

Swipe, interact, engage: Analysis of generation Alpha's consumer behavior on TikTok

Deslizar, interactuar y conectar: Un análisis del comportamiento de consumo de la generación Alfa en TikTok

Deslizar, interagir, conectar: Uma análise do comportamento de consumo da geração Alpha no TikTok

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Abstract

The global impact of TikTok has prompted discussions digital consumption among youth. This study originated from this contentious context aimed at exploring the audio-visual consumption patterns of generation Alpha in thematic, audio-visual, and interactive terms. The analysis comprised 500 videos collected through the “For You Feed” of two 14-year-old individuals on the platform using quantitative content analysis. The findings reveal a predominance of humorous and dance-related content, along with a notable presence of advertising. It is noteworthy the popularity of the original content over promotional messages, with minimal employment of audio-visual techniques in the former case. These results underscore the relevance of understanding how new generations engage with digital content in an increasingly controversial and algorithm-dependent environment in contrast to governmental regulations and restrictions.

Keywords

Generation Alpha; TikTok; Algorithm-driven content; Digital trend; Young consumer; Social media.

Resumen

El impacto global de TikTok ha generado debates sobre el consumo digital juvenil. Este estudio parte de este contexto controversial con la finalidad de explorar los patrones de consumo audiovisual de la generación Alfa en términos temáticos, audiovisuales e interactivos. Se parte del análisis de 500 vídeos bajo la perspectiva de dos individuos de 14 años en la sección “Para ti” de la plataforma mediante análisis de contenido cuantitativo. Los resultados muestran un predominio de contenidos humorísticos y relacionados con el baile, junto con una notable presencia publicitaria. Destaca también la popularidad del contenido original sobre los mensajes promocionales, siendo mínima la técnica audiovisual en el primer caso. Estos datos subrayan la relevancia de comprender cómo las nuevas generaciones interactúan con el contenido digital en un escenario efímero cada vez más polémico y dependiente

de sistemas algorítmicos, que contrasta con las regulaciones y restricciones gubernamentales.

Palabras clave

Generación Alfa; TikTok; Contenido algorítmico; Tendencia digital; Consumidor joven; Redes sociales.

Resumo

O impacto global do TikTok gerou debates sobre o consumo digital dos jovens. Este estudo parte deste contexto controverso para explorar os padrões de consumo audiovisual da geração Alpha em termos temáticos, audiovisuais e interactivos. Baseia-se na análise de 500 vídeos na perspetiva de dois jovens de 14 anos na secção "Para ti" da plataforma, através de uma análise de conteúdo quantitativa. Os resultados mostram uma predominância de conteúdos humorísticos e relacionados com a dança, juntamente com uma presença notável de publicidade. Também se destaca a popularidade dos conteúdos originais em relação às mensagens promocionais, sendo a técnica audiovisual mínima no primeiro caso. Estes dados sublinham a importância de compreender como as novas gerações interagem com os conteúdos digitais num cenário efémero, cada vez mais controverso e dependente de sistemas algorítmicos, que contrasta com as regulamentações e restrições governamentais.

Palavras-chave

Geração Alpha; TikTok; Conteúdo algorítmico; Tendência digital; Jovem consumidor; Redes sociais.

1. Introduction

The digital landscape has undergone perpetual evolution, marked by the pervasive presence of social media platforms, catering to millions of interconnected users across the globe (Maldonado-Pérez, 2024). Notably, TikTok, introduced to

the international market in September 2017 by the Asian company ByteDance, has emerged as a prominent fixture in contemporary discourse. Originating as a derivative of Douyin, a platform popularized within China in 2016, TikTok's ascension was accelerated through the strategic acquisition of Musical.ly. This merger facilitated the amalgamation of distinctive features from both platforms, thereby substantially augmenting TikTok global reach and influence (Abidin, 2021).

TikTok facilitates the creation of short videos, suited for consumption on smartphones. Its operational framework incorporates an algorithmic recommendation system that leverages user interactions, views, likes, and comments to optimize engagement (Sidorenko-Bautista *et al.*, 2023). It is noteworthy that the global lockdown precipitated by the health crisis of 2020 catalyzed its international proliferation (Tamara-Quiroz, 2020). As of February 2024, the platform boasted a global user base exceeding 1,023 billion individuals, firmly establishing it as the preferred social media outlet for the younger demographic cohort. Statistics indicate that 67% of TikTok users aged 25 and above, falling within the ambit of Generation Z (1996–2010) (Seara, 2024), have turned its system into a primary information search engine, even competing with Google.

The popularization of TikTok have raised red flags within public organizations, educational establishments, and research institutions, which have closely monitored the dissemination of misinformation, significantly among youth (Díaz-Lucena & Vicente-Fernández, 2023). These concerns involve the potentially deleterious ramifications of forthcoming societies stemming from the unregulated proliferation of information within apps (Hartwig *et al.*, 2024). Concurrently, governmental initiatives have been introduced to safeguard minors from the perceived risks associated with TikTok usage, highlighting the need for regulatory interventions to mitigate potential harm (Cooban, 2024).

