



## SPANISH UNIVERSITIES ON TIKTOK The Effectiveness of Trends and Challenges in Generating Engagement

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### KEYWORDS

*TikTok*  
*Engagement*  
*University*  
*Viral trends*  
*Digital marketing*

### ABSTRACT

*This study analyses the use of TikTok by Spanish universities as an institutional communication tool, focusing on viral trends and their impact on engagement. From the 60 universities with a presence on TikTok, the 10 with the highest engagement were selected for a content analysis (N = 100) of their most popular videos. A mixed methodology, combining deductive and inductive coding, was used to classify content types and measure engagement rates. The results highlight the effectiveness of short videos aligned with viral trends.*

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## 1. Introduction

In recent years, TikTok has emerged as one of the most influential social media platforms, particularly among younger demographics. Initially launched in 2016, the platform has subsequently experienced exponential growth, with projections indicating that it will reach 2 billion users by 2024 (Business of Apps, 2024). The capacity for viral dissemination, coupled with the platform's creative and spontaneous tone, has attracted the attention of educational institutions, including universities, which are seeking novel methods to engage with students and prospective candidates through tailored engagement strategies for this network.

The utilisation of social media by universities is not a novel phenomenon. However, the distinctive characteristics of TikTok, including its brief, highly contagious video format, present a unique challenge for professionals engaged in marketing and branding. In contrast to platforms such as Facebook or Twitter, where content is typically more static, TikTok enables greater dynamism due to its capacity to present concise, ephemeral, and highly visual information, which are key elements that resonate with its youthful audience (Sidorenko & Herranz, 2022). Furthermore, TikTok is distinguished by its anti-marketing tone and unconventional narratives, where success is contingent upon eschewing traditional approaches and instead embracing more authentic content that more effectively resonates with the audience (Sidorenko et al., 2021; Sidorenko, 2022).

Despite the abundance of literature on the utilisation of social media as a branding and marketing instrument for academic institutions (Rutter et al., 2016; Hall & Peszko, 2016; Peruta & Shields, 2017), research on TikTok in particular remains scarce. Consequently, there is a necessity for further investigation into the efficacy of TikTok campaigns within the higher education context (Abdul & Mohd, 2023). The objective of this article is to make a contribution to this field by analysing how Spanish universities are using TikTok and the strategies that generate the most engagement on the platform.

### 1.1. Engagement, or Excitement for a Shared Project

The term engagement emerged in consumer behaviour and marketing studies and is used to describe the active and emotional participation of consumers with brands (Algesheimer et al., 2005). From a complementary approach, the philosophical anthropology of Julián Marías, engagement can be understood from the concept of collective claim, which he describes as an "ambiguous concept full of difficulties" (Marías, 1965). Marías elucidates how social conventions impel individuals towards a shared aspiration, defining collective pretension as a system of social tensions that not only has a psychological, but also a strictly social existence, mobilising individuals towards a specific direction. Similarly, engagement cannot be reduced to an isolated interaction between an individual and a brand; rather, it is the outcome of a complex social dynamic that influences the behaviour of all participants.

This process can be observed particularly in online brand communities, where engagement extends beyond passive consumption to encompass the co-creation of value between consumers and brands through meaningful interactions (Schau et al., 2009). As Marías (2016) asserts, engagement encompasses not only direct participation but also the establishment of an enduring relationship between consumers and brands, wherein mutual expectations are harmonised. Brodie et al. (2011) posit that engagement is a multidimensional process encompassing cognitive, emotional, and behavioural aspects. They further suggest that the impact of engagement can be measured not only by the number of observable interactions, such as likes or shares, but also by the depth of engagement generated by these relationships.

