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**Tik Tok News: An analysis of users' perception  
of journalistic content on Tik Tok**

*Master Thesis*

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## **Bibliographic note**

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## **Abstract**

Considering the significant number of news outlets branching out to the Tik Tok app, more research on this format of news delivery and users' perception is crucial. Through a mixed-method study of qualitative content analysis, sentiment analysis of comments, and semi-structured interviews with 12 followers of each Tik Tok account, this study aimed at understanding how active users perceive the news on Tik Tok. The results show that the Accessibility, Style, Didactics, and Creativity resources are the ones that most encourage people to follow news on Tik Tok and in the specific media chosen for this study: Folha de S. Paulo, Estadão, NBC News, and Washington Post. This study also suggested two possible frameworks in which journalism on Tik Tok can be inserted: (1) Ambient Journalism (Hermida, 2010); and, (2) X Journalism (Loosen, Ahva, Reimer, Solbach, Deuze, and Matzat, 2020).

## **Keywords**

Tik Tok news, user perception, audience research, social media journalism, Ambient Journalism, X Journalism, Journalism on Tik Tok

## **Abstrakt**

Vzhledem k velkému počtu zpravodajských serverů, které se objevují v aplikaci Tik Tok je zásadní další výzkum tohoto formátu publikování zpráv. Diplomová práce se věnuje výzkumu publika, zaměřila se na to, jak uživatelé vnímají a komentují obsah zpravodajství na Tik Tok. Autorka se ve výzkumu zaměřila na kombinaci výzkumných metod a výsledky analyzovala pomocí kvalitativní obsahové analýzy, analýzy sentimentu komentářů pod vybranými příspěvky na Tik Tok, a také hloubkovými polostrukturovanými rozhovory s

dvanácti sledujícími na Tik Toku. Výsledky ukazují, že dostupnost, styl, a kreativita jsou důvodem sledování zpravodajství na Tik Toku. Pro předloženou diplomovou práci bylo vybráno několik médií: NBC News, Washington Post, Folha de S. Paulo a Estadão. Tato studie také navrhla dva možné rámce, do kterých lze zařadit žurnalistiku na sociální síti Tik Tok: (1) Ambient Journalism (Hermida, 2010); a (2) X Journalism (Loosen, Ahva, Reimer, Solbach, Deuze a Matzat, 2020).

## **Klíčová slova**

Tik Tok, vnímání uživatelů, žurnalistika na sociálních sítích, Ambient Journalism, X Journalism, žurnalistika na Tik Tok

**Range of thesis: 59 pages and 99572 characters**

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1. The author hereby declares that he compiled this thesis independently, using only the listed resources and literature.
2. The author hereby declares that all the sources and literature used have been properly cited.
3. The author hereby declares that the thesis has not been used to obtain a different or the same degree.

Prague, July 29, 2022

Giovana Alves Faria



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**Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism FSV UK**  
**Approved research proposal**

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**Main research question** (max. 250 characters): How does the audience perceive news on Tik Tok?  
**Current state of research on the topic** (max. 1800 characters):

With the amount of news outlets branching out to Tik Tok with the purpose of reaching the Gen Z audience, more research on this format of news presenting is crucial. As far as Tik Tok is concerned, the majority of research focus on Tik Tok and its power as a platform (*Abidin, 2021; Kaye, 2020; Southerton, 2021; Zeng, Abidin, & Schäfer, 2021*), and Tik Tok as a means to Covid-19 information (*Li, Guan, Hammond, & Berrey, 2021; Chen, Min, Zhang, Ma, Evans, 2021; Basch, Mohlman, Fera, Tang, Pellicane, Basch, 2021*). However, little research on the topic “news on Tik Tok” has been found. Only one study investigated how the news media are adapting to Tik Tok (*Vázquez-Herrero, Negreira-Rey, & López-García, 2020*). Previous studies on online journalism and journalism on social media have examined mostly social networks such as Instagram and Facebook and the impact of social media spaces on news consumption. Hermida, Fletcher, Korell, and Logan (2012) found out, for instance, that social networks are becoming a significant source of news for Canadians. Other scholars analyzed how the media uses Instagram Stories to identify the strategies that they apply, as well as the adaptation and innovation features on this platform (*Vázquez-Herrero, Direito-Rebollal, & López-García, 2019*), as well as audience interactivity research, like the one by Larsson (2017) in which he conducts a comparative study to analyze the employment of online interactivity by news media users in relation to the social media presences of a selection of Norwegian media outlets. To sum up, most of the existing literature addresses mainly journalism on social media - e.g. Instagram and Facebook - and, concerning Tik Tok, mostly on Tik Tok as a short video application, trends and the use of the application by news outlets without addressing the audience perspective on this content. Therefore, the proposed research intends to deepen the debate on this new way of doing journalism on Tik Tok - which I classify in this study as a new type of X Journalism (*Loosen, Ahva, Reimer, Solbach, Deuze, & Matzat, 2020*) - but from the analysis of the audience's perspective.

**Expected theoretical framework** (max. 1800 characters):

- News Coverage (*Pavlik, 2019; Zelizer, 2019; Sheller, 2015*)



- X Journalism (*Loosen, Ahva, Reimer, Solbach, Deuze, & Matzat, 2020*)
- Social media and journalism (*Bossio, 2017; Meikle, 2016; Sheldon, 2015; Park & Kaye, 2020; Zhang, 2020*)
- Audience theories (*Vaterlaus & Winter, 2021; Lawrence, Radcliffe, & Schmidt, 2018; Hill & Bradshaw, 2018; Lee & Tandoc, 2017; Meijer, 2020*)
- Tik Tok (*Schmidt, 2019; Vázquez-Herrero, Negreira-Rey, & López-García, 2020; Poniewozik, Hess, Caramanica, et al., 2019; Zeng, Abidin, & Schäfer, 2021*)

**Expected methodology, and methods for data gathering and analysis (max. 1800 characters):**

Sentiment analysis of comments combined with purposeful sampling of Tik Tok users, both who are active on news outlets on Tik Tok – i.e., leaving comments on posts – as well as not active on news outlets on Tik Tok, for conduction of in deep semi-structured interviews to find out how they perceive news on Tik Tok.

Questions for active users on TikTok news outlets' accounts:

1. Why do you follow news on Tik Tok?
2. Why do you follow \*name of the account\* on Tik Tok?
3. Do you follow any other news accounts on Tik Tok?
4. What is your opinion on the way news outlets present the news on Tik Tok?
5. Would you say you can get well informed by following news on Tik Tok?
6. Do you usually seek for more information after watching a TikTok news piece?

The criteria for selection of news outlets' accounts on Tik Tok where the gathering of audience will take place was based on their journalistic character, engagement (over 1M likes), and post frequency (at least once a day). This sorting process resulted in 5 accounts: Clarín, NBC News, The Washington Post, Estadão, and Folha.

**Expected research design (data to be analyzed, for example, the titles of analyzed newspapers and selected time period):**

The data to be analyzed would be the responses to the interviews conducted with the Tik Tok users and the comments left by the users on posts of news outlets on Tik Tok. The criteria for selection of news outlets' accounts on Tik Tok where the gathering of audience will take place was based on their journalistic character, engagement (over 1M likes), and post frequency (at least once a day).

This sorting process resulted in 5 accounts: Clarín, NBC News, The Washington Post, Estadão, and Folha.

- From each news outlet, five (5) people are going to be chosen for the interviews;
- From each news outlet, one (1) post is going to be selected for sentiment analysis in the comments

**Expected thesis structure (chapters and subchapters with brief description of their content):**

- 1) Abstract
- 2) Introduction
  - Tik Tok news as a new form of X Journalism

- Previous studies on news on social media (specially Tik Tok)

3) Theoretical Framework

- Social Media and Journalism

- Audience on Social Media

- Tik Tok

- Journalistic News

4) Methods

- Description of the selected news outlets and its Tik Tok accounts

- Purposeful sampling of TikTok users for interviews and sentiment analysis of comments on TikTok posts.

5) Findings

6) Discussion and conclusion

**Basic literature list (at least 5 most important works related to the topic and the method(s) of analysis; all works should be briefly characterized on 2-5 lines):**

Vázquez-Herrero, J., Negreira-Rey, M. C., & López-García, X. (2020). Let's dance the news! How the news media are adapting to the logic of TikTok. *Journalism*, 1464884920969092.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884920969092> - Exploratory search of news media and programmes on TikTok from around the world; content analysis of the 19 news media and programmes identified with a verified profile and general thematic scope.

Zeng, J., Abidin, C., & Schäfer, M. S. (2021). Research perspectives on TikTok and its legacy apps: introduction. *International Journal of Communication*, 15, 3161-3172.

<https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/14539> - A collection of articles in the growing field of studies on TikTok and its legacy apps providing a glimpse of the nascent framings, approaches, methodologies, and applications of TikTok studies in the field of social media scholarship.

Vaterlaus, J. M., & Winter, M. (2021). TikTok: an exploratory study of young adults' uses and gratifications. *The Social Science Journal*, 1-20. [10.1080/03623319.2021.1969882](https://doi.org/10.1080/03623319.2021.1969882) - The study wants to understand young adult TikTok users' and non-users' motivations (to use or not use), experiences, and perceptions related to TikTok through online survey. Results discussed in relation to Uses and Gratifications theory and TikTok was found to meet realism, coolness, agency-enhancement, community building, bandwagon, interactivity, browsing/variety seeking, and play/fun gratifications.

Abidin, C. (2021). Mapping Internet celebrity on TikTok: Exploring attention economies and visibility labours. *Cultural Science Journal*, 12(1). <https://culturalscience.org/articles/10.5334/csci.140/> - With empirical data drawn from an extended period in-depth digital ethnography, and analyses and insights informed and supported by traditional anthropological participant observation and personal interviews with TikTok Influencers and agencies, the paper offers a foundation for how celebrity, attention, and visibility are constituted across TikTok's platform norms and features.

Related theses and dissertations (list of B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. theses defended at Charles University or other academic institutions in the last five years):

**From Charles University:**

Kohlová, B. (2020). Využití sociální sítě Instagram ve zpravodajství na příkladu České Televize. <https://dspace.cuni.cz/handle/20.500.11956/121720?locale-attribute=en> - The thesis examines the social network Instagram as a means of news coverage, specifically in case of the Czech Television. The theoretical part brings a complex description of Instagram including its evolution and the most important terms. The practical part brings results of quantitative analysis of the form and content of posts added to Instagram profile ct24zive in 30 following days.

Mudrová, Z. (2019). Informační bubliny v prostředí sociální sítě Facebook. <https://dspace.cuni.cz/handle/20.500.11956/108260> - Through the combined qualitative method of diaries and subsequent interviews, it explores how young people consume news content on this social network and, above all, what is their awareness of the algorithm and the phenomenon of information bubbles.

Bezdičková, A. (2012). Sociální síť Facebook ve zpravodajství: srovnání prostoru věnovanému sociální síti Facebook a jejímu obsahu v českých médiích v roce 2009 a 2011. <https://dspace.cuni.cz/handle/20.500.11956/40117> - The paper summarizes the establishment and strengthening of online media, particularly the phenomenon of social networks on the example of social network Facebook, and their influence on the transformation of the media sector, news values and new resources.

Pfeiferová, J. (2017). Jazyková analýza příspěvků českých zpravodajských internetových serverů na sociální síti Facebook. <https://dspace.cuni.cz/handle/20.500.11956/86426> - The thesis analyzes posts that are produced by three online Czech news websites – Aktuálně.cz, iDnes.cz and Novinky.cz. In order to conduct a linguistic analysis based on the five linguistic levels – orthography, syntax, lexicology, morphology and stylistics.

Brendlová, E. (2014). Využití sociálních sítí ve zpravodajském pokrytí povodní 2013 na ČT24. <https://dspace.cuni.cz/handle/20.500.11956/68278> - This thesis deals with the use of social networks in CT24 emergency continuous broadcasting during the floods in June 2013. Theoretical part describes the phenomena of citizen journalism and focuses on social networks in connection with the use for reporting purposes.

**Other academic institutions:**

Cejnek, P. (2016). Šíření digitálního zpravodajství prostřednictvím sociálních sítí [Univerzita Tomáše Bati ve Zlíně. Fakulta multimediálních komunikací, Ústav marketingových komunikací]. Univerzita Tomáše Bati ve Zlíně. <http://hdl.handle.net/10563/39097> - The news distribution model is constantly evolving, to which its publishers must respond more and more quickly. This bachelor thesis deals with the analysis of the current situation of this issue in the domestic environment and outlines the trends by which the field can develop further.

Sklenářová, B. A. (2016) Praktiky sekundárního gatekeepingu v prostředí online sociální sítě Facebook. [https://is.muni.cz/th/o2s9n/DP\\_386232\\_Sklenarova.pdf](https://is.muni.cz/th/o2s9n/DP_386232_Sklenarova.pdf) - The thesis deals with secondary

gatekeeping, as described by Jane Singer, and qualitatively examines it in the online social network Facebook using semi-structured interviews with 15 respondents aged 18 to 39 years. The aim of this work is to reveal how this phenomenon is practiced by selected respondents in the environment of this online social network

Date / Signature of the student:

15/11/21

**THIS PART TO BE FILLED BY THE ACADEMIC SUPERVISOR:**

I confirm that I have consulted this research proposal with the author and that the proposal is related to my field of expertise at the Faculty of Social Sciences.

I agree to be the Thesis supervisor.

Mgr. Veronika Macková, Ph.D.