In April 2024, the legislative authority of the United States, ratified a bill aimed at impeding the operation of TikTok within its jurisdiction. This legislative action alleged that the application indiscriminately commercializes user data, thereby contravening established protocols pertaining to data protection. However, the enforcement of this legislation is deferred until the calendar year 2025, contingent upon the possibility of ByteDance, divesting a portion of its shares with a Western entity, thereby ensuring oversight over the management of user data (McMahon, 2014).

In addition, the European Commission initiated an inquiry into TikTok, citing concerns regarding its design's propensity to engender addictive behaviors that infringe minors' rights (Alderman, 2024). The Commission embarked on a novel investigation focusing on TikTok Lite (Europa Press, 2024), an alternative platform that diverges from the official iteration that operates under a reward-based system, facilitating users to accumulate points exchangeable for gift cards (Higuera, 2024). According to European pronouncements, this latest application was suspended throughout the European Union (Cherre, 2024).

A common concern underscores the importance attributed to the Alpha generation, delineating individuals born since 2010 (Rose & Rani-Thomas, 2024). Characterized by an inherent acclimatization to digital technology, early exposure to mobile devices and social media platforms, and a predilection for audio-visual stimuli (McCrindle, 2023), this cohort occupies a central position in contemporary socio-technological discourse.

Thus, this study examines TikTok consumption patterns in generation Alpha, focusing on video themes, advertising prevalence, and gender differences. It explores the correlations between content categories and audio-visual attributes and assesses their impact on engagement levels.

1.1 Intergenerational consumption of digital and audio-visual content

A myriad of socio-cultural, historical, technological, economic, and political phenomena has considerable influence on the delineation of audience segments. Within the realms of marketing and communication, segmenting populations based on birth year to delineate generational cohorts has emerged as a well-established methodology (Gardiner *et al.*, 2013). This segmentation approach acknowledges the multifaceted nature of societal evolution and recognizes divergent experiences and behavioral patterns that crystallize within discrete generational groups.

This study focuses on the cohort commonly referred to as generation Alpha, encompassing individuals born between 2010-2025 (Rose & Rani-Thomas, 2024). The formative years of this generation have unfolded against the backdrop of the global Covid-19 pandemic, engendering a milieu characterized by early and

pervasive technology adoption, predominantly centered on social interaction via digital networks, alongside a documented increase in mental health challenges (McCrinkle, 2023). As of 2024, the eldest members of generation Alpha are poised at the threshold of adolescence, with the oldest individuals reaching 14 years of age. This group represents the youngest stratum within contemporary society, coexisting with other generations such as Z (1997-2010), millennials (1981-1996), X (1965-1980), baby boomers (1946-1964), and the silent generation (1925-1945) (García-Rivero *et al.*, 2022; Jha, 2020).

Generation Alpha exhibits ubiquitous engagement with technology and digital media, starting from early development (Sramova & Pavelka, 2023). Their daily interaction with mobile devices and adept digital literacy distinguish them (Cirilli *et al.*, 2019), with personalized advertising playing a significant role in their consumption habits (Rani-Thomas *et al.*, 2020).

In terms of audio-visual content targeted at generation Alpha, platforms such as YouTube Shorts and TikTok have emerged as preeminent venues for the consumption of short-form video content (Chang & Guo, 2023). Conversely, platforms such as Instagram and Twitch introduce animated, live streaming, and video game content (Núñez-Gómez *et al.*, 2020). This demonstrates the profound influence of digital entertainment culture over the lived experiences of generation Alpha, evidencing their predilection for audio and visual expression and interactive forms of entertainment.

Youthful individuals, akin to generation Z and millennials, favor fragmented and on-demand digital media over linear television (Iwamoto-Tosi, 2023; Díaz-Lucena & Vicente-Fernández, 2023). This preference contrasts with that of generation X and baby boomers, who preferred traditional television, highlighting a generational gap in consumption habits (Cortés-Quesada *et al.*, 2022).

1.2 The impact of TikTok on youth consumption trends

A considerable phenomenon accompanying the ascent of social media platforms is the preference among users for sharing everyday images and audio in a format conducive to interactive engagement (Logan & Rawady, 2021). This trend has gained traction prominently with the advent of Snapchat, originally known as

Picaboo, which brought a paradigm shift in Internet studies towards ephemeral content (Bayer *et al.*, 2016). Users were introduced to the concept of content vanishing after a stipulated period, typically 24 hours, which engendered a sense of immediacy and exclusivity. Instagram subsequently embraced this pioneering methodology through its *Stories* feature, which established the app as the preferred scenario for transient content consumption (Rubio-Romero & Perlado-Lamo-de-Espinosa, 2017).

This mode of content dissemination precipitated a discernible shift towards transient consumption patterns (Bainotti *et al.*, 2020), thereby catalyzing the proliferation of a myriad of platforms specifically engineered to accommodate this genre of audio-visual content. Users found themselves immersed in a digital landscape replete with information facilitated by communication interfaces in infinite scrolling (Lynch, 2024). Consequently, the consumption habits of younger generations metamorphosed into a regimen of "audio-visual snacks" (Scolari, 2021; Cortés-Quesada *et al.*, 2022).