Marías, in his work *Breve tratado de la ilusión / A Short Treatise on Enthusiasm*<sup>1</sup>, also provides a key to understanding why individuals adhere to a common project: the capacity to generate enthusiasm. "Enthusiasm means anticipation. It primarily affects projects and, naturally, their terms" (Marías, 2018). Similarly, engagement fosters this anticipation and projection into the future, which strengthens the

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<sup>1</sup> In the original Spanish text, the word *ilusión* is used in the sense highlighted by the philosopher Julián Marías, who describes it as a hope projected towards the future, charged with enthusiasm and vital meaning. Although in English it has been translated as 'enthusiasm', this term fails to fully capture the depth and richness of *ilusión* in Spanish - as the philosopher explains in his work -, which represents a unique dimension of its Spanish meaning: the capacity to imagine and orient life towards projects with meaning and hope.

bond between brands and their consumers, maintaining engagement over time in view of some expectation.

Although quantitative metrics such as likes, shares and comments are useful for measuring visible aspects of engagement, it is important to note that these measurements offer only a partial view of the full phenomenon. As is the case with statistics in general, these metrics are unable to capture the structural complexity and social forces that are responsible for mobilising individuals towards a shared project. As Marías observes, "All of this, which can be the object of statistical analysis, informs me about a series of facts; however, these facts, in and of themselves, are unintelligible and, above all, do not constitute a structure" (Marías, 1965). Nevertheless, the utilisation of quantitative metrics remains a crucial element in the evaluation of the efficacy of digital strategies and in the comparison of the impact of content across disparate audiences. Zulli and Zulli (2020) have emphasised the pivotal role that these metrics play in the viral dissemination of content on platforms such as TikTok.

## ***1.2. Branding and Marketing in Higher Education Institutions***

In a similar manner to commercial brands, universities endeavour to foster engagement by cultivating profound and genuine connections with their students, employing branding and marketing strategies that are tailored to digital contexts. A bibliometric analysis of this field reveals that the co-creation of brand value with faculty and students has emerged as a significant trend since 2016. This approach proactively engages members of the university community in the construction of the brand identity of these institutions, thereby facilitating their differentiation and success in the market (Le et al., 2023). In order to reinforce the quality of these relationships, universities must adapt their marketing practices, promoting engagement, collaboration and the creation of shared value, particularly in digital environments, where it is crucial to involve their members at each stage of the marketing strategy (Jain et al., 2022).

In the context of intense competition within the higher education sector, it is crucial for institutions to reinforce their brand personality in order to foster a sense of connection with students. Previous research indicates that universities which project a sincere and dynamic brand are more likely to generate greater student identification and engagement, which in turn promotes supportive behaviours such as university promotion and participation in activities. Moreover, it is of paramount importance that branding strategies are aligned with credibility and trust in order to stimulate student engagement (Naheen & Elsharnouby, 2024).

In the context of digital marketing, the effective management of communication requires the adaptation of strategies to the specific characteristics of each platform (Jain & Rao, 2024). In general, it can be observed that a higher number of followers on social media platforms correlates with increased interaction. However, the frequency of posting or the length of the content does not appear to have a significant influence in this regard. These findings indicate that universities should prioritise the quality of content over the quantity of posts (Sörensen et al., 2023).

## ***1.3. TikTok as a Marketing Tool***

TikTok's emphasis on creativity and virality provides a distinctive opportunity for universities to not only disseminate their brand identity but also to cultivate a more intimate and interactive relationship with students. As indicated in the Digital 2024 Global Overview Report, the reach of TikTok in terms of advertising audiences has approached that of Instagram, which is indicative of the platform's expanding global influence. It is noteworthy that between July and September 2023, TikTok recorded the highest average time spent per user among the top social apps, with Android users spending 34 hours per month on the platform. This indicates that the typical TikTok user spends in excess of an hour per day on the platform, thereby underscoring its capacity to engage users on a sustained and continuous basis (Datareportal, 2024).

