



MASTER'S DISSERTATION

SHORT VIDEO MARKETING: A GOOD STRATEGY FOR SMALL BUSINESSES ON TIKTOK?

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If these two years have taught me something is that the path is everything but linear. During this journey, I learned how to deal with the bad and the good, the unexpected and the expected. Completing a master's degree is more than having a new title. It means finding the right balance between a personal and professional life for self-improvement.

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I want to thank my friends for their incredible power in making me see the bright side of things. Finally, thank my supervisor, Fernando Santos, for his patience, guidance, and genuineness. He played a crucial role in completing this dissertation.

Todo lo que pasa en tu vida tiene una razón de ser. Si aún no lo ves, confía.

Abstract

Over the last years, what began as a dancing and lip-syncing app, is now one of the most revolutionary social media platforms for businesses. TikTok is the first algorithm-driven app that allows creators to reach an audience beyond their followers. Its features make the platform advantageous for businesses with low visibility and budget. The purpose of this dissertation is to explore how short video marketing on TikTok is strategically employed by small businesses. Starting from the literature review, which is focused on short video marketing and TikTok, the author was able to conduct interviews with fifteen small business owners to analyze their experience with the platform. Taking into consideration the research and the analysis, it is evident that the TikTok algorithm offers a powerful environment for small businesses with low reach and resources to promote their product or service to a broader audience. Within the main outcomes of the study, the author was able to identify that genuineness and closeness are what work better with the community of TikTok. While through other platforms, businesses captivate the users by exhibiting products, on TikTok, businesses catch users by entertaining them with stories and experiences. By simply analyzing TikTok's insights they are able to measure their performance on the platform. Certainly, the results show that by staying close to the target, entertaining them, and following trends on TikTok, small businesses can increase their sales, clients, and reach.

Keywords: Short video marketing; TikTok; Small business; Digital marketing; Social media.

Resumo

Nos últimos anos, o que começou como uma aplicação móvel de dança e *lip-sync*, tornou-se agora uma das mais revolucionárias redes sociais para negócios. O TikTok é a primeira *app* conduzida pelo algoritmo que permite os criadores de conteúdo chegarem a audiências que vão para além dos seus seguidores. As suas características tornam a plataforma vantajosa para negócios com pouca visibilidade e orçamento. O propósito desta dissertação é explorar a forma como o *Short Video Marketing* no TikTok é estrategicamente implementado por pequenos negócios. Começando pela revisão da literatura, que é focada no *Short Video Marketing* e no TikTok, o autor foi capaz de conduzir entrevistas com quinze donos de pequenas empresas para analisar as suas experiências com a plataforma. Tendo em consideração a pesquisa e a análise, torna-se evidente que o algoritmo do TikTok, oferece um ambiente poderoso, para pequenas empresas com baixo alcance e recursos. Entre os principais resultados do estudo, o autor foi capaz de identificar que a autenticidade e proximidade são os fatores que melhor funcionam com a comunidade da plataforma. Enquanto através de outras plataformas, as empresas cativam os utilizadores exibindo produtos, no TikTok, os utilizadores são atraídos pelo entretenimento. Certamente, os resultados demonstram que se mantendo próximos do alvo, providenciando entretenimento e seguindo modas na plataforma, as pequenas empresas conseguem aumentar as suas vendas, clientes e alcance.

Palavras-Chave: Short Video Marketing; TikTok; Pequenos Negócios; Marketing Digital; Redes Sociais.

INDEX

LIST OF FIGURES	8
LIST OF TABLES	8
INTRODUCTION	9
1. LITERATURE REVIEW	13
2.1 DIGITAL MARKETING	13
2.1.1 Mobile Video Marketing	15
2.1.2 Viral Marketing	19
2.2 SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING	22
2.2.1 Content Marketing	24
2.3 TIKTOK	26
2.3.1 How do small businesses use short video marketing on TikTok	30
2.3.2 Trends and Challenges on Tiktok	34
2.3.3 TikTok's success metrics	35
2. METHODOLOGY	40
2.1 PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS	40
2.2 EMPIRICAL CONTEXT	40
2.3 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH	42
2.4 DATA SOURCES AND DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES	43
2.5 DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUE	48
3. DATA ANALYSIS	49
4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION	54
5. CONCLUSIONS	64
6. REFERENCES	67

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1 - PROTOTYPE OF TIKTOK ALGORITHM	28
FIGURE 2 - HUAXIZI'S TIKTOK MARKETING CAMPAIGN.....	32
FIGURE 3 - CORRELATION COEFFICIENT OF POPULARITY METRICS.....	38

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1 - WAYS TO CONDUCT DIGITAL MARKETING	15
TABLE 2 - SHORT VIDEO MARKETING CHARACTERISTICS	18
TABLE 3 - POSITIVE FEATURES FOR MARKETING PRACTICES.....	18
TABLE 4 - MESSAGES KEY ASPECTS	20
TABLE 5 - SOCIAL MEDIA TYPES.....	22
TABLE 6 - TIKTOK ALGORITHM MECHANISM PARTS.....	29
TABLE 7 - SUMMARY OF SHORT VIDEO STRATEGIES ON TIKTOK	33
TABLE 8 - TYPE OF INTERACTION	35
TABLE 9 - META DATA OF A TIKTOK VIDEO.....	36
TABLE 10 - CLASSIFICATION OF VIDEO REGARDING ITS FEATURES	36
TABLE 11 - CHARACTERISTICS OF TIKTOK VIDEOS	37
TABLE 12 - DATA COLLECTION PROCESS.....	43
TABLE 13 - HASHTAG ANALYSIS	44
TABLE 14 - BUSINESS OWNERS' DATA	45
TABLE 15 - INTERVIEW SCRIPT.....	47
TABLE 16 - PHASE TWO OF DATA ANALYSIS: FIRST RESEARCH QUESTION.....	51
TABLE 17 - PHASE TWO OF DATA ANALYSIS: SECOND RESEARCH QUESTION.....	52
TABLE 18 - PHASE TWO OF DATA ANALYSIS: THIRD RESEARCH QUESTION.....	53

INTRODUCTION

In today's world, where the pace of life is becoming faster, new social media platforms, are emerging to substitute traditional marketing channels, such as Instagram and TikTok. More and more, smartphones are responsible for the increase of digital time in consumer's life, allowing users to consume content on the go (McLean et al., 2020).

As society's lifestyle evolved, social media platforms adapted themselves to be suitable for people with a rapid pace of life. To satisfy this need for short but explosive content, short video apps emerged becoming dominant on social media platforms (Xiao et al., 2019). Video marketing became one of the biggest opportunities to attract and engage with customers' needs and emotions (Sedej, 2019). Hence, marketers started to include a strong component of video marketing in the mobile domain within their digital strategy (Sedej, 2019).

The key aspect that differentiates short video marketing from traditional practices is that even with its easy and low-cost production, its content tends to be rich and redefined (Xiao et al., 2019). Therefore, it can be adopted even by small businesses with an insufficient budget for big social media campaigns.

TikTok is one of the most widely used social media platforms, with 689 million daily users, surpassing the number of active users of Twitter, Pinterest, and Snapchat (Kemp, 2021). It was originally launched as a short-form video-sharing platform, for lip-syncing and dancing, in China in September 2016. Despite its original purpose, TikTok has grown into a fully-fledged video service, with content available for all types of viewers (Iqbal, 2022). In November 2017, TikTok acquired Musical.ly. After the fusion, the app snowballed into the most popular app in 2019 and 2020. With 850 million downloads in 2020, it began to be a true competitor against Facebook's ecosystem of social networking. After many years, TikTok is the first non-Facebook app to reach 3 billion downloads, which it achieves in the second quarter of 2021.

Since its launch, TikTok has gained popularity because it is a social network that has nothing to do with one's social network (Tolentino, 2019). The app is especially popular among Millennials and Gen Z. According to Iqbal (2022), Tiktok is mainly used by those under thirty years old, who represent 63% of the users. As Bresnick (2019) claims, TikTok's uniqueness allows young people to liberate themselves and play without adhering to the visual styles, narratives, and online cultures of the past.

For the development of this master thesis, small businesses are considered as companies with several limitations, like limited financial resources, lack of marketing skills and knowledge, and low visibility and impact

in the market (Gilmore et al. 2001). In addition, the type of communication being explored is exclusively Business to consumers (B2C).

This master thesis purpose is to explore how short video marketing on TikTok is strategically employed by small businesses. A variety of authors have linked TikTok marketing with brand awareness and customer engagement, supporting the positive relationship between the two factors. Furthermore, Mou (2020) analyzed how beauty companies in China applied different strategies through TikTok to enhance customer engagement and brand awareness. However, it is not completely clear how small businesses take advantage of TikTok's system in their marketing strategy.

