HOW DO UNIVERSITIES COMMUNICATE ON TIKTOK?

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
	To determine how universities worldwide use TikTok, 7,880 TikTok posts from 118 institutional university profiles were reviewed and categorized through a systematic review. The results show an initial effort by universities to search for institutional content, although from 2021 onwards an increase in playful content focused on the university community is reported, making evident the need to exploit the platform with the corresponding narrative style, aesthetics, and particular times, thus connecting more efficiently with its target audience and betting on consolidating this community both in the real and digital terrain.

1. Introduction

Currently, in university classrooms, there is a preeminence of *Generation Z*, also known as *Centennials*: determined to use mobile broadband internet connections, a marked difference between the previous cultural model, i.e., that of the *Millennials* (Baysal, 2014; López & Gómez, 2021; Prensky, 2001; Turner, 2015).

A single generation, despite leading a fully digital life, is not yet decisive in the flow of information available online but makes use of what is available and produced to give quick answers to specific and practical questions. However, some have already begun to stand out as content creators and, therefore, as *influencers* (Doardi, 2021).

This is a segment of users that assigns a large part of their information consumption, leisure, socialization, entertainment, and even the construction of their brand to the digital sphere, (Álvarez, et. al., 2019; Lu, 2021; Masanet *et al*, 2020), a process that has reported a notable increase after COVID-19 (Del Moral et al, 2021).

According to We Are Social's January 2023 report in conjunction with Hootsuite, the average global Internet user (ages 16-64) spends nearly 7 hours online daily and the average social network user spends just over 2.5 hours daily. That time is spent on finding information (almost 60%), keeping in touch with family and friends (over 50%), keeping up with the news (over 50%), watching videos, movies, and TV shows (almost 50%) and searching for information on how to do things, i.e., tutorials and *'unboxing'* (almost 50%).

In other words, it is no longer only the Internet, but digital platforms, that are becoming increasingly important channels through which younger users carry out various activities in their lives.

The report also highlights that TikTok is positioned as the most used monthly platform globally (23.28 hours per month), followed by YouTube (23.09 hours per month), although it also warns that on average *Centennials* frequently use 8 platforms and networks, which they alternate according to need and time.

TikTok stands out as a digital platform made up mostly of 'Generation Z' users (Li et al 2019; Shuai et al, 2019) although an increase in *Millennials* and *Generation X* users was reported throughout 2020, certainly because of the first radical confinements on a global scale by COVID-19. However, by the third quarter of 2022, the majority active presence of *Centennials* remains at almost 60% of total platform users (Kemp, 2022).

Although, like other platforms, TikTok allows any business, company, or institution that wishes to contract advertising, in this case, they insist that the content must respect the message code established by the user community. In other words, advertising should not interrupt the user experience and should have the appearance and dynamism of an organic publication (Sidorenko, 2021).

This is an important aspect as TikTok stands out for its dynamism, speed of production, content consumption, and creative demand, many times higher than other platforms (Li et al, 2019), thus highlighting narrative elements such as playbacks, funny stories, and mind-soothing content (Yu-Liang et al, 2019), whose recommended length is below one minute, which is an innovation towards what can be defined as a "micro-narrative model" regardless of the content category (Chaoudhary *et al*, 2020; Cortés *et al*, 2023).

However, in the case of higher education institutions, the study by Alcolea & Núñez (2021) on the incorporation of the social network TikTok into universities is significant as it concludes that in 2012 only 8.7% of Spanish private universities had a profile on Instagram when in 2020 100% already had an institutional profile. It also found that in 2021 only 5.7% of Spanish private universities were using TikTok's communicative potential, which raised a question about the future of TikTok in this area. This raises some questions a priori: what does it take for an university profile to be successful on TikTok? Are there specific keys or content that all universities should develop to effectively connect with their target audience? should universities work on TikTok to increase their digital reach?

Given the rapid popularity of TikTok, in the field of higher education and its digital communication especially in front of young and very young audiences (Peña-Fernández et al, 2022), 4 objectives have been established in this research:

> O1. To study the formulas used by young audiences on TikTok to attract prospective university students.

O2. To study whether the narrative imposed by the TikTok user community forces universities to use entertainment formulas in their publications to achieve greater reach and engagement.
O3. To find out the areas or topics that universities aim to make more visible on their TikTok accounts.
O4. To examine whether TikTok can eventually become an educational booster for universities.

2. Methodology

2.1. Design

The present study has a mixed methodological approach, and its main objective is focused on trying to demonstrate the relevance of the active presence of universities through this platform, since, according to its promoters, it is more of an entertainment platform than a simple social network (Sherman, 2022). This is an exploratory study in which the specific variables are not known, so the qualitative approach would make it possible to specify some considerations regarding the objectives established (Creswell, 2012).

2.2. Sample and Data Collection

The content search was carried out manually through the *app* itself, based on the terms "Universidad" and "University" to find out how many of these institutions had a profile up to the first quarter of 2022, a period in which, according to the "TikTok What's Next 2022" report[1] prepared by the platform itself, interest in new knowledge and the interweaving of community and marketing were established and growing as strategies in this channel. These language parameters were set since English and Spanish are the most spoken languages in the world, according to Berlitz Mexico (2020).