Generation Alpha's inclination toward sharing personal content is heightened by platforms specializing in short-form videos and their recommendation algorithms. TikTok's algorithm particularly, driven by user metrics such as hashtags and likes, dynamically suggests similar content, fostering a cycle of personalized consumption (Klug *et al.*, 2021). Updates aim to boost engagement through interactive features and the platform's short-form format, catering to the modern preference for brief (Lee *et al.*, 2022), ephemeral content dissemination (Yang *et al.*, 2024).

Studies on the consumption relationship between the platform and generation Alpha are emerging. Within academia, prevailing research encompasses explorations of the platform's educational merits for minors (Sramova & Pavelka, 2023), ethical dilemmas pertaining to child protection arising from its content and operational framework (Martín-Ramallal & Ruiz-Mondaza, 2022), interplay between youth usage patterns and parental mediation (Sarwatay *et al.*, 2023), and over-exposure of young users to advertising (Feijoo *et al.*, 2023; Vicente-Fernández & Díaz-Lucena, 2023). Additionally, scholarly discourse delves into the pervasive effects on self-image and eating disorders (Pruccoli *et al.*, 2022), problematic behaviors (Pedrouzo & Krynski, 2023), and the addiction continuum (Zeynep-Meral, 2021) (Omar & Dequan, 2020).

Thus, this research examines consumption patterns, thematic trends, and user engagement to understand behavioral dynamics within short-form content, amid heightened media scrutiny and regulatory initiatives concerning new generations and TikTok.

2. Objectives and methodology

To explore the audio-visual consumption patterns of generation Alpha on TikTok, we structured the study around the following objectives:

- 01: Identifying predominant themes in videos consumed by generation Alpha on TikTok.
- 02: Evaluating the type and frequency of advertising content consumed by generation Alpha on TikTok.
- 03: Determining the presence of gender differences in the content consumed by generation Alpha on TikTok.
- 04: Examining the relationship between content types and audio-visual characteristics of videos consumed by generation Alpha on TikTok.
- 05: Justifying the relationship between content types and the engagement of videos consumed by generation Alpha on TikTok.

The analysis was conducted through a quantitative methodological framework, specifically employing a quantitative content analysis. This approach is characterized by the application of statistical tools to describe, correlate, and predict socio-economic and cultural phenomena, thus enabling the generalization of findings from representative samples (Creswell, 2009).

Quantitative content analysis systematically examines information and converts it to quantifiable data (Riffe *et al.*, 2019). This technique is particularly suitable for this study, as it enables the identification of patterns and trends within a substantial dataset extracted from TikTok. The process involved (1) defining the unit of analysis, (2) coding the content into pre-established categories, and (3) tabulating the results for statistical analysis. We opted not to establish exclusion criteria when analyzing videos, as the objective was to assess and gather data on

all videos received by young minors on TikTok without restrictions other than those imposed by the platform itself.

In accordance with the recommendations outlined in the TikTok Child Safety and Well-being Guidelines (2024): (a) Minors must be at least 13 years old to access the platform in Europe; (b) Minors under the age of 16 cannot appear in the "For You Feed" (FYF); (c) Profiles of users up to 15 years old are private by default; (d) Profiles of users up to 15 years old do not allow viewing their videos, LIVE broadcasts, short descriptions, likes, or lists of friends and followers unless explicitly approved by the minor; (e) Until the age of 15, other users cannot use the *Duet* and *Stitch* features with the videos of minors or add their posts to their *Stories*.

2.1 The codebook and inter-coder reliability

The unit of analysis for the study was the TikTok video appearing in the young user's feed (the "For You" feed). To examine this, we defined a codebook with categories (and corresponding statistical coding) that allowed us to identify (a) variables related to the audio-visual characteristics of the video (camera shot, camera movement, camera angle, lighting, text, music, time of video), (b) thematic content variables, (c) variables related to the nature of the content (influencer advertising, original content, viral content, business advertising, media channel), (d) variables related to video engagement (likes, comments, favorites, shares, hashtags). Additionally, we considered the independent variable of gender: (d) female/male, as defined by TikTok, when creating a profile.

We derived the variables for the resulting codebook (see the codebook in Table 1 at <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.25836649>) from the work on multimodal content analysis of videos (Li & Jay-Kuo, 2003; Mora-de-la-Torre & Díaz-Lucena, 2023; Vicente-Fernández & Díaz-Lucena, 2023) and from the interactive features available on the TikTok platform at the time of the study (January 2024) (TikTok, 2024).

To ensure the validity of the codebook, we applied Cohen's Kappa test, which measures the agreement between different coders to assess the consistency of the codes (Goyanes & Piñeiro-Naval, 2024). The procedure involved two coders interpreting an exact and equal number of TikTok videos appearing in the profiles of the

Alpha minors, thereby ensuring the clarity and uniformity of the codes during the data collection process. Based on the reliability values proposed by Altman (1999), inter-coder reliability is categorized as follows: $<.20$ (poor reliability), $.21-.40$ (fair reliability), $.41-.60$ (moderate reliability), $.61-.80$ (significate reliability), and $.81-1$ (almost perfect reliability).