Taking the previous ideas into consideration, the research questions that guided this research are:

Research question 1: Which are the different ways short video marketing is being used by small businesses on TikTok.

Research question 2: How are the impacts of short video marketing strategies on TikTok are measured and evaluated by business owners?

Research question 3: Which are the outcomes of short video marketing strategies on TikTok in small business activities?

This research was conducted under a qualitative approach, using two different data collection techniques to give answers to the research questions. The first one is a documental analysis through TikTok to identify the different

strategies among the small businesses. The second one consists of interviewing business owners to explore the impact of video marketing strategies on social media in startup activities.

The structure of this dissertation consists of 5 chapters. After the introduction, the author revises the state of the art of the topic in the literature review. Next, the author establishes his methodological approach and analyzes the data collected. Lastly, throughout the findings and discussion, the author is able to demonstrate how the data collected contributes to today's knowledge.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 DIGITAL MARKETING

Edelman (2010) defends that the inclusion of the internet in marketing practices completely changed strategies and the way customers engaged with the brands. The internet allowed companies to create a more loyal relationship with their clients by continuously communicating and publicizing their products or services through mass media. Two authors adopted an inclusive definition and describe digital marketing as “an adaptive, technology-enabled process by which firms collaborate with customers and partners to jointly create, communicate, deliver, and sustain value for all stakeholders” (Kannan and Li, 2016, p.4-5)

Digital marketing itself is facilitated by several adaptive digital touchpoints encompassing the marketing activity, processes, institutions, and customers. According to Bughin (2014), the number of touchpoints is increasing by 20% annually as more offline customers shift to the digital environment. The adaptive process creates new value in new digital environments. Digital technologies are constantly changing the environment in which companies operate. The most notable change is the reduction of information asymmetries between customers and sellers. On top of that, Digital marketing provides an invaluable opportunity to examine which components

of the strategy are working – or bombing. Simple new digital marketing strategies enable any business, whether a four-person startup or a global organization, to have an online impression.

Furthermore, people consume digital content daily. Traditional marketing channels will be phased out soon, and the digital market will entirely take over. Digital environments allow companies to reach a greater audience in a shorter amount of time and at a more affordable cost. Traditional marketing organizations and departments have seen significant customer loss because of technological advancements. People have shifted to tablets, phones, and laptops, which are where digital marketers have made the most progress. Society is living in a digital world, and marketers must adapt or risk falling behind tech-savvy competitors (Malar, 2016).

According to Malar (2016), there are four ways to conduct digital marketing. By creating an electronic storefront, placing ads online, participating in the Internet forums, newsgroups, or web communities, and using online e-mail or webcasting.

Ways to conduct digital Marketing	Description
Creating an electronic storefront	Companies can buy their space on a commercial online service, or they can open their own website. These sites allow the engagement between the company and the consumers, thus moving them closer to the purchase action.
Placing ads online	There are three ways to place ads online: 1. Classifies ads in special sections of major commercial online services.

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Ads in certain internet Newsgroups set up for commercial purposes. 3. Buy online ads that pop up while people are surfing the web.
Participating in the Internet forums, newsgroups, or web communities	Companies may participate in or sponsor internet forums, newsgroups, and bulletin boards that appeal to specific interest groups.
Using online e-mail or webcasting	Companies can send out a customer newsletter, a special product, or a promotion based on consumers' list of interests and buying histories. Moreover, they can use Webcasting or "push" programming to deliver information of interest to consumers' desktops.

Table 1 - Ways to conduct digital marketing

Source: Malar, 2016.

Digital marketing extends beyond internet marketing including channels that do not require the use of the Internet. It includes mobile phones, social media marketing, display advertising, search engine marketing, and many other forms of digital media.

2.1.1 Mobile Video Marketing

According to Smith (2017), Mobiles are the fastest-growing channel in digital marketing. Kaplan (2017) defines mobile marketing as "any marketing activity conducted through a ubiquitous network to which consumers are constantly connected using a personal mobile device". More and more smartphones are responsible for the increase of digital time in consumers' life, thus becoming the dominant way to consume content (McLean et al., 2020). People are 1.5 times more likely to consume video content on a smartphone than on a computer (Facebook IQ, 2017). Therefore, more than 75% of all video

viewing is from mobiles (Facebook IQ, 2017). The vertical screen position of smartphones is appealing for mobile vertical video content creation, mobile users can shoot and consume video content without rotating their phones (Corbett, 2015).

The previous point details the expansion of mobile video marketing within the vertical format type of video, but according to data is not the only element of the video marketing growing trend. Short video marketing is an emerging type of video that is normally played by users that are always on the move (Xiao et al., 2019). Generally, videos from 5 seconds to five minutes can be defined as short videos. They are mainly produced by mobile intelligent terminals (Liu et al., 2019). TAO and Yang (2018) are convinced that a short video is a few seconds of video content that is played on a media platform and is suitable for watching during short leisure periods. Even though short videos have an easy and low-cost production, their content tends to be rich and refined, and it adapts to the fast-paced life (Xiao et al., 2019). In a narrow sense, “Short video marketing refers to all marketing activities on the specializes short video platforms” (Xiao et al., 2019).

TikTok, today’s most influential short video platform, was created in September 2016, the most important year for short video marketing (Xiao et al., 2019). Along with the rapid development of the internet, artificial intelligence technology, and the accelerated appearance of short video content creators, video marketers should be immersed in the short video marketing

world (Xiao et al., 2019). It's expected that over the years short videos will occupy more leisure time of users and positively affect all aspects of their life (Xiao et al., 2019). Short videos are bringing rising curiosity among scholars because of their great value to the marketing enterprises' activities. If companies can effectively take advantage of short video marketing, it will benefit the establishment and dissemination of the brand (Liu et al., 2019).

Short videos are becoming a popular marketing method due to their quickness to spread, which attracts customers to understand brands, goods, and services (Xiao et al., 2019). According to Xiao et al. (2019), there are 3 common characteristics of short video marketing:

Short Video Marketing Characteristics	Description
Form Fragmentation	Consumers of short video content usually play them on mobile devices, whether they are resting or on the go. Short videos are suitable for people with a rapid pace of life because of their simplicity and short but explosive content. Short video apps generally consist of scrolling down to watch the next video and double-clicking to like; therefore, more and more short videos are coming up. Due to their lack of complexity, consumers started consuming short video applications during leisure time.
Distribution personalization	Short videos are constantly collecting data from their users, allowing the platform to select the specific content users are interested in to later create a personalized and accurate distribution. Personalized content turns marketing practices more effective and precise. As a result of personalization, the short video environment is more immersive, and users' curiosity is creating stickiness to the apps. Back-ends allow this to happen, they labeled each user according to their most frequent visited video types, providing

	merchants with the information about who to target through the app.
Content decentralization	Short video platforms normally adopt the decentralized mechanism of content production. The formula is simple, and it does not set any privilege. “Whoever can produce the hottest video will win the most views”. The combination of Professional Generated Content and User Generated Content encouraged users to create while watching. Short videos do not need a million dollars production sets, if the idea is good, everyone can make beneficial content for themselves.

Table 2 - Short video marketing characteristics

Source: Xiao et al., 2019.

Based on the finding of the study by Liu et al. (2019), the following features can have a positive impact on short video marketing.

Positive features for video marketing practices	Description
Interesting Content	Short video content should be created with strong interest and a high degree of entertainment, integrating the brand culture into the content, and promoting consumers’ cognition and emotion of the brand pleasantly and amusingly”.
Scene-based Experience	Companies should bring their consumers real scenes content that can be sensed by themselves.
User Participation Interaction	When using short video marketing, they need to stimulate more users to participate in the creation and imitation of short videos.
Brand Perception	Short video marketing should allow consumers to have a clear perception of the brand through the creation of interesting and scene-based content.

Table 3 - Positive features for marketing practices

Source: Liu et al., 2019.

2.1.2 Viral Marketing

Viral marketing is cost-effective with interactive advertising methods and convenient means of being able to reach large potential customers, conveying personalized messages with a high speed of message transmission and the minimum effort to transmit these messages (Shashikala & Mahapatro, 2015).

According to Palka et al. (2009), the term “viral” describes a type of marketing in which the message is spread from one customer to another like a spread of a virus. Therefore, viral marketing may lead to the proliferation of messages in unexpected growth paths, where many individuals spontaneously practice the principle by sharing messages sent to them through applications (Fouad, 2017). The purpose behind resending or sharing is to spread the knowledge with others. Kim and Lowrey pointed out that viral marketing is used as a marketing tool.

As Anis and Ismail (2014) explained, this strategy is a technical marketing practice that exploits social networks and depends on the creation of a self-perpetuated message through circulation among internet users in a rapidly increasing way. Even though viral marketing emerged before social media, it is one of the most recent types of marketing and it is almost associated with it.