From the search using the term "University", Cornell, Harvard, Yale, and Princeton universities were excluded, as there were several profiles with similar names, but without verification and content, which did not allow their integrity to be determined. At the end of 2022 Cornell and Harvard finally made their profiles operational on the platform with a verified seal and were also left out of the sampling period.

Similarly, those universities with a profile and followers, but without any publications, were left out of the sample.

The entire process has been manual, and the categorization of the contents corresponds, as already mentioned, to the proposal of the authors after a systematic review of each profile. In other words, the 7,880 publications registered in the 118 university profiles obtained (total work sample) were reviewed one by one by the researchers, thus consolidating the data in the corresponding analysis tables.

According to the educational portal Truowl (s.f.), there are more than 25,000 universities in the world, so the study sample does not even represent 1% of this universe, although it should also be noted that although the total is unknown, the number of universities in TikTok is dramatically lower than the number of institutions in the world and that the keywords chosen were intended to obtain as many results as possible on this platform. This reaffirms the exploratory nature of the study.

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[1] See https://newsroom.tiktok.com/es-es/tiktok-desvela-las-tendencias-de-la-plataforma-para-el-ano-2022

Table 1. Summary of the universities consulted and their representation in the study sample

Territory and search key	Total universities	Porcentage of total work sample (n=118)
North America ("University")	20	17%
North America ("Universidad")	20	17%
Africa, Asia & Oceania ("University")	10	8%
Africa, Asia & Oceania ("Universidad")	0	0
Europe ("University")	27	23%
Europe ("Universidad")	9	7%
South and Central America ("University")	0	0
South and Central America ("Universidad")	32	28%
	118	100

Source(s): Own elaboration, 2024.

2.3. Data Analysis

Following the qualitative methodology proposed by Sidorenko et al (2022) and Alonso et al (2023), the data analysis tables have been performed only based on the records obtained through the review on the platform, with the understanding that, with more precise searches such as the specific names of the institutions, for example, some additional profiles could be obtained, thus warning that there are possibly university accounts that were not taken into account in the present work.

The results have been consolidated in each table in alphabetical order and not by country or any other indicator. The cases of Africa, Asia, and Oceania have been grouped in the same table due to the reduced number of samples. South America and Central America followed the same model, being grouped in a single table.

As a main limitation, it should be noted that the search within the platform can be very difficult at times as it does not report "efficient" results according to the user's requirements. The technical reasons why some profiles containing the keywords determined for the present survey do not appear in the results are unknown, forcing the user to access them through a direct search.

The following variables were considered for the construction of these analysis tables:

- Total publications up to the maximum observation date
- Evidence of verification seal
- Total number of likes
- BIO Characteristics (formal - FM, satirical - ST, no information - NIN)

The total number of followers has not been taken into consideration since the current usage and consumption habits of TikTok users encourage them to consume more content in the main *feed* (updated recommendations from the algorithm) since this is the default interface when entering the platform.

These contents are promoted by the algorithm by the *engagement* rate they receive, so the "likes" indicator is more decisive.

To determine the content categories, the methodology proposed by Sidorenko et al (2022) was followed, following these parameters: *challenges/trends* (CHT), administrative information (INF-AD), events information (INF-EV), scholarships and economic benefits information (INF-ECON), job opportunities information (INF-JOB), academic offerings information (INF-AC), sports (SPT), university community protagonist (COM-UNI), entertaining (ENT), educational (EDU), corporate (CORP), religious (RELG), urban and tourist context /CTX-TUR).

Based on this, each content was visualized and categorized by the researchers, i.e., it is a subjective task that seeks to order the sample obtained to be interpreted through the analysis tables. Given a certain volume of publications, differentiating the content by the tone of the message makes it possible to understand the interests of each account, as well as to identify possible common patterns among others in the same or another geographic area.

Due to their length, simplified tables have been arranged in the results section based on other more extended tables, whose variables of analysis are: total universities, total publications, total unverified profiles, total verified profiles, type of 'bio' of these accounts and type of content (totals): Total universities,

total publications, total unverified profiles, total verified profiles, typology of the 'bio' of said accounts and typology of the contents (totals), however, the graphs correspond to the data of the extended tables, which are available through the following link.

Specifically, content analysis is proposed to subsequently delimit the content categories in which universities around the world (according to the established sample) invest time and effort to build their image and communication through TikTok.

3. Results

Finally, of the university profiles obtained in the search process, the territories of North America (tables 2 and 3), Europe (tables 5 and 6), and South and Central America (table 7) had the highest number of active accounts.

Table 2. North American university profiles on TikTok under the search term "University" through the first quarter of 2022.

Total universities	Total publications	Total verified profiles	Total profiles not verified	Bio typology (totals per profile)	Content typology (totals per profile)
20	1.379	8	12	ST= 2 FM= 18 NIN= 0	CORP= 18 EDU= 4 ENT= 19 COM-UNI= 18 CHT= 3 INF-AD= 9 INF-ECON= 1 INF-EV= 1 INF-AC= 2 INF-JOB= 0 SPT= 16 CTX-TUR= 4 CULT= 4 RELG= 0

Source: own elaboration, 2024.