For this purpose, we selected a random sample of 25 videos from the FYF of a fictitious account created specifically for the study, with a birth date set in 2010 (hypothetically representing a 14-year-old user). Two coders individually analyzed this sample and measured the degree of agreement to reflect the reproducibility of the codebook for future studies.

The results demonstrated almost perfect agreement between coders, with a Cohen's Kappa coefficient of $k=1$, $p=<.001$. We observed minimal discrepancies with significant agreement in the codes for "music" ($k=.780$, $p=<.001$) and "hashtags" ($k=.934$, $p=<.001$). This test underscores the robustness and reliability of the codebook, affirming its validity for systematically analyzing TikTok videos.

2.2 Sample and data analysis

The sample acquisition involved two coders accessing the TikTok platform daily for 20 minutes, from February 1st to March 31, 2024. Independently, each coder established a blank account following TikTok's gender segmentation guidelines: one representing a male born in 2010, and another representing a female born in 2010. These descriptions were tailored to simulate profiles of minors within the 14-year-old segment of generation Alpha, with the year 2010 adopted as the cohort's baseline (McCrindle, 2023). The selection of this particular year was made to capture the profile of the youngest Alpha user.

In addition, our decision to use fictitious minors' profiles rather than authentic ones was motivated by our commitment to adhere to the legal framework outlined in the European Commission's (2022) *Digital Services Act package*. This approach ensures the safeguarding of minors' privacy, rights, and data confidentiality in the online realm.

Throughout the analysis, we collected 500 videos from the FYF of TikTok across both profiles (269 videos from the female profile and 231 from the male profile).

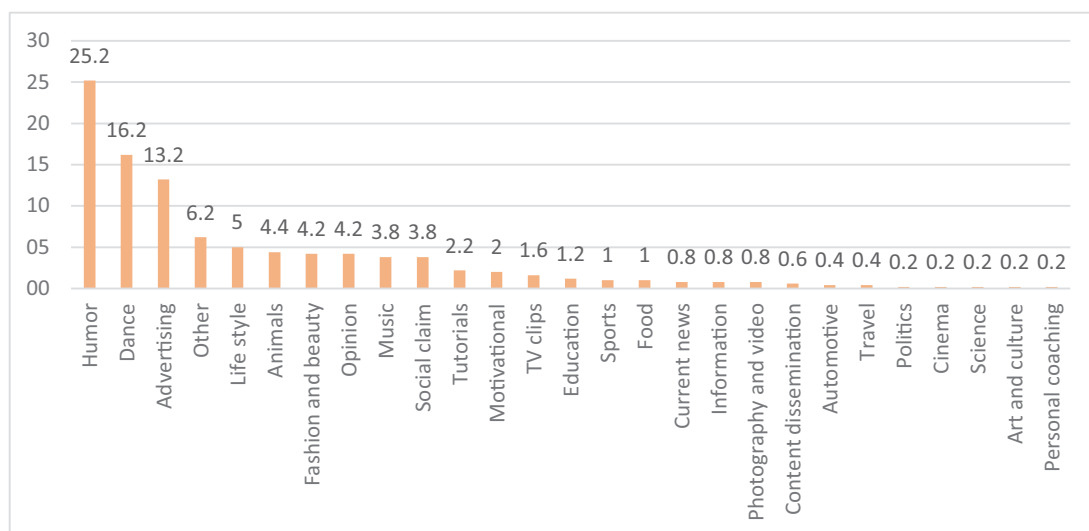
Our analysis protocol consisted of: (1) accessing the “For You” section, (2) viewing the video, (3) systematically recording data in a spreadsheet in accordance with the codes outlined in the codebook, and (4) swiping up the following video and repeating the analysis action. To maintain the integrity of our findings, we abstained from engaging with any TikTok features (likes, comments, profiles, shares, and others) that could potentially influence the platform’s algorithmic content recommendations. Subsequently, the gathered data were subjected to descriptive and correlational analyses using the SPSS Statistics v.25 software.

3. Results and discussion

3.1 Objective 1: Main themes in TikTok videos among generation Alpha

Starting with the prevailing thematic types in the content minors received on TikTok, we observed the data collected in Figure 1.

Figure 1. *Thematic content appearing on the minors’ FYF on TikTok*



Source: *Created by the authors.*

The results unveil that generation Alpha predominantly consumes humorous content (25.2%) and dance videos (16.2%). Furthermore, we observed a notable presence of advertising content (13.2%), indicating brands' utilization of this leisure platform to engage with a younger audience, despite the operational safety measures outlined in the *TikTok Child Safety and Well-being Guidelines* (2024).

Lifestyle posts (5%), animal-related content (4.4%), fashion and beauty (4.2%), and opinions (4.2%) also garnered moderate popularity among this cohort. Lifestyle videos offered insights into daily routines, while animal, fashion, and beauty content cater to visual and aesthetic preferences. Additionally, the opinion category indicated a desire among this cohort to express viewpoints and engage in discourse.