Viral marketing theory is based on three principles: the message, the messenger, and the context. In the next table the message's key aspects are explained:

Message key aspects	Description
Social Currency	The recipient of the message should feel privileged if spoken or shared with others.
Emotion	Feelings and emotions are 2 factors that make people more open to spreading new ideas. The feelings might be positive or negative.
Practical Value	Any message with added value that may help others to know things or solve problems will be spread. The social nature of people makes them want to help.
Stories	People are attracted to stories. Content that is transmitted in form of memorable stories is going to engage more with the recipient.

Table 4 - Messages key aspects

Source: Berger,2016.

According to Berger (2016), the message relies on several aspects. The previous table defined key characteristics that the message principle should have to be spread and be viral.

This marketing method is intended for quick communication of ideas, trends, and knowledge to thousands or even millions of people. The main idea is to get the recipient of the message to promote it. Viral marketing is based on the broad-broad social fabric of relations between family, friends, and acquaintances, where the recipients pass the message willingly to others (Mills, 2012).

There are key elements that can make viral marketing more popular than other marketing practices, example (Yousif, 2009):

- There is a huge trend toward virtual social relationships in the community.
- The availability of digital platforms that can be easily installed on their devices to enable them to communicate rapidly.
- Messaging is costless. Everyone can send messages to hundreds of individuals without payment, which enhances dissemination and create viral messages.

Viral marketing is cost-effective, it allows the use of interactive advertising methods and at the same time reaches large potential customers, conveying personalized messages with a high speed of message transmission and applying the minimum effort to transmit these messages (Shashikala & Mahapatro, 2015).

On top of that, trust and confidence are crucial factors for the success of this method. The trust between the sender and the receiver will increase, or not, the exchange of knowledge (Kuo, 2013). From the perspective of the receiver, the sender has a degree of expertise, which shows its power over the recipient (Wiedemann et al., 2008).

2.2 SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

Understanding the role of social media in the strategy of small businesses is essential for the development of this research. In theory, social media can be defined as “a group of internet-based applications that build on ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and it allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p.61). Nowadays social media meaning can be interpreted more broadly. According to Appel et al. (2020), social media should be understood less as digital media and technology services, and more as digital places where people conduct important parts of their life. On top of that, Logofatu (2012) claims that social media when compared to traditional media has the advantage of ease of use, spreadability of content, and unlimited reach to an international audience. To further define social media, it can be divided into three different types:

Social Media Types	Description	Examples
Social Networks	These platforms are usually used to communicate with other people through the Internet.	Facebook and Twitter
Discussion Forum	They are often used for sharing and discussing different kinds of information.	Reddit and Quora
Media Sharing Networks	They have become essential for the growth of brand awareness and audience engagement.	Instagram and TikTok

Table 5 - Social media types

Source: Logofatu, 2012.

Logofatu (2012) divided social media into 3 types, social networks, discussion forums, and media sharing networks. This division makes it easier to classify social media platforms.

Social Media became an essential channel for marketers to enhance brand awareness, launch new products, engage with target audiences, and source qualified leads in a fast and efficient manner (Mou, 2020). The usefulness of social media for marketing has been examined by different authors. For example, Trusov et al. (2009) concluded that specific social interactions that happen on social media can have a significant and positive impact on marketing outcomes such as new customer acquisition and sales.

Over the last 10 years, the number of social media users increased significantly, thus the presence of organizations in the social media environment is higher. Social media marketing allows companies to boost their reach and reduce costs at the same time. It became an alternative to practices like face-to-face sales or sales with middlemen or distributors which are a less affordable option for companies with an insufficient budget. Moreover, social media marketing allows businesses to reach customers that may not be accessible due to temporal and locational limitations of existing distribution channels (Watson et al., 2002; Sheth & Sharma, 2005). Cole et al. (2017) stated that social media can be successfully used by small businesses to promote their brand as well as to enhance company-consumer engagement.

On social media, advertising is easily mistaken for consumer content, which, accordingly to Dahlén and Edenius (2007) could lead to the advertising being understood more openly, creating a successful digital brand communication and promotion. Additionally, brand researchers concluded that community building in social media leads to more brand loyalty and trust, even though there are still different ideas on how to achieve it (Laroche et al., 2013).

For this research, were selected one of the major and emerging social media platforms, TikTok. This platform became a popular platform for marketing practices because the content generated through it is short, fun, trendy, creative, and highly interactive (Mou, 2020). Further literature about these two applications is going to be approached in the following sub-chapters.

2.2.1 Content Marketing

Content marketing has become a dominant technique in digital marketing efforts. This technique uses the point of view of the consumer to build relationships by creating and sharing content through social media (Du Plessis, 2017). It is often seen as resembling publishing, native advertising, inbound marketing, and storytelling (Holliman & Rowley, 2014). Marketing professionals are implementing content marketing to substitute interruptive advertising and to attract more attention to the brand (Zahay, 2014). It is

created and shared by the company itself and helps them create and distribute relevant and valuable brand content to their target.

There are numerous definitions of content marketing in the literature, but so far, the most popular is from the CMI (Content Marketing Institute) and which is defined as “the marketing and business process for creating and distributing relevant and valuable content to attract, acquire, and engage a clearly defined and understood target audience – with the objective of driving profitable customer action.” (Pulizzi, 2012). Pulizzi (2012) also argues that authentic brand stories are the focus of content marketing.

The principal difference between traditional marketing and content marketing is that the communication efforts of content marketing are focused on consumers’ interests rather than selling products (Holliman & Rowley, 2014). Moreover, traditional marketing efforts were difficult to be measured. On the contrary, content marketing efforts can be measured and analyzed. Four types of metrics were developed for this purpose: consumption metrics, sharing metrics (likes, shares, among others), and lead and sales metrics (Holliman & Rowley, 2014).

Sally (2003) believes that the interesting feature of content marketing can stimulate consumers’ willingness to spread and share more than other characteristics, and the interestingness of content promotes consumers to have a positive image of the brand, and thus to have a positive attitude towards the

brands. The key to a great effect of content marketing is that the information it transmits must be useful and interesting. If neither of them is satisfied, the marketing objectives will be difficult to achieve.

Companies should produce content that humanizes their brand and connects with their audience by demonstrating an understanding of their needs and problems (Du Plessis, 2017). In addition, users could co-create a story that reinforces a favorable perception of the brand.

2.3 TIKTOK

TikTok is a social media application used for creating and sharing innovative short videos. In the last few years, it became the most popular application for people who use smartphones. The clips usually include funny music, short plays, lip-synching, dancing, or light-hearted humor. So far TikTok has been downloaded more than a billion times around the world. The platform is becoming a community for generation Z, in which they can express their ideas and make a social statement in politics and other kinds of campaigns (Zhao, 2020). More and more brands are entering the world of TikTok, which improved the status of the platform in the new media era. Not only companies have moved in, but also official government agencies have joined (Zhao, 2020).

The unique characteristics of TikTok make it different from other short video platforms. The extensive use of algorithms helps to understand users' preferences, showing them more of their favorite content and making users addicted to their TikTok feed (Zhao, 2020). Furthermore, TikTok integrates information, music, and e-commerce while intersecting with different fields, becoming an internet lifestyle (Zhao, 2020). Anderson (2020) explains that TikTok is essentially an algorithm-driven app.

TikTok uses artificial intelligence in two ways. First, on the consumer side, the system learns quickly about the individuals' preferences because they capture not only user comments, but also how long a user watches each video. Second, on the producer side, artificial intelligence helps creators make viral videos. It simplifies the trouble of video editing and suggests popular music, tags, filters, and other improvements by categories (Zhao, 2020).

The short video distribution mechanism is based on the selective exposure theory. On TikTok, the mechanism can not only label different users according to their interests, but after it learns what the users like, it can continuously show similar videos to the users. It's important to know that the tags applied by the users are not necessarily matched with the users' needs, for that reason, the mechanism pushes videos in a batch-by-batch way. First, the back-end measures the amount of interaction, that is, the video playback completion rate, the number of likes the number of comments, and the sharing and forwarding; being the number of likes the most critical indicator. Second,

the system pushes the content to a small group of users. If 10% of the interactions are completed, the push can be determined to be accurate. From there on if more than 10% of the interactions are completed, the system will continue to expand the range. This means that the more videos the viewers watch, the more accurate content they will get (Xiao et al., 2019)

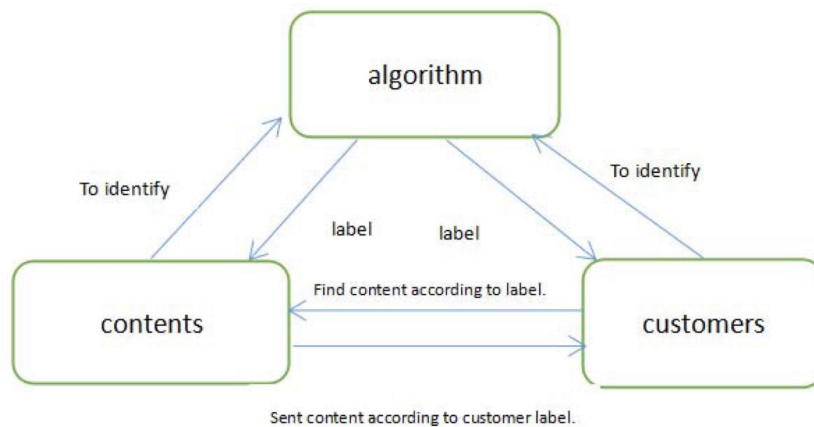


Figure 1- Prototype of TikTok algorithm

Source: Zhao, 2020.

