



SCHOOL OF  
ECONOMICS AND  
MANAGEMENT

# **How does algorithmic literacy challenge the utilisation of TikTok for global marketers, taking into account ethical concerns?**

A qualitative study on the TikTok algorithms, personalisation & ethics

May 2023

by

**Natalie Klimecka & Phuong Vo Hoang Hoai**

*Master's Programme in International Marketing and Brand Management*

Supervisor: Annette Cerne

Examiner: Sönnich Dahl Sönnichsen

# Abstract

**Title:** How does algorithmic literacy challenge the utilisation of TikTok for global marketers, taking into account ethical concerns? A qualitative study on the TikTok algorithms, personalisation & ethics

**Date of seminar:** 2nd June 2023

**Authors:** Natalie Klimecka & Phuong Vo Hoang Hoai

**Keywords:** TikTok algorithm, Algorithmic literacy, Social media marketing, Personalisation, Marketing ethics, Ethical decision-making

**Thesis purpose:** To investigate the role of algorithmic literacy in the case of TikTok, and how its strategic performance, including the challenges and associated ethical issues, affects global marketers.

**Methodology:** Adapting a social constructivist approach, twelve qualitative semi-structured interviews with global marketers allowed us to gather deeper insights

**Theoretical perspective:** In order to fulfill the above objective, the study looks at literature streams in social media algorithms and algorithmic literacy, as well as adopts scholarship in marketing ethics and socio-psychological concepts concerning consumer behaviour and decision making processes.

**Results:** The study found an above-average literacy of the marketer for its strategic purposes; defining nuances within the algorithmic systems; having attitudes towards the algorithm; including a comparison to other platforms. However, a grey area and challenges were identified concerning its function. Additionally, the marketer identifies key ethical concerns concerning the algorithm.

# Acknowledgments

This master's thesis in International Marketing and Brand Management was conducted in Spring 2023 at Lund University, School of Economics and Management. The study would not have completed without the help of some amazing people whom we would like to show our gratitude to.

First and foremost, we would like to express our warmest appreciation to our supervisor, Annette Cerne, who provided us with comprehensive guidance and constructive feedback throughout the writing process. Her patience, dedication and wide range of knowledge, covering from marketing communications to business ethics, helped us formulate the theoretical framework and reconstruct the analysis in a more efficient way.

Furthermore, we owe our gratitude to the participants, who are talented marketing practitioners from all over the world. The time and effort they invested in assisting us with interviews provided us with highly valuable insights into the perspectives and pragmatic experiences concerning TikTok algorithms, social media marketing and ethical practices.

Finally, we would like to show a big thanks towards each other and the great teamwork we have maintained throughout the journey.

Lund, 31th of May 2023,



---

Natalie Klimecka



---

Phuong Vo Hoang Hoai

# Table of Contents

<b>1 Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
1.1 Background	5
1.2 Research problem	7
1.2.1 The challenge of adopting TikTok algorithms	7
1.2.2 A global marketing approach	8
1.3 Research question	9
<b>2. Literature Review</b>	<b>10</b>
2.1 Algorithmic Literacy and Commerce	10
2.2 The TikTok Algorithm	11
2.2 Ethical perspective of TikTok algorithms	13
2.2.1 The scope of marketing ethics	13
2.2.1 Ethical issues of the algorithmic governance on TikTok	14
2.3 Algorithmic Awareness and the Consumer	16
2.4 Initial conceptual framework	17
<b>3. Methodology</b>	<b>20</b>
3.1 Scientific approach	20
3.2 Research design	21
3.2.1 Method	21
3.2.2 Semi-structured interviews	21
3.3.3 Interview guide	22
3.3.4 Sampling method & sample	23
3.4 Analysis of empirical material	24
3.5 Methodology review	26
3.5.1 Trustworthiness	26
3.5.2 Ethical principles	27
3.5.3 Limitations of methodology	27
<b>4. Analysis of empirical findings</b>	<b>29</b>
4.1 TikTok algorithmic literacy	29
4.1.1 Overall attitudes	29
4.1.2 Opaqueness in knowledge and imagined understanding	30
4.1.3 Perspectives of TikTok algorithmic impact on consumer	32
4.2 The marketer - consumer awareness gaps	33
4.2.1 The ambiguity of TikTok algorithmic practices	33
4.2.2 Agency and responsibility	36
4.2.3 “Grey zones” in ethical awareness	37
4.3 Association with other social media platforms	40
4.3.1 Reference for the performance of tasks	40
4.3.2 Situational factor to justify ethical concerns	44