Less prevalent were topics such as music (3.8%), social claim (3.8%), tutorials (2.2%), and motivation (2%). Also, niche subjects with smaller followings included TV clips (1.6%), education (1.2%), sports (1%), food (1%), current news (0.8%), information (0.8%), photography and videography (0.8%), content disclosure (0.6%), automotive (0.4%), travel (0.4%), politics (0.2%), cinema (0.2%), science (0.2%), art and culture (0.2%), and personal coaching (0.2%).

In this sense, humor seems to be a key factor in capturing youth attention. Furthermore, dance challenges and viral choreographies are clearly attractive to this audience, reflecting the platform's musical, dynamic, and participatory nature. On the other hand, the significant presence of advertising content indicates that brands have recognized TikTok's potential to reach these users.

3.2 Objective 2: The advertising effect in the FYF of Alpha minors on TikTok

Amidst the prevalence of advertising within the most frequently encountered content in minors' feed, we conducted a more detailed examination of this aspect. Our research revealed that, within this demographic, original non-promotional content holds sway (75.6%), followed by direct promotional content from business companies (12.8%), viral content emulating trends and challenges (8.2%), influencer-driven advertising (2.4%), and content cross-posted from other media platforms (1%). Figure 2 delineates the brands that featured the most prominently in content aimed at minors.

Figure 2. Brands appearing on the minors' FYF on TikTok

Source: Created by the authors.

Youth's exposure to advertising on TikTok has sparked significant discussion regarding its influence on their development and behavior (Feijoo *et al.*, 2023), through which brands featured showed a wide range of products and services.

Shein and La Cuponera ranked highest in frequency of appearance, followed by Disney+, AliExpress, Vinted, and AI Cleaner. This pattern is not arbitrary, but rather mirrors marketing strategies aimed at engaging a youthful, highly impressionable audience with burgeoning indirect purchasing potential (Le, 2024).

From a marketing perspective, the prevalence of fashion and online shopping brands, such as Shein and AliExpress, may harbor significant ramifications for body image perception (Harringer *et al.*, 2023). Research indicates that fashion and beauty advertising on social media can contribute to body dissatisfaction and internalization of unrealistic beauty standards, particularly among younger cohorts (Bissonette-Mink & Szymanski, 2022). Extended exposure to such advertisements can foster a culture of comparison, potentially leading to eating disorders and negatively impacting self-esteem. Likewise, the use of image and video

editing apps such as Adobe Photoshop, Photoroom, and Filmin may encourage minors to alter their photos or visuals to conform to prevailing beauty standards (Freitas, 2017).

The presence of brands such as Disney+ or DAZN aims to cultivate consumer loyalty early on by tapping into minors' affinity for audio-visual content. Similarly, the appearance of technological apps such as AI Cleaner reflects the increasing integration of technology into young individuals' daily lives. The inclusion of the La Cuponera app, offering discounts and cashback on e-commerce platforms, along with exposure to AliExpress and Vinted, familiarizes minors with typical digital purchasing practices (Gbadamosi *et al.*, 2017).

3.3 Objective 3: differences in content consumption patterns of TikTok across gender profiles

To explore whether there were differences between the consumption patterns of male and female profiles among minors on TikTok concerning the type and nature of consumption, we conducted the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test (based on 500 videos, with a standardized sample of $n > 50$) to examine the normality of the distribution among variables. The outcomes revealed that the significance level was below $p > .05$ for both variables ($K-S(500) = .361_{\text{gender}}; .166_{\text{type of content}}; .453_{\text{nature of content}}$; $p = .001$). Consequently, we used the chi-square test and Cramer's V test to analyze the differences between the two groups.

Analyzing the association between gender and "type of content" ($\chi^2(N=500) = 113.779$; $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = .477$), we found a significant and moderately strong relationship. Specifically, males exhibited greater engagement with content related to "politics" and "sports", whereas females showed a preference for "fashion and beauty" and "lifestyle" categories.

Likewise, in the examination of gender and the nature of the content, we identified a significant relationship, albeit less pronounced than in the former analysis ($\chi^2(N=500) = 18,844$; $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = .194$). This indicates that while there is indeed a correlation between the genders of young consumers, the influence of the nature of content is somewhat less decisive. For instance, among females, there

was a slight predominance of “original content”, whereas among males, “business advertising” was more prevalent. Thus, gender does not appear to be a unique determinant factor in the consumption preferences of generation Alpha.

3.4 Objective 4: Impact of the audio-visual characteristics of TikTok videos on the content themes consumed by Alpha generation

We employed the chi-square test to determine the correlation between audio-visual and type of content variables. In addition, we applied Cramer’s V measure to quantify the strength of the relationships between these variables (Table 2).

Regarding the data, we observed significant relationships with weak strength between content type and angle ($X^2(N=500)=231.021$; $p<.001$, Cramer’s $V=.257$). The findings indicate that humorous videos tend to use high angles (“high angle shot”) and normal angles (“eye level shot”) more frequently, while advertising content predominantly introduces normal angles (“eye level shot”) and overhead angles (“overhead shot”).