The typology of content differs geographically, and even with more specific identity elements such as language. In graphs 1 and 2 (North America), the records in English show a tendency to create mainly entertaining content, and secondly, corporate content, with the preeminence of the university community, and where heritage and sports activities are equally visualized.

This contrasts with the records in Spanish, where there is a predominance of corporate, informative-academic, and educational publications over those with a purely entertaining focus without any specific additional objective.

Figure 1. Typology of the content in which North American universities invest the most effort on TikTok under the search term "University" until the first quarter of 2022.
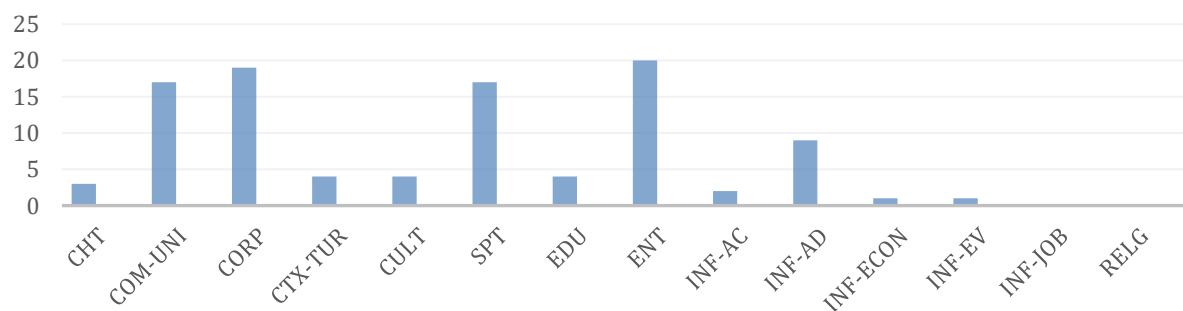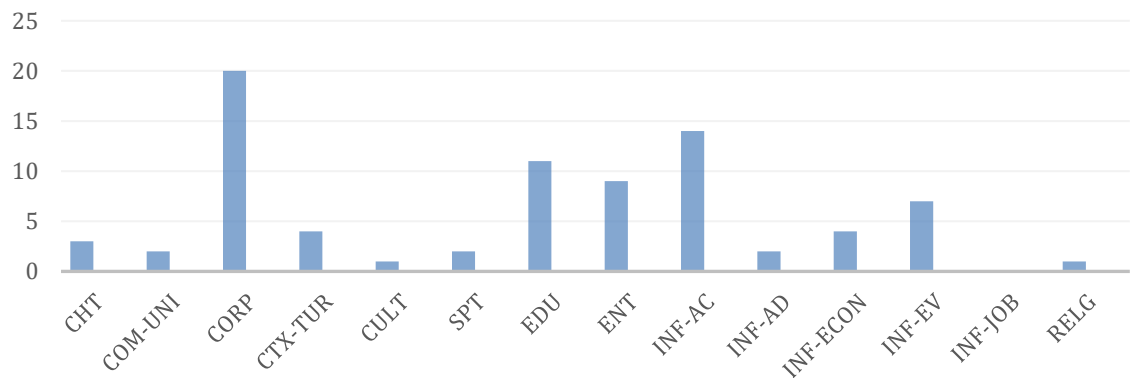

Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

The preliminary interpretation according to the data in Table 2 is that North American universities, in the English-speaking world, concentrate their communication efforts through TikTok on entertaining, corporate content, with a focus on the university community and an emphasis on sports, in that order. Meanwhile, in Table 3, North American Hispanic universities invest more effort in corporate communication, with equal emphasis on academic (academic offerings, programs, seminars) and educational (valuable content) messages.

Table 3. North American university profiles on TikTok under the search term "Universidad" through the first quarter of 2022.

Total universities	Total publications	Total verified profiles	Total profiles not verified	Bio typology (totals per profile)	Content typology (totals per profile)
20	1.657	1	19	ST= 0 FM= 19 NIN= 1	CORP= 20 EDU= 11 ENT= 9 COM-UNI= 2 CHT= 3 INF-AD= 2 INF-ECON= 4 INF-EV= 7 INF-AC= 14 INF-JOB= 0 SPT= 2 CTX-TUR= 0 CULT= 1 RELG= 1

Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

Figure 2. Typology of the content in which North American universities invest the most effort on TikTok under the search term "Universidad" until the first quarter of 2022.
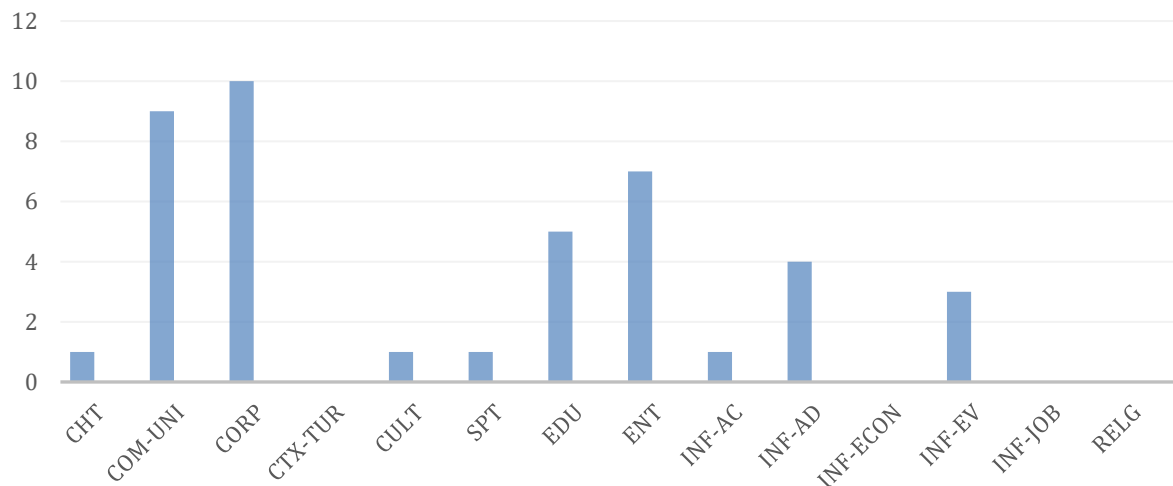

Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

According to Table 4 and Graph 3, in the Africa, Asia, and Oceania compendium, universities on TikTok focus in a similar proportion on corporate content, as well as on making the university community visible. In smaller proportions, there is content of an educational or entertaining nature, not to mention little or no consideration of other categories of content. It is also noteworthy that there is evidence of more verified profiles among the three territories analyzed, which has an impact on the veracity of the digital image of the institution, and therefore, of its message.

Table 4. Profiles of universities in Africa, Asia, and Oceania in TikTok under the search term "University" through the first quarter of 2022.

Total universities	Total publications	Total verified profiles	Total profiles not verified	Bio typology (totals per profile)	Content typology (totals per profile)
10	640	6	4	ST= 2 FM= 8 NIN= 1	CORP= 19 EDU= 5 ENT= 7 COM-UNI= 9 CHT= 1 INF-AD= 4 INF-ECON= 0 INF-EV= 3 INF-AC= 1 INF-JOB= 0 SPT= 1 CTX-TUR= 0 CULT= 1 RELG= 0

Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

Figure 3. Typology of the contents in which universities in Africa, Asia, and Oceania invest more effort in TikTok under the search term "University" until the first semester of 2022.
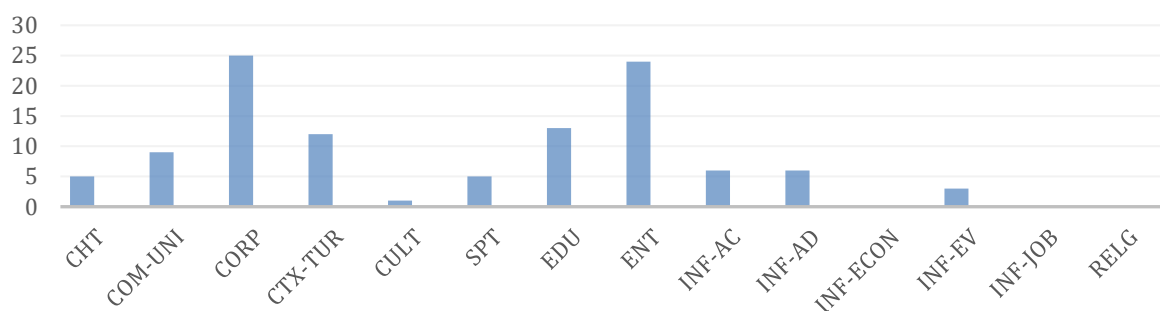

Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

Europe is a territory that is not so much vast as heterogeneous. However, to simplify, in "non-Ibero Europe" (Table 5 and Graph 4) it is possible to observe that the publication efforts are mainly inclined towards the corporate, followed by the intention to entertain, while in "Ibero Europe" (Table 6 and Graph 5) the corporate message prevails, followed by a balanced inclination towards entertainment or educational messages.

Similarly, there is a greater presence of unverified accounts and a formal proposal of information in the 'bio' of the profiles in both cases. However, in comparison with North American universities (Table 2), there is an increase in the production of content, especially in those institutions corresponding to "non-Ibero Europe".

Table 5. Profiles of universities in Europe on TikTok under the search term "University" until the first quarter of 2022.