<b>5. Discussion</b>	<b>45</b>
5.1 TikTok literacy: Challenges from the DIY	45
5.2 Associations with other social media platforms	46
5.3 Ethical perspectives of TikTok algorithms	47
5.3.1 Individual factors	47
5.3.2 Situational factors	48
5.3.3 Socio-cultural factors	49
5.4 Marketer-consumer divide	50
5.5 Model proposition	51
<b>6. Findings &amp; Conclusion</b>	<b>53</b>
6.1 Conclusion	53
6.2 Theoretical & managerial implications	54
6.3 Limitations & Future research	55
<b>Reference list</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>APPENDIX A</b>	<b>755</b>

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

*Today's culture hitmaker is no longer a publisher, label, journalist or even influencer – it is an algorithm, used by everyone, mastered by none.*

- Carpentier on *Le Monde* (2023)

The phenomenal diffusion of algorithms has transformed how we perceive reality, for example, how we make sense of place, politics, culture, identity, and agency (Willson, 2017; Bucher, 2018). Situated within socio-technical systems, these invisible computational mechanisms mediate our everyday life online and offline, from decision-making to actions, from individual experiences to community engagement (Thumlert et al., 2022). In digital spaces, algorithmic procedures involve collecting and analysing data inputs by users to perform a certain decisional output, concerning “sorting, filtering, analyzing, ranking, recommending, and distributing digital content or interactive experiences” (Thumlert et al., 2022, p. 20). Due to its power of curating the information that we consume online and determining the architecture of possible experiences (Lustig et al., 2016), the relationship between algorithms and technology users have been discussed intensively in public discourses. In relation to the concept of communicative capitalism, Hill (2015) and Zuboff (2015) argued that the acceptance of the knowledge and informed decisions mediated by algorithms as a process of big data exploitation could delimit the lives of consumers and our socio-political structures at large. Algorithmic authority, as in John Cheney-Lippold (2017) terms, has also sparked the interest of other researchers on exploring algorithmic bias and the ‘filter bubbles’ we are trapped in (Kitchens, Johnson & Gray, 2020).

On the other hand, the inexorable potency of digitalization powered by technological advancements has driven brands toward a competition in personalized consumption. In their book on “Understanding personalisation: new aspects of design and consumption”, Kuksa, Fisher and Kent (2022) identified a shift in consumer behaviour from mass-produced goods to ones that are tailored to their desires as an escape from “the restrictions of industrial society and conformist cultures” (p. 39). In a sense, the increasing significance of personal identity is embraced by our dependence on social media (Kuksa, Fisher & Kent, 2022), forcing brands to seek new types of offering – more responsive and customisable – to accommodate their

consumers, particularly younger ones. Such a context values the role of the machine learning algorithms in profiling social media users, prefiguring their browsing preferences and moderating their purchase experiences. Central to the process of capitalizing personalization are tech organizations whose businesses orbit around AI technologies that enable them to read people better, namely, Google with Google Search and YouTube, Meta with Facebook and Instagram, and ByteDance with their rising star app TikTok. Since algorithms, fueled by these companies, are becoming more pervasive and complicated, it leads to a gap between algorithmic visibility and user awareness (Lustig et al., 2016). This asymmetry in information is referred to as ‘black-boxes’ (Lustig et al., 2016; Bucher, 2018) by researchers due to the fact that the algorithmic languages are too difficult for users to fully understand.