15. 11. 2021

Surname and name of the supervisor

Date / Signature of the supervisor

Further recommendations related to the topic, structure and methods for analysis:

Further recommendations of literature related to the topic:

The research proposal has to be printed, signed and submitted to the FSV UK registry office (podatelna) in two copies, by **November 15, 2021**, addressed to the Program Coordinator. Accepted research proposals have to be picked up at the Program Coordinator's Office, Mgr. Sandra Štefaniková. The accepted research proposal needs to be included in the hard copy version of the submitted thesis.

**RESEARCH PROPOSALS NEED TO BE APPROVED BY THE HEAD OF ERASMUS MUNDUS JOURNALISM PROGRAM.**

# Contents

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>INTRODUCTION</b>                                      | <b>1</b>  |
| <b>1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK</b>                          | <b>2</b>  |
| 1.1 <i>Online journalism</i>                             | 3         |
| 1.2 <i>Social media and journalism</i>                   | 4         |
| 1.2.1 <i>Journalism on Tik Tok</i>                       | 7         |
| 1.3 <i>Ambient journalism</i>                            | 9         |
| 1.4 <i>X Journalism</i>                                  | 10        |
| 1.5 <i>Audience research on social networks</i>          | 11        |
| 1.5.1 <i>Users on social media</i>                       | 14        |
| <b>2. METHODOLOGY</b>                                    | <b>15</b> |
| 2.1 <i>Semi-structured interviews</i>                    | 15        |
| 2.2 <i>Qualitative content analysis of Tik Tok posts</i> | 19        |
| 2.3 <i>Sentiment analysis of comments</i>                | 23        |
| 2.4 <i>Selected Tik Tok news accounts</i>                | 24        |
| 2.5 <i>Data collection</i>                               | 28        |
| 2.6 <i>Research sample and research questions</i>        | 31        |
| <b>3. RESULTS</b>  | <b>34</b> |
| 3.1 <i>Folha de S. Paulo</i>                             | 34        |
| 3.2 <i>Estadão</i>                                       | 39        |
| 3.3 <i>NBC News</i>                                      | 44        |
| 3.4 <i>Washington Post</i>                               | 48        |
| 3.5 <i>Comparison of selected media</i>                  | 53        |
| 3.5.1 <i>Dynamic, young, and up-to-date journalism</i>   | 56        |
| 3.5.2 <i>Speed, and easy interaction</i>                 | 56        |
| 3.5.3 <i>Diverse news presentation</i>                   | 57        |
| <b>CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION</b>                         | <b>57</b> |
| <b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>                                      |           |

## Introduction

Tik Tok is a social networking service (SNS) for sharing short videos of up to three minutes in length that can include background music, text, and embedded links to redirect users to other sites, and interactive buttons to like, share, and comment on the publications. The app was developed by the Chinese technology company ByteDance - known in China as Douyin, it was launched in China in September 2016, and introduced to the international market as Tik Tok a year later, becoming the number two ranked app overall in the Apple Chinese App Store (Hallanan, 2018).

In August 2018, Tik Tok purchased the Chinese social media service Musical.ly., which made downloads around the world skyrocket. As of the last quarter of 2021, Tik Tok surpassed 160 million downloads worldwide (Sensor Tower, 2022). With the platform's rampant growth, several news outlets started to publish their content on Tik Tok, with around 271 news accounts currently active on Tik Tok (Zaffarano, 2018).

The majority of research focuses on Tik Tok and its power as a platform (Abidin, 2021; Kaye DBV, Zeng, 2020; Southerton, 2021; Zeng, Abidin, & Schäfer, 2021), and Tik Tok as a means to Covid-19 information (Li, Guan, Hammond, & Berrey, 2021; Chen, Min, Zhang, Ma, Evans, 2021; Basch, Mohlman, Fera, Tang, Pellicane, Basch, 2021). Meanwhile, one that has not yet been extensively explored is the universe of journalism on Tik Tok.

This study will also suggest two possible frameworks in which we can insert journalism on Tik Tok: (1) Ambient Journalism (Hermida, 2010); and, (2) X Journalism (Loosen, Ahva, Reimer, Solbach, Deuze, and Matzat, 2020).

Considering the significant number of news outlets branching out in this Gen Z-dominant app, more research on this format of news delivery is crucial for social media

scholarship. As a suggestion for future research, boyd and Ellison (2007) mention in their study on SNS that, back then, scholars still had limited knowledge about who is using these social networks, who is not, and for what reasons. Later, these points were eventually addressed in research related to the existing social networks of that time, but with the newest Tik Tok, this area is still uncharted.

With that in mind, the main objective of this research is to understand the perception of the news posted on Tik Tok by the eyes of the public, having as main research question for this study *RQ1: How do users perceive news on Tik Tok?* followed by *RQ2: Why do people follow news on Tik Tok?*, and *RQ3: How do news outlets present the news on Tik Tok?*. This study uses qualitative content analysis, combined with semi-structured interviews with a purposeful sampling of followers of the Tik Tok news profiles Folha de S. Paulo, Estadão, NBC News, and Washington Post, and sentiment analysis of the comments section of a post from each Tik Tok account.

The study also introduces a review of the theoretical framework on 1) Online journalism; 2) Social media and journalism; 3) Journalism on Tik Tok – and possible frameworks to contextualize it in the field of media and communication studies; and 4) Users on social media. Subsequently, the methodology used for both data selection and data analysis is explained, as well as the research model that will be used to analyze the interviews. Following, the results of the research are presented.

Finally, the last section of this study will resume what has already been presented, discuss the research findings, and suggest more paths for expanding the research in this field.

## **1. Theoretical Framework**

To emphasize the significance of the present study, it is foremost necessary to familiarize ourselves with theories and previous investigations in the research spheres of online and social media journalism, audience research, and social media as a part of the organizational and institutional structures of journalism, as well as the public of these news outlets on social media.

### ***1.1 Online journalism***

It is not a priority of this research to delve deeper into the advent of Web 1.0 and 2.0 and the fusion between journalism and the internet, since it has long been a common reality. However, before approaching the rise of mobile social media and its convergence with journalism, it is necessary to remember that the means of production, distribution, and transmission of news have already undergone a reformulation when the internet was introduced in newsrooms, completely reshaping the way of doing journalism.

In fact, as Pavlik (2000) highlights, from Julius Caesar's *Acta Diurna* to Gutenberg's printing, and later the invention of the telephone, journalism has always been shaped by technological changes. The internet was just one more of those innovations, but as the latest, it is the one that has been branching out the most in recent years. Pavlik (2000) suggests that technological changes affect journalism in four different areas:

(1) the way journalists do their job; (2) the nature of news content; (3) the structure and organization of the newsroom and the news industry; and (4) the nature of the relationships between and among news organizations, journalists and their many publics, including audiences, competitors, news sources, sponsors and those who seek to regulate or control the press.” (Pavlik, 2000, p. 229)



The interface shift affected especially the hierarchies of online news production. In one of his studies, Hermida (2010) noted that Twitter started to play a significantly influential role in hard news, exemplifying it with the BBC coverage of the “Arab Spring”, which integrated Twitter feeds into mainstream journalistic practices.

This resulted in print news media – which were already at a disadvantage in fact-checking, editing, and publishing fresh news – having to resort to reporting what has already been shared on social media and, in the case of TV journalism, incorporating live social media coverage, turning traditional reporting into something distant and not so new for the already online-updated audience (Sheller, 2015).

Sheller (2015) also shed light on four overlapping and mutually reinforcing trends of the online news flow brought up by the media analyst Ben Adler that, according to Sheller (2015) are re-shaping, not only news distribution, but also the content of the news itself:

Proliferation of news sources, formats, and new technologies for media consumption; Participation by consumers in the dissemination and creation of news, through social media sharing, commenting, blogging, and the posting online of photos, audio, and video; Personalization of one’s streams of news via email, mobile apps, and social media; Source promiscuity—rather than having strong relationships with a handful of media brands, young people graze among a vast array of news outlets. (Sheller, 2015, p.19)

Adler (2013, apud Sheller, 2015) highlights that the growing consumption of news on smartphones by younger audiences promotes summary presentations with easily clickable links to longer stories – a trend that can be observed on Tik Tok news and that will be further explored in this research.

## ***1.2 Social media and journalism***

Narrowing down to social media, a broad definition of social media can be web-based applications or services that exist to allow a series of connections to be made online through a profile or media content (boyd & Ellison, 2007). It allows people to share various contents, different ideas, and standpoints with a wider community that overreaches barriers, not possible in the physical world, and also to create a representation of a common identity with shared values and beliefs in an online sphere.

Social media platforms have heavily modified the nature of public and private communication (van Dijk, 2013). They started to become more popular in the late 1990s, with the creation of the first recognizable social network in 1997, SixDegrees.com, but only really started to be adopted – although initially by a teenage majority – in the early 2000s with the advent of MySpace in 2004 (boyd & Ellison 2007). Thereafter, several different types of social media – e.g. Facebook, Youtube, Twitter, Instagram, Tik Tok – sprang up at a frantic speed, each in search of its audience.

The introduction of social media to journalism happened when there was already a transition taking place in journalism from Web 1.0 – in which journalists had to adapt to the basics of the World Wide Web by keeping a newsroom 24 hours active and updated content in multi-platforms – to Web 2.0, in which users have the opportunity to not only enjoy a journalistic piece online but also interact with it by sharing, liking, and commenting (Bossio, 2017). This led several scholars to express their views on this new space and temporality that journalism gained.

Peters (2012 apud Sheller, 2015) argues that the easy interactivity with the news made available by the emergence of several mobile interfaces has affected the places, spaces, and time of production and consumption of news, thus changing what is news as a whole. Sheller (2015) endorses this declaration saying that “the rise of on-demand, on-

location, participatory capabilities has also changed the content, form, style, and temporality of news as an event” (Sheller, 2015, p.13).

Lee Humphreys (2013 apud Sheller, 2015) on the other hand remarks that what makes mobile social media so captivating is not just their mobility or their relation to space - since those features can be easily spotted on print media as well - but the fact that the means of media production, distribution, and consumption are all converged on a single device.

For Bossio (2017), the only things that have not changed since journalism joined social media environments are the durability of journalism as a profession and the uncertainty of its future. Regarding the uncertainty of its future, Zelizer (2019) suggests that, for journalism to prosper amidst the endless digital revolutions, we must never forget what journalism is and why it matters, regardless of its technological proclivity. In Zelizer’s (2019) own words, “it is journalism that gives technology purpose, shape, perspective, meaning and significance, not the other way around” (Zelizer, 2019, p.1).

Such statements are a stimulus to flex the muscle of communication research more focused on the new shapes that journalism is taking to adapt to the cutting edge of social media without losing its purpose and principles, and on how the audience is reacting to these transformations.

A myriad of studies analyzing social media and its applications to journalism has already been previously conducted. Meikle (2016) addressed social media and its convergence of public and personal communication, citizen journalism, its sharing industry, and polarities, as well as social media from its basic principles like interpersonal communication until its applications in varied areas, i.e. political, mass-mediated, educational, and more (Sheldon, 2015).

With the possibility of both audience and journalists sharing the same rooms in social media-enabled environments, the impacts of social media on journalism, and journalists' practices have also been a subject of matter for scholars (Hermida, 2012; Bossio, 2017).

### **1.2.1 Journalism on Tik Tok**

As journalism and journalists have been branching out to different social networks to reach a wider and younger audience, it was expected that traditional news outlets would not be left out of the newest and most popular Tik Tok. There are around 271 news accounts currently active on Tik Tok (Zaffarano, 2018). And, as Sundar and Limperos (2013) apud Vaterlaus and Winter (2021) previously advised, it is recommended to conduct qualitative research when new media emerges to see why people are using this new media and what personal needs the new media meets.

Tik Tok, also known as Douyin and formerly Musica.ly in China, is a social network app for creating and sharing short videos. Owned by the Chinese tech company ByteDance, the media app was launched as Douyin in China in September 2016 and introduced internationally as Musical.ly a year later. In August 2018, Tik Tok purchased Musical.ly, taking the number of app downloads to over 160 million worldwide (Sensor Tower, 2022). The app's popularity skyrocketed during the lockdown of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the U.S. recording an 18% week-on-week uplift in downloads between March 16 - 22 (Reich, 2020).

Studies previously conducted on Tik Tok are all very recent. These have mostly addressed: how internet celebrity cultures are constituted on Tik Tok (Abidin, 2021), how Tik Tok accounts are used to communicate health-related information (Zhu et al., 2019) its power as a communication medium (Southerton, 2021), Tik Tok as a platform, and its emergent research perspectives (Zeng, Abidin, & Schäfer, 2021; Savic, M.,

2021). In the scope of news on Tik Tok, one content analysis study on how news media are adapting to the dynamics of Tik Tok was found (Vázquez-Herrero, Negreira-Rey, & López-García, 2020).

When it comes to research on the motivation behind consumers' use of Tik Tok, most of it has been conducted in China (Yang & Ha, 2021; Lu, X & Lu, Z, 2019; Meng & Leung, 2021; Omar & Dequan, 2020). There are also studies exploring this field in Denmark (Buchnell Bossen & Kottasz, 2020), and in the United States (Vaterlaus & Winter, 2021). These have shown that most motivation results for using Tik Tok are supported by the Uses and Gratifications Theory (U&G) (Katz et al., 1973 apud Vaterlaus & Winter, 2021). U&G deems that “media users are goal-oriented, active, and purposive in their selection of media, and focuses on why users choose certain media (i.e., uses) and what needs are met through their use of the media (i.e., gratifications) (Katz et al., 1973 apud Vaterlaus & Winter, 2021, p.2).