This platform enables brands to cultivate more intimate connections with consumers, showcasing their brand identity in a dynamic and engaging manner (Guarda et al., 2021). One of the defining characteristics of TikTok is its authenticity and spontaneity. Content that is less polished is perceived as more authentic, particularly by younger users. Furthermore, it fosters creativity through the collaborative remixing of existing content, which contributes to its high level of virality (Su et al., 2020).

TikTok's capacity to disseminate content rapidly is associated with the ease with which users can follow and replicate trends or challenges. This facilitates the dissemination of content among diverse communities of users, thereby making the platform a key driver for propagating contemporary cultural and consumer trends (Lisa et al., 2023). The challenges presented on TikTok are often framed within the context of meme culture, inviting users to engage in a gamified dynamic where they adhere to performative rules that encompass text, sound, and movement. This structure encourages collaborative participation and the viral dissemination of popular trends by transforming content creation into a collective game (Divon & Ebbrecht-Hartmann, 2022).

Additionally, the duration of videos on TikTok has been identified as a significant predictor of engagement levels. A review of the literature reveals that videos of a shorter duration, between 15 and 60 seconds, elicit a greater level of engagement in the form of likes, comments, and shares. This is due to the fact that users have a preference for consuming content in a rapid and continuous manner. In contrast, longer videos tend to be less engaging, as they require more attention from the viewer. It can be reasonably deduced that conciseness in content creation is a crucial factor in optimising engagement on TikTok. This is in line with the prevailing trend of short-form social media consumption, where the qualities of immediacy and brevity are seen to drive viralisation (Cheng & Li, 2024).

## 2. Research Objectives

The principal objective of this study is to examine the ways in which Spanish universities employ TikTok as an institutional communication platform, with a particular emphasis on their engagement with trends on the platform and their performance in terms of user engagement. Furthermore, it aims to provide an overview of the presence of these universities on TikTok, emphasising their level of adoption and performance on their official accounts, in order to contextualise the current utilisation of the platform in this domain.

In order to achieve the stated objective, a series of specific objectives (SO) have been identified and set forth as follows:

- SO1: An investigation will be conducted into the presence and adoption of Spanish universities on the social media platform TikTok. This will involve an examination of the number of universities that have created accounts on the platform and an evaluation of their level of activity.

Secondly, the following question will be addressed:

- SO2: The objective is to analyse the type of content published by the most successful universities on TikTok, with a view to establishing whether specific types of content generate greater engagement than others.
- SO3: The objective is to evaluate whether there is a correlation between the frequency of posting and the length of videos and the engagement rates of university accounts on TikTok.

The following hypotheses (H) have informed the research:

- H1: Spanish universities have a notable presence on the social network TikTok, yet their performance remains relatively low.
- H2: Videos that participate in popular trends elicit greater engagement than videos with an institutional or promotional focus.
- H3: It can be observed that there is a direct correlation between the frequency of posts and the length of videos, and the levels of engagement achieved.

## 3. Methodology

This study employs a content analysis approach that combines deductive and inductive coding methods. The former utilises predefined categories to elucidate the nature of content shared by universities, whereas the latter allows for the identification of challenges and trends emerging from the data. A content analysis is an appropriate methodology for examining the ways in which universities utilise

TikTok. It enables the classification and systematisation of produced content, as well as the measurement of interactions and engagement generated.

The Countik tool was employed to ascertain the engagement rate of the Spanish university accounts. The level of engagement was calculated by totalling all interactions (likes, comments and shares) across the final ten videos posted by each university and dividing this figure by the number of followers. This resulted in a percentage value for each university. To evaluate the performance of the university accounts on TikTok, the engagement thresholds proposed by the InsightIQ tool were employed. The platform employs a five-point classification system for engagement rates, with the categories being low, below average, average, above average, and high. Subsequently, these categories are cross-referenced with the size of the company in question. InsightIQ's methodology employs a five-category system based on company size. The categories are as follows: Nano, Micro, Mid-tier, Macro and Mega. As the majority of the analysed accounts have fewer than 50,000 followers, the analysis categories have been simplified by focusing exclusively on the Nano (1K-10K followers) and Micro (10K-50K followers) categories. Finally, in order to enhance clarity and facilitate analysis, it was decided that the engagement thresholds of the Nano and Micro categories should be unified (Table 1). This was achieved by calculating an average engagement value for both categories, thus creating a unified evaluation category for accounts with up to 50,000 followers. The revised average engagement performance criteria are as follows:

**Table 1.** *Engagement performance thresholds*

Performance	Average engagement
<b>High</b>	> 3.60%
<b>Medium</b>	1.21% - 3.60%
<b>Under</b>	<1,21%

Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

### 3.1. Sample

The initial study sample comprised the total number of Spanish public and private universities (91 in total). The official list of universities in Spain, as of 2 September 2024, provided by the Ministry of Education and available on its official website, was taken as a reference. In order to test Hypothesis 1, the total number of universities was reduced to the 60 that had an official account on TikTok. In order to test Hypotheses 2 and 3, the ten universities with the highest levels of engagement (as detailed in Table 2) and their ten most popular videos were selected. This resulted in a final sample of 100 videos.

**Table 2.** *Universities with highest engagement on TikTok*

Account	Followers	Total Likes	Total Videos	Engagement (%)
@universitatdelleida	1696	67972	85	4.79%
@upfbarcelona	2812	66876	117	4.39%
@universitaturv	1312	24169	67	4.40%
@uvice	3805	207093	359	4.32%
@universidaddegranada	1219	11037	81	3.84%
@unibarcelona	5494	161656	199	3.82%
@upct.university	1178	22222	220	3.66%
@udit_en	12333	489699	320	3.42%
@unisevilla	4068	189846	243	3.39%
@infouma	2058	13511	134	3.38%

Source: TikTok public data, obtained via Countik, as of 9 September 2024.

### **3.2. Codification Process**

Each of the 100 videos was subjected to a detailed analysis, with data obtained on a range of variables, including the number of times the video was played, the number of likes it received, the number of comments it elicited, the number of times it was shared, and its duration. In order to categorise the type of content published by the universities, we began by utilising the categorisations established in previous studies (Sidorenko et al., 2024). The categories included in the analysis were as follows: challenges/trends (CHT), administrative information (INF-AD), information on events (INF-EV), information on scholarships and financial benefits (INF-ECON), information on job opportunities (INF-LAB), information on academic offerings (INF-AC), sports (DEP), university community (COM-UNI), entertainment (ENT), educational (EDU), corporate (CORP), religious (RELG), urban and tourist context (CTX-TUR). These categories were selected based on previous studies (Sidorenko et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the analysis of content pertaining to challenges and trends on TikTok (CHT) employed an inductive and open content analysis. This approach permits the categories to emerge directly from the data without predefined structures (Sampieri et al., 2014), which is appropriate for evolving phenomena such as viral trends or challenges, where dynamics are constantly changing (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This inductive process, aligned with the principles of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), facilitated the identification of categories from the review of the most popular videos from the institutional accounts on TikTok. Once the categories had been identified, a second round of coding was conducted, in which the categories were reapplied to the content in order to facilitate further classification. This additional step enabled us to refine the analysis and validate the emerging categories, thereby ensuring that they were representative of the observed dynamics.

## **4. Results**

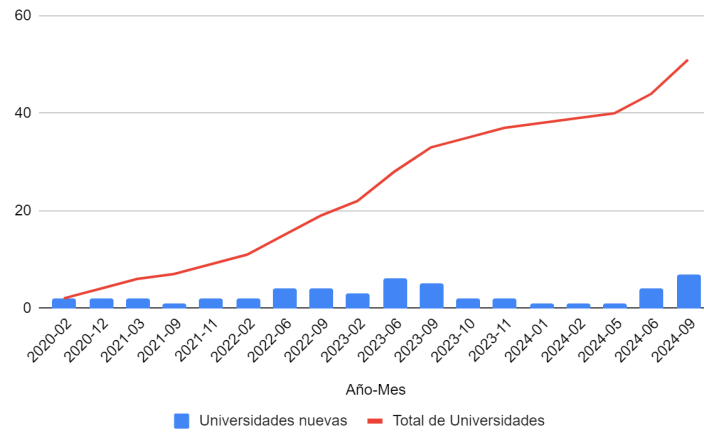
### **4.1. Spanish Universities' Presence and Engagement on the Social Media Platform TikTok**