In analyzing the data regarding content type and lighting, we found a significant association between humorous content and ambient lighting ($X^2(N=500)=450.757$; $p<.001$, Cramer’s $V=.316$), with a high observed count of 77 compared to an expected count of 65.3. Another notable association was between “dance” content

Table 2. Pearson’s chi-squared test between type of content and audio-visual variables

	Shot	Movement	Angle	Lighting	Text	Music	Time	<i>p</i>
Pearson's chi-squared test	523.683 ^a	322.965 ^b	231.021 ^c	450.757 ^d	260.240 ^e	185.500 ^f	419.772 ^g	.001
Cramer's V	.309	.268	.257	.316	.361	.431	.276	
Valid cases	500							

a. 298 cells (92.0%); b. 248 cells (91.9%); c. 190 cells (88.0%); d. 248 cells (91.9%); e. 106 cells (78.5%); f. 56 cells (69.1%); g. 301 cells (92.9%) had expected counts of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 0.00.

and the use of “key light”, “backlight”, and “ambient light”, with observed counts of 44, 11, and 81, respectively, significantly exceeding the expected counts. In addition, we identified an association between advertising content and the use of various types of lighting, such as “ring light” and “dimmable LED lights”, with high observed counts compared to the expected.

Regarding the relationship between content type and movement ($X^2(N=500)=322.965$; $p<.001$, Cramer’s $V=.268$), the relationship between humor again with the “pan”, “zoom”, and “POV (Point of View)” movements stand out, with observed counts of 3, 3, and 14, respectively, exceeding the expected. Another association was that of dance with the camera movement “static”, “pan”, and “multiple movements” (observed count of 71, 1, and 81 respectively). The influence of movement on advertising content also stands out, where the “pan”, “crane shot”, and “multiple movements” contribute to the aesthetic and visual impact on youth audiences.

In reference to the relationship between content and music, our data showed a significant and moderate association ($X^2(N=500)=185.500$; $p<.001$, Cramer’s $V=.431$), with videos more prone to diegetic, extradiegetic, or non-musical formats. For example, “politics” is substantially associated with the absence of music, while “humor” and “dance” content primarily employ “extradiegetic” music. Additionally, contents about “automotive”, “current news”, “personal coaching”, “travel”, “photography and video”, “art and culture”, “personal coaching”, “travel”, “social claim”, “opinion”, and “motivational” do not present relevant associations.

On the other hand, the use of shots was highlighted by a weak association ($X^2(N=500)=523.683$; $p<.001$, Cramer’s $V=.309$) with “advertising” content (66 counts), followed by “dance” (81 counts) and “humor” (126 counts). The most employed shots, in this sense, are the “medium shot”, the “close-up shot”, and the “long shot”. In the case of “text”, we also identified that the most significant and weak relationship ($X^2(N=500)=260.240$; $p<.001$, Cramer’s $V=.361$) occurred with “advertising”, followed by “music” and “dance.” In these cases, the preferred type of text was “overlaid”, followed by “subtitles” and “titles”.

Finally, we also found a significant and weak relationship between content type and video time interval ($X^2(N=500)=419.772$; $p<.001$, Cramer’s $V=.276$). The highest actual counts were in “humor” (126 counts), followed by “dance” (81 counts). Among these, videos of “1 minute” and “2 minutes” stood out. Conversely, we identified that contents with the lowest actual counts were “science” (1 count),

"current news", "automotive", "art and culture", "travel", "personal coaching", and "photography and video" (2 counts), and those of "time" were videos of "more than 2 minutes" (2 counts) and "more than one part" (7 counts).

Thus, the study uncovered distinct characteristics in content types on TikTok. Humorous videos commonly use high or normal camera angles, ambient lighting, and dynamic camera movements. Dance content exhibits varied lighting and camera techniques. Advertisements employ multiple camera angles, lighting effects, and audio-visual techniques. Humor and dance videos frequently incorporate background music, contrasting with genres like political or personal coaching. Additionally, humorous and dance videos tend to be shorter (1-2 minutes), while science, news, and tutorial content are longer and may be segmented into multiple parts.

3.5 Objective 5: Engagement with themes in TikTok videos from generation Alpha

Finally, we analyzed the relationship between engagement variables, themes, and the nature of the content appearing in the FYP of minors on TikTok. To achieve this, we employed statistical tests to evaluate correlations and identify the most significant interaction patterns.

First, we applied the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test to assess the normality of the distribution among the variables. Since we obtained significance levels below $p > .05$ for all variables ($K-S(500) = .166_{\text{type of content}}; .453_{\text{nature of content}}; .267_{\text{likes}}; .252_{\text{comments}}; .176_{\text{favorite}}; .194_{\text{share}}; .230_{\text{hashtags}}$, $p = .001$), we performed Spearman's correlation test for non-parametric data.

With respect to data in Table 3, the moderately negative correlation between content type and engagement metrics such as "likes", "comments", "favorites", and "shares" suggests that certain types of content may not resonate well with the youth audience, resulting in lower interaction levels. This trend can be attributed to the oversaturation of certain content types, making them less novel or interesting to the audience.

