as unique as possible given no one else would have done the same thing until after viewing the creator's video. On the flip side, there appeared to be

a significant use of the pre-recorded audios by male creators. Whether a creator chooses to use one over the other is not an issue but there proves to be pros and cons to each. Using a pre-recorded audio makes it easier and quicker for a video to be made and most people who use this are either following the trend associated with it or applying their personal experience to the associated meaning of the audio but it is not unique at that point. Whereas original audio can become a lengthy process with retakes, phrase and word selection, as well as the responsibility that comes from producing an original piece. Therefore, as previously mentioned earlier in this study, the "opportunity for an ordinary user's video to be found increases when like sounds and visuals are used and linked to a previously popular video for observers to interact with. (Zulli & Zulli, 2020).

Video Length

All of the previously discussed elements of TikTok are what lead to the ideas and time put into a video. In other words, the overall length of one of these videos can vary from creator to creator depending on what they chose to use but that does not mean that there is any guaranteed success with how much or how little they choose to film. Of the 80 videos filmed, over half of them were recorded in a minute or less, and all of them consistently reached hundreds of thousands of viewers. Those who did choose to go over that one-minute threshold did so in order to tell a story, break down a do-it-yourself demonstration, or explain what they are doing in the moment their camera is capturing.

Additional Thoughts & Considerations

TikTok is fairly new to the realm of social media and has yet to stop progressing every single day both for the company and its users. Nowadays, it seems as though creators are taking applications such as this one into their own hands and deciding what needs to be created, what a

platform can be used for, and if they are lucky, what should become a trending idea. All of what was discovered within the boundaries of this study aided researchers and creators alike in understanding that to prosper on such a large-scale platform, you do not necessarily have to become someone else entirely. There is still a sense of identity and authenticity that can be used to relate with your audience and, in most cases, becomes what creators rely on more than filters or trends. Relatability demonstrates to the greater audience that a creator does not see themself above but rather in a similar light, having experienced similar day-to-day scenarios in familiar settings such as at home, in a car, or in a public space such as a restaurant or the gym. While there are still those who chose to have an online and offline presence different from one another, it is worth noting that should one want to become an influencer and build an audience, it does not have to be at the expense of becoming an entirely different person altogether.

If another study was to be conducted with similar expectations or questions, it would be recommended that they consider observing a larger scale of creators. Ten creators is fairly small in comparison to the millions of users that happen to use TikTok on a daily basis and so, a bigger selection could allow for more insight on if more features are being used, how trends developed, and the timeline in which they remained relevant and when they were used by different creators. Furthermore, future investigators might remain open to the idea of interviewing TikTok veterans or influencers with a large following to understand the long-term development of their creation style and how they came to focus on the content they create in present. Another version of this study that could potentially be interesting is the insertion of the researcher into the application. Create an account and use the data from this study, try to become successful either by using similar hashtags, video category types, time length, or record trends in line with when they begin

to grow in popularity. Record, post, and analyze the success of their video in contrast with ones posted by fellow creators.

Limitations

TikTok is a very widespread media platform, spanning throughout the world. With this platform being so well-known, used, and widespread, a few limitations surfaced as I did my research. One limitation that presented itself is the lack of in-depth interviews. Since TikTok is so well-known and so often used, there were no circumstances in which I could do an in-depth interview with any creators to identify their motives and motivations. In other words, I had no opportunities to ask why creators create. Another limitation that presented itself was the fact that I could only observe past content from January. Only being able to create past content poses some difficulties, especially with how often content is changing. Using old content from an ever-changing platform means that some statistics may be out of date or inaccurate. Ever-changing content is also a factor that poses a challenge. With dynamic content on such a popular and ever-changing platform, research and statistics from January may be inaccurate, especially with certain trends disappearing while others make an entrance sometimes within a day's time. The small data set I worked with is another limitation I faced. Working with a small data set often creates a limit on how accurate information is when compared to larger data sets containing multiple different types of creation styles.

Future Research

If I or another researcher were to expand off of this study, it would be my suggestion that it be applied to other social media platforms. Plenty of competing applications have adopted a variation of the short-film setup, for example Instagram and YouTube in the last few years began to have reels; longer than a regular one minute video posting limit. My thought is that someone

could expand my codebook with additional categories, then continue on to apply the similar tactics I used and apply it to those creators on other platforms. Similarly, researchers could also take advantage of the TikTok creators I had already selected and see if their attached social media accounts corresponded with similar content they currently post on their TikTok account. Additionally, I feel as though pursuing in-depth interviews with social media creators about their creation styles, backgrounds, and beginnings would help to shed light on why the upcoming generations are so drawn to being so involved with the online world.

Conclusion

The purpose of the following research study was to better understand the use of an upcoming application and tools used by creators to refine their online creation styles. Based on the findings and analysis provided to researchers, it can be concluded that while there are many approaches a creator can take to content creation, once they determine their categorical style they often become consistent in future videos. Specifically, with the use of TikTok, platform creators can express a more natural and relatable environment for their viewers to be a part of through an otherwise entertaining technique. Lastly, the application of TikTok proves to give both male and female creators the opportunity to have free range in the developmental and editorial aspects of becoming an influence within their online community.

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