Total universities	Total publications	Total verified profiles	Total profiles not verified	Bio typology (totals per profile)	Content typology (totals per profile)
26	2.254	9	17	ST= 1 FM= 25 NIN= 0	CORP= 26 EDU= 14 ENT= 25 COM-UNI= 10 CHT= 5 INF-AD= 6 INF-ECON= 0 INF-EV= 4 INF-AC= 6 INF-JOB= 0 SPT= 5 CTX-TUR= 13 CULT= 1 RELG= 0

Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

Figure 4. Typology of the content in which universities in Europe invest more effort in TikTok under the search term "University" until the first quarter of 2022.
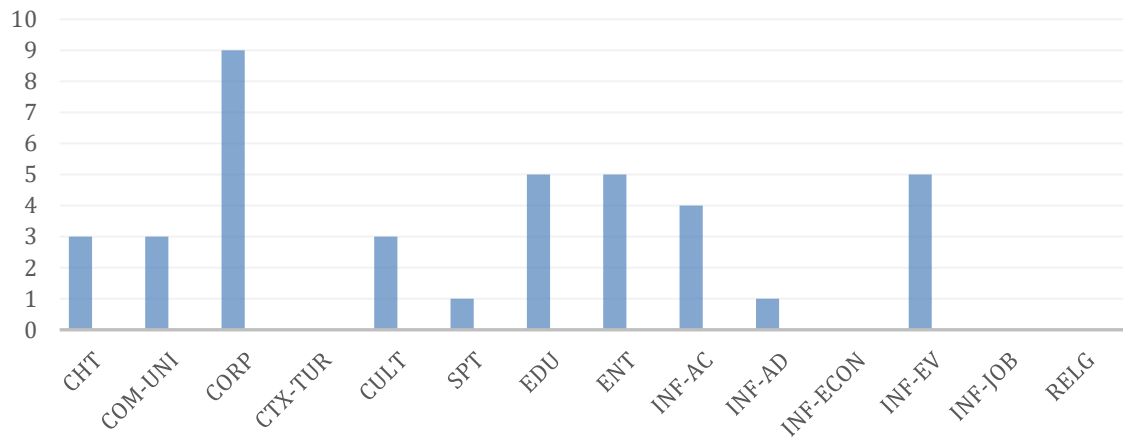

Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

Table 6. Profiles of universities in Europe on TikTok under the search term "Universidad" until the first quarter of 2022.

Total universities	Total publications	Total verified profiles	Total profiles not verified	Bio typology (totals per profile)	Content typology (totals per profile)
9	375	1	8	ST= 0 FM= 8 NIN= 1	CORP= 9 EDU= 5 ENT= 5 COM-UNI= 3 CHT= 3 INF-AD= 1 INF-ECON= 0 INF-EV= 5 INF-AC= 4 INF-JOB= 0 SPT= 1 CTX-TUR= 0 CULT= 2 RELG= 0

Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

Figure 5. Typology of content in which universities in Europe invest more effort in TikTok under the search term "Universidad" until the first quarter of 2022.
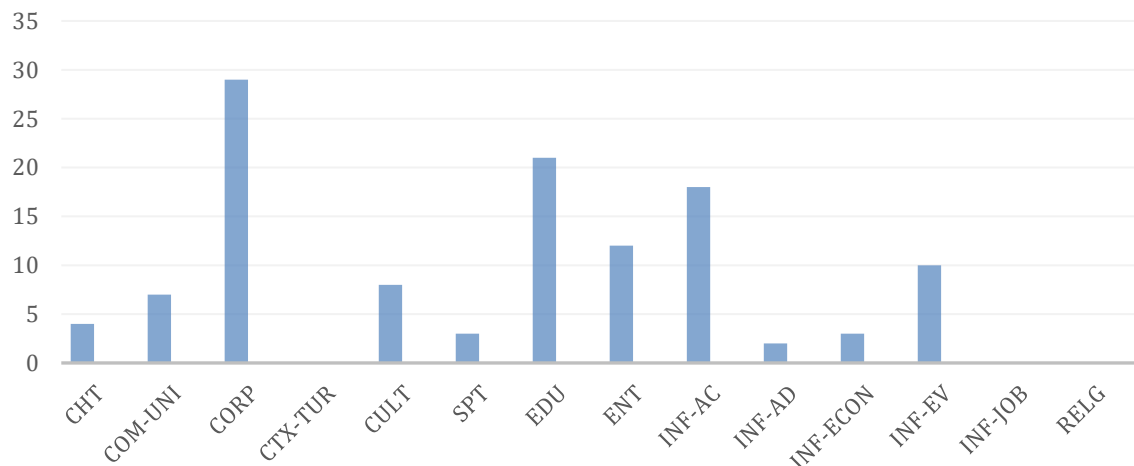

Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

Finally, universities in Central and South America (Table 7 and Graph 6) prioritize consolidating TikTok as a channel for corporate communication and, secondly, for education. To a lesser extent, content that values academic information stands out, and to a much lesser extent, the rest of the categories can be found.

Likewise, in general terms, as in previous cases, the formality of presenting the information of the 'bio' in the profiles, as well as the lack of importance in verifying them, is also evident.