In contrast, the weak and positive correlation with "hashtags" indicates that while content type minimally influences hashtag usage, there might be a tendency to use specific hashtags for particular content types as a strategy to boost visibil-

Table 3. Content and engagement Spearman correlations

Content	Engagement				
	Likes	Comments	Favorites	Shares	Hashtags
Type of content	-.243**	-.155**	-.256**	-.204**	.095*
Sig.	.001	.001	.001	.001	.033
<i>p</i>	.49	.39	.50	.45	.30
1-β	1	1	1	1	.99
Nature of content	-.300**	-.198**	-.336**	.202**	-.091*
Sig.	.001	.001	.001	.001	.043
<i>p</i>	.54	.44	.57	.44	.30
1-β	1	1	1	1	.99

*Sig.<.05, **Sig.<.01; *p*=.10 low, .30 medium, .50 high.

Table 4. Pearson's chi-squared test between type of content and engagement

	Likes	Comments	Favorites	Shares	Hashtags	<i>p</i>
Pearson's chi-squared test	319.354 ^a	285.498 ^b	535.159 ^c	472.753 ^d	367.405 ^e	.001
Cramer's V	.283	.267	.312	.307	.271	
Valid cases	500					

a. 217 cells (89.3%); b. 220 cells (90.5%); c. 294 cells (90.7%); d. 269 cells (90.6%); e. 273 cells (91.9.5%) had expected counts of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 0.00.

ity. Given the moderate significance of these variables, we applied the chi-square test and Cramer's V to identify which content typologies generated the most engagement among youth, as detailed in Table 4.

We identified significant relationships between humorous content and engagement metrics: "likes" (5,001 to 100,000), "comments" (500 to 10,000), "favorites" (6,001 to 10,000), "shares" (more than 10,000), and "hashtags" (1 to 5). These counts exceeded expectations, suggesting that "humor" is a highly engaging type of content for minors on TikTok. Alternatively, "advertising" showed significance in lower engagement categories for "likes" (0 to 100 and 101 to 1,000), "comments" (0 to 500), "favorites" (0 to 500), and "shares" (none), indicating that brand promotion do not engage this segment effectively.

For “hashtags”, humorous content also showed a significant presence in the “none” category, suggesting that much comedic content does not rely on hashtags for visibility. In contrast, promotional content was significantly concentrated in the “21 or more” category, indicating a deliberate strategy to maximize visibility through hashtags.

The nature of the content emerged as the most influential factor in engagement, with moderately negative correlations in “likes” and “favorites”, and a weak positive correlation in “shares”. This underscores the importance of content’s intrinsic value and relevance to the audience. To further understand these relationships, we applied the chi-square test and Cramer’s V test again (Table 5).

We found a statistically significant relationship between the nature of the content and the quantity of “likes” received from the videos. The distribution of “likes” shows a clear preference for “original content (non-promotional)”, with 378 counts, followed by “business advertising”, with 64 counts, and “viral content (mimics trends)”, with 41 counts. Specifically, original content not only prevails but also garners a wide range of “likes”, from “0/100” to “more than 2 M”, highlighting its appeal to a diverse youth audience. “Influencer advertising”, though less frequent with 12 counts, achieves a notable concentration of “likes” in the “5,001/10K” range, indicating that, although less common, this content can generate high engagement among youth.

For “favorites”, original non-promotional content dominates engagement with 378 counts. It is the most prevalent and exhibits a broad distribution, especially in the “more than 10K” range, where it reaches 111 counts, significantly surpassing the expected 101.3. “Business advertising”, though less frequent with 64 counts, shows an unusual concentration of favorites in the “0/500” range (53 counts),

Table 5. *Pearson’s chi-squared test between nature of content and engagement*

	Likes	Favorites	Shares	<i>p</i>
Pearson’s chi-squared test	126.219 ^a	255.024 ^b	107.758 ^c	.001
Cramer’s V	.251	.357	.232	
Valid cases	500			

a. 34 cells (75.6%); b. 42 cells (70.0%); c. 38 cells (69.1%) had expected counts of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 0.00.

significantly higher than the expected 10.8. This implies that, while it is less likely to become extremely popular, this content type enjoys a solid base of regular support on TikTok.

In relation to “shares”, the original content was most frequently shared, with 378 counts. This type of video shows a wide distribution (“0/500” and “501/1,000”) and notable presence in higher ranges (“more than 10K”). Thus, user-generated original content on TikTok tends to become potentially viral. “Influencer advertising” (12 counts) shows a concentration in the lower ranges of “shares” (0/500 and 501/1,000).

Statistical analyses confirm that both the type and nature of content on TikTok have a significant impact on the engagement of generation Alpha. Humorous and original non-promotional content stand out as the most effective in generating high interactions. This means that despite advertising content being one of the persuasive formats most prevalent in the FYP of minors, it appears to be ineffective.