However, Sundar & Limperos (2013) apud Vaterlaus & Winter (2021) highlight that, while traditional approaches to U&G have stated that media is used to meet preexisting needs, new gratifications have emerged as users interact with advanced media and technology. These new nuanced gratifications were explored by Vaterlaus and Winter (2021) in their study on users' motivations to use Tik Tok. Their results met with eight modality-based gratifications for Tik Tok use motivation presented by Sundar & Limperos (2013): “realism (motivated by the uniqueness of short-form video combined with audio), coolness (share creative or humorous content), agency-enhancement (contribute to trends, but can make them their own), community building (relationship maintenance/building inside app and in-person), bandwagon (staying up with and contributing to trends), interactivity (ease in using app features - app promotes active engagement), browsing/variety seeking (a variety of content/information

available), and play/fun gratifications (entertainment and escapism)” (Vaterlaus & Winter, 2021, p. 16).

While researches by Yang and Ha (2021), Lu, X and Lu, Z (2019), Meng and Leung (2021), Omar and Dequan (2020), and Buchnell Bossen and Kottasz (2020) found many unique motivations for using Tik Tok, the familiar element among them was the entertainment gratification, which was, among others, the most common motivation found for Tik Tok usage. These outcomes create a solid background that gives an idea of what to expect from the present research when conducting interviews with followers of Tik Tok news profiles. Moreover, as Tik Tok is an “understudied new media” (Wang, 2020, p. 8 apud Vaterlaus & Winter, 2021), and there is also a research gap in how journalism has been paving its way into Tik Tok, it is also possible to find room to suggest some frameworks that allow us to better understand this new form of journalism. These are going to be discussed in the following chapters.

### ***1.3 Ambient journalism***

In Hermida’s (2010) study about the role Twitter is playing in new forms of para-journalism as microblogging – i.e. a new media technology that broadens our communication skills, somehow similar to broadcast – he promotes the idea that these asynchronous, lightweight, and always-on communication systems are enabling citizens to maintain an awareness system that his paper describes as Ambient Journalism (Hermida, 2010). This could be one way of comprehending Tik Tok news.

Awareness systems are “intended to help people construct and maintain awareness of each others’ activities, context or status, even when the participants are not co-located” (Markopoulos et al., 2009 apud Hermida, 2010 p. 301). However, Hermida (2010) uses in his study the definition of awareness proposed by Chalmers (2002) as “the ongoing interpretation of representations i.e. of human activity and of artefacts”

(Chalmers 2002, p. 389 apud Hermida, 2010). Hermida applies this to his study by defining Twitter messages as “both representations of human activity and as artefacts” (Hermida, 2010, p. 301).

Breaking it down into simpler words: news is shared on Twitter in fast and frequent messages, making users obtain this information on the fringe of their awareness, i.e. with no need for the cognitive attention that one takes to read a full article, for instance. The value of the news shared on Twitter then does not lie in each individual short tweet, but in the mental picture created by the consistency of several tweets over time. Giving rise to what Hermida (2010) calls “Ambient Journalism”, the mental model of news and events around people.

Hence, some similarities can be identified when comparing this structure to Tik Tok news in terms of speed of share, content size, and frequency, allowing users to keep track of the news, whether by spontaneous/incidental exposure to the news on Tik Tok, or by purposeful exposure, i.e. when the user chooses to follow a specific news outlet on Tik Tok.

#### ***1.4 X Journalism***

Another framework that could be helpful for future scholars in contextualizing journalism on Tik Tok scholarship could be through the lens of X Journalism by Loosen Ahva, Reimer, Solbach, Deuze, and Matzat (2020). With the ever-changing and evolutionary field of journalism, Loosen et al. (2020) chose to come up with an observational tool and a concept that they named X Journalism.

To better categorize all the emerging developments and forms of journalism in a less complicated way, they use X journalism as a tool to both “capture the diversity of the field as a whole by looking at it from a sufficient distance”, as well as “to enable us to trace the constant evolution of the field over time” (Loosen et al., 2020, p.3). As a

concept (with a capital ‘X’ and ‘J’), X Journalism is proposed due to “the emergence of ever new X journalisms (with a small ‘j’), i.e. combinations of the word ‘journalism’ with a particular modifying term that (is supposed to) represent and signal a certain specificity and, in a certain time frame, novelty” (Loosen et al., 2020, p.3).

With a constantly expanding database, their study collected about 166 X journalisms that were crowd-categorized into groups according to the different aspects they refer to. This resulted in eight categories of X journalisms that were clustered in relation to what their ‘X’ primarily stands for (Loosen et al., 2020). Thus, following one of the proposed further researches by the authors to “analyze what types of terms (dis)appear at what time, e.g. to identify trends/phases in journalism’s transformation” (Loosen et al., 2020, p. 16), the present study suggests two categories that better accommodate journalism on Tik Tok:

[...] 4. a particular kind of audience relationship in terms of participatory openness, publics reached, etc. (e.g. ‘engagement’, ‘millennial’, ‘citizen’ journalism); 5. a particular type of (distribution) medium or channel (‘print’, ‘TV’, ‘Facebook’, ‘Snapchat’ journalism). (Loosen et al., 2020, p.8)

It is important to underscore that, due to the time and length limitations of the present study, the frameworks mentioned above are supposed to serve as the starting point for future scholars to ripen their own stances further, and enrich this constantly developing field with more in-depth theoretical and empirical research.

### ***1.5 Audience research on social networks***

Focusing on the main subject of this analysis – the public that consumes the news – we must acknowledge the previous researches that have already been conducted on audiences on social networks, and their perceptions of these new “journalisms”. This chapter will also explain the choice of the terminology “user” to refer to the “audience”.



When further exploring the previous scholarship on the field, one can find research addressing the users' perspectives on online journalism and social media journalism from different angles and methodologies. Lawrence, Radcliffe, and Schmidt (2017) and Costera Meijer (2020) decided to advance audience studies with in-depth interviews with journalists and editors from various news outlets.

Lawrence et. al (2017) conducted interviews with editors from different countries to understand how they measure and practice engagement, if they see the audience as more active – the 'user' – or more passive, and when they take the users' input into account in the news production. The results show that, although some outlets are exploring ways to engage users and make them take part in the so-called 'participatory' journalism (Deuze et al., 2007 apud Bossio, 2017), there's still a heavy focus on metrics and statistics from many news outlets.

Meanwhile, Costera Meijer (2020) uses a case study in the Dutch journalism scenario to identify four inflection points between 1995 and 2020 concerning the audience turnaround in commercial news and public service journalism:

- (1) Quality news as “not having to reckon with your audience”; (2) Increasing professional awareness of “informed citizenship” as quality journalism's remit; (3) digitalization of journalism; and (4) increasing relevance of “audience engagement”. (Costera Meijer, 2020, p.1)

The author's findings show that the innovation discourse has taken over digital journalism, which has facilitated communication with the audience. Furthermore, it appears that news organizations have become open to discovering how to better serve their audiences, open up their minds, and give them the best and more reliable information possible. As a guide for future research, Costera Meijer (2020) suggests an improvement in our understanding of the experience of quality by news users “– when

do they feel informed – and how such experience changes concerning time, place, need, habit, mood, device, medium, and platform” (Costera Meijer, 2020, p. 2338). The perfect cue for the investigation of the present research with a focus on Tik Tok, since there has been previous research on the field but with a focus on social media in general (Hermida, Fletcher, Korell, and Logan, 2012).

Their study, conducted with 1600 Canadians based on an online survey, found that social networks are becoming a significant source of news in Canada and that social media users are more likely to have a diversified news diet. Around 40% of social network users said they consume news from people they follow on social media like Facebook, while 20% from news organizations and individual journalists that they follow (Hermida et al., 2012). People surveyed justified choosing social media as a source of information by saying that it helps them keep track of events and exposes them to a wider range of news and information. The survey also showed that users are integrating social networks into their news sources, but not using them as substitutes for reliable traditional media.

Moving forward to Lu, X. and Lu, Z.’s (2019) research, their analysis is already directed to Tik Tok, but with a broader goal regarding people’s interests in the platform as a whole, aiming to understand why people are using Douyin (Tik Tok), and not specifically why people follow news on Tik Tok. To answer the research questions, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 28 active users of Tik Tok in China, being five of them active content creators on the platform as well. Compared to other social media, unique motivations were discovered for the use of Tik Tok when analyzing the interviews. The authors found that people use Tik Tok not only for entertainment, but also for presenting themselves as leading a “fashionable” lifestyle, and for informational and practical needs (Lu, X. & Lu, Z., 2019).

### 1.5.1 Users on social media

In the book *Mobile-First Journalism Producing News for Social and Interactive Media*, Hill and Bradshaw (2018) analyze not only social network trends, scenario transformations, and how news media should operate to “feed” their now ‘always-on public’ with the content (news) they are looking for on social media, but they also bring up the change enabled by social media and journalism convergence to the producer-user relationship from passive audiences to active users.

How news outlets engage with their public before and after the shift to the online environment is remarkably different. While in the past the only possible way for the media to have an idea about the upshot of its journalistic pieces was through the number of subscribers to a magazine or a newspaper, the ranking of viewers of a broadcast, or the number of listeners of a radio program, for instance, today news outlets can gather a much larger amount of data about the user’s point of view and satisfaction/dissatisfaction through comments, likes, and the number of shares.

Yet, this ‘horizontal media’, as Shirky (2008, apud Hill & Bradshaw, 2018) wisely names social media, blurs the line between professional journalists and users. The positive side of it is the democratization that comes with this merged territory, whereas the public gets to be part of the news production by either contributing with exclusive reporting or by circulating existing news (Bossio, 2017) – a phenomenon that has been vastly explored academically and called ‘participatory’ journalism by some scholars (Deuze et al., 2007; Domingo et al., 2008 apud Bossio, 2017), and ‘produsage’ by others (Bruns, 2006 apud Bossio, 2017). The negative side is the heightened likelihood of misinformation and fake news dissemination since “journalism content mixes freely with gossip and personal updates” (Hill & Bradshaw, 2018, p.7), and user-

led content can be shared at lightning speed by news outlets on social media – eager to be the first to break the news – without proper fact-checking.

Social media and mobile spaces have also gifted news consumers with the power of interactivity and participation. Back in 2006, Jay Rosen already referred to users as “the people formerly known as the audience” (2006, apud Hill & Bradshaw, 2018 p.5), and the academic Henry Jenkins described the perfect media consumer as someone emotionally engaged, active, and social networked (Jenkins, 2008 apud Hill & Bradshaw, 2018).

By arguing that the term ‘audience’ can imply passivity, Hill and Bradshaw (2018) opted to utilize the word ‘users’ instead of ‘audiences’. They claim that the former “is a model of media that presents the audience as the ‘child’ and we, the journalists, as a ‘parent’ who is ‘teaching’ the children what they need to know about the world” (Hill & Bradshaw, 2018, p. 5). On that note, this research will also make use of the term ‘users’ to avoid any allusion to the no longer existing passivity from the audience’s side.

## **2. Methodology**

The methodology used for the present research is a combination of semi-structured interviews with a purposeful sampling of followers of the selected news outlets’ accounts on Tik Tok, qualitative content analysis of one post from each Tik Tok account, and sentiment analysis of the comments of the selected post from each Tik Tok account. It is worth mentioning that all translations from Portuguese to English that will appear from now on were made by the author.

### ***2.1 Semi-structured interviews***

The questions for the semi-structured interviews were based on Lu, X. and Lu, Z.’s (2019) study. These questions are a great foundation to investigate people’s

reasonings for following Tik Tok news because, in their study, the authors include e.g. questions about people's motivation to watch short videos on Tik Tok, what types of content they enjoy watching on Tik Tok, and what they like or dislike about the platform. From this basis, new questions of the same genre were developed directing the focus to people's motivation to watch the news on Tik Tok.

Semi-structured interview (SSI) is a great way to find out the *why* in a research rather than the *how many* or *how much*. It is a qualitative data collection method that consists of a set of closed and open-ended questions for an interview in which you already know what you want to find out. (Adams, 2015 apud Hatry et al., 2015; Fylan, 2005) The disadvantages are that SSIs can be time-consuming and, if conducted with a big group and without enough time and personnel, it is “unlikely to encompass a large enough sample to yield precision of the “plus or minus n percent” variety” (Adams, 2015 apud Hatry et al., 2015, p.493). On the other hand, semi-structured interviews are advantageous since they are flexible, meaning that the researcher can adapt the questions to address points that are important to individual respondents, and it is useful to reach a “deeper understanding of the research question by exploring contradictions within your participants’ accounts” (Fylan, 2005, p.67).

The interviews were text-based, meaning the respondents received the questions via email/social media and replied in written form, and were conducted with a purposeful sampling of followers of the four selected Tik Tok accounts: Folha de S. Paulo, Estadão, NBC News, and Washington Post. A total of 12 followers were selected for a 14-question interview that addressed their Tik Tok news consumption habits, interests, what attracted them to these Tik Tok news accounts, and how they perceive the news on Tik Tok. To analyze the respondents' answers, this study utilizes the

qualitative data method of Thematic Analysis (Clarke, Braun, & Hayfield, 2015) commonly applied to interviews.