Table 7. Profiles of universities in South and Central America in TikTok under the search term "Universidad" until the first quarter of 2022.
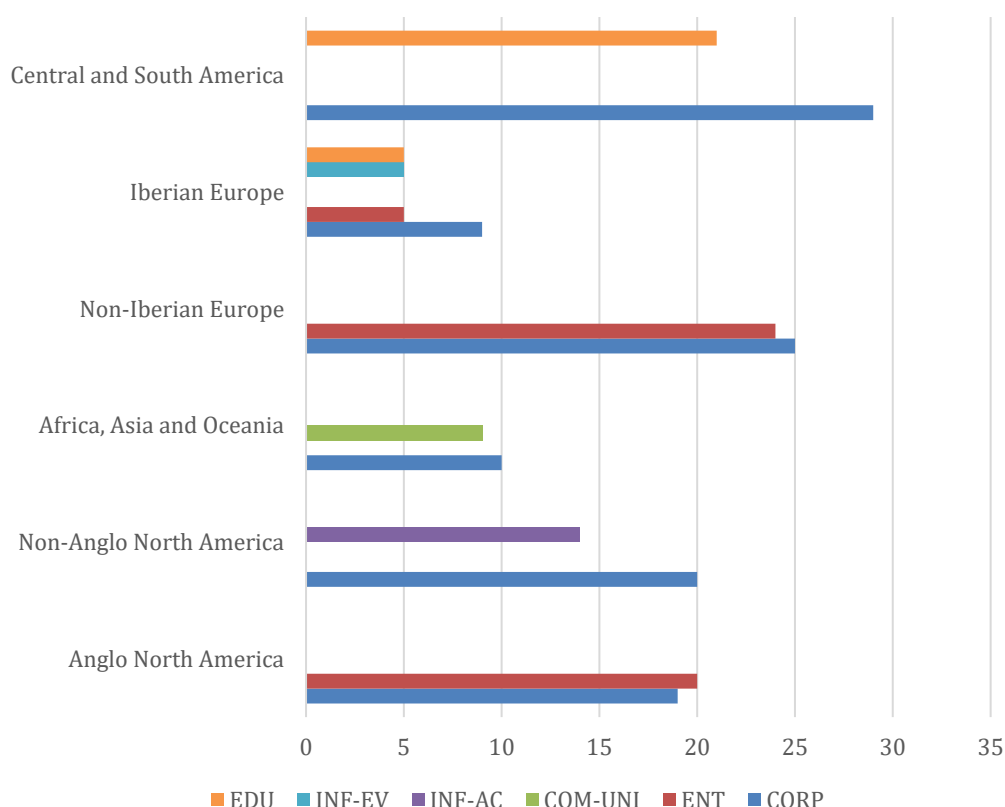

Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

In summary, as highlighted in Graph 7, on a global scale and in general terms, universities mainly develop corporate communication through TikTok and then focus on other tones or codes of the message such as entertainment, education (using the profile as a channel for reinforcement and offering valuable content), connection or visibility of the university community itself, i.e., students, etc.

Likewise, there is little interest in developing contents of a touristic nature as a strategy to attract a potential foreign public, considering that on many occasions, universities are nourished by internal mobility students, as well as external students from international programs such as Erasmus or similar.

There is also no noticeable development of marketing strategies or *Call to Action (*CTA) actions under the modality of specific '*trends*' or '*challenges*', so intrinsic to this platform and the emerging digital culture.

Figure 7. Summary of the content typology in which universities invest more effort in the world in TikTok under the search term until the first quarter of 2022.

Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The first evidence of the communication of universities around the world through TikTok is the appreciable heterogeneity in the message. Depending on the territory and possibly the social idiosyncrasy, the emphasis is on entertainment in some cases (North America - Graph 1, Europe - Graph 4), while in others the focus is on educational content (South and Central America - Graph 6) or on giving visibility to the university community, which after all is the driving force of these institutions (Africa, Asia, and Oceania - Graph 3).

However, one constant that prevails is to use TikTok primarily as a promotional and informative channel about the institution and its infrastructure, rather than about the academic offerings or the educational proposal itself. In other words, TikTok as the main channel for corporate and institutional communication.

This data may be of interest because a priori it contradicts the informal message code of the platform in question, imposed de facto by the user community: a communication far from traditional advertising formulas, with satirical tones and a search for a closer relationship between content creator and audience with an emphasis on entertainment and even satire (Sidorenko et al, 2022).

This type of content usually corresponds to the first publications of these profiles, in a context that in most cases corresponds to 2020 and 2021, i.e., there is a process of creative maturation and evolution in production (experimentation) where the codes and dynamics established by the platform are understood.

Possibly due to the action and pressure of the user community, universities are giving way to more dynamic content, less advertising, focusing on more organic and original creative processes, not only highlighting the value of the services and courses offered by each institution, but also providing an audiovisual offer that complements the university experience on the network.

Regions such as the Americas as a whole and a large part of Europe, stand out for a notable increase in their presence and activity through this platform, especially from that time curve of success already mentioned, which corresponds to the beginning of the third decade of the 21st century.

This process is not mere chance, i.e., beyond the fact that TikTok has undeniably been a trending platform because of the first confinements by COVID-19, what motivates universities to explore and experiment through it is the target audience.

Although it is not decisive, most of the active users through this channel correspond to the *Centennial* and *Alpha* segment (IAB, 2022), which is the current student population in their first courses and the future population of universities. In other words, the presence of universities through TikTok reaches a character of investment in image reach and provision of a privileged channel of information and communication with its natural segment of the public.