A total of 66% of Spanish universities were found to have an active TikTok account. While most universities have adopted TikTok, the aforementioned percentage indicates that a significant number have not yet utilised the platform. This suggests a potential growth area for the use of this social network as a tool for interaction between universities in Spain and their respective audiences. This data provides partial validation of the projection made by Alcolea & Núñez (2021), which predicted that by 2023, all Spanish private universities would have an active profile on this platform. While this objective has not yet been met, the rate of adoption has been more rapid than that observed for other social networks.

The year 2023 saw the greatest adoption of TikTok by Spanish universities, with a total of 18 new additions that year (Graph 1). This considerable increase demonstrates that, despite a period of relative disengagement from TikTok, there is now a renewed interest in utilising the platform as an institutional communication tool. It is important to note that, for the purposes of this analysis, the researchers took the date on which the universities published their first video as a reference point, marking their debut on TikTok. The date of account creation was not available for analysis; therefore, the focus was on the date of the first generation of active content. Although 2024 has also demonstrated noteworthy growth, with 14 additional universities joining the platform by September 2023, this period represents a pivotal inflection point, solidifying the presence of universities on this social network.



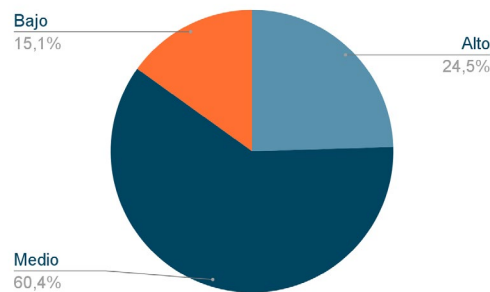
**Figure 1.** The evolution of the adoption of TikTok by Spanish universities



Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

While the majority of Spanish universities have a presence on this social network, the extent of their participation varies considerably. The research findings indicate that most university accounts on TikTok can be classified as belonging to the medium engagement category. This is evidenced by the fact that 60.3% of the accounts analysed exhibited interaction rates between 1.21% and 3.60%. This finding suggests that, while interaction is present, it does not reach particularly high levels in the majority of the analysed accounts. A total of 24.5% of the accounts were classified as high engagement, with interaction rates exceeding 3.60%. This indicates a notable level of follower participation. These accounts succeed in capturing greater interest and generating a high volume of interactions relative to their follower base. Conversely, 15.2% of the accounts are in the low engagement category, exhibiting interaction rates below 1.21%.

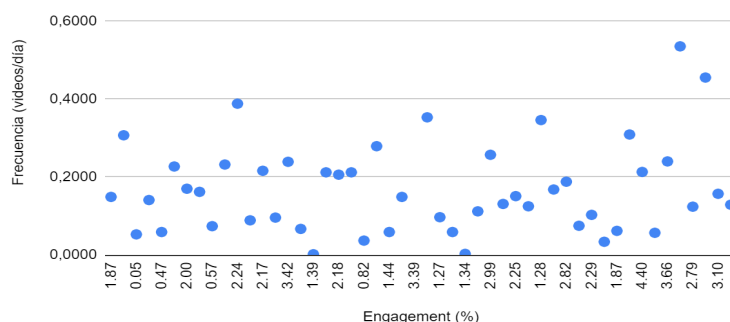
**Graph 2.** Level of *engagement* of Spanish university accounts on TikTok



Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

The analysis of the frequency of publication by Spanish universities on TikTok does not demonstrate a discernible correlation with engagement rates, as illustrated in the scatter graph (Figure 3). The graph depicts the data points representing the respective universities. To perform this analysis, the first video published by each university was identified along with the total number of videos published up to the cut-off date (12 September 2024). Subsequently, the number of days elapsed during the specified period was calculated, thus enabling the frequency of publication (i.e., the number of videos published per day) for each account to be determined. The mean posting frequency of Spanish universities on TikTok is moderate, with most accounts maintaining a rate of between 0.1 and 0.3 videos per day. This equates to approximately one video every three to ten days.

**Graph 3.** Engagement of Spanish university accounts on TikTok in relation to frequency of publication



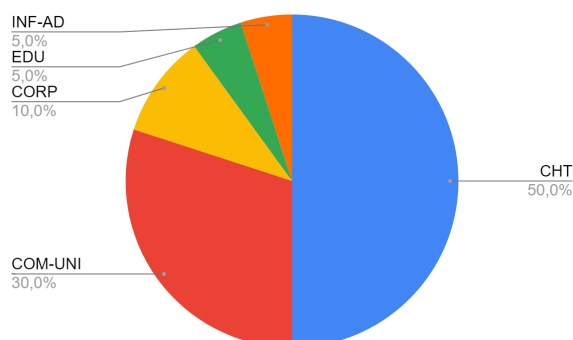
Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

To illustrate, the Public University of Valencia (@upv) posts with a high frequency of 0.535 videos per day, yet its engagement rate is 3.01%. In contrast, the Pompeu Fabra University of Barcelona (@upfbarcelona) posts with a much lower frequency of 0.129 videos per day, yet its engagement rate is 4.39%. While an increased posting frequency may enhance an account's visibility, it is an insufficient means of markedly enhancing audience engagement. These findings indicate that, in addition to maintaining an active presence, content quality, relevance, and the strategic utilisation of emerging trends are of greater consequence in the generation of engagement on TikTok. This will be addressed in greater detail in the following sections.

#### 4.2. Content Types, Duration, and Interaction

The most popular videos from Spanish universities with the highest engagement on TikTok have been analysed, and the results demonstrate a clear preference for content related to viral challenges and trends (CHT), which represent 51% of the total number of videos analysed (Graph 4). The second most prevalent category of content is that which, despite not being related to challenges or trends, features the university community as the primary subject (COM-UNI), accounting for 26% of the total. In these instances, students and university personnel are the focal point of attention. It is also noteworthy that challenges and trends are primarily focused on students, which corroborates the findings of Sidorenko et al. (2024) that engagement is heightened when the protagonist is the student or when they are the creators of the content. In this regard, it is evident that students not only assume the role of protagonists but also serve as the primary creators and presenters in all the accounts. To a lesser extent, universities also disseminate corporate content (CORP), which represents 7% of the total and is primarily focused on the transmission of institutional information. The Administrative Information (INF-ADM) and Educational (EDU) categories have a minimal presence, with 3% and 1% respectively. This indicates that, although this type of content may be useful, it is not the main focus of their TikTok strategies.

**Graph 4.** Distribution by type of content



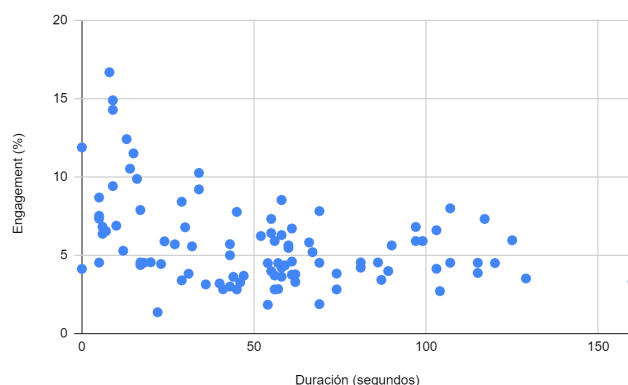
Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