Among popular social media platforms, TikTok is gaining momentum in transforming the work of creative professionals (Collie & Wilson-Barnao, 2020), which many researchers attribute to its distinctive algorithmic architecture. The short-form video sharing app is characterized by individually customized streams of content curated by artificial intelligence and machine learning (Klug et al., 2021). In digital spaces, algorithms dictate the hidden rules of what is accessible on the feed, and these rules are not explicitly visible to the public (Rainie & Anderson, 2017). As we have reached a point that daily lives of those under 25 in particular hinge on a growing number of personalised media applications, algorithmic literacy or the ability to comprehend and deal with algorithmic curation consciously has become a critical skill (Swart, 2021). Prior empirical effort in this area focuses mostly on the ordinary consumers’ point of view with little attention to the practitioners’ perspective despite the fact that the manifestation of personalisation on social media is a value co-creation process by both consumers and sellers (Sashi, 2012). Online content produced by brands has the power of mediating consumers’ perceptions, forging relationships and eventually influencing their decision-making (Robson, Banerjee & Kaur, 2022). Considering TikTok’s rapid growth and impact on consumer behaviour as well as the debates surrounding its “environment of expected use” (Light et al., 2018, p. 889), it is worth to examine the perception of practitioners in utilizing TikTok as a marketing communications platform, taking into account both algorithmic literacy and ethical awareness.

## 1.2 Research problem

The youngest among the biggest social media platforms for Millennials and Gen Z (Kaur, 2020) boasted over one billion active monthly users in 2021 (TikTok, 2021). Due to the novelty of TikTok, there needs to be more scholarship exploring the socio-economic tension between its algorithmic organism and commercial brands. According to Wahid et al. (2022), an in-depth study on TikTok content marketing is needed to address a massive theory-practice gap concerning this platform. Existing literature on social media algorithms has been *consumer-centric*, with a highlight on a deeper understanding of how personalisation disrupts perception and behaviour, or *political*, paying attention to algorithmic authority in the era of communicative capitalism (Hill, 2015; Zuboff, 2015; Bucher, 2018; van Dijk, 2020). On TikTok specifically, researchers have stressed the importance of demystifying its virality-centric logic through a technological approach and the lens of consumers (Klug et al., 2021; Swart, 2021; Simpson & Semaan, 2021). A limited number of researchers have attempted to explore the algorithmic factors that challenge the creative process of TikTok creators/influencers (Zeng & Kaye, 2022; Collie & Wilson-Barnao, 2020). However, academic and empirical research is scarce concerning the impact of TikTok algorithms on marketing communications, touching upon the perspectives of global brand practitioners.

### 1.2.1 The challenge of adopting TikTok algorithms

What sets TikTok apart from other video-sharing platforms, e.g YouTube, and collective networking channels, e.g Facebook, Twitter, Instagram is that it enables individual content to perform as *brand publics*, a simultaneous practice of shared meanings and isolated expressions all kept and mediated in the digital space without the need of sustaining any form of communities or consistent interactions (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016). Additionally, its user-generated content recommendation is drawn from the entire TikTok universe, not only anchored in users profile or their following behaviour. It means that a brand's influence largely depends on the virality of individual posts. While other mainstream social media facilitate brand-consumer connections through a continuity of exchanging information and curating emotional bonds with users (Sashi, 2012), none of these attempts is guaranteed on TikTok. From an ethical point of view, the emerging platform has been under close scrutiny and criticism by scholars, politicians and media as its algorithm-driven logic poses multiple challenges in regulating its political and societal impacts (Zeng & Kaye, 2022). Such intensified scrutiny could pressure brands and marketing professionals to ensure their ethical



decisions in marketing practices (Lim et al., 2023). These have resulted in the complication of marketing communications jobs.