Consequently, and to answer the first research question on whether the popularity and strong presence of young audiences make TikTok a must-have platform for universities, the answer is affirmative with nuances.

While in America and the so-called "non-Iberian Europe" (due to the search terms) there is a clear interest on the part of the universities in establishing this platform as another channel for the communication strategy, in the particular case of Spain, not only there is little interest in this regard[2], but also little production of content by those involved, which presumably may be due to lack of knowledge (of the operation of the platform or the development of content adapted to the particular message code) or a lack of dedicated personnel in the communications departments.

Thus, according to the second research question on whether the narrative imposed by the community of TikTok users forces universities to apply entertainment formulas in their publications to achieve greater *engagement*, it is possible to specify, as shown in graphs 1 to 6, that on average the contents indicated as "entertaining" are very present in the results obtained through the search in English, while in the rest of the territories they do have presence and consideration as an asset, but rank third and fourth place as a category of content.

Comparatively, content of an entertaining nature has a greater impact and gathers more *engagement* on average concerning other categories, although universities have as a priority, as already indicated, to produce in the first instance (or at least this was the case at the beginning of their activity in TikTok in general terms) content of a specifically promotional-institutional nature.

To give some concrete examples, University of Arizona publications (No. 3 Table 2) such as "There's nothing like knowing you're going to love your new home!" (University of Arizona, 2022a), "This one goes out to all the seniors! There are 5 weeks until commencement!" (University of Arizona, 2022b) and "Which of these are you vibing with today?" (University of Arizona, 2022c) report better attention indicators than "Come visit the A-Center!" (University of Arizona, 2021b), "Another reason our campus is so special" (University of Arizona, 2021a) or "Welcome Home, Wildcats!" (University of Arizona, 2021c).

**Figures 8, 9, and 10.** Examples of publications in entertaining tone by the University of Arizona

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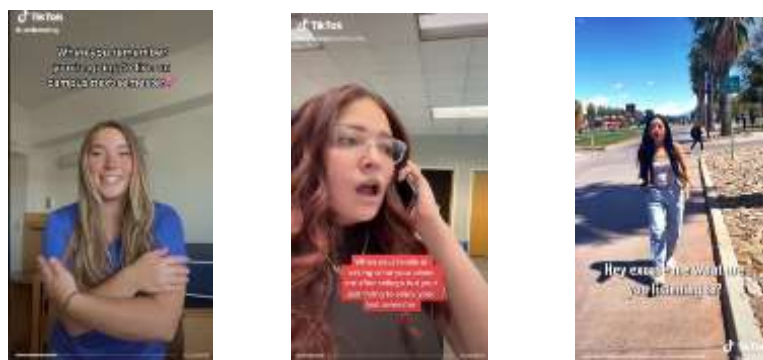
[2] Out of 83 registered universities in Spain (González, 2023), only 8 were on TikTok as of the first quarter of 2022.

Source: @uarizona (TikTok)

The same is true for the University of Sydney profile (No. 8, Table 4) with the case of "Just 5 more mins 😊" (University of Sidney, 2022c), "Guess who's back? In-person graduations! Get your mortarboards ready 🎓" (University of Sidney, 2021b) and "You asked for more running 🏃" (University of Sidney, 2022d) in contrast to "Getting ready to study be like ✏" (University of Sidney, 2021a), "Heard of the Uluru Statement? Teela Reid gets to the heart of it ahead of the 5th anniversary" or (University of Sidney, 2022a).

Figures 11, and 12. An example of a humorous/satirical publication about the student routine in the University of Sydney profile
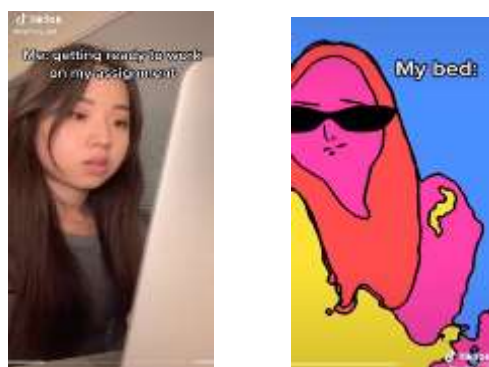
Source: @sydney_uni (TikTok)

Having said all this, it is possible to confirm that especially from the maturity of the universities' profiles, that is, when they understand the synergies and codes that the community of users establishes particularly through this platform, their production enters balance with those contents that seek to generate interest from the value they promote with an educational and/or informative-documentary sense.

Likewise, publications that pursue the direct participation of students through challenges or specific questions tend to have a greater return of attention from users, although in a contrasting way, they do not involve the first effort or a notable investment in the publication routine of these profiles.

In other words, making the student community the protagonists of the content and, therefore, indirect creators, has a greater reward in the form of *engagement* and, therefore, greater organic notoriety for the platform's algorithm, which has an impact on a greater reach for that university's profile.

By asking students directly on camera how they feel about starting the new course (University of Sidney, 2022b) or how they have done in the last week of exams (Universitat Politècnica VLC, 2022a) educational institutions gain a possibly more sincere response than through a traditional survey because first of all people like to gain relevance through a medium - and more so through the medium they use to be informed, entertained and to communicate - they can speak to the face of educational decision makers and they know that the content will last there as a document in case of any complaint or disagreement.

