TIKTOK:

Communication Theory

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Abstract

This paper will discuss the popular social media platform, TikTok and how this platform is actually applied to PR campaigns. TikTok is a successful app and has been used for more than just entertainment purposes. TikTok is now being strategically used for various public relations campaigns in gaining exposure in a fun way.

Keywords: TikTok, communication, public relations
Introduction

Hashtag challenges, renegade and the box dance: these are just a few of the several worldwide trends that the social media app TikTok has created. Short videos have become a popular form of sharing and interacting on social media. While apps such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter remain relevant in this ever-evolving digital age, the rise of the social media app TikTok has taken the world by storm. In this paper we will research the factors involved with TikTok’s recent success and just how important TikTok has become from a public relations standpoint and how TikTok can be a successful tool in creating successful Public Relations campaigns. Due to TikTok’s growing influencer value and social media marketing potential this research is extremely relevant and useful.

Description of the theory

TikTok is a video sharing app where users can create videos of up to one minute in length. It features a "for you page" with content that is carefully curated for each user based off of their interactions on the app. Users can use hashtags, tag people, and even go live on the app as a way to interact with one another. TikTok is changing social media in a remarkable way. The app has passed 1.5 billion downloads worldwide and continues to grow each day.

TikTok has revolutionized social media as it has created a whole new way for users to interact with content creators. While other social media apps tend to favor influencers with large followings, TikTok has created a place where all users have an equal opportunity to express themselves through their own individually crafted videos. Users on other social media platforms typically only interact with people they actually know in real life, meaning they use the social network with the intention of maintaining existing connections. TikTok, on the other hand, enables people to discover users they wouldn’t know otherwise, creating new connections and
increasing engagement. This niche and unique way that the app connects people together helps people feel like they’re creating success, thus making users want to continue using the app and creating videos.

TikTok has also created a great way to incorporate branded content in a more subtle and creative way than is usually seen on social media. Various brands, such as Chipotle, Guess, The Washington Post, have partnered with TikTok. In fact, *PR WEEK* article, “Late to TikTok? How to get your brand on track” written by Chris Daniels, goes in further depth of how the brands are interacting with TikTok, from a public relations point of view. The article discusses how Chipotle created the #GuacDance challenge. The hashtag was made for users to show off their best dance moves for National Avocado Day. Users got very creative with the #GuacDance challenge. Some users created their own dance while others went as far as dressing up as an avocado. The challenge deemed successful in more than 250,000 videos and 430 million video starts during a six-day run were created (Daniels, 2019).

Unlike other social media sites, TikTok is generally a place for laughs and good times and it is hard to go on the app without cracking a smile. In a recent article posted in *The New York Times*, reporter John Herrman wrote an article titled “How TikTok Is Rewriting the World”. The article discusses the popularity of TikTok in a very short amount of time and how TikTok differs from other popular social media sites. Herrman noted how “The result is an endless unspooling of material that people, many very young, might be too self-conscious to post on Instagram, or that they never would have come up with in the first place without a nudge. It can be hard to watch. It can be charming. It can be very, very funny. It is frequently, in the language widely applied outside the platform, from people on other platforms, extremely “cringe” (Herrman, 2019).
TikTok has become a global phenomenon. It is available in 155 countries, with more than 500 million active users worldwide, and is the most downloaded app on the entire Apple app store. The average user spends 52 minutes per day on the app and 9 out of 10 users go on it multiple times in one day. Although 41% of TikTok users are aged between 16 and 24, the demographic of users is slowly increasing, and in less than 18 months, the number of adult users has grown 5.5 times. The Jonas Brothers, Britney Spears, and Cardi B are just a few of the many celebrities that have also become obsessed with the platform, inspiring others to download the app and discover it for themselves.

TikTok, formerly known as Musical.ly, was launched by Alex Zhu and Luyu Yang in Shanghai China in 2014. Zhu and Yang wanted to make it easy for people to shoot music videos which they could share with their friends. They initially introduced Musical.ly to both China and the USA. However, the market that took most notice of Musical.ly was American teenagers, who enjoyed making videos of themselves lip-synching music.

In a recent report, the Influencer Marketing Hub noted that of all the TikTok engagers, 63% have liked a video in the last month and 53% have personally uploaded a video to their account. More than half of the app’s users not only frequently use the app, they actually upload their own content, which increases engagement in the app overall. Most users are from the US; however, it was also noted that 1 in 7 people in Thailand have downloaded the app and there are 20 million users from India (2019). From a public relations perspective, it is very important to know the demographics of the widely popular and mesmerizing world of TikTok.

Below is a conceptual model graph for TikTok. It is very straightforward and has a lot of more for people to create successful campaigns.
Application in PR

As a public relations folk, we should not shy away from the phenomena of the app TikTok, as it will only get increasingly more popular in society. What is so unique about the app and social media in general is that typically, you can create free campaign advertisements while still reaching out to a large number of audiences. Trends, for you pages, and internet challenges are soon what the new normal of public relations will look like. Eventually, social media will be the capital of all campaigns. This shift in public relations is growing at a rapid pace, sometimes so fast that it can be challenging to continuously keep up to date. This form of media is ever evolving and it is important for the world of public relations to understand and embrace this new, generational shift of media.

As stated above, many big brands are taking advantage of the popularity of TikTok and are creating unique ways to gain exposure. Noted above, was discussed how Chipotle used the TikTok app in creating its own challenge. Chipotle is just one of the many brands that have successfully created a TikTok campaign.
Another example of a brand campaign who used TikTok is the reputable and well-known makeup brand of Elf Cosmetics. Elf’s TikTok campaign was truly genius. The brand specifically commissioned a song called “Eyes Lips Face”, created after the brands acronym. Some users created makeup looks to the song and others lip synced the song while making facial gestures of what the song says. Elf came out successful as the current count for the posting is 3.8 billion and the number is still continuing to rise (2020).

Another big brand that is using TikTok for a campaign is Spikeball. Spikeball best describes themselves as a mixture of volleyball and foursquare. Spikeball is definitely not as popular of a sport compared to the traditional sports, like football and basketball however, with the help of TikTok, they are making a presence. The spikeball account is gaining exposure and increasingly growing. They state that their trick is to create content that follows the trends of TikTok and is carefully understanding of their demographic. The spikeball account currently has over 140,000 followers and has created 44 videos. Some of the Spikeball’s content includes playing the game in various untraditional locations and they have even got a dog to join in on the game (2020). Spikeball is using TikTok as a way to gain exposure for their brand in a unique way by inspiring the plethora of users to hop on the trend for themselves.

Elf cosmetics and Spikeball are just two companies that are putting their public relation skills to the test and carefully creating content that is super relevant in the time of social media. With the rise of social media and particularly the TikTok app, it is important for the public relations field to stay up to date and capitalize on such a fast-growing market.

**Conclusion**

TikTok is taking the public relations world by storm and it is only going to keep growing from here. TikTok is a great form of communication as it reaches a large number of its audience, in a
fun and engaging way. TikTok gives public relations folk a chance to be creative and engaging like we have yet to see before. It is truly exciting to see how far the world of public relations can push the envelope and create unique, memorable content for a very large audience. Public relations is about gaining exposure while spreading a message and what is better way to do that then doing something fun and creative, like participating in a challenge with your best friends or dancing your heart out in a video. TikTok has helped paved the way for the new and next generation of public relations. TikTok is only the start of what is to come for the interaction between social media and public relations.
Works Cited

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