As described in the previous figure, the whole process of TikTok’s algorithm mechanism is divided into three parts, namely, labeling the content, labeling the customers, and sending intelligent personalized content according to the previous labeling (Zhao, 2020). The following table will explore each part in more detail:

TikTok algorithm mechanism parts	Description
Labeling the content	The development of a label database is essential to put different labels on different content.
Labeling the consumers	<p>TikTok system analyzes the behavior path according to users' habits and then labels to continue optimizing the label. There are four approaches to collecting the data:</p> <p>Personal information filling: Using this method TikTok can acquire users' basic information. For example, phone number, age, and gender.</p> <p>Keyword searching records: The records represent customers' habits and interests.</p> <p>Like and comment video data: Tiktok can trace customers' behaviors to find potential. Interests of users. This method allows the expansion of labels and produces some overlaps which are conducive to its future.</p> <p>Address book circle: The system will analyze the interest of your closest friends, family, and colleagues, which will help the app with user labeling and customer segmentation. TikTok's content production and delivery have no limitations and costs, thus they do not have to worry about what age group of people will pay attention to it because everyone is already labeled and ready to find videos that interest them. Additionally, while other social media platforms focus on global consistency and influence, TikTok focuses on users' specific regions.</p>
Sending personalized content	When a user plays TikTok for the first time, the algorithm system labels every preview and comes up with a label for that person on the platform. After the first label, the platform algorithm will make real-time statistics of other new tag videos that the person likes and comments on many times. Finally, the label portrait is intelligently optimized and shows a new label portrait. This artificial intelligence algorithm is programmed to compute, update, optimize labels and never stop.

Table 6 - TikTok algorithm mechanism parts

Source: Zhao, 2020.

2.3.1 How do small businesses use short video marketing on TikTok

Compared to other social media platforms, short video applications have become the top platform since 2019 (Mou, 2020). The number of daily active users is around 800 million, twice the average of other online video platforms. Therefore, more investors and content creators are starting to get involved in the short video marketing trend (Mou, 2020). In 2018, TikTok established an ecosystem providing opportunities for brand support on integrated marketing, lifecycle marketing, and performance marketing. The ecosystem support brands to reach their target users in a very fast and precise manner.

TikTok marketing went from user-generated content marketing to integrated marketing, in which Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs), play a crucial role (Mou, 2020). According to the CASS Data's 2019 short video report, from October 2018 to October 2019, the number of KOLs increased by 1.47 times. Regarding KOLs statistics on TikTok, 42.5% of them are men and 57.50% are women. In terms of age, most of them are very young, with 94.39% under the age of 35. In terms of the number of followers, just 0.38% of the KOLs have more than 10 million followers. Most of the KOLs have from 100 thousand to 300 thousand followers (54.61%). In 2019, the brands' investment in TikTok's marketing became more diversified, with the beauty industry taking first place in the rank, accounting for 34.55% of the total investment (Mou, 2020).

In Mou's research paper (2020), he studied different marketing campaigns that went viral on TikTok and categorized the strategies into three types: integrated marketing, IP marketing, and "spamming" marketing.

For this dissertation, the author is going to develop IP marketing, which leverages the impact created by KOLs with more than 10 million followers and attracts other KOLs to create related content voluntarily, which considerably reduces the advertising budget.

The first thing brands need to do, is to go into a long-term collaboration agreement with a KOL. The agreement will guarantee the company that every time a new product or promotion is launched, the KOL will post it on his/her TikTok to make it viral. Moreover, brands can invest in vloggers, within their vertical kick, with a relatively smaller number of followers between 300K and 3 million for product reviews and to demonstrate how to use the product. Finally, brands can consider investing in KOLs from other verticals to ample the impact and reach a broader audience. The main difference between IP marketing and integrated marketing is that the first one uses the top-tier KOLs to attract other KOLs to join the evaluation voluntarily, thus reducing expenses. There are some challenges for brands to apply this strategy. First, the limited choices when selecting a top-tier KOL should be someone who can effectively recommend the new products when being launched and help the product establish trust among customers. The second challenge remains the product quality, as mentioned previously it will always be a key factor. Lastly, even though the investment for

IP marketing is relatively smaller than integrated marketing, brands need to invest a sufficient advertising budget to make the campaign viral.

In 2019, Huaxizi's IP marketing campaign helped them establish their products maintaining a very high sales volume. Their lipstick was on Taobao's list of top 10 most selling lipsticks for 6 consecutive months. It's also important to mention that Huaxizi's revenue during the double 11 sales, a non-official holiday in China, was over 100 million yuan, and was ranked the sixth most selling beauty brand during the double 11 sales.

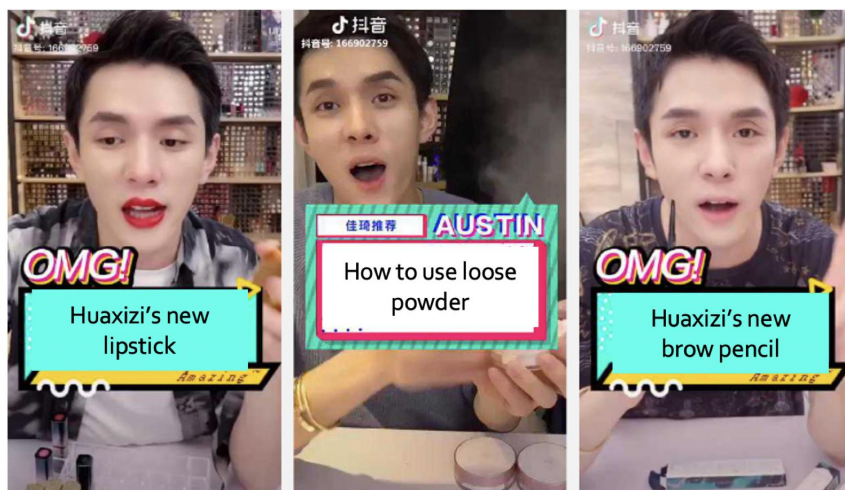


Figure 2 - Huaxizi's TikTok marketing campaign

Source: Mou, 2020.

The next table will synthesize the information about the IP marketing strategy and the other two strategies mentioned before, highlighting how they can be suitable for the different types of companies:

Summary of Short video strategies on TikTok	Description	Investment
Integrated Marketing	The strategy involves a large group of top-tier KOLs and celebrities to promote a product and to make it spread and shareable.	The investment needed for this strategy is usually big.
IP Marketing	Consists of working with some KOLs with more than 10 million followers to attract other KOLs to also promote related content voluntarily.	In comparison with integrated marketing, the investment is lower but to be successful companies should work with enough KOLs and invest the right amount in advertising.
Spamming	Spamming consists of working with a large group of KOLs with followers between 100k and 300K to complete the spam marketing.	Perfect for brands with low budgets and low visibility
User-Generated Content	Creating content to connect with customers through social media and enhance brand relationships and awareness.	Big investments are not needed, they can be strategically implemented by any brand.

Table 7 - Summary of short video strategies on TikTok

Source: Mou, 2020.

2.3.2 Trends and Challenges on Tiktok

Tiktok popularity has grown exponentially as a platform for the creation and dissemination of short videos (Liu, 2019). As it was described, the app allows users to create short videos set to an audio clip, a song, or a prerecorded video sequence with effects, stickers, filters, augmented reality, and green screens. It's crucial to relate its impacts to the audio elements. Especially audio memes and music in posts are the platform's core features (Vizcaíno-Verdu & Abidin, 2022)

One of the main and unique characteristics of TikTok is the audio background. Communication networks based on the use of such audio, have generated innovative ways to build relationships among users, for example, the challenges (Vizcaíno-Verdu & Abidin, 2022). These consist of creating videos where a challenger completes a goal and invites other users to participate and share with others, creating a loop.