The analysis of the videos revealed that the mean length was 64.09 seconds. The relationship between length and engagement was examined, and it was found that shorter videos (in particular,



those under 30 seconds) tend to elicit higher levels of engagement than longer videos. In contrast, videos exceeding 60 seconds in length, such as interviews or institutional content, tend to elicit lower levels of engagement. This pattern corroborates the hypothesis that users of the TikTok platform prefer content that is both rapid and dynamic, which is consistent with the nature of the platform itself. Figure 5 presents a scatter plot which illustrates the observed trend of higher engagement on shorter videos, and how this decreases as the length of the videos increases.

**Graph 5.** Engagement of videos in relation to their duration



Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

A review of the interaction of videos posted by universities on TikTok reveals a clear trend: videos are shared at a much higher frequency than they are commented on. In order to more accurately reflect typical user behaviour, the median was used as a key metric, thereby avoiding the distortion caused by videos with extremely high interactions. The results demonstrate that the median number of shares per video is 125, while the median number of comments is markedly lower, at only 17 per video. The mean value of the ratio of shares to comments is 7.35. This notable discrepancy suggests that, although users derive value from the content, they prefer to disseminate it through their networks rather than engage in interaction through comments. While our research does not permit us to ascertain the destination of the videos, it seems reasonable to posit that users prefer to engage in commentary and discussion of the content in private forums, such as direct messages and other messaging networks, rather than in public. Therefore, on platforms such as TikTok, where content is consumed rapidly and visually, user behaviour is inclined towards passive dissemination rather than active participation in discussions.

### 4.3. Participation in Trends and Challenges

The inductive analysis of the trends and challenges employed by Spanish universities on TikTok identified a total of 15 distinct types of trends, which emerged from the observation of the videos. The most prevalent trend was the question-and-answer interview format, which constituted 21.15% of all identified trends. This format is often employed to engage with the audience in an immediate and conversational manner, addressing contemporary issues of relevance to younger demographics. In the course of the analysis, other formats of the interview format were also identified, including Quiz and PinPon. Other trends that were identified as recurring include rating (11.54%), which entails participants providing their opinion by rating the content presented to them, and the POV (point of view) format (9.62%), which allows for a more creative and intimate approach.

**Table 3.** Trends and challenges present in the contents of Spanish universities on TikTok

Type of trend/challenge	Percentage of total (%)	Average engagement (%)
Baianá - You and me flying to...	1.92%	11.89%
Music	7.69%	10.91%
I told him... He said...	1.92%	10.26%

Videomeme	7.69%	9.63%
POV	9.62%	8.61%
Lip Sync	5.77%	7.82%
In My Era	1.92%	7.32%
Interview: Quiz	9.62%	6.46%
Debunking myths	1.92%	5.82%
Interview: Q&A	21.15%	5.30%
Scoring	11.54%	4.75%
Name a Song	3.85%	4.67%
I am... and of course...	3.85%	4.39%
Outfit challenge	1.92%	4.21%
Pin-pon	3.85%	3.14%

Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

An analysis of the levels of engagement achieved by these contents reveals that music-related trends generate the highest interaction rates. The trend "Baianá - You and me flying to..." exhibited the highest average engagement rate at 11.89%, followed by music videos with 10.91% and video memes with 9.63%. These findings suggest that content based on music trends and viral memes is more effective in capturing the audience's attention. In contrast, despite their high frequency, interview formats achieved a relatively moderate level of engagement, with average rates of 5.30% and 6.46%, respectively.

The success of video memes can be explained from the perspective of internet meme culture, which represents a form of participatory cultural production. Memes are digital cultural artefacts that are replicated and adapted rapidly on social networks, reflecting the dynamics of user creativity and participation. In her 2013 study, Marwick defines memes as cultural units that spread from person to person, gaining relevance in digital environments due to their adaptability and rapid propagation. The act of participating in the reworking of memes can be viewed as a collective expression of self-affirmation, as it serves to identify a specific group—in this case, young people—around a series of shared codes in relation to other generations (Pérez et al., 2014).