Rowley (2008, p. 522) regarded content marketing as an effort to identify, anticipate, and satisfy consumers “in the context of digital content, or bit-based objects distributed through electronic channels.” Because of the essential role of content marketing on digital media, there is an increasing demand in adopting TikTok algorithmic literacy to gain brand visibility and sociality (Zeng, 2021; Zulli & Zulli, 2020). TikTok is a video-centric platform, meaning that the technological requirements for content governance, such as detecting and removing videos, are more complicated and time-consuming than text-rich or static image-centric platforms like Facebook, Twitter or Instagram (Gray & Suzor, 2020). It leads to an emphasis on human moderation (Shead, 2020). Prior study has indicated that the embeddedness of consumer-brand relationship is often manifested in tribal settings, namely, consumer tribes, subcultures or brand communities (Bertilsson, 2017). Meanwhile, the attention economy on TikTok (Goldhaber, 2006) is built around individual expressions, which defies conventional and straightforward tactics from brands. Bowman and Swart (2020) argued that the value of creative work would soon be codified into algorithms, systems and assets, which demands marketers to acquire algorithmic literacy in implementing communication strategies. It is of importance for companies as well to address the asymmetry between algorithmic visibility and marketers’ awareness (Lustig et al., 2016). Hence, the level of awareness, adoption and usage of TikTok algorithms among marketing practitioners should be investigated through empirical research.

### 1.2.2 A global marketing approach

Marketing literature has recommended differentiation and market segmentation in order to avoid the “one-size-fits-all” approach in communication strategy (Haenlein et al., 2020). A global perspective is necessary for TikTok since the use of social media is varied by culture and region (Lin, Swarna & Bruning, 2017). According to Zhang, Beatty, and Walsh (2008), different cultures correspond to different expectations and attitudes of employees toward a service. In emerging markets, there is a greater pressure on global brands to optimise their social media marketing strategies in each targeted country (Wahid et al., 2022). In the context of TikTok, since the younger population is particularly enchanted by the platform (Zeng & Kaye, 2022), it has witnessed a surge in global companies actively joining TikTok to engage with younger demographics (Ehlers, 2021). Thus, a global marketing approach was adopted

for this study in exploring the algorithmic-centric challenges that influence the effective use of TikTok by global marketers.

### 1.3 Research question

Drawing upon the gap mentioned above, we seek to contribute to the literature stream on TikTok, expanding our theoretical comprehension of the use of this platform for marketing communications. This paper aims to identify the influence of TikTok algorithms on branding and marketing by capturing the perspectives of global marketers through real practices. The research question thus follows:

- ❖ *How does algorithmic literacy challenge the utilisation of TikTok for global marketers, taking into account ethical concerns?*

TikTok is a content focused platform, with many global brands present, and its success is massively affected by an advanced algorithm (Wahid et al., 2022). The platform created new branding methods, having spread across the globe in about two years only, redefining how brands approach the Gen Z and Millennial consumer (ZNFrontier, 2019). Therefore, it is of importance for both companies and academia to understand the complexity of TikTok communication governance for professionals in order to develop a refined strategy. Adjusting to the local areas made it possible to expand globally (Ren et al., 2021) and so that insights curated from this empirical research can also assist global marcom managers in adapting strategically to target countries in the context of TikTok.

Algorithmic literacy, as used by Swart (2021, p.2) is “the combination of users’ awareness, knowledge, imaginaries, and tactics around algorithms that relate to these computational scripts that are responsible for many of the mechanisms associated with personalization”. Since TikTok algorithmic literacy becomes an essential skill for brands to thrive in digital spaces, this study will be helpful in identifying the disparity in awareness and improve the utilisation of the platform. In addition to that, the study will be helpful in shedding light on ethical concerns that brand people take into account when implementing communication strategy on TikTok.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Algorithmic Literacy and Commerce

With the rise of social media, the impact of algorithmic systems within societies increased (Silva, Chen & Zhu, 2022). Data is collected and coded through interactions and fed back to the individual through recommendations. As the users of these systems, the majority tend to accept their existence without being comprehensive. Furthermore, operations behind these systems might seem untransparent or sometimes referred to as "black-boxed" (Lomborg & Kapsch, 2019). To get transparency, studying these seems complicated as the rules behind them are hidden and inaccessible (Bitzer, 2022). The algorithmic system is designed and programmed by individuals who determine its operations (Silva, Chen & Zhu, 2022), and so the neutrality of these systems might get questioned (Lomborg & Kapsch, 2019).