In a study of Tiktok, they identify 3 levels of interaction in the hierarchical structure of the user’s experience, the audio library, and the platform’s music:

Interaction level	Type of interaction
Level 1	Emotions, that is audio dubbing with funny stories.
Level 2	Interactivity, that includes imitations, mind relaxing, and liking (Ask & Adibin, 2017)
Level 3	Usability reflects the easiness to switch between content, effects, and so on.

Table 8 - Type of interaction

Source: Mou, 2020.

The TikTok challenges recreate a venue for brainstorming, creativity, and memetic entertainment (Zulli & Zulli, 2020). Despite looking like a trivial and competitive game, challenges’ interaction models spread beyond musical concepts and processes (Vizcaíno-Verdú et al., 2021).

2.3.3 TikTok’s success metrics

The success of online video-sharing platforms has been remarkable. Some scholars have analyzed the metrics and correlations of indicators for each platform. According to Chen et., al (2019), TikTok videos are found to be significantly different from traditional online videos. Each video contains meta-data that is later interpreted to understand the correlation between the parameters and the popularity of the video.

Video ID	6553843141084974347
Video Release Time	January 11, 2022, 12:06:00
Bitrate	1104867 bps
Video Length (Duration)	15070 ms
Video File Size	1.98 MB
Verification type	1
Number of Views	1564
Number of Likes	12
Number of Comments	3
Number of Shares	1

Table 9 - Meta data of a TikTok video

Source: Chen et al., 2022.

The previous table is an example of the basic parameters of meta-data that each video contains. The features of TikTok videos can be classified into two types: time-invariant and time-variant:

Time-Invariant Features	Time-Variant Features
Video Length	Number of Views
Video File Size	Number of Likes
Video Published Time	Number of Comments
	Number of Shares

Table 10 - Classification of video regarding its features

Source: Chen et al., 2022.

Some of the characteristics are static within each time slot, such as video length, video file size, and video published time, while others are dynamic, for example, number of views, number of likes, number of comments, and number of shares. For this dissertation, only the following characteristics are going to

be studied: video length, video file size, number of views, number of likes, number of comments, and number of shares.

Video Characteristics (Time-invariant)	Description
Video Length	The length is one of the biggest differences between TikTok and other video Platforms. Based on the dataset of Chen et al., (2019) study, 95% of the video length is within fifteen seconds. According to Chen et al., 2019, videos of 15 seconds are the most popular among users.
Bitrate	The bitrate indicates the playback quality of a video. The low bitrate reduces the user’s quality of experience (QoE), leading to a decline in the popularity of TikTok over time. Compared to traditional videos, 74,15 of the videos have rates between 500 kbps and 3000 kbps. This is a result of the development of network communication technology and the enhancement of the function of the device chip.
Video File Size	TikTok does not have any information regarding the video file size. However, Chen et al., 2019, calculated the video file size from video length (duration) and its bitrate. In the data collected, 97,8% of the videos are smaller than 5 MB and the average video file size is 1,96%, which is smaller than the average of YouTube videos (7,6 MB).

Table 11 - Characteristics of TikTok videos

Source: Chen et al., 2019.

The previous table explains the three time-invariant features of TikTok videos to understand how they influence the popularity of a video.

Video popularity is crucial in the design of recommendation systems and cache mechanisms. Popular videos are likely to be recommended to the users and cached at the edge servers close to the users to lower delay. There are four popularity indicators for each TikTok video: number of views, number of likes, number of comments, and number of shares. Chen et al. (2019), verified

that most of the videos get few views compared to the popular ones. The most popular videos have most of the views as well as likes, comments, and shares.

The next figure is going to be presented the study of the correlation of the four popularity indicators (Chen et al., 2019):

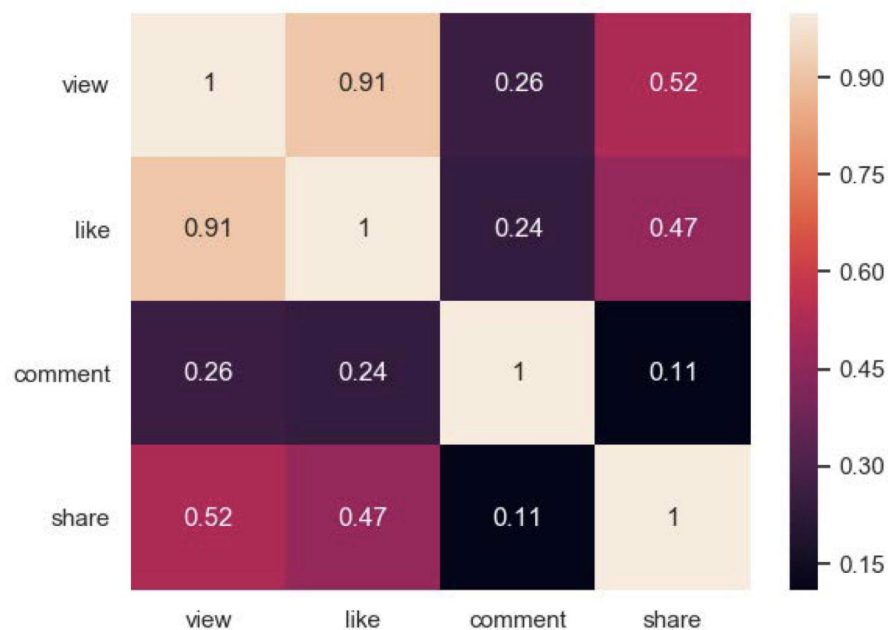


Figure 3 - Correlation coefficient of popularity metrics

Source: Chen et al., 2019.

The correlation coefficients between each two of the four popularity indicators are positive. Especially, the number of likes and the number of views have a very high correlation coefficient which is 0.91, i.e., a video that is popular in views is very likely to be popular in terms of the number of likes and vice versa. Despite the fact being all positive, in comparison, the other coefficients are relatively low. In particular, the correlation between the number of comments and the number of shares.

After the analysis of the characteristics of TikTok videos and the different popularity metrics. It is understood that the indicators of success and popularity of TikTok videos that have a stronger correlation are the number of likes and the number of views, meaning that a video with a high number of views and likes is more popular than a video with a higher number of comments and views, for example.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As described in the first section of this master thesis, the purpose of this dissertation is to explore how short video marketing on TikTok is strategically employed by small businesses. Consequently, the research questions are:

Research question 1: Which are the different ways short video marketing is being used by small businesses on TikTok?

Research question 2: How are the impacts of short video marketing strategies on TikTok are measured and evaluated by business owners?

Research question 3: Which are the outcomes of short video marketing strategies on TikTok in small business activities?

2.2 EMPIRICAL CONTEXT

As it was made clear TikTok is the focus of this research. The video platform is an algorithm-driven app that allows content to be fully customized by users. Since its beginnings, Tiktok seized the attention of young audiences around the world (Bresnick, 2019).

Its uniqueness is what merits the app to be studied. TikTok is a social network that has nothing to do with one's social network, meaning that regular people are more likely to become viral with no followers, to begin with (Tolentino, 2019). Is the place where content from anyone is given a chance to be seen, despite your number of followers. As Bresnick (2019) claims, TikTok breaks the narrative that is strongly related to other media sharing networks and that's the key difference that makes this platform a unique social media.

The low-cost production of rich and specific content on TikTok allows a strategical inclusion of this platform in the communication plan of small businesses (Xiao et al., 2019), making it more attractive for businesses that do not have enough budget to invest in advertisement. While on Instagram people need a strong follower base to see results, with TikTok a business does not need to have millions of followers to reach their audience effectively.

In the following chapters, the author will be collecting and analyzing data from small businesses about the inclusion of TikTok in their marketing strategy to understand better the phenomenon under study.

2.3 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Considering the purpose of this research and its research questions, the qualitative approach is the most suitable approach for this dissertation. It allows comprehending the context in which the small businesses operate, discovering the opinions of all the involved individuals, and how they use these communication platforms, such as Instagram and TikTok, to approach their target.

The author aims to understand how small businesses use TikTok strategically, what are the consequences of this use for the sales and customer engagement of the companies, and how these results are being measured by the business owners. This approach allows the exploration of personal experiences and strategies that business owners are continuously including in their TikTok communication. Collecting data from the business owners helps to develop an in-depth understanding of the strategies, outcomes, and metrics used by their companies on the platform.

For this analysis to be successful is important to understand the knowledge, opinion, and experiences the business owners have about their experience with TikTok. The qualitative approach is the most appropriate for the data collection, interpretation, and conclusions because it assists in the comprehension of complex, nuanced situations, and numerous perspectives and views.