Likewise, it is possible to indicate that publications of a more didactic nature of the tutorial or short explanation type report high rates of attention and reward from the community of users of the platform and followers. In contrast, it is noticeable the little use by the universities of the resource of the '*challenge'* or the '*trend'*, so characteristic of TikTok, when trying to connect with students.

However, we do see some cases mainly associated with filters or songs/sounds that are trending, such as the case of the Universidad Politécnica de Valencia (UPV) (No. 9, Table 6) for the week of defense of Final Degree Projects (FDP) (Universitat Politècnica VLC, 2022b).

Figure 13. UPV publication based on the cumbia trend to illustrate the FDP defense week.

Source: @upv (TikTok)

The evidence of this study contrasts with the findings of Eizmendi and Peña (2022) who point out that universities prioritize through Twitter and Facebook a communication focused on academic and research results. TikTok was for a long time a showcase channel to show the institution and its benefits, especially in terms of infrastructure, services, and, to a lesser extent, academic offerings, which has not been the case since 2021, when a shift towards the entertaining formula can be seen.

In other words, so far there has been a process of experimentation that agrees with Castañeda *et al* (2023) that today universities do not have a clear strategy for the digitization process, and communication in such an environment seems to have obvious problems.

However, according to the fourth research question and concerning the data reflected in Figure 7 of the results, in Central America, there is a willingness to exploit this channel for educational purposes, as an extension of the work carried out in the classrooms of these institutions (which serves as a resource for attracting future students), except that they are not necessarily doing so in the most appropriate narrative terms for the platform, and therefore, for the target audience.

In other words, the intentionality shown is important, but more emphasis should be placed on disruptive and non-traditional formulas when dealing with educational content aimed at young audiences.

All the universities studied have developed educational content in their TikTok profiles, but these are smaller in proportion to other content categories, in which these institutions presumably gain greater visibility and interaction with their public.

The study by Alcolea & Nuñez (2021) shows the significant potential of the TikTok platform in the communication process undertaken by universities. For the year of their publication, the researchers proposed a scenario in which specifically the Spanish universities studied had a 100% presence on the Instagram network and reported interest and growth in TikTok: *If TikTok continues the upward trend, a promising future is predicted for it, and it is established as a future line of research* [...].

There are precedents regarding the development of digital content and strategies through emerging narratives applied to scientific and academic outreach such as the studies of Lu et al (2021), Rehm et al (2019), and Sidorenko et al (2022). As demonstrated in this research, TikTok universities have found a potentially key asset to take advantage of, because they have invested more efforts and time in working on branding and institutional communication.

Younger audiences have an important predilection for TikTok and, therefore, institutions such as universities must make the effort to have an active presence through it to become a reference (in the eyes of potential audiences) and connect more efficiently with the university community (target audience). Therefore, without a doubt, universities must develop specific strategies to connect with their target audience through these channels, and in this case, through TikTok with valuable content.

The social platform TikTok is presented as a benchmark for entertainment, and we have also been able to verify in this study that there are university accounts that are already implementing these contents in their publications, so it would be optimal to include this type of formulas within the communication strategy of universities.

The evidence demonstrated in this study confirms that, like Instagram, TikTok is a channel with a strong and active presence of young audiences who, to put it briefly, are the main target audience of universities. However, beyond the mere process of institutional or corporate communication, universities, like any other educational entity, have an excellent opportunity to reinforce through this digital alternative the educational work, especially of an informative nature.

The previous paragraphs have highlighted the thematic areas that different universities intend to make visible in their publications, such as educational topics, which can help other accounts to develop creativity to increase the reach of their content. Consequently, new fields of analysis and work remain open with the challenge of innovating in digital communication at an increasingly rapid and disruptive pace. At this point it would be good to develop new strategies to position TikTok university accounts as a source of learning and knowledge reinforcement, especially in terms of dissemination, which would also have an impact on knowledge transfer with professional agents, a task with wide margins of growth by many higher education institutions.

Universities and other educational agents must face the enormous challenge of improving the relationship with their target audience through this type of privileged channels, in which particularly the idea of community is very important and therefore strengthens the relationship between sender (universities, educational institutions) and receiver (students, university communities). A task that must be supported by a concise, clear message that invites participation, while being visually stimulating.

Understandably, the first communication intention of any actor in TikTok is aligned to the interests and tastes of most of the user community. However, universities, as educational institutions, should reinforce this identity through any channel used. In TikTok, engagement is an important variable because it determines the visibility and reach of the content in an organic way, but there must be a better balance between entertainment, corporate or institutional communication, and marketing (because yes, it is necessary to attract new students) and education. In the face of the "dictatorship of algorithms," this is a pending task for universities on this platform.

Future research should monitor not only the proposed evolution but also the effective quality of the content and the levels of user interaction with it, since this will also lead to a greater visibility of the audiovisual work and an increase in the organic reach of these publications, which will also strengthen the influence of universities and improve their brand.

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