Blurring the line between "publicity and privacy", users encounter situations in their everyday life that make them aware of the algorithm. With the consequences of living in the "algorimicised" world, it seems crucial to understand how they affect people (Bucher, 2017). Algorithmic literacy combines "knowledge, awareness, imaginaries and tactics", as described by Swart (2021, p.2).

The platforms determine what information and ads the user will see. By grabbing attention, they theoretically capitalise on advertising (Wheeler, 2017). The architecture of each social media differs. In theory, different apps adapted by users are competitors trying to involve different features to gain a competitive advantage. Algorithmic rules are then a part of the architecture and can help to gain audiences. Instagram and Snapchat, for instance, focus more on grabbing the users' attention with visuals, compared to Facebook and Twitter, which are older (Bossetta, 2018). Considering the nature of TikTok, we put it on the spectrum of attention-grabbing visual platforms (Schellewald, 2021).

Algorithms are far from perfect and are constantly evolving to improve the user experience. Some changes can be made to prioritise content that includes a richer conversation (Barnhart, 2022). Instagram uses a different algorithm for each of its sections. During the early days of Instagram, the content was shown by the posted date (Council, 2016). The Reels, short videos inspired particularly by TikTok, were a game changer to help build audiences (Hill, 2023).

On the other hand, some creators needed clarification on the enhanced focus, facing complications in reaching their target group. To survive, users (and businesses) reinvested themselves and started creating videos for Reels or moved to other platforms. Another option was paid sponsorship for Reach (Six, 2022).

Algorithms and competitive advantage were studied before, specifically in the case of Instagram, which tried to look at challenges and opportunities on Instagram for marketers. Agung (2019, p.747) concluded, "Instagram allows marketers to increase prospective customers, detect market conditions so that online marketers can respond directly to strategies and reach more audiences". Moreover, it identified some challenges with complexity, which need to be clarified to run Instagram regularly (Agung, 2019).

Networks usually prefer to keep the specific changes in the hidden algorithmic rules private. Because of these changes, the marketer has to adapt and find "what the algorithm wants to share" (Barnhart, 2022). In theory, engagement and interaction (likes, comments and shares) lead to more engagement and interaction. Therefore, encouraging the audience to add more comments is a possible strategy. Other factors include using hashtags, scheduling posts, and frequency. Ultimately, performance gets measured via analytics (Barnhart, 2022). Because of the invisibility of the algorithm and its impact on the success of TikTok in the global market (Ren et al., 2021), this study takes into account the perspective of the marketer and her understanding.

## 2.2 The TikTok Algorithm

TikTok, owned by the Chinese company ByteDance, was launched in 2016 and has grown in popularity to 1 billion users worldwide since (Schellewand, 2021). This social media allows everyone to find content relevant to their interest, ranging from LGBTQ movements and pop culture to conservative politics (Hern, 2022). As one of the fastest-growing platforms with more than 500 million monthly active users worldwide (Ren et al., 2021), it shares similar features to other content-driven social media platforms such as Facebook or Instagram (Bhandari & Bimo, 2022).

At the core of the platform, the algorithm-driven content is also user-driven (Bhandari & Bimo, 2022). The young audiences use it for entertainment, getting information and self-expression (Wahid et al., 2022). Its addictive behaviour has been exposed (Qin et al., 2022; Petrillo, 2022;

Zhao, 2021) since TikTok uses one of the most advanced recommendation systems. Qin et al. (2022) describe its additive nature in terms of participation, content, and types of interaction. The TikTok algorithm was previously studied regarding user awareness, from the first interaction to understanding how the system recommends content. Furthermore, some users recognized the algorithmic recommendations as more developed than Meta (Siles et al., 2022). TikTok engages the user from the start with a neverending streaming of short videos. The rich content streaming starts when opening the app. It provides a competitive advantage compared to platforms that adjust the content with time spent (Hern, 2022).

Previously, scholars described TikTok as reflexive to the market, a fast-moving consumer culture, with launched videos 15 seconds in length (Schellewald, 2021). To thrive on the platform, brands need to emotionally connect with their audience through a “sound-on experience”, with ads reflecting the format visually and sonically (TikTok, n.d.). Its unique algorithm keeps the viewer engaged, and it considers the captions, sound and hashtags in addition to interaction in the form of likes and comments. With time, the app learns the profile, and recommendations become more targeted towards individual preferences (TikTok, 2020). In another study by Bhandari & Bimo (2022), users praised the accuracy of the content generated by the platform to suit their interests. Additionally, users were aware of the advanced algorithm and praised it for serving them accurately to “creation of the self” (Bhandari & Bimo, 2022).

The ‘New Google’ is the latest title that the short-form video-sharing platform TikTok has earned after a recent report by Google (2022) confirmed: “40 per cent of Gen Z reportedly exploring TikTok or Instagram before trying a standard Google Search”. Other media interviews have also shown that many young people favour the app over traditional search engines. As for today, information flow, data sharing, and data protection are critical battlegrounds for human rights (Khan, 2021). However, lacking a clear legal and ethical framework, digital communication platforms are highly vulnerable to abuse by individuals and for-profit entities (Kent, Kuksa, and Fisher, 2022).

The platform allows users to hide certain content from their feed, influencing their recommendations on the “For You” page. Occasionally, TikTok adds diversified content to the feed for the audience to discover. (Smith, 2021; TikTok, 2020) Algorithmic culture on TikTok has arguably benefited creators since every produced video gets served to at least one user, which gives less-known profiles the option to gain interaction, hence growing in popularity

(Hern, 2022). Hashtags also provide suggestions on the following types of videos for users to produce by introducing various “challenges”, jokes, or repeating formats. Hashtags can tell users which videos they should make and watch and help create and sort trends on the platform. (TikTok, 2020)

Bytadance patented a recommendation system that labels each piece of content, for instance, “travel” or “education”, matching it to the corresponding audiences. This creates a hierarchy of interests, interconnected like a tree network. The tree links together data sets, and each branch can be narrowed down into narratives (Zhao, 2020).

In the case of Douyin, the entire system is decentralised, meaning that close connections to an individual do not matter, which differs from Meta. Instead, it tries to find similar behaviour patterns and network interests to other users and “gets inspired” by these. That also means everyone can get viral on the platform, with fewer followers/connections on their profile (Zhao, 2020).

At the end of 2022, TikTok implemented a new analytics tool to give its audience insights. For the creator, it shall give them an advantage when planning content strategies based on data. It breaks the audience into subcategories and sub-interests (Southern, 2022). Furthermore, in March 2023, TikTok launched a site featuring top keywords and insights on the platform to help advertisers with ad performance. The Keyword Insights tool shows the click-through rate for selected keywords (Ahmed, 2023).

## 2.2 Ethical perspective of TikTok algorithms

### 2.2.1 The scope of marketing ethics

Because complex algorithmic systems become increasingly prevalent and pervasive in society, a multitude of complaints by consumers and academia arise concerning the governance of data, transparency of algorithms, legal and ethical frameworks for automated algorithmic decision-making, and the societal impacts of algorithmic automation (O'Hara, 2021; Olhede & Wolfe, 2018). Since marketers and consumers are growingly tethered to and reliant upon the use of social media, thus, the everyday engagement with algorithms, it is necessary to examine TikTok's algorithmic practices from the ethics perspective. The aim is to shed light on algorithmic biases in marketing decision-making and foster a greater understanding of their impact on society. Additionally, a study in algorithmic literacy promotes transparency. It

encourages institutions' responsible use of algorithmic systems (Zuboff, 2019), hence equipping marketers with critical attitudes and ethical decision-making skills in algorithm-mediated spaces.

Ethical perspectives regarding social media, in general, are drawn upon the theoretical underpinning of ethical marketing. Goulet (1997) conceptualized ethical marketing as a guiding principle to drive companies towards morally accepted marketing decisions that uphold positive relationships between marketing managers and other stakeholders, including customers, employees, competitors, and the general public. In the course of marketing activities, it offers marketers a framework to address ethical dilemmas (Reidenbach, Robin & Dawson, 1991). Such ethical authority catalyzes enhancing trust and fostering more long-term consumer and brand relationship (Tanveer et al., 2021).

### 2.2.1 Ethical issues of the algorithmic governance on TikTok

According to a systematic review of marketing ethics by Nill and Schibrowsky (2007), the subject encompasses Internet-related and consumer-related ethical issues in which social media algorithms exhibit a dominant influence. The advent of communication and data mining technologies has brought forth plenty of privacy concerns and the ethical implications of digital interactions (Nill & Schibrowsky, 2007). Discourse spanning from academic study to mainstream media has called attention to the manipulations of algorithms such as selectively determining what content are presented to consumers (Hargittai et al., 2020), exploiting consumer data for increasing revenue from advertisements (Silva, Chen, & Zhu, 2022), promoting 'algorithmic hegemony' that perpetuate the continued normalization and privilege of whiteness (Karizat et al., 2021).

As for TikTok specifically, the unpredictability of its virality-driven mechanics encourages creators to push boundaries, producing freakish content as well as harmful viral trends for visibility (Zeng & Kaye, 2022). Taking into account the human subjectivity and values embedded in the design of TikTok algorithms, researchers have cautioned against human bias introduced in algorithmic governance by human content moderators, bringing issues of fairness and efficiency to the fore (Gorwa et al., 2020; Zarsky, 2016). While fairness concerns how specific groups are treated under the governing systems of digital platforms, efficacy addresses challenges stemming from inaccurate automated decision-making (Zarsky, 2016). These two interconnected issues play a prominent role in the governing logic of TikTok For You Page

(FYP). Reports allege FYP algorithm has suppressed content featuring users with traits associated with "unattractiveness", such as age, body shape, and developmental disorders, such as autism, Down syndrome (Biddle et al., 2020). The policy aimed to make the platform more "pleasant and marketable", but the ideological subtext behind it was rather questionable (Biddle et al. 2020). Individuals started receiving recommendations to follow profiles similar to their race, because the algorithm reflected their previous behaviour. In 2021, a creator Ziggy Tyler got flagged for putting in his Bio on the Creator Marketplace phrases as "Black Lives Matter", because algorithms identified the phrase as relevant to violence. TikTok took responsibility for this accident and apologised (Ohlheiser, 2021).

Big data including geolocation, source, buyer persona, or buyer status are leveraged to derive insights into customers' needs and preferences (Yan et al., 2009). Data availability and the advancement of analytical processes provide marketers with more opportunities to create and deliver highly personalized advertisements and product offerings to consumers (Hemker, Herrando & Constantinides, 2021). It has raised concerns among users about the collection of personal data regarding potential errors during data handling and storage as well as the threats from the secondary use of their data and the unauthorized access and dissemination of personal information (Smith, Milberg & Burke, 1996). TikTok algorithm is capable of discovering extensive private information about an individual's profile (Khan, 2020). As of 2023, the US Government is facing decisions on the potential ban of TikTok, since they suspect the app collects more information than necessary on its users, which could fall in hands of the Chinese government in the Global Information War (Maheshwari & Holpuch, 2023). Several countries have already opted to prohibit TikTok due to mounting cybersecurity concerns. The European Union, the US and other Western countries banned the app on government-owned devices. The FBI defined the app as a "national security risk" in Taiwan. Countries like Pakistan and India have implemented complete bans on TikTok due to concerns about deceitful or immoral content (Chan, 2023). The potential ban could negatively influence individual creators who use it as a source of income, as well as small businesses. Online communities are built over time and would not be easily duplicated on another platform and marketers profit from these (Deming, 2023).

### 2.3 Algorithmic Awareness and the Consumer

Algorithmic awareness falls under the terms algorithmic literacy (Bruns 2019; Swart, 2021), - it is the skill of understanding the user on how the system operates to bring the content to the



user, and thereby the information received in everyday life (Hargittai et. al, 2019). As Siles, Valerio-Alfaro & Meléndez-Moran (2022, p. 1) describe, “algorithmic awareness matters as it is tied to an increased capacity to limit manipulation and exploitation through data extraction practices, protect human autonomy and privacy, refine Internet skills, and develop critical thinking abilities”. Algorithms became present in almost everyday life for the consumer, since they in matters from selecting music recommendations to more privacy sensitive areas of life (Gran, Booth & Bucher, 2021).

Marketers have tools capturing immersive data through interaction, which are then transformed into recommendation systems. Even streaming services such as Netflix use recommendations to recommend content, which helps them to drive their business. Personalised recommendations might bring benefits to the user in the form of connection, but also possess ethical and privacy concerns (Shin et. al, 2022). With the enhanced algorithm, the consumer is getting concerned about their data privacy. When it comes to commercial behaviour, too much personalisation can scare the consumer off buying decisions, as the intimacy might feel “creepy” with networks possessing too much information (Utpal, 2015).

Through the interaction the user leaves a footprint, which helps create an accurate psychological user profile (Milmo & Hern, 2023). Users see the outcome of their data exposure in the form of recommendations in forms of content generation, but are generally less aware of the input, or the cost (Klug et al. 2021). As a psychographic predictive engine (Khan, 2020), it targets people on their emotional responses and patterns of thinking. Digital interaction can help the AI detect personality traits, personal values and interests. These detected traits get back to the user by showing videos, depending on the psychological profile (CB Insights, 2020; Khan, 2020). Bhandari & Bimo (2022) discuss self-making from the perspective of the user. A high degree of personalisation gives the platform a competitive advantage through mirroring the user's personality.

Algorithmic awareness has been approached from the perspective of the user. On a scale from high to low, this measurement relates to the attitude towards algorithms. These attitudes might be neutral, such as not caring about the algorithm and its impact, or mixed; seeing both the negative and positive. Other users are critical, meaning perceiving the data tracking on social media over average. Overall, the literacy of the population was low, and the study poses the question of the impact on the user in benefits for their daily life (Gran, Booth & Bucher, 2021). According to the professionals interviewed by Rainie & Anderson (2017), a highly data-driven

world requires increased algorithmic literacy among the general user population. In the case of Instagram, users that report awareness and use the algorithm for their advantage. To get desired content, they deliberately engage with certain profiles (Bhandari & Bimo, 2022).

Rainie & Anderson (2017) interviewed influential scholars and professors related to the field of data privacy, and a recurring theme in their research was a call for “algorithmic transparency and oversight”. Moreover, according to the respondents, the designers of the algorithm should be ethically trained (Rainie & Anderson, 2017).

Zuboff (2019) also pointed out that it is difficult for the public to engage critically and politically in algorithmic systems. The concept of coherence of attitudes and actions suggests that this may be because the public does not yet have strong and accessible attitudes that sufficiently motivate political action (Fazio et al. al., 1982). Therefore, recent scholarship seeks to contribute to the understanding of how users interpret the interplay between identity and algorithmic processes, and if and how such literacy shapes their behavior in return (Karizat et al., 2021).

Altogether, as previous literature examines the user, we shall see the ethical awareness of marketers on the impact on the consumers. In our study, we are going in-depth to see how marketers approach this topic. Awareness will be taken into consideration, as well as their attitude towards the algorithm.

## 2.4 Initial conceptual framework

Following an extensive literature review, our objective is to examine algorithm-related factors that influence the effective deployment of TikTok as a strategic communication platform from the perception of global marketers. To ensure a directory for our empirical analysis, we have developed a conceptual framework that outlines the key elements and relationships to be explored. Given the limited availability and fragmented nature of literature concerning the tension between TikTok algorithms and practitioners, we have approached the conceptual model with a more experimental perspective, drawing on theoretical branches in ethical marketing, political behaviours, and empirical findings regarding TikTok user awareness.