2.4 DATA SOURCES AND DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES

The following table was created to organize and guide the research process:

Data Collection Process	Phases	Frame time	Criteria	Research Question
Exploratory analysis	Phase 1: Exploring the different hashtags regarding small businesses on TikTok. Then from the top 5 hashtags, are going to be selected the business owners with more experience with the app.	From February 21 st to March 21 st .	The criteria for selection will be based on the total number of views of each hashtag. For this research is needed more than 100K views within the wholes videos that represented the hashtag.	This phase will assist the next phase of interviews, which will give answers to the three research questions of the study.
Interviews	Phase 2: Interviewing the selected business owners.	From February 30 th to March 15 th .	The selection criteria will be based on the number of views and likes of their most popular video and the number of followers, with a minimum number of followers of 7K.	From the interviews, the author will answer the three research questions.

Table 12 - Data collection process

Source: Made by the researcher

The data collection is based on a process to understand the current context of TikTok usage by small businesses as a short video marketing strategy. To gather the information needed for the development of this

research the data source used were business owners of the small businesses, and the data was collected through interviews.

The table below was created to guide the process of choosing the small business owners that participated in the interviews. The table summarizes the most used hashtags on TikTok regarding small businesses.

First Phase	#smallbusinessportugal	#portugalsmallbusiness	#negociosportugal	#pequenonegocioportugal	#smallbusinessportugal
Day	21/02/2022	21/02/2022	21/02/2022	21/02/2022	21/02/2022
Hour	20:38	20:39	20:43	20:40	20:41
Nº of Views	10.1M	239.2K	188.9K	5.5M	238.2K

Table 13 - Hashtag analysis

Source: Made by the researcher

By using these hashtags, the author was able to identify which business owners have more success on TikTok and the accounts that are more popular within the field of small businesses. The selection of the business owners was done through the previously chosen hashtags and following the criteria established for this data collection technique. The selection criteria were based on the number of views and likes of their most popular video and the number of followers, with a minimum number of followers of 7K. The ones with a greater number of indicators were approached and interviewed. It's important to note that the most relevant indicator is the number of likes and not the number of followers because the TikTok mechanism is not so much affected by the number of followers.

To reach the business owners, the author contacted them through direct messages using his own personal Instagram. For reaching the business owners another platform was needed because TikTok doesn't allow you to send a direct message to people that don't follow you back. In the following table the small businesses are going to be present:

Business owner	Number of likes in the most popular video	Number of views in the most popular video	Number of Followers	Industry
@gisa.pt	95.2K	736.6K	33.4K	Beauty products
@Corilins.art	43.4K	365.4K	66.5K	Hand-painted hoodies
@myshebyacs	21.3K	196.3K	21.3K	Clothing/Fashion
@acidriplu	6806	102.5K	11.1K	Tattoo studio
@rrnailsss	12.1K	105.8K	12.5K	Nails studio
@madam.jewelrysty	66.6K	820.8K	64K	Jewelry
@biju0nline	58.5K	735.6K	13.4K	Jewelry
@marianasoareshfreire	48.8K	347.1K	31.5K	Bakery
@ladolie.oficial	8700	112.2K	14.4K	Skincare
@greenbeads.store	42K	415K	44.9K	Handmade accessories
@laurinhacaceres	7929	115K	19.8K	Beauty products, real state, and bikinis
@minespereiraa	38.9K	426.9K	42.3K	Bakery
@najla.pt	5519	63K	12.1K	Hair accessories
@keturah.pt	205.5K	9644	7771	Personalized design services
@smartify	18.2K	280.1K	8282	Intelligent house

Table 14 - Business owners' data

Source: Made by the researcher

The business owners operate in different industries, from tattoos to intelligent house products, and they all included TikTok in their strategy. The data from the

business owners about their followers and their video with more likes and views were collected by March 15th, 2022.

The data was collected by interviewing the previous small business owners. The objective of the interviews is to understand the trends on TikTok, based on the experience of each owner, as well as the outcomes, sales, and customer acquisition, and the success measurement system of their activity on TikTok.

For the collection of the data, fifteen business owners were interviewed. The fifteen business owners were chosen by a list of hashtags that helped the author to understand where the most experienced and popular small businesses on TikTok were. The interviews were semi-structured, with questions that were previously prepared in the script attached below. The interviews consisted of a set of seventeen questions regarding the knowledge and experiences of the business owners with the app.

Question	Key Reference	RQ
1. In the last years, TikTok's growth resulted in an opportunity for many businesses, what do you think about the usage of TikTok as a communication tool for brands?	Xiao et al., 2019	RQ 3
2. When did you decide it was the right time to put your company on TikTok?	Mou, 2020	
3. For how long you have been using TikTok to promote your small business?		RQ 2
4. Name three advantages of using TikTok for your business	Xiao et al., 2019 Mou, 2020	RQ 3
5. In your opinion, what does it mean viral on Tiktok?	Zhao, 2020 Anderson, 2020	

6. How does the TikTok system work regarding the viralization of a video?	Zhao, 2020	RQ 1
7. According to your experience with the platform, how is a pattern within the viral videos?	Vizcaíno-Verdu & Abidin, 2022	RQ 1
8. Which are the most effective KPIs for evaluating the performance of the videos on TikTok?	Chen et al., 2019	RQ 2
9. What are the crucial factors you need to consider for the development of a campaign?	Vizcaíno-Verdu & Abidin, 2022	RQ 1
10. Which are the metrics you use to evaluate the success of a TikTok campaign?	Chen et al., 2019	RQ 2
11. For the analysis of a campaign, do you compare the performance on TikTok vs other Social Media platforms? For example, Instagram vs TikTok	Chen et al., 2019	RQ 2
12. Which is/are the strategy(s) you implement for content creation?	Mou, 2020	RQ 1
13. Regarding the use of hashtags, which are the steps you follow for efficient use.	Zhao, 2020	RQ 1
14. How does TikTok bring your customer closer to you and your product?	Mou, 2020	RQ 3
15. How does TikTok increase the purchase intention of the customers?	Mou, 2020	RQ 3
16. Do you think all kinds of companies could benefit from the system of TikTok?	Mou, 2020	RQ 3
17. What examples of brands that embraced TikTok as the main tool of communication you can give me?		

Table 15 - Interview script

Source: Made by the researcher

The interaction with the business owners during the interview helped to understand more deeply their experiences, opinions, and feeling regarding the platform. The interviews were done online through google meetings and on average the interviews lasted around 17 minutes each. During the interviews the author was able to connect in a more personal way with the interviewees, allowing the acquisition of more relevant information for the study. The interviews evolved naturally as conversations which made it easier to comprehend the answers.

2.5 DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUE

For the analysis of the interviews, the author based his process on Saldaña's (2013) first and second cycle of coding. For the first cycle, it was used the descriptive coding that allows the author to highlight the most important and useful data of each interview, resulting in a summarized version of the data collected during the interviews. In the second cycle, after collecting and summarizing the information, the data was put into categories that gave answers to the research questions.

In the first part of the cycle, the author was looking for every interesting piece of each of the interviews to have a perspective on their experiences, feelings, knowledge, and opinions. Reading and taking into consideration all the important aspects of the interviews helped to understand which details were essential for giving consistent answers to the questions of the research.

After the first phase of reading and highlighting the interesting parts of the interviews, the author started coding the information. This second phase was focused on building codes, that give precise answers to the research questions. Throughout this phase, the goal was to take what the interviewees said and construct it into one or more codes in form of phrases, that by themselves formed an answer. These codes were sustained by some of the extracts the author gathered from the interviews.

3. DATA ANALYSIS

Below are three detailed tables, each one with its research question and codes. In the next table, are presented the answers to the research question number one:

1. Which are the different ways short video marketing is being used by small businesses on TikTok.

Answers	Extracts from the interviews
Adapting their small businesses to the trends to promote the service or product, without losing coherence.	<p>« The music is essential as well ... because there are viral music and more known. However, I look for music that makes senses. » (I.1)</p> <p>« Always using the trends and adapt to the niche of the business. » (I.4)</p>
Showing the most real part of the business to increase the proximity between them and the client.	<p>“TikTok ends up being a more informal tool, so businesses can create a closer relationship with the consumer and the people end up relating to your face.” (I.4)</p> <p>“TikTok helps to humanize the brand because you can show a more human side, doing whatever you want for the brand.” (I.10)</p>
Promoting their products subtly.	<p>“I found it more interesting when an influencer is doing advertisement, but it doesn’t look like an ad, it looks like a normal video but then in the middle has an ad.” (I.1)</p> <p>“I believe that the TikTok audience doesn’t like to see ads in the app, I try that my videos don’t look like a company, but at the same I want them to promote my product.” (I.2)</p> <p>“We managed on an indirect way to make the person want our product,</p>