4. Conclusions, limitations and future research lines

The purpose of this study was to scrutinize the audio-visual content accessible on TikTok, with a specific focus on its resonance among the generation Alpha. To facilitate this research, we analyzed 500 videos sourced from the platform’s FYP, leveraging the perspectives of two minors aged below 14. This methodological approach enabled us to gain insights into the nature of the content consumed by individuals within this demographic cohort, ultimately culminating in the following conclusions.

In pursuit of our first objective, our observations revealed that the prevailing content consumed by minors on TikTok gravitates towards humor, with dance and advertising content following closely behind. Although our study did not delve into qualitative analysis, we noted a concerning trend within the humorous content topic. Despite its satirical and light-hearted nature, a significant portion of videos within this category exhibited undertones of sexism, racism, and homophobia, alongside the pervasive use of rude language referencing in some cases to alcohol or drugs. Similarly, within the realm of dance content, a substantial proportion of thematic videos alluded to sexualized speeches or acts.

Regarding the second objective, our analysis revealed that the majority of content tailored to the generation Alpha on TikTok was not overtly promotional or advertising in nature. Notwithstanding the prevalent non-promotional content, advertising is indeed featured on this social media platform. Notably, the advertising content that surfaced on the FYF of Alpha users primarily pertained to *fast fashion* brands, with prominent mentions of platforms such as Shein and AliExpress. Additionally, we observed advertisements promoting image and video editing tools, such as Adobe Photoshop and Photoroom, whose features have the potential to influence minors' perceptions of body image. In summary, our findings highlight that advertising targeting minors on TikTok often fosters unsustainable online consumption patterns and, at times, fails to align with their sociodemographic profiles, as evidenced by instances of incongruent promotions, such as those from automobile brands.

Concerning the third objective, our analysis discerned notable disparities in content based on the gender of TikTok profiles. Specifically, male audiences appeared to be exposed to content predominantly centered around themes such as "politics", "sports", "advertising", and "opinion issues". Remarkably, political and opinion-based content often exhibited tendencies towards extremist viewpoints, lacking the presentation of contrasting data. Furthermore, opinion-based content targeting male audiences was observed to harbor sexist and misogynistic biases.

Alternatively, female audiences were found to be more frequently exposed to content revolving around "beauty and fashion" or "lifestyle". This content tends to be highly sexualized, attributable to factors such as the type of clothing depicted, sexualized dances, or the argumentation employed within the content itself. Such findings emphasize the presence of gendered patterns in the content landscape of TikTok, reflecting divergent thematic inclinations and potential societal influences on content creation and consumption.

In addressing the fourth objective, we observed the relationship between TikTok content themes and their corresponding audio-visual characteristics. In particular, humorous and dance-centric videos exhibited distinct audio-visual traits conducive to fragmented consumption, characterized by multiple camera angles, extradiagetic music, and a time duration typically not exceeding 2 minutes. In contrast, content pertaining to "science", "current affairs", or "news" diverged in its audio-visual presentation, with a noticeable reduction in the utilization of elaborate

audio-visual resources. Political and opinion-based content videos avoided the inclusion of music. Moreover, our analysis revealed that advertising content on TikTok showcased specific audio-visual attributes, prominently featuring multiple angles, varied shots, and extended time durations, thereby differentiating it from organic content on the platform and fostering a more pronounced visual impact on adolescents.

Finally, regarding the fifth objective, we found a significant correlation between the thematic content of the TikTok videos and their corresponding levels of engagement. Humorous content indeed garnered the most engagement in terms of “likes”, “comments”, “favorites”, or “shares”. In contrast, advertising exhibited the lowest levels of interaction, signaling either the disinterest of this youth demographic, the inefficacy of brand-designed advertising strategies, or the potential limitations imposed by the platform itself to foster a safe environment for minors.

While offering valuable insights, this analysis has inherent limitations. The sample size, examining 500 videos from two profiles of minors under 14, may not fully represent TikTok’s diverse generation Alpha users. Also, the study’s location (Spain) and browsing time could introduce biases from the platform’s recommendation system, impacting global validity, and the absence of qualitative analysis on issues such as sexualization or violence limits understanding. Future research should adopt an international and qualitative approach for a nuanced comprehension of TikTok content consumption among new generations.

In this sense, our findings emphasize the prevalence of advertising content on TikTok, especially related to consumer brands and online shopping. This saturation of promotional messages poses risks to the mental health and body image perceptions of young users. Gender disparities in content consumption and advertising tactics suggest TikTok may unintentionally perpetuate stereotypes and unhealthy behaviors among its young audience.

Both government regulators and the platform must implement robust measures to address algorithmic recommendation system complexities. This includes safeguarding young individuals from risks associated with online content and enforcing stricter advertising policies targeting minors. By fostering a safer online environment, TikTok can mitigate adverse impacts of digital media consumption and promote young people’s well-being.

Authors Contributions

José Antonio Cortés-Quesada: Conceptualization; Formal analysis; Investigation; Methodology; Validation; Project administration; Resources; Writing-original draft; Writing-review & editing.

Arantxa Vizcaíno-Verdú: Conceptualization; Formal analysis; Funding acquisition; Investigation; Methodology; Validation; Resources; Writing-original draft; Writing-review & editing.

Conflicts of interest

All authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

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