As previously observed, another notable trend is the use of the POV (point of view) format, whereby creators present scenes from a particular perspective, as though the viewer were an integral part of the narrative. This trend is popular due to its capacity to foster an emotional connection between the creator and the audience, whereby viewers are made to feel immersed in the narratives. Recent research (Divon & Ebbrecht-Hartmann, 2022; Lisa et al., 2023) has demonstrated that the use of the POV format on TikTok has become a highly viral format due to the personal connection it offers to the viewer and the immersive nature of the format.

Another prevalent practice on TikTok is lip-syncing, which entails users lip-syncing to a prerecorded audio track, typically comprising popular songs or dialogues. This format enables the recreation of scenes through the addition of visual effects, choreography, or humorous and artistic interpretations, thereby encapsulating the participatory spirit of the platform (Vizcaíno-Verdú, 2024).

Finally, the In My Era trend enables users to identify with a specific phase of their life, such as their "productive era" or "lazy era", through the use of humour and creativity. This phenomenon draws attention to various aspects of users' identity, transforming ordinary moments into significant phases of their lives. It thereby contributes to the proliferation of this type of content on the platform (Princiotti, 2023).

## 5. Discussion and Conclusions

The analysis of the utilisation of TikTok by Spanish public and private universities has yielded notable findings that serve to reinforce and qualify the hypotheses initially posited at the outset of this study.

Once SO1 has been fulfilled, it can be concluded that, despite the fact that a majority of Spanish universities have adopted TikTok as an institutional communication platform, the level of engagement exhibited by these institutions varies. A total of 67.78% of the universities have a presence on the platform, yet only 24.5% have achieved high levels of interaction, while 60.3% are at medium levels of engagement and 15.2% are at low levels. This finding partially supports hypothesis H1, which proposed that, although Spanish universities have a presence on TikTok, their performance in terms of engagement is generally low.

The analysis of the content posted by the most successful universities on TikTok (SO2) yielded the following findings: The analysis revealed that videos which align with popular trends and challenges tend to achieve higher engagement rates than those which adopt a more formal or institutional approach. In particular, the most frequent trends include musical challenges, video memes and participatory formats such as question-and-answer sessions, which generate the most engagement. These findings corroborate the hypothesis that videos aligned with viral trends will elicit a higher level of engagement than those that are more formal, institutional, or promotional in nature.

With regard to SO3, the analysis indicates that shorter videos, particularly those of less than 30 seconds in length, elicit a higher level of engagement, whereas longer videos exceeding 60 seconds in duration tend to be less appealing to users. Therefore, H3, which proposed that duration would affect engagement, is confirmed. However, no clear correlation was identified between a higher posting frequency and an increase in interaction levels, which introduces nuances to the original hypothesis.

It is notable that there is a low level of participation in comments in comparison to the high frequency of sharing. The mean number of times a video is shared is 7.35 times greater than the mean number of times it is commented on. This phenomenon indicates that users of TikTok tend to disseminate content passively by sharing it on private networks, rather than publicly participating in the conversation through comments. This finding contributes to the evolving understanding of engagement on TikTok, indicating that passive dissemination may represent a significant form of interaction on the platform. Further investigation is required to gain a deeper understanding of this phenomenon, particularly with regard to the social media interaction habits of younger generations.

It is important to note that the present study was conducted exclusively at Spanish universities, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other contexts. Moreover, the analysis of only the 10 most popular videos from each university, while providing a representative sample over time, does not fully capture the variety of strategies employed. Additionally, a qualitative analysis of the comments was not conducted, which would have provided a more comprehensive understanding of the nature of user interaction.

## **6. Acknowledgements**

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