	<p>doing some videos of looks, or showing some new product.” (I.6)</p>
<p>Using TikTok’s algorithm to deliver their content to an audience that doesn’t follow them</p>	<p>“It suggests videos from people that you don’t follow but that has the interest as you, so it helps to reach a lot of people.” (I.3)</p> <p>“The platform is made for thousands and thousands of people to be able to see a single video and not just be focused on the people they follow.” (I.5)</p>
<p>Delivering a more meaningful message, allowing them to entertain and create a deeper relationship with their target audience, by using storytelling</p>	<p>“The truth is that I try to get people to understand my storytelling, collection, or brand... and I try to make launches a little more strategic... and that people can understand my side and that really want to buy... but listen to me as a story and as a vibe...” (I.8)</p> <p>“For my segment, storytelling can’t miss while I create content... because I like people to understand the context... what is being done... in what way... for them to be able to connect and relate to me as a brand” (I.13)</p>
<p>Giving a face to the brand and using voice-over, allowing them to engage with the audience</p>	<p>“Make it a little more personal for example... they listen to my voice, showing my face, use it more for the funny side” (I.5)</p> <p>“As a rule, I always use my voice because I think it calls a lot more people... I try to show my face” (I.7)</p>
<p>Spending some time, daily, on TikTok, to study what is working or not on the platform now</p>	<p>“I spend hours of my day on Tiktok, it’s the social network where I spend the most time and I see trends and see what other brands are doing” (I.4)</p> <p>“Always be aware of the moment... never fall behind in terms of viral songs that are trending right now... the trends, the challenges... all of these even if it has nothing to do with my brand” (I.5)</p>
<p>Connecting through lives with the audience, showing them, live, how the products or services are done</p>	<p>“Making lives... I can show my face, talk to people they know that’s my voice... that I’m making the products for them...” (I.7)</p> <p>“Another thing that has also given me some followers that I don’t know if it’s important the lives... when I feel like I</p>

	haven't published videos for a long time, and they end up not having a lot of interaction... I put myself in the lives ... sometimes I spend 2 hours there or more ... which is where people start to realize how is that I do the work in real-time" (I.11)
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Table 16 - Phase two of data analysis: First research question

Source: Made by the researcher

As evidenced in the previous table, the business owners have eight different ways of using TikTok for their communication strategy. In the table below, are shown the answers to the research question number two:

2. How the impacts of short video marketing strategies on TikTok are measured and evaluated by business owners?

Answers	Quotes of interviews
Analyzing basic TikTok metrics	<p>"On the settings of the video you can analyze how many views it has, the time the video was seen, the likes" (I.4)</p> <p>"I normally use TikTok's own metrics to analyze, it's very complete" (I.6)</p>
Analyzing the number of sales and the number of interested clients	<p>"The increase in sales, and increase in messages from new customers for sure" (I.1)</p> <p>"The views, likes, comments, orders, and the messages I receive are indicators" (I.7)</p>
Analyzing the number of shares of the video	<p>"If I see that it went very well, it's noticeable because there are many shares too" (I.2)</p> <p>"Above all, also the number of sharing of the video itself" (I.13)</p>
Analyzing the traffic on the website of the brand after launching a video	<p>"Sometimes I will see after publishing the video how many people entered the site to see if they were really interested in the product" (I.2)</p>

	<p>"I use linktree for that... to evaluate the number of people entering the site... the number of sales I'm generating..." (I.12)</p>
Analyzing the new followers on other social media after launching a video	<p>"Whenever I post a video, I think there is a relation, right? because I post the video and I gain 200 followers" (I.7)</p> <p>"When I post videos on TikTok... when they have many views and they are successful, I feel ... I gain, without exaggerating, about 15-20 followers" (I.14)</p>
Creating polls on Instagram stories allows business owners to estimate how many clients are coming from TikTok	<p>"I also sometimes put some ... some polls on Instagram stories and there are a lot of people who say they came from... almost everyone came from TikTok" (I.1)</p> <p>"On Instagram, I also ask... I ask some questions on Instagram stories... to ask... to know where they came from Instagram, from TikTok, from an ad and so on ... but most of my clients came from TikTok" (I.5)</p>

Table 17 - Phase two of data analysis: Second research question.

Source: Made by the researcher

As indicated in the second table, business owners always find practical and simple ways to measure their results. Lastly, in the last table the answers to the research question number three are demonstrated:

3. Which are the outcomes of short video marketing strategies on TikTok in small business activities?

Answers	Quotes of interviews
Traffic is generated to Instagram, or to their website, to finalize their purchase	"I feel that a lot of people come from TikTok to Instagram to order... after, after seen videos on TikTok about some products" (I.1)

	<p>“In terms of results, I felt that in terms of sales ... sales increase a lot in fact ... I can say that, more or less, I don’t want to say 50% but 45% of my sales are from TikTok” (I.4)</p>
Increased visibility and number of customers	<p>“Probably if it wasn't for TikTok, I wouldn't grow so fast or would probably never ... reach the level I'm at today” (I.1)</p> <p>“70% of the new customers that we have, or of the people who access our site, come from TikTok ... in September when I started to focus, I had 130 followers and since then we have grown a lot ... Now we are 13k” (I.13)</p>
Proximity with customers and increase trust	<p>“They connect with you, with your space, your story, so it's much easier, they have that closeness, they come to you” (I.9)</p> <p>“I think that's where it comes from, people see that I've always been publishing constantly, and they see that I love what I do, that I have a disposition, that I have evolution and I think it's from there that people want to make an appointment with me” (I.14)</p>
Reaching international markets	<p>“I managed to reach many more countries and after creating TikTok for my store, I was able to make more international sales” (I.6)</p> <p>“They videos manage to reach a much larger audience, outside Portugal and everything else” (I.11)</p>

Table 18 - Phase two of data analysis: Third research question

Source: Made by the researcher

In this last table, is evident that the main outcomes of using TikTok for small businesses are sales and clients. In the next chapter, the insights of the previous table are going to be explained more deeply as the findings of the dissertation.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Using the codes from the previous table, in this chapter the author highlights the main findings of this thesis and at the same time gives answers to the research questions of the dissertation.

The main feature TikTok offers to small businesses is the ability to reach people that don't follow them

After using the platform for some time, the business owners interviewed were able to figure out the algorithm of TikTok, allowing them to take advantage of the way the app delivers the content. Some of the interviewees expressed their frustration with other platforms because, while on other social media platforms more followers mean more reach, on TikTok not necessarily. According to the business owners, if a brand-new business wants to join TikTok, they should worry first about the content they are creating and not about building a strong fan base. By combining the right content, the duration of the videos, and the hashtags business owners can maximize the performance of their videos, reaching a broader audience.

One of the biggest issues of small businesses on other platforms is that they need to pay for advertisements to get their content to be seen by others other than their followers. Business owners that were interviewed mentioned that,

with the expansion of TikTok, they can find their target on this platform and reach them more effectively without having to spend money on ads. Many of the interviewees, described TikTok as a platform for free marketing and advertisement because of the organic reach the app has.

Small businesses need to focus on being genuine and transparent on TikTok rather than on being professional

Based on the experience of the business owners, and the segment in which they operate, the community of TikTok seems to appreciate the more human side of the business. Whenever they produce a more personal video, where they are being honest and real, the videos will have a better performance, according to this research' respondents. They mentioned that TikTok gives space for the business owners to adapt their content to be more fun, relax, and personal, changing their corporative identity for a more informal one. This identity allows them to create and strengthen the relationship with their clients, and at the same time build trust in their businesses. During the interviews, some examples of videos came up, including packaging orders, backstage, or unboxings.

Furthermore, TikTok launched the feature of the live session and since then the small businesses interviewed started to take advantage of it as well. The business owners expressed how live sessions allow them to interact with their audience in real-time, answer their doubts, their curiosities, and more.

Building on the data gathered in the interviews, with this feature the business owners can connect with the audience beyond their products or services.

During their time on TikTok, business owners were able to identify that TikTok users don't appreciate pushy marketing. According to them, the community sees the platform as a channel to support other businesses rather than a massive consumption app. This has led to other ways of selling and promoting a product without the audience knowing that purpose is making sales. They claimed that small businesses should be able to raise a desire from the unconscious part of the consumer's mind and the best way of getting there is by producing the right content for the audience on TikTok.

Small businesses need to produce the right content to optimize their engagement and interaction rate

It is possible to identify key elements that business owners must include in their videos to captivate the viewers and boost the algorithm. During the interviews, the strategies for content creation that stand out the most were the voice-over and storytelling. From the data collected, it was clear that these two are the ones that engage the most with the users. They come together to entertain and catch the user to stay on the video longer. Some of the business owners stated that, the longer the user stays, the more interaction the video will get. Additionally, they recommend having a face associated with the business, this will help the user to easily identify and humanize the brand. This

combined with good light and high quality will push the video to a bigger audience.

On other hand, business owners are paying attention to the trends that are currently famous on TikTok to adapt them to their businesses. According to the respondents, this will help the business to stay on top of the things that are happening on the app and will improve their possibility of appearing on more for you pages.