Thematic Analysis (TA) is recommended for studies with data that comes from interviews with a small number of interviewees – e.g. u/g project – medium projects – e.g. Master's, Prof Doc – or large projects – e.g. Ph.D. (Braun & Clark, 2013 apud Clarke et. al., 2015). When conducting a TA, it is necessary to follow a six-step process that consists of: “Familiarization, Coding, ‘Searching’ for themes, Reviewing themes, Defining and naming themes, Writing the report” (Braun & Clarke, 2006 apud Clarke et. al., 2015, p. 230).

The Familiarization step consists of the process of going through the data set – rereading transcripts, listening to audio recordings – and taking notes of any initial observations; Coding is the process of identifying and labeling relevant features of the data to identify common patterns; The verb to search in 'Searching' for themes is in quotation marks because it is not a discovery, but a gathering of codes for the purpose of creating a plausible mapping of key patterns in the dataset; Reviewing themes gives the researcher the chance to check whether they are a good 'fit' with the dataset; Defining and naming themes is the part in which the researcher writes a brief summary of each theme with its definitions, and, finally; Writing the report, the last stage in which the researcher interweaves their analytical narrative, drawing the final conclusions (Braun & Clarke, 2006 apud Clarke et. al., 2015).

#### Naming themes

After the familiarization with the interviews and the coding process, these were the themes created for this analysis: **Accessibility**, **Didactics**, **Diversity**, **Curiosity**, **Style**, **Creativity**, **Trust**, and **Algorithm** (Faria, 2022).

### Defining themes

**Accessibility:** stands for all the answers that mentioned speed, practicality, agility, dynamics, convenience, and anything else related to accessibility;

**Didactics:** was chosen to group all answers that touched on the educational, and explanatory take of the Tik Tok accounts;

**Diversity:** was chosen for answers that mentioned the need for more variety in terms of the genre of content on the Tik Tok feed;

**Curiosity:** as the name gives away, is a theme for answers that cite curiosity as a motivator to start following a Tik Tok account;

**Style:** this theme groups all answers related to the point of view, editorial and aesthetic style of presentation of the news chosen by each news outlet;

**Creativity:** stands for the approach taken by each news outlet and the reporters in charge of the Tik Tok accounts when creating and presenting the news;

**Trust:** brings together all answers related to the reliability of each media, and, finally;

**Algorithm:** stands for answers that named the algorithm as the reason for some pattern on Tik Tok.

Below are the final questions. The ones in bold are the ones that did not enter the Thematic Analysis since the answers are usually “yes”, “no”, “not sure”, followed or not by a justification, or simply questions that lead the respondents to a direct answer such as names of topics, news outlets, a number, etc.

### Questions:

1. **For how long do you follow \*name of the account\* Tik Tok?**
2. **Do you follow any other news outlet on Tik Tok? Which ones?**
3. Why did you choose to follow the news on Tik Tok?

4. Why did you choose to follow \*name of the account\* on Tik Tok?
5. What are your thoughts on the way news outlets present the news on Tik Tok?
6. **Do you feel like you get well informed by following news on Tik Tok?**
7. **Do you seek information on other platforms after watching a Tik Tok news piece?**
8. What attracts you the most to Tik Tok news style?
9. What would be the thing that you like the most about Tik Tok news from \*name of the account\*?
10. **Is there anything you would like to be different in the posts from \*name of the account\*?**
11. **Would you say that the \*name of the account\* account on TikTok allows audience engagement?**
12. **Do you consume news from other social networks or news sites, TV, or radio? If not, why?**
13. **Do you consider the news on the social network Tik Tok to be full-fledged?**
14. **What type of news are you watching on Tik Tok? Do you miss any other type of news content?**

## ***2.2 Qualitative content analysis of Tik Tok posts***

The qualitative content analysis (QCA) conducted with the Tik Tok posts is mainly linked to the third research question *RQ3: How do news outlets present the news on Tik Tok?*. However, it is worth reminding that, given that the main objective of this research is to analyze the users' perspective of news on Tik Tok, RQ3 is



complimentary. The main goal of the QCA in this research is to help provide a general idea of the style of each selected Tik Tok account – e.g. visual and non-visual elements, the tone used, etc. For an in-depth analysis, a further study could be conducted with more than one post, during a longer period, and by combining other methodologies. Therefore, to have an overview of the way the news outlets operated on Tik Tok during the selected period, a short qualitative content analysis was conducted with a small sample – four posts, one from each selected Tik Tok account.

Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) is a method used for the subjective interpretation of content in a systematic and context-dependent manner (Mayring, 2014; Schreier, 2014 apud Selvi, 2019). While the qualitative approach to content analysis shares some similarities with the quantitative approach, such as “utilization of predefined steps in data utilization (e.g. sense-making through a coding frame, generating definitions of categories, segmenting data, etc.)” (Schreier, 2014 apud Selvi, 2019 p. 442) it does have its own distinctive features such as emphasis on meaning. The concern of QCA is to provide a comprehensive description of the data under analysis. For that, it is required to develop a coding frame based on the actual data of the main study (Selvi, 2019).

After following the news outlets on Tik Tok for about two months, and further narrowing down this period to 14 days, one post from each Tik Tok account was selected for the analysis. To pursue a certain level of equality and, therefore, balance both in the qualitative content analysis as well as in the sentiment analysis of comments, all four posts address issues within the same theme and are all from the same time period.

The theme chosen was the war between Russia in Ukraine that started on February 24, 2022. The analysis of the posts happened during the months of February

and March 2022, starting on February 24 – the exact day Russia invaded Ukraine. However, since the last Tik Tok post about the war from the Brazilian news outlet Estadão was on March 9, 2022 – during the selected period – it was decided to analyze the other three news outlets until the same date as well to achieve a balance – 14 days in total.

The coding method used was inspired by Zhu et al.'s (2019) study of Tik Tok accounts used to communicate health-related information. In their study, they used content analysis to analyze 31 Provincial Health Committees' Tik Tok accounts in China. The three main coding groups of their study were: Quantified Impact, Video Content, and Video Form. These had several other aspects merged into each code e.g. Video content: groups Video type, Theme, Emotion, and Characters (Zhu et al., 2019, p. 4). However, Zhu et al.'s (2019) study has a quantitative approach, for this reason, the coding method was based on their study to group the aspects that will be analyzed, but the interpretations of these aspects will be conducted in a qualitative way.

The analyzed aspects will be

- **Visual elements:** subtitles, headlines, hashtags, emojis, tagged users, embedded links, background images, and characters.
- **General characteristics:** category, tone, and length.
- **Impact:** likes, comments, and shares.
- **Non-visual elements:** background sound.

Although the qualitative content analysis was conducted only with the final four selected posts, a general analysis of the types of news presented by each news outlet during the analyzed period was conducted to understand what was the most predominant category for each Tik Tok account.

The categories are:

- **Hard News:** One common definition of hard news is a type of news that requires immediate reporting due to its importance and short lifespan (Limor & Mann, 1997 apud Lehman-Wilzig & Seletzky, 2010). So all Tik Tok posts that presented this type of news – e.g. reports on bombing, explosions, refugees fleeing from Ukraine, soldiers looting shops – without any other attribute added by the news outlet – e.g. an explanation of the subject/situation, a comment by the reporter, etc – were grouped in this category.
- **Press Conference:** Grouped in this category were e.g. snippets from politicians in press conferences presenting a statement about a certain subject without any additional attribute added by the news outlet.
- **Explainer:** Explainer videos have an informal style of presentation, a greater degree of narration and didactics, and present a simple language, as well as a complementarity of spoken word and image. (Krämer & Böhrs, 2017 apud Schneiders, 2020). All Tik Tok posts that presented these features were grouped in this category.
- **Humor:** All Tik Tok posts addressing news in a funny, humorous way were grouped in this category. e.g. videos with ironic/sarcastic comments or a joke in between the presentation of the news.
- **Peace journalism:** One of the definitions of peace journalism is “when editors and reporters make choice – of what to report, and how to report it – that create opportunities for society at large to consider and value non-violent responses to conflict” (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005 apud Youngblood, 2016, p.3). Therefore, all Tik Tok posts that presented these features were grouped in this category.
- **Sketch:** “A comedy sketch is a self-contained 30-second to 10-minute scene based on a single premise (traditional sketch) or a satiric point (political sketch),

with little character or plot development” (Fotis, 2020, p.8). All Tik Tok posts that presented these features were grouped in this category.

- **Fact Check/Media Literacy:** This category grouped Tik Tok videos that taught users how to verify the veracity of news and the trustworthiness of websites, helping with the improvement of fact-checking skills of ordinary citizens and contributing to the users’ media literacy. Media literacy is “generally defined as the ability to access the media, to understand and critically evaluate different aspects of the media and media content” (European Commission, 2007 apud Koltay, 2011, p. 213).
- **On-Site:** The last category comprises all Tik Tok posts in which the reporter was at the place where the reported event was happening.

### ***2.3 Sentiment analysis of comments***

According to Mejova (2009), the sentiment analysis field usually studies subjective elements that are single words, phrases, or sentences. Sometimes entire documents are studied as a sentiment unit (Turney & Littman, 2003; Agrawal et al., 2003 apud Mejova, 2009), but in her study, she presents a view remarking that it is generally agreed that sentiment resides in smaller linguistic units (Pang & Lee, 2008 apud Mejova, 2009). Within the umbrella of analyses that can be carried out with the sentiment analysis methodology, Liu (2012) presents the three levels in which sentiment analysis has been mainly explored: Document level, Sentence level, and Entity and Aspect level.

The goal of a Document Level is to classify whether a whole opinion document expresses a positive or negative sentiment, and this level assumes that each document expresses opinions on a single entity, being therefore not applicable to documents that evaluate or compare multiple entities (Pang et al., 2002; Turney, 2002 apud Liu, 2012).

As an example, the author mentions a product review that can express either a negative or positive opinion.

At a Sentence level, the task is aimed at sentences and determines whether each sentence expresses a positive, negative, or neutral opinion, in which neutral usually means no opinion (Liu, 2012). It involves the classification of a sentence into the class of subjectivity – objective or subjective – and the class of sentiment – positive, negative, or neutral. The subjective sentence, in this case, would be one expressing the commentators' personal beliefs, and emotions, and an objective sentence is the one bringing some factual information.

Finally, Entity and Aspect level, previously called Feature level (Hu & Liu, 2004 apud Liu, 2012), enters the picture to contribute with a more fine-grained analysis, since both document and sentence level do not fully discover what exactly people like and dislike about something. The main point of this process is to extract features that the public has commented on and to define whether the opinion is positive, negative, or neutral.

Since the main object of investigation of this research is the users' perception of the content posted on Tik Tok by the news outlets based on interviews with followers of the Tik Tok accounts, the sentiment analysis of the comments is going to be used as another complementary examination – together with qualitative content analysis – to add more angles for further investigations in future research advancing on the topic. On that note, the Sentence level is going to be the chosen one to conduct the classification and analysis of the comments on the selected posts.

#### ***2.4 Selected Tik Tok news accounts***

As aforementioned in the theoretical framework, there are about 271 news accounts currently active on Tik Tok. Nonetheless, taking into consideration the length,

and time limitations of the present research and the fact that this study will combine two other methodologies, only four news outlets' Tik Tok accounts from two different countries were selected:

1. **Folha de S. Paulo** (Brazil) - 238,4K Followers; 2,9M Likes
2. **Estadão** (Brazil) - 538,9K Followers; 6,7M Likes
3. **NBC News** (United States) - 2,5M Followers; 70,5M Likes
4. **Washington Post** (United States) - 1,3M Followers; 54,0M Likes

For a more equal sample, only high-engagement Tik Tok accounts – which for this research was determined that a high-engagement account would be an account with over a million likes – were selected. Initially, the Argentinian news outlet Clarín was also included in the media that would potentially be analyzed, but due to the lack of response from the followers of its Tik Tok account in time, it had to be disregarded.

- **Folha de S. Paulo**

Folha de S. Paulo (also known as Folha de São Paulo or simply Folha) was founded in 1921 and is one of the largest and most influential national daily newspapers in Brazil. It seeks to follow four main principles: pluralism, non-partisanship, critical journalism, and independence. It aims at producing and organizing critical, plural, and non-partisan journalistic content to contribute to the improvement of democracy and the reduction of inequalities in Brazil (Institutional Folha).

Among its editorial principles, Folha de S. Paulo claims to confirm the veracity of all news before publishing it, to practice journalism that offers a careful and up-to-date summary of the most relevant events in São Paulo, Brazil, and the world, and to promote the values of representative democracy, human rights, the evolution of customs, knowledge, peaceful conflict resolution, free enterprise, and equalization of opportunities (Institutional Folha).

Folha de S. Paulo started its testing phase on Tik Tok in April 2021, and in August 2021 the account was already being regularly updated by the Interactivity department. According to the article published by Folha de S. Paulo to announce their debut on the app, the reason for the creation of the Tik Tok profile was to reach the younger audience, but through content that can reach the most diverse audience possible i.e. covering history, science, sports, security, economics, politics, and even incorporating memes and trends from Tik Tok itself (Folha de S.Paulo, 2021).

- **Estadão**

O Estado de S. Paulo (commonly referred to as Estadão) was founded in 1875 under the name A Província de São Paulo, and it is the oldest newspaper in the city of São Paulo still in circulation. Its founders were a group of republicans who decided to create a news diary to fight the monarchy and slavery. The guideline that was established characterizes the newspaper to this day: “make your independence the hallmark of your strength” (Archive Estadão). The news outlet debuted on Tik Tok in 2019.

- **NBC News**

NBC News is the news division of the American broadcast television network NBC, which was founded in February 1940 and operates under a division of NBCUniversal. NBC News Digital is present on radio, TV, and online, and it features brands including NBCNews.com, MSNBC.com, TODAY.com, Nightly News, Meet the Press, Dateline, and the existing apps and digital extensions of these properties (NBC Universal, 2020). On Tik Tok, NBC News started in 2019.

- **Washington Post**

The Washington Post was founded in 1877 and its principles were written by Eugene Meyer, a financier who bought the newspaper in 1933. Among basic

fundamental principles i.e. “to tell the truth as nearly as the truth may be ascertained; The newspaper shall tell ALL the truth so far as it can learn it” it also counts with a principle that states that “what it prints shall be fit reading for the young as well as for the old” (Staff, 2021; Staff, 2021b).

Alongside NBC News, the Post was one of the pioneer news media on Tik Tok, launching its profile in 2019. Dave Jorgensen, the “Tik Tok guy” of the Washington Post, when asked by The Atlantic in an interview why The Washington Post is on Tik Tok, made a comparison with editorial cartoons. “There’s been cartoons in [newspapers] for 300 years, technically,” he told the magazine (Nover, 2019).

Michelle Jaconi, the new Head of News Talent Strategy and Development at the Post, during the same interview with The Atlantic, compared Tik Tok news with crosswords:

“When crossword puzzles were introduced, a lot of people said, ‘I don’t understand. This is silly. Why does this belong in the news?’ They were buried – in some newspapers – in the ‘ladies section,’ and a lot of people couldn’t understand it. Now you look at it and it’s a thriving business, a source of not only subscription revenues, but also syndication. And it is looked at as this elite daily habit.” (Nover, 2019)

Jaconi and Jorgensen both describe the Washington Post’s adventure on Tik Tok as “a seemingly lighthearted side project that serves, sneakily, to reinforce the paper’s journalistic mission and draw in new readers” (Nover, 2019).

## ***2.5 Data collection***



### Selection of interviewees

Due to the features of the Tik Tok application, the interviewees' gathering process was more complex than expected. The initial idea was to go through each of the selected Tik Tok accounts' followers, randomly select the potential participants, and approach them directly on Tik Tok to ask if they would be interested in sharing their thoughts on the subject of Tik Tok news. Nonetheless, it is only possible to send a direct message to someone on Tik Tok if you and the other user follow each other. Consequently, given the time constraints, the best and fastest alternative was to:

1. Go through the followers of each selected Tik Tok account;
2. Check the profile of people with their name and surname – instead of a made-up username to make it easier to look them up on other social media – and a profile picture in which the users' face is easily recognizable on other social media, in case they happen to have the same profile picture;
3. Look up the person on a secondary social media in which it is possible to send a direct message to a user without mutually following each other and/or having each other as friends, e.g. Facebook;
4. Send a direct message explaining the purpose of the research and the invitation to participate in the interview.

Facebook and Instagram were the mainly used social media for searching users. Since Tik Tok allows people to embed a link to Instagram in their profile, it was easier to reach out to some users. Yet, an overwhelming majority was more likely to reply and collaborate when contacted via Facebook. Although it was overall a very difficult task to get people to respond to messages asking for an interview and/or agreeing to be interviewed, the final number of 12 participants was successfully reached.

Another interviewees' gathering method that was used was the typical

announcement on social media, i.e. posts on personal social media explaining the thesis purpose, asking if someone follows/know someone who follows news on Tik Tok, having friends and family reposting it, and also asking friends and family directly if they know someone who follows the news on Tik Tok.

However, being part of a journalistic community – whether these are journalists, or journalism students – did not help and, therefore, the last method was not the most ideal. The reason is that, to avoid biased answers, it was established that only people who do not belong to the journalism area would be interviewed. Journalists and journalism students could end up presenting a more technical outlook of how they perceive news outlets on Tik Tok. Therefore, only non-journalists were taken into account for the sample.

#### Selection of Tik Tok posts

In the qualitative content analysis, four posts were selected to have some presentation features analyzed to better understand how each selected news outlet presents itself on Tik Tok. After following each news outlet on Tik Tok for about two month – and later through a narrowed-down period of 14 days – one post from each account was selected to have the aforementioned characteristics scrutinized.

To achieve a more balanced analysis, all four posts address the war between Russia in Ukraine that began on February 24, 2022. The analysis of the posts happened during February and March 2022, starting on February 24 – the exact day Russia invaded Ukraine. However, since the last Tik Tok post about the war from the Brazilian news outlet Estadão was on March 9, 2022 – during the selected period – it was decided to analyze the other three news outlets until the same date for a fair and equal sample – 14 days in total.

#### Comment selection

The comments were categorized by subjectivity – objective or subjective –, and by sentiment – positive, negative, or neutral. After that, a manual sentiment analysis was conducted. Other than the fact that there was a feasible amount of comments to be analyzed in each Tik Tok post, another reason for choosing the manual method was the lack of options for automated analysis that would accurately: 1) bring an accurate interpretation of comments in different languages, being the main two Portuguese and English, but also other languages that were identified in some of the posts e.g. Russian, Indonesian, Thai; 2) take into consideration comments that may portray a positive reaction initially – either about the journalist presenting the news, about the content of the news, or the way it is being reported – when in fact the positive elements in it are being used to transmit another sentiment, e.g. irony, and, lastly; 3) identify comments that are not in any way related to either the content of the news, the reporter’s presentation of it, or the way that information is being transmitted.

The item number 3 is especially important since comments on social media are never consistent and users – or even bots – can make comments completely random and unrelated to the topic being discussed. Some of the comments were also not categorized by subjectivity and sentiment and, therefore, not considered for the sample. Those comments were: users tagging friends only to share the post, and comments made by the news outlet – whether replying to users’ comments/questions or stating the credits of the post.

It is important to note that the sentiment categorization of the comments was not made based on what the comment addresses, but on what mood it expresses instead. As an example, there were several comments made by supporters of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in some Tik Tok posts. Hence, when categorizing people’s feelings towards

the content of the news and/or the Tik Tok post as positive, the celebration part is what is being taken into consideration, and not the subject of the feeling.

## ***2.6 Research sample and research questions***

### Interviewees

A total of 12 followers of the selected Tik Tok accounts were selected for the 14-question interview that addressed their Tik Tok news consumption habits, interests, what attracted them to these Tik Tok news accounts, and, as it is the main objective of this research, how they perceive the news on Tik Tok.

Out of the 12 interviewees, 8 identify themselves as women, and 4 as men. The age range goes from 19 to 56 years old, which was in fact an interesting wide-range discovery, given that the Tik Tok app is known mostly for its popularity among Gen-Z users. A total of 8 followers are from Brazil, 2 from the United States, one from Lebanon, and one from Canada (Table 1).

| <b>Interviewee</b> | <b>Sex</b> | <b>Age</b> | <b>Nationality</b> | <b>Occupation</b>                         | <b>Tik Tok account</b> |
|--------------------|------------|------------|--------------------|---|------------------------|
| 1                  | M          | 28         | Brazil             | Teacher                                   | Estadão                |
| 2                  | F          | 33         | Brazil             | Teacher                                   | Estadão                |
| 3                  | F          | 25         | Brazil             | Psychologist                              | Estadão                |
| 4                  | F          | 26         | Brazil             | Biomedic                                  | Folha de S. Paulo      |
| 5                  | M          | 56         | Brazil             | CEO                                       | Folha de S. Paulo      |
| 6                  | F          | 39         | Brazil             | Architect                                 | Folha de S. Paulo      |
| 7                  | F          | 31         | United States      | Intergovernmental<br>affairs professional | NBC News               |

|    |   |    |               |                                  |                 |
|----|---|----|---------------|----------------------------------|-----------------|
| 8  | M | 22 | Brazil        | Video producer                   | NBC News        |
| 9  | M | 30 | United States | Musician                         | NBC News        |
| 10 | F | 25 | Canada        | Digital Marketing<br>Consultant  | Washington Post |
| 11 | F | 19 | Brazil        | Student                          | Washington Post |
| 12 | F | 25 | Lebanon       | Refugee services<br>at nonprofit | Washington Post |

**Table 1.** General background of followers of the selected Tik Tok news accounts that were interviewed.

#### Tik Tok posts

After a 14-day analysis of Tik Tok posts published by the selected news outlets about the war in Ukraine, the selected ones were:

- **Folha de S.Paulo:** Por que a #Rússia começou uma #guerra contra a #Ucrânia? Veja um resumo do que provocou a crise militar #TikTokNotícias (Translation: *Why did #Russia start a #war with #Ukraine? See a summary of what caused the military crisis #TikTokNews*), posted on February 25, 2022;
- **Estadão:** Repórter Eduardo Gayer mostra como é um bunker por dentro. Kiev acionou a sirene de emergência após bombardeios #ucrania #tiktoknotícias #estadao (Translation: *Reporter Eduardo Gayer shows what a bunker looks like from the inside. Kyiv triggered an emergency siren after bombings #ukraine #tiktoknews #estadao*), posted on February 24, 2022;
- **NBC News:** A number of #explosions were heard near an airfield and bomb depot in Myrhorod, a city in central #Ukraine. #Russia #news □: AP, posted on February 24, 2022;

- **Washington Post:** Western companies are cutting ties and suspending business dealings as the conflict continues in Eastern Europe #bp #gm #shell, posted on March 1, 2022.

#### Comments

Only the main comments were considered for this analysis, i.e. the replies received by the main comments were not analyzed. The justification for this choice is that often the replies consist of a message directed towards the first commentator to either compliment, disagree, or agree with the first comment and, hence, start a debate, and not of messages about the news or the way it is being displayed. Other types of comments that were disregarded were comments in which people were only tagging friends on the post to share. These types of comments were considered only if they were followed by an actual comment about the post, and not when it was just the handle of the other user being tagged. Below is the comment count for each post:

- **Folha de S. Paulo:** 264 comments
- **Estadão:** 264 comments
- **NBC News:** 404 comments
- **Washington Post:** 681 comments

Just like the questions for the interviewees, the research questions developed for this study were also based on Lu, X. and Lu, Z.'s (2019) set of research questions, but adapted to investigate people's motivations and perceptions towards Tik Tok news, and not Tik Tok in general.

The main research question for this study is

**RQ1:** How do users perceive news on Tik Tok?

Followed by two complementary questions

**RQ2:** Why do people follow news on Tik Tok?

**RQ3:** How do news outlets present the news on Tik Tok?

### **3. Results**

The results of this research will be divided by each selected Tik Tok account, followed by a chapter comparing the results between them, some highlights of the main points spotted in the answers to each research question, and, finally, the conclusion and discussion.

#### ***3.1 Folha de S. Paulo***

The selected post by Folha de S. Paulo was chosen based on the criteria aforementioned in the data collection chapter: it addresses the selected theme, the war in Ukraine, it is from the same week as the posts selected from the other Tik Tok accounts, and it has roughly the same amount of comments as the other selected posts as well. Having a balance in the number of comments makes the sentiment analysis more fair and equal among the chosen media.

In two weeks of analysis, Folha de S. Paulo published 6 Tik Toks in total: 4 in the category Hard News, 2 in the category Explainer, and 1 in the category On-Site. Posts in the Hard News category were mostly reporting attacks committed by Russia (e.g. bombings), and people running for shelter in bunkers. One of the videos in the Explainer category was the selected one, in which the reporter sums up the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and the other one explains how the war in Ukraine affects the economy in Brazil. In the only one in the category On-Site, another reporter from Folha de S. Paulo follows a driver who is helping people fleeing Kyiv.



**Fig 1.** Caption: *Why did #Russia start a #war with #Ukraine? See a summary of what caused the military crisis #TikTokNews (Source: Folha de S.Paulo’s Tik Tok)*

The selected post has 26K likes, 264 comments, and 353 shares, it is 01:21s long – the longest one among the analyzed media – and it is in the Explainer category – given that Folha de S. Paulo is a Brazilian news outlet, and the Russia-Ukraine historical background is not of common knowledge in Brazil, the video explains in a summarized way why Russia started a war with Ukraine. This explanatory approach was also mentioned by Folha de S. Paulo’s followers concerning motivations to follow news on Tik Tok and, specifically, on Folha de S. Paulo’s account “It is a more accessible and faster way to receive information, news in a summarized but very explanatory way” (Interviewee 6, 2022), “Mainly for summaries and presentation of the news” (Interviewee 5, 2022), “Because they inform you in a fast and didactic way, and in the rush of everyday life you can stay informed” (Interviewee 4, 2022).



Folha de S. Paulo makes use of almost all interactivity features available on the platform, the only one not used is the feature to tag a user on the video. The post contains subtitles – which not only is an accessibility feature for people with hearing disabilities but also allows the user to watch the video on mute – and hashtags on the caption (#Russia, #war, #Ukraine, #TikTokNews). Hashtags are useful to group each type of content in its corresponding category, and to increase the chances of a video being found and accessed, thus generating traffic and engagement on the page.

The video contains an embedded link to the full article on Folha de S. Paulo's website, which indicates that Folha de S. Paulo also uses Tik Tok to lead its viewers to its main website with full-fledged articles. The use of these interactivity and engagement features shows that Folha de S. Paulo is aware of the need to not only conform to traditional norms of journalistic practice when using new social media platforms, as it has been previously problematized by Hermida (2012) apud Bossio (2017) but instead make use of the additional tools brought to journalism by social media to increase opportunities for interactivity and audience engagement (O'Sullivan & Heinonen, 2008 apud Bossio, 2017).

The character of the video is the reporter Ian Alves, and his credits are given in the comment section, alongside credits for the background images – from AFP – that are displayed while he presents the video. The video was recorded on a green screen, so the background images are related to the topic and show up according to what the reporter is saying – e.g. when he talks about Putin, a photo of Putin appears in the back.

The tone of the video is neutral, i.e. the reporter solely gives background information about the roots of the conflict without expressing any personal opinion. Regarding non-visual elements, a song with drum beats can be heard in the background. The visual elements were also highlighted and praised by interviewees who follow

Folha de S. Paulo: “I like the highlighted titles, one accesses Tik Tok and can already spot what one is looking for. You don't have to watch all the videos until you find what you're looking for” (Interviewee 4, 2022), “I like the graphic language and video narration” (Interviewee 6, 2022).

All followers of Folha de S. Paulo mentioned Accessibility features i.e. speed, and practicality as the most attractive in the Tik Tok news style. “For the practicality and for already being an assiduous reader of this news outlet” (Interviewee 5, 2022). “For the speed of communication” (Interviewee 6, 2022). Style and Didactics features were identified as the main motivators for users to start following Folha de S. Paulo’s Tik Tok account. “I particularly like it a lot, it's a younger and more up-to-date journalism that manages to reach a large niche of people” (Interviewee 4, 2022) “Folha, in my opinion, has a differential in the way of presenting the news, which is the seriousness” (Interviewee 5, 2022). “TikTok allows for simplified communication, with a graphic pattern suitable for short videos. It allows you to quickly give the main news of the day” (Interviewee 6, 2022). Even on Tik Tok, in which the space for the display of content is tight, Folha de S. Paulo is perceived by its followers as a full-fledged media and the majority feels like they can get well informed by following Folha de S. Paulo’s news on the platform. “Yes, they provide a summary however complete” (Interviewee 4, 2022) “From Folha yes, I do consider the content to be full-fledged” (Interviewee 5, 2022).

The users’ appreciation for the explanatory take of Folha de S. Paulo’s posts was also noted in the sentiment analysis of comments. All positive comments were subjective, which means that the comments expressed the users’ personal beliefs, and emotions towards either the content of the video, the editing, or the presentation. Eight

of these comments were complimenting the didactics and conciseness of the video (See Fig. 2).



**Fig 2.** Examples of positive/subjective comments on Folha's Tik Tok post.

Translations of comments in Fig 2: **1** The best explanation I've ever heard.....simple and basic.....straight to the point...congratulations!!!! **2** FINALLY SOMETHING USEFUL IN MY FY (FY stands for For You, the name of the Tik Tok feed) **3** the best explanation (Source: Folha de S.Paulo's Tik Tok)

The results from Folha de S. Paulo are in line with the Uses and Gratifications theory, which focuses on why users elect to choose certain media, and what needs are met through their use of the media (Katz et al., 1973 apud Vaterlaus & Winter, 2021), but when compared to users' motivations for using Tik Tok in general – in which the most common gratification spotted by previous studies was entertainment (Yang & Ha's, 2021, Lu, X & Lu, Z, 2019, Meng & Leung, 2021, Omar & Dequan, 2020, and Buchnell Bossen & Kottasz, 2020), the difference between users oriented toward obtaining journalistic information on Tik Tok is noticeable. These motivations were more related to the aesthetics and didactics of the content than to entertainment.

Folha de S. Paulo on Tik Tok is performing a role that Hill (2018) names “sense-maker”. He states that with the social media environment constantly changing, and allowing anyone to publish anything, journalists are not only informers but also sense-makers – i.e. the function of “explaining the importance of events to users who are being bombarded by information, much of it of dubious quality” (Hill, 2018, p. 5-6).

### ***3.2 Estadão***

The selected post by Estadão was chosen based on the criteria aforementioned in the data collection chapter: it addresses the selected theme, the war in Ukraine, it is from the same week as the posts selected from the other Tik Tok accounts, and it has roughly the same amount of comments as the other selected posts as well. Having a balance in the number of comments makes the sentiment analysis more fair and equal among the chosen media.

In two weeks of analysis, Estadão published 7 Tik Toks in total: 5 in the category Hard News, and 4 in the category On-Site. Only one Tik Tok video did not fit into any of the categories. It was a video in which the reporter talks about how Tik Tok became one of the main sources for images about the war in Ukraine, generating mobilization inside and outside the country. As it addresses the war but with a focus on Tik Tok instead, this post was put in a separate category named Other. All posts in the Hard News category were also reporting bombings and people fleeing Ukraine or going to bunkers, and four of these Hard News videos were also in the category On-Site, in which the reporter was at the place of the event showing the situation.



*Fig 3. Reporter Eduardo Gayer shows what a bunker looks like from the inside. Kyiv triggered an emergency siren after bombings #ukraine #tiktoknews #estadao (Source: Estadão's Tik Tok)*

The selected post has 54,7K likes, 264 comments, and 838 shares – it was the post with more likes and shares among the analyzed media – it is 00:36s long, and it is in the Hard News/On-site category. In the video, the character, the reporter Eduardo Gayer, is in Kyiv, Ukraine, going down an escalator when the emergency sirens were triggered to alert the population of bombings, to show how a real bunker looks from the inside. The video is recorded by the reporter himself, creating a certain proximity between the journalist and the viewer.

Concerning visual elements, Estadão uses a flashy headline that stays on the screen throughout the whole video, which is a good asset to draw users' attention to their content when scrolling through the infinite feed of Tik Tok, it contains hashtags

(#ukraine #tiktoknews #estadao) and, as the video was recorded at the location of the events being reported, there are no background images added in post-production. Instead, the background images are from the location of the reporter. Like Folha de S. Paulo, Estadão also adds a link to the full article, allowing the user to obtain more information on the subject. No users are tagged in the video and no subtitles are added.

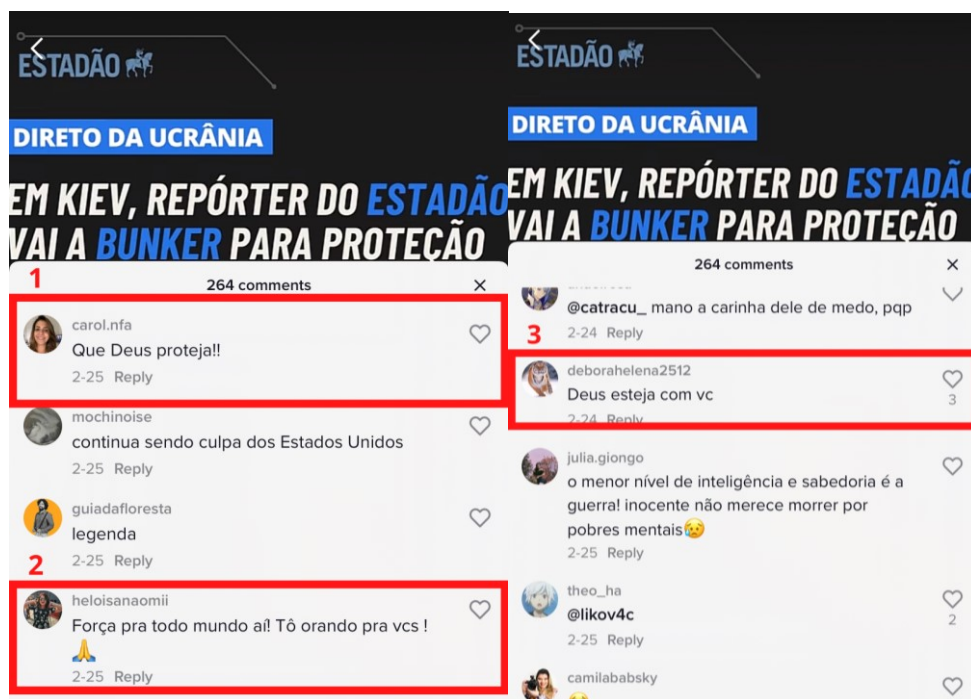
The lack of subtitles is a flaw in the news production for Estadão's Tik Tok page, given that, as mentioned previously in Folha de S. Paulo's analysis, subtitles make the content accessible for people with hearing disabilities, and add the benefit of allowing users to watch videos without audio, e.g. if a person is in a quiet environment, without earphones, and does not want to disturb people in their surroundings. The video from Estadão is also the only one recorded horizontally, while Tik Tok is a vertical-friendly app. It shows that the medium can still be in the adaptation phase of content production for Tik Tok, which was also noticed by one of Estadão's followers during the interview "They are trying to adapt to new information technologies and entertainment platforms" (Interviewee 2, 2022).

However, when analyzing in combination with the semi-structured interviews, it is possible to notice that instead of Style features, the biggest incentive for Estadão's followers to start following the outlet on Tik Tok is the Trust in the vehicle. "For trusting the information" (Interviewee 1, 2022) "Because it is a reliable news channel" (Interviewee 3, 2022).

The tone of the video is neutral, i.e the reporter presents facts without his personal opinion, and there is no background music, only natural sounds of the environment in which the reporter is located. Estadão's Accessibility features – speed, practicality, dynamics – are the strongest points among its followers on Tik Tok. "I

think it's very nice and dynamic" (Interviewee 1, 2022), "The interaction is easier" (Interviewee 2, 2022), "It's fast and dynamic" (Interviewee 3, 2022).

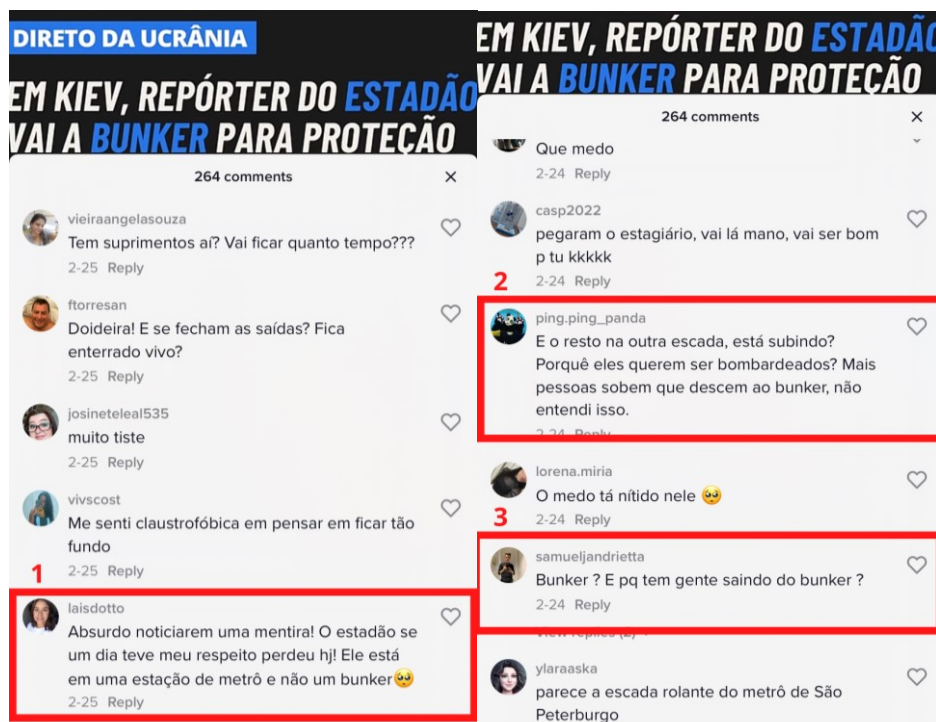
Unlike Folha de S. Paulo, the positive/subjective comments of the general public do not enhance the Accessibility features that were highly mentioned by the active followers of Estadão's Tik Tok. Instead, all positive comments were showing empathy towards the reporter and everyone involved in the war – e.g. showing concern with how shaken the reporter seemed to be, and sending blessings and protection wishes to the reporter and the Ukrainian people (See Fig. 4). It does, however, show that Estadão is incorporating what Bossio (2017) claims to create proximity to the audience, which is to provide an authentic representation of identity to avoid the "supposedly "elitist" transmission model of objective distance from the audience" (Bossio, 2017, p. 10).



*Fig. 4 Examples of positive/subjective comments on Estadão's Tik Tok post.*

Translations of comments in Fig 4: **1** God bless you!! **2** Strength to everyone! I'm praying for you all! **3** God be with you (Source: Estadão's Tik Tok)

The majority of comments on Estadão's post was negative/subjective, not towards the way the news was being presented, but instead towards the news itself. Viewers were calling the information fake since the title of the video says "In Kyiv, a reporter from Estadão goes to a bunker for protection against bombings; watch", and at no point does the reporter mention that it is the deepest subway station used as a bunker. Therefore, users were commenting that he was lying about going to a bunker when he is going down to a subway station, and others were calling fake news that he was going to the bunker/subway station because of bombings when in the background it was possible to see people going up the escalator, instead of down (See Fig 5.)



**Fig. 5** Examples of negative/subjective comments on Estadão's Tik Tok post.

Translations of comments in Fig 5: **1** It's absurd to report a lie! If Estadão ever had my respect it has lost today! He is in a subway station and not in a bunker **2** What about the rest in the other escalator, are they going up? Because they want to be bombed? More people are going up than down to the bunker, I didn't get this. **3** Bunker? And why are there people going out of the bunker? (Source: Estadão's Tik Tok)



While trustworthiness was identified as the main reason for people to follow Estadão's Tik Tok, the users' frustration with the unclear headline and other actions happening in the background of the video shows that Estadão still lacks the explanatory/didactics take that users showed appreciation towards on Folha de S. Paulo's posts on Tik Tok.

### **3.3 NBC News**

The selected post by NBC News was chosen based on the criteria aforementioned in the data collection chapter: it addresses the selected theme, the war in Ukraine, it is from the same week as the posts selected from the other Tik Tok accounts, and it has roughly the same amount of comments as the other selected posts as well. Having a balance in the number of comments makes the sentiment analysis more fair and equal among the chosen media.

In two weeks of analysis, NBC News posted 60 Tik Toks: 34 in the Hard News category, 10 in Press Conference; 4 in explainer, 13 in Peace Journalism, and 3 in the On-Site category. Most of NBC News' Hard News posts were about bombings, explosions, soldiers looting stores, and people fleeing Ukraine or going to bunkers. The Press Conference posts were snippets from different politicians – e.g. U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Linda Thomas-Greenfield, President Joe Biden, and President Zelenskyy – giving statements during press conferences. In most cases, a whole snippet of a speech would be divided into several Tik Toks and posted in a sequel.

The Tik Toks on the explainer category varied a lot in terms of subject. Two were about sanctions on Russia by the SWIFT bank system, one explaining why NATO countries will probably not quit buying Russian energy entirely, and one about FIFA and UEFA suspending Russia from soccer competitions. NBC News was the media that made the most effort to highlight the positive and humane actions that took place during

the war, with 13 posts in the Peace Journalism category showing footage of people playing instruments in the bunker to alleviate the tension, kids singing, hugging the reporters, a soldier and his partner getting married amid the war, etc. Of the videos in the On-Site category, all of them were also Hard News.



*Fig 6. A number of #explosions were heard near an airfield and bomb depot in Myrhorod, a city in central #Ukraine. #Russia #news\_□: AP (Source: NBC News' TikTok)*

NBC News' selected post has 26,4K likes, 404 comments, and 507 shares, it is 00:15s long, and it is in the Hard News category. The video shows a large plume of smoke in the sky caused by explosions in the Ukrainian city of Myrhorod. The noise of the explosions can also be heard in the back, which is also the only background sound of the video. The only visual elements of NBC News' post are the headlines "Explosions heard near airfield and bomb depot in central Ukraine", complementing the information

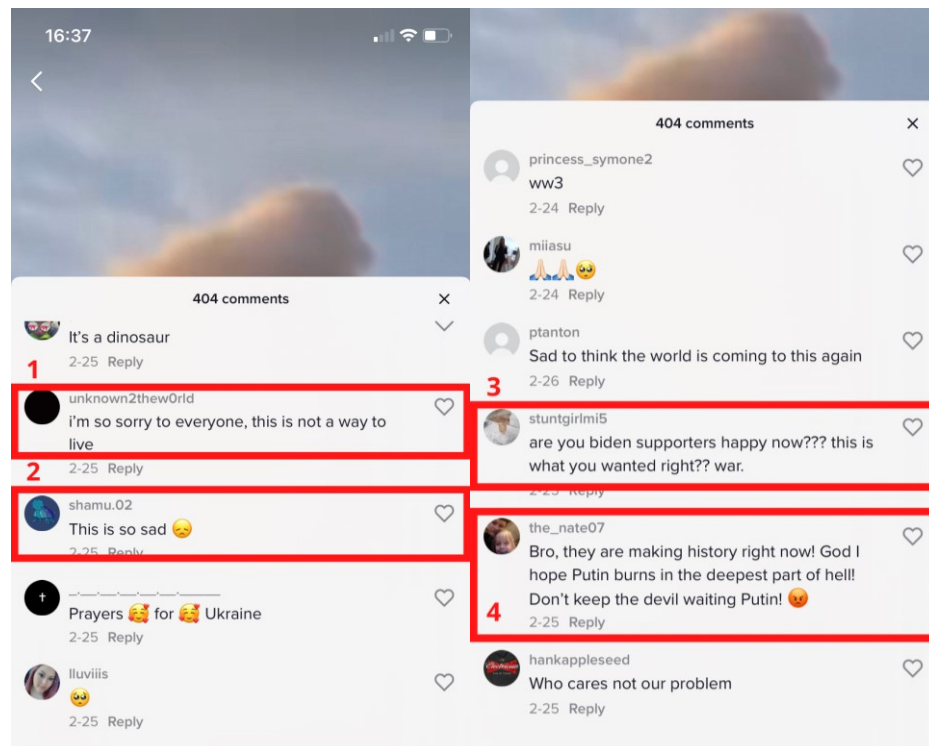
given in the caption, hashtags (#explosions #Ukraine #Russia #news), and the emoji of a video camera to indicate the credits of the footage – which are given to the Associated Press. The post from NBC News was the only one without a character, i.e. a reporter presenting the news. For that reason, the tone of the video is neutral.

NBC News is very present on Tik Tok. Among the selected media, it was the one that posted more Tik Toks within the analyzed period – 60 in total –, and with its large majority belonging to the Hard News category – 34 in total – also noticeable by the selected post for analysis, showing an explosion near a bomb depot. NBC News was also the only media that posted snippets of press conferences split into many different Tik Toks, without any additional attribute or editing other than subtitles. This constant presence shows that NBC News' intentions on Tik Tok may lean more towards being noted by the users, the first to give breaking news, and the first on people's timeline, and less towards highly produced content aimed exclusively at a Tik Tok format. "What attracts me the most is that it's easily digestible and I can get a lot of information (highlights of big stories, breaking news) in a very short amount of time." (Interviewee 7, 2022) "I like the reports on current events, just the facts, no biases." (Interviewee 9, 2022). NBC News was also the media that posted the most daily, sometimes 8 posts on the same day, which highly contributes to the algorithm on the platform as well. "I started following NBC because it was the first outlet suggested it when I typed in 'news accounts'" (Interviewee 9, 2022).

NBC News' followers' reasons to follow news on Tik Tok and specifically on NBC News' Tik Tok go alongside people's justifications to use social media as a source of information on Hermida et al's (2012): a way to keep them up with events and exposed them to a wider range of news and information. "I like to get some news from media outlets from other countries and not just Brazil" (Interviewee 8, 2022) "I started

following NBC to have another way to get information, especially on an app that I use frequently in my spare or non-work-related time” (Interviewee 7, 2022).

Most comments on NBC News’ post were negative, but all demonstrated either sadness or anger toward the current war and political leaders, not towards the way the news is presented by NBC News (See Fig 7.)



**Fig 7.** Examples of negative/subjective comments on NBC News’ Tik Tok post.

Comments: **1** i’m so sorry to everyone, this is not a way to live **2** This is so sad **3** are you biden supporters happy now??? this is what you wanted right?? War. **4** Bro they are making history right now! God I hope Putin burns in the deepest part of hell! Don’t keep the devil waiting Putin! (Source: *Estadão’s Tik Tok*)

The ‘always-on’ approach adopted by NBC News relates to the Ambient Journalism concept proposed by Hermida (2010), which suggests that these asynchronous, lightweight, and frequent pace way of sharing news contributes to, not an in-depth understanding of a subject, but instead to the maintenance of an awareness system of what is going on in the world. “I don’t think you can get well informed on TikTok, but I do think that what is possible is to create in teenagers/kids the habit of

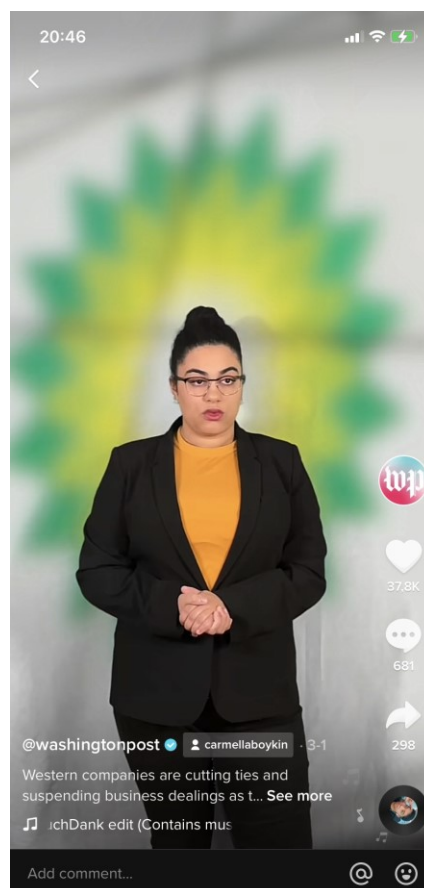
getting informed online, and to create this association of brand and content to distinguish what is reliable and what's not" (Interviewee 8, 2022). "As I said before, what is interesting for me is the possibility of these trustworthy news outlets to be closer to a younger audience, inciting them to get informed, and of course the convenience and ease of the app" (Interviewee 8, 2022).

### ***3.4 Washington Post***

The selected post by the Washington Post was chosen based on the criteria aforementioned in the data collection chapter: it addresses the selected theme, the war in Ukraine, it is from the same week as the posts selected from the other Tik Tok accounts, and it has roughly the same amount of comments as the other selected posts as well. Having a balance in the number of comments makes the sentiment analysis more fair and equal among the chosen media.

In two weeks of analysis, the Washington Post published 23 Tik Toks in total: 6 in the category of Hard News, 6 in Fact Check/Media Literacy, 6 in On-Site, 2 in explainer, 2 in Peace Journalism, 5 in Humor, and 4 in the Sketch category. There were no posts in the Press Conference category. The Hard News Tik Toks were also mostly about bombings, and 5 out of 6 were also in the On-Site category, meaning that there was a Washington Post reporter at the place where events unfolded to report. The Washington Post does not usually post hard news alone, i.e. without adding some context/explanation about what is happening. The only Hard News post that was not On-Site had a video of a reporter explaining the situation attached to it – the news was about Russia's ambassador to the U.N. denying that Russia attacked Europe's largest nuclear power plant. The other On-Site post is also in the Peace Journalism category, and it consists of the reporter showing women making food for Ukrainian soldiers and civilian defense forces.

The Washington Post was the only media with Tik Toks in the Fact Check/Media Literacy category. In this category, the Washington Post responds to requests from its followers to verify certain news to know if it is fake or not – e.g. Russian police checking people’s phones. Not only does the Washington Post check if the news in which users are tagging them is real, but they explain how they fact-checked, show the tools used, different commands that can be executed by the smartphones themselves to fact-check, and more tips so that users can fact-check themselves as well. The videos in the Sketch category are staged role plays to perform certain news that usually makes use of analogies to make complex news easier to grasp. The sketches are also in the Humor category, but not all videos in the Humor category were necessarily sketches. Some were just videos giving some serious information, but with a humorous touch – whether that was a joke, an ironic comment at the end, or even a small staging in between the news to “break the ice” when presenting serious topics.



*Fig 8. Western companies are cutting ties and suspending business dealings as the conflict continues in Eastern Europe #bp#gm #shell (Source: Washington Post's Tik Tok)*

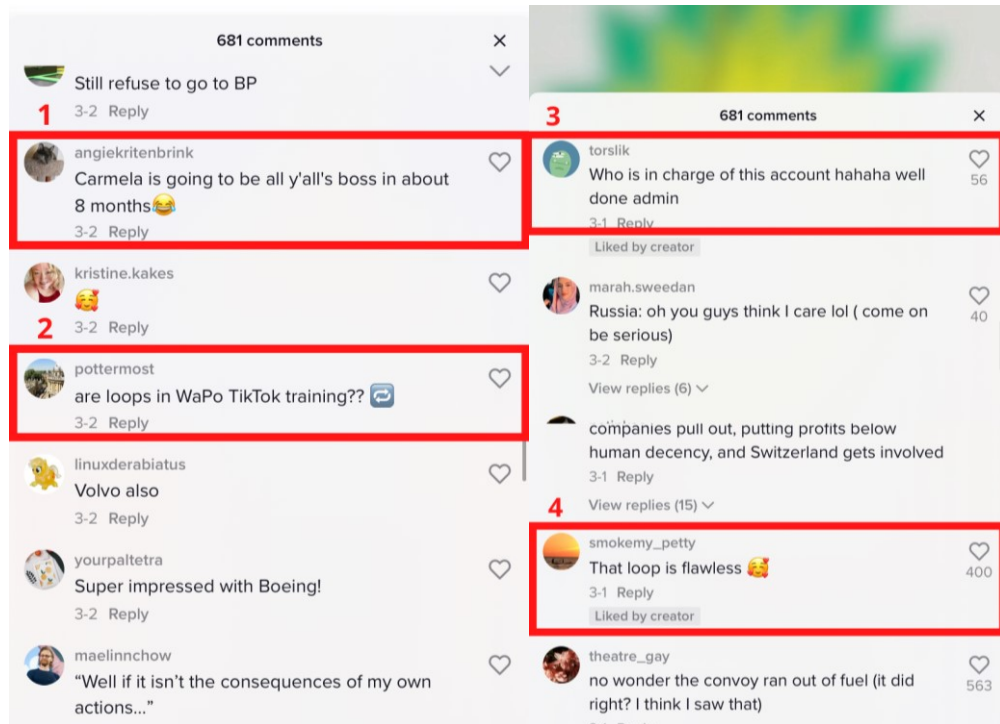
Washington Post's selected Tik Tok has 37,8K likes, 681 comments – the one with more comments among the analyzed media –, and 298 shares. It is 00:18s long, and it is in the Sketch category. The video was recorded on a green screen, so it contains background images added in post-production of the flags/logos corresponding to each country/company mentioned in the video, hashtags (#bp #gm #shell), subtitles for every time the character speaks, and it is the only media among the selected ones that tagged the reporter's personal Tik Tok profile in the video. In this video, the character, who is the reporter Carmella Boykin, plays several roles. First, she represents Russia, then the companies Shell, General Motors, and BP. When she plays Russia, she holds a pen and a paper while watching all the other companies – also interpreted by her – leave the scene. Then, while playing Russia, she asks: And where are you going?. BP “replies”: “We’re complying with sanctions”, and General Motors “endorses”: And we don’t like what you’re doing. Other visual elements of the video are the names of each character, e.g. when she plays Russia, the word “Russia” appears on the screen so that the reader knows which character she is interpreting at that moment since there is no one else interpreting any other role in this video, and additional information i.e. the measures taken by each company, are also displayed on the video. When Shell is in the video, the additional information is “Leaving Russian operations”, for General Motors it is “Suspending exports to Russia”, and for BP it is “Exiting \$14 billion stake in Russian oil company”. The background music is an edited version of Blinding Lights by The Weeknd, and, as the news is being presented in the form of a sketch, the tone of the video is humorous.

It is noticeable that the Washington Post is very Tik Tok-driven, as it is the only selected media that produces comedy videos and sketches, mixing serious news with the biggest feature of the platform which is entertainment, a gratification sought by most of its users as it was found out in previous studies (Yang & Ha, 2021, Lu, X & Lu, Z, 2019, Meng & Leung, 2021, Omar & Dequan, 2020, and Buchnell Bossen & Kottasz, 2020) and confirming what Sheller (2015) pointed out in her previous study on mobile news media that “the rise of on-demand, on-location, participatory capabilities has also changed the content, form, style, and temporality of news as an event” (Sheller, 2015, p.13).

During the analyzed period, no hyperlinks to a full article were embedded in the videos, which also indicates that the Washington Post’s use of Tik Tok is aimed at keeping the user on their page, and not as a bridge to their main website or any other social media. Washington Post also highly focuses on creativity and puts efforts into post-production. “The creativity! I would never think of informing about isolation during COVID with cartoon characters and puppets made of whatever you have home. I think it is funny and still informative” (Interviewee 11, 2022). “What I like the most are the storytelling and the concision” (Interviewee 11, 2022). He focuses on the news but definitely takes a more creative approach” (Interviewee 10, 2022).

These characteristics were also noticed by the general viewers. The Washington Post was the only media with more positive/subjective comments than negative/subjective. These positive comments were from users complimenting either the journalist, the editing of the video, the content, or the Washington Post account in general (See Fig. 9).





**Fig. 9** Examples of positive/subjective comments on the Washington Post's TikTok post. Comments: **1** Carmela is going to be all y'all's boss in about 8 months **2** are loops in WaPo TikTok training?? **3** Who is in charge of this account hahaha well-done admin **4** That loop is flawless (Source: Washington Post's Tik Tok)

As Costera Meijer (2020) found out that news organizations have become open to discovering how to better serve their audiences, open up their minds, and give them the best and more reliable information possible, the combination of humor with serious news and the production of sketches of the Washington Post reflects this behavioral change of traditional news outlets. "I chose to follow the WaPo on TikTok because it's just short snippets of the news - not a long article or not an hour-long broadcast. WaPo content is usually really funny, a bit silly, and takes the news lighter, but still makes sure the point gets across" (Interviewee 10, 2022). "TikTok is an outlet for creative and unique content and unfortunately, I don't think some news outlets take advantage of that. Even though it's the news, it's okay to be creative!" (Interviewee 10, 2022).

The Washington Post also seems to have succeeded in breaking what Bossio (2017) calls an 'elitist' broadcast model that distances the journalist from the audience

by providing this authentic representation of identity. In their case, they did it with the journalist Dave Jorgenson, the main Tik Tok content creator for Washington Post. “I think Dave Jorgenson nailed the essence of communicating in a simple way from the beginning. His persona and the characters he created to inform people – especially during the pandemic – got my sympathy! I think the content is clever and not pretentious.” (Interviewee 11, 2022). “Dave Jorgenson, the face of the account and his creative production” (Interviewee 12, 2022). “It’s funny! It’s literally run by a guy in his house and his content is so funny and lighthearted, but still manages to stay relevant and serious. He focuses on the news but definitely takes a more creative approach; it’s almost like he tries to go viral (he does well with engagement numbers)” (Interviewee 10, 2022).

### *3.5 Comparison of selected media*

The present research conducted with a combination of semi-structured interviews, qualitative content analysis, and sentiment analysis of comments showed that, although the common gratification identified between the vast majority of the research sample was Accessibility when it comes to the appealing traits of Tik Tok news, diverse features characterize each analyzed Tik Tok account differently: **Folha de S. Paulo** was mostly perceived for its didactic approach to the news and production of explainers, **Estadão** for its reliability as a consecrated news outlet, **NBC News** for its always-on presence on the platform, and **Washington Post** for its creative approach to the production and presentation of the news on the platform.

The four selected media posted more Hard News content on Tik Tok. One possible reason for it is that it is easier to make use of the democratization created by this merged environment of social media when reporting Hard News. The merged environment, also called ‘horizontal media’ by Shirky (2008, apud Hill & Bradshaw,

2018), is the environment in which the public gets to be part of the news production by either contributing with exclusive reporting or by circulating existing news (Bossio, 2017). Hence, to report on e.g. an explosion, the news outlet can simply repost footage produced and posted on social media by regular citizens – which was the case on NBC News’ analyzed post, in which the footage is from a person who was near the explosion, recorded it, and had their footage reproduced by Associated Press, and later by NBC News on Tik Tok.

Most of the followers from all four media declared that they do not feel like they get well informed by only following the news on Tik Tok, and all of them said that they also consume news from other sources – e.g. other social networks, TV, radio, and news sites. These results match with the ones from Hermida et. al.’s (2012) analysis of social media usage as a news source in Canada. They found that users are integrating social networks into their news sources, but not using them as substitutes for reliable traditional media. In the case of the present study, users are integrating social media into their news sources, however by following social media accounts of reliable news outlets, and still not relinquishing other formats of news. “Yes, I follow news on other social networks and news websites” (Interviewee 1, 2022). “Yes. I rarely watch TV, but I listen to the radio in the car. I follow some news websites, I’m subscribed to the printed version of Estadão, and at night I follow the channel Papo Antagonista on YouTube” (Interviewee 6, 2022). Yes. Instagram, Twitter & Facebook. All the news agencies listed above plus the New York Times & Foreign Affairs magazine (subscriptions); various podcasts on Spotify (NPR, New York Times); radio (NPR). I don’t really have TV, but through Hulu I will watch ABC News programs (Interviewee 7, 2022). “Yes: websites, television, podcasts, newsletters, YouTube videos, social

media (Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter) and print media, mostly magazines” (Interviewee 10, 2022).

While the two Tik Tok accounts from the North American news outlets, NBC News and Washington Post, show a dedication to growing their audience on the platform – by either being consistent and keeping an active presence on the platform (e.g. NBC News), or by producing creative and unique content for Tik Tok (e.g. Washington Post), the Tik Tok accounts of the Brazilian news outlets Folha de S. Paulo and Estadão are the only ones that still seem to try to lure people off the platform for more information by adding embedded links to their main website pages. NBC News was the only media that really took advantage of the ‘always-on’ approach that goes in line with the concept of Ambient Journalism (Hermida, 2010), which suggests that the value of short snippets of news – e.g. Tik Toks – lies in not each Tik Tok separately, but in all of them together, being shared consistently, creating a mental awareness in the users of the events and news around them. “I don’t think you can get well informed on TikTok, but I do think that what is possible is to create in this teenager/kid the habit of getting informed online, and to create this association of brand and content to distinguish what is reliable and what’s not” (Interviewee 8, 2022).

### **3.5.1 Dynamic, young, and up-to-date journalism**

Concerning the first and main research question *RQ1: How do users perceive news on Tik Tok?* results have shown that most people see it as a younger and more up-to-date type of journalism, dynamic, laid-back but creative and accurate at the same time, with a format that allows the transmission of a lot of complex information in simplified communication. In essence, attributes of Style, Accessibility, Didactics, and Creativity were described as part of what composes news on Tik Tok in the eyes of the active followers of this type of online journalism. It is noticeable also from the

sentiment analysis of the comments that people appreciate the features of Style, Didactics, and Creativity, when compliments were aimed at the e.g. editing of the video, presentation of the reporter, creative approach, and good explanation of the news.

### **3.5.2 Speed, and easy interaction**

As for the second research question *RQ2: Why do people follow news on Tik Tok?*, the majority of interviewees said that they chose to follow the news on Tik Tok for all the conveniences and Accessibility features of the platform. Among some examples of these characteristics are the speed with which news is delivered, the dynamic format, and the ease of interaction. Other reasons mentioned were related to the Style of the presentation– e.g. brief summaries – the Didactics of the format, Curiosity to see how journalism would adapt to the platform, and also the desire for more Diversity in the content that appears on their Tik Tok feed. “I decided to follow news on Tik Tok change up my algorithm a bit, more news, less dancing.” (Interviewee 9, 2022). When it comes to the analyzed news outlets, the biggest incentive for users to start following these accounts was the Style of the presentation.

Although varying according to the media that the interviewed user follows – e.g. while one follower of Folha de S. Paulo enjoys the seriousness kept by the media even on a platform like Tik Tok, a follower of Washington Post said that they enjoy the “funny silly” format adopted by the media – the majority pointed out Style traits, followed by the Trust in the news outlets as the second most cited reason to start following these news accounts. Other features that led these users to start following the selected Tik Tok news accounts were Didactics, Accessibility, and Diversity of content.

### **3.5.3 Diverse news presentation**

Results related to the final research question *RQ3: How do the news outlets present the news on Tik Tok?* show that, although there is a pattern among the analyzed

accounts of posting mostly hard news on Tik Tok, each vehicle has its way of presenting the news, which varies according to the editorial line and intentions of each news outlet on the platform. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Folha de S. Paulo was mostly perceived for its didactic approach to the news and production of explainers, Estadão for its reliability as a trustworthy news outlet, NBC News for its always-on presence on the platform, and Washington Post for its creative approach to the production and presentation of the news on the platform. However, the fact that all these consecrated news outlets are present on Tik Tok shows that they are integrating the innovation discourse into digital journalism, and are opening up their minds to discover how to better serve the audience (Costera Meijer, 2020).

## **Conclusion and Discussion**

This study aimed at understanding how active users perceive the news on Tik Tok through a mixed-method study of qualitative content analysis, sentiment analysis of comments, and semi-structured interviews with 12 followers of each Tik Tok account selected for analysis: Folha de S. Paulo, Estadão, NBC News, and Washington Post. The results show that the Accessibility, Style, Didactics, and Creativity characteristics are the ones that most encourage people to follow news on Tik Tok, and in the specific media chosen for this study. It also suggested two possible frameworks in which Journalism on Tik Tok can be inserted: (1) Ambient Journalism (Hermida, 2010); and, (2) X Journalism (Loosen et. al., 2020).

From the participants' answers, it is also possible to observe a pattern in people's justifications for choosing Facebook as a source of information, as analyzed by Hermida et al., (2012). They found out in their study that people choose social media to follow the news because they say it helps them keep up with events and to keep themselves exposed to a wider range of news and information. Meanwhile, in this study,

some people justified their choice of following Tik Tok to keep up with the news because they are already frequently on the app, so it is an easy way to be exposed to the news, even if not in-depth – which relates to the concept of Ambient Journalism.

Hermida's (2010) concept of Ambient Journalism promotes the idea of asynchronous, lightweight, and always-on communication systems helping to keep people's awareness of the news and events happening around them. This can be applied to Tik Tok news, given that the value of the news shared on the platform lies in the mental picture created in the users' minds by being constantly and quickly exposed to this news – even if in short snippets – and on the spike of curiosity created to search for more information from other sources and social networks.

Most motivation results for using Tik Tok match with some of the eight modality-based gratifications from the Uses and Gratifications Theory (U&G) presented by Vaterlaus and Winter (2021) in their study on the motivation behind consumers' use of Tik Tok in the United States. U&G states that “media users are goal-oriented, active, and purposive in their selection of media (Katz et al., 1973 apud Vaterlaus & Winter, 2021, p.2), and focuses on why users choose certain media (i.e., uses) and what needs are met through their use of the media (i.e., gratifications). The modalities are interactivity (ease in using app features – app promotes active engagement), coolness (share creative or humorous content), realism (motivated by the uniqueness of short-form video paired with audio), and browsing/variety seeking (a variety of content/information available).

Yang and Ha's (2021), Lu, X and Lu, Z (2019), Meng and Leung (2021), Omar and Dequan (2020), and Buchnell Bossen and Kottasz's (2020) researches found that the entertainment gratification is the most common motivation among Tik Tok users. From the participants' answers to the interview in the present study, it is notable that the

element of entertainment is still also present in the motivations of users for following news outlets on Tik Tok to some extent, given that Style features – lighthearted, laid-back, satire – and Creativity features – funny, nice storytelling, engaging – were frequently mentioned when users were asked what attracted them to Tik Tok news and what they liked the most.

Future research should consider investigating a wider group of Tik Tok news followers, and from a bigger variety of news outlets on the platform, not only to have a more encompassing research, but also to expand on the suggested frameworks of Ambient Journalism (Hermida, 2010); and, (2) X Journalism (Loosen, et. al., 2020).



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