If something is clear in the research setting of this dissertation, is that businesses don't need to be experts on the subject, or they don't need to hire a marketing team to succeed on TikTok. Like any other platform, is continuously changing and improving. That's the main reason why business owners commented on investing their time in analyzing what is trending on TikTok, what is working, and what is not. Taking other brands as examples is an effective way of doing this daily research.

TikTok's insights are enough for analyzing the performance of small businesses on the platform

After analyzing the interviews with the business owners, it became evident that, on TikTok, businesses don't need to worry too much about the

analysis of their videos. The business owners of this study are very pragmatical and they don't have specific metrics, they evaluate the impact of their videos through the information that is available on the platform. The simplicity of the app makes it very easy for anyone to understand whether they are uploading the right content or not.

In the empirical context of this research, a video is successful if companies have an increase in followers and sales. Getting a lot of views, comments and shares can help in the analysis of the performance but will not determine if there were outcomes in terms of clients and sales. They also commented on how going viral doesn't necessarily mean sales. For them, the viralization of the videos helps the business to grow a social media presence, which will later contribute to other outcomes.

TikTok results in different outcomes for businesses, all contributing to more sales and clients at the end

Despite the business owners talking about many benefits throughout the interviews, sales are the fuel of any business. For the business owners considered in this study, TikTok turns the brand more accessible and genuine, resulting in a bigger and more trustful fan base. All these strategies to get the users to see the real side of the business help the brand to get visibility and consequently, get more clients. In some of the interviews, the business owners commented on the possibility of reaching international markets, that with

other social media platforms can be a difficult challenge. From their business point of view, the biggest outcome of TikTok is building a client portfolio that will lead to more sales.

In recent years, the world has seen the rise of new video apps. TikTok is nowadays the center of so many marketing strategies due to the support the platform gives to small business owners (Anderson, 2020). Now, the author will discuss the contributions of his findings to the literature. As the popularity of TikTok is recent, most of the findings are related to the literature from the perspective of small businesses.

As explained by Zhao (2020) TikTok is an algorithm-driven app. Zhao (2020) commented on how TikTok's algorithm understands users' preferences making the app more and more addictive. During the interviews, business owners expressed their knowledge on how the mechanism of TikTok was able to deliver their content to a broader audience, but at the same time to users that might be interested in their business. This is possible because of the knowledge TikTok has over the interests of its users. If business owners can create content that the algorithm identifies as interesting for a specific target audience, they might reach clients easily. In the context of this study, interesting content for the business owners mean, genuine, informative, and entertaining content.

Throughout the interviews, none of the business owners had sustained knowledge about how the algorithm of the app works. However, Xiao et al. (2020) explanation of how the algorithm works, fits what the business owners seem to assume about how the app works. During the data collection process, the author was able to understand the point of view of the business owners, that is, the more interaction you get, the more TikTok will spread the video and the more reach it will get.

According to Zhao (2020), TikTok creates a space for more fun and relaxed content. This integration fits the space small businesses need to be more fun and to adopt another identity on this platform, turning them more fun, reliable, and relaxed. One of the main insights the author got from the interviews was the attitude of closeness the brands have towards their customers, they become more than just a company. According to the data, users join TikTok to be entertained, this means that mass communication might be not the best option for a brand entering the platform. The business owners of this research, use their creativity to produce content that unconsciously will sell their products or services, but without the feeling of advertisement and pushy marketing.

This new perspective that TikTok gave to businesses has been advantageous for creating deeper relationships between the customers and the small businesses. Mou (2020), identified different levels of interaction, the first one being emotions. As described earlier, using strategies such as voice-over,

allow small businesses to show a more genuine and real part of their brand and this helps them to channel the affection of the users.

Vizcaíno-Verdu and Abidin (2022) mentioned that the use of trending audios has generated innovative ways to build relationships among users. As stated above, the impact of audio strategies on the performance of the video is significant. Nevertheless, the literature does not suggest any audio strategy for small businesses to connect more with the audience. Conforming to the business owners that were interviewed for this study, using voice-over or audios that are trending on TikTok, is one of the best ways of getting more attention to their videos. Doing voice-over enhances the storytelling and most of the users are captivated for a longer period whenever they are hearing someone telling a story. Furthermore, trending audios are easy to identify by the users, so it's more probable for them to stop scrolling on a video that they recognized.

Regarding the strategies that were found by Mou (2020), he identified three types of marketing campaigns that can be used for promoting products on TikTok. These campaigns were proven to be successful among the different brands that were studied, however, they don't seem suitable for the sample of small businesses that were interviewed for this research. The categorization of the strategies in the literature was mainly focused on the budget and financial capacity of the companies, as important as the budget is for small businesses, they are too complex and specific for this type of venture. One thing that was

clear after talking with the business owner is that small business doesn't worry too much about KPIs, metrics, or strategies. According to their experience, what works better with the platform is being yourself and producing the content that you like. Having that said, small businesses can take advantage of TikTok without worrying too much about creating a perfect strategy regarding budgeting, content creation, and campaign releasing.

According to Chen et al. (2019), TikTok videos can be analyzed for their time-variant or invariant features. These features are later correlated to understand their impact on the performance of the videos. However, the small businesses that were interviewed, don't consider these correlation indicators in the evaluation of performance. The way they analyze the indicators is very simple and is based on the insights the platform gives them. As in the literature (Chen et al., 2019), the business owners interviewed, recognized that the followers don't have a strong correlation with the performance of the videos, so they don't consider them as important as the number of shares, comments, views, and average watch time. On another hand, for most of the small businesses in the research settings of this study, these indicators don't mean anything if they don't bring them sales or followers to other platforms.

According to the empirical settings, small businesses can increase results like sales, reach, and clients by using a more genuine and fun strategy. With zero budget and marketing specialists, business owners can put together a strong strategy for their brands on TikTok.

After discussing the findings of this research and the literature, the author was able to recognize similarities between the studies that now exist about TikTok and the experience of the small businesses, of the empirical settings, using the platform. Nonetheless, small business strategies and performance are not common in academic articles.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, the author presents the main conclusions of this research. This master thesis was based on the study of TikTok as a tool for small businesses, where fifteen business owners contributed with their experience and opinions concerning the app.

TikTok is the platform of the moment, that even the big companies and governments are joining. With the development of this dissertation, it becomes clear that TikTok has unique features that can boost small businesses like no other social media platform before. The main reason why the app is changing how social media works, is because of its algorithm. Small businesses entering TikTok are not limited to the people that follow them. If they produce the right content, it can be delivered to a large number of users that can later become customers of the brand.

TikTok provides a distinctive space for small businesses to communicate with their audiences in ways that would not be possible on other social media platforms. It has allowed business owners to create and implement innovative identities and strategies to engage and connect more with the users. This platform embraces a stronger relationship with the audience that can lead to more trust and loyalty toward the brand.

Beyond exhibiting products, TikTok's main purpose is to entertain the audience. Small businesses on TikTok look for innovative and entertaining ways of promoting their offer. This entertainment comes along with businesses being genuine and transparent. One of the biggest advantages TikTok brings to small businesses is the confidence of being themselves on the platform. Users get so comfortable with their storytelling, voice, or face, that they start creating a strong bond with the brand.

TikTok can be the opportunity small businesses need to boost their brands. Targeting the right people on social media can be difficult, however, this platform gives another perspective to business owners. While on other social media channels campaigns need to follow demanding strategies and organization, on TikTok, successful business owners follow their instinct and feelings for content creation.

All things considered, TikTok is a platform with exponential growth that can be used for more than lip-syncing and dance. TikTok offers small businesses a level of closeness that other social media platforms don't have, and that is vital for creating proximity with the clients. More and more, small businesses are entering TikTok in the search for new ways of showing their products subtly. TikTok not only helps business owners to boost their brands in terms of sales and clients but also supports small businesses to create and improve their social media presence by showing the most genuine side of the business.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

What captivated the author to write about TikTok was the lack of research that still exists. There is not much scientific data concerning small businesses and TikTok, the absence of information was one of the biggest limitations when developing the thesis. The usage of TikTok is complex and it involves a variety of perspectives that can change the direction of the study. The author found some limitations in trying to address the whole phenomenon of TikTok, so this research is specifically focused on one of the many scenarios that exist within TikTok, being small businesses.

In the future, I will suggest for new researchers interested in this topic, go more in-depth about the hashtag strategy the business owners use to reach a broader audience, and how the hashtags work within the platform. From the interviews, some of the business owners stated that sometimes their videos went viral with hashtags but other times without them as well, and the author believes it's worth studying it. Additionally, an analysis of the most popular videos of small businesses will be valuable to understand why those kinds of videos go viral. Lastly, studying the relation between marketing efforts and outcomes for small businesses on TikTok will be complementary to this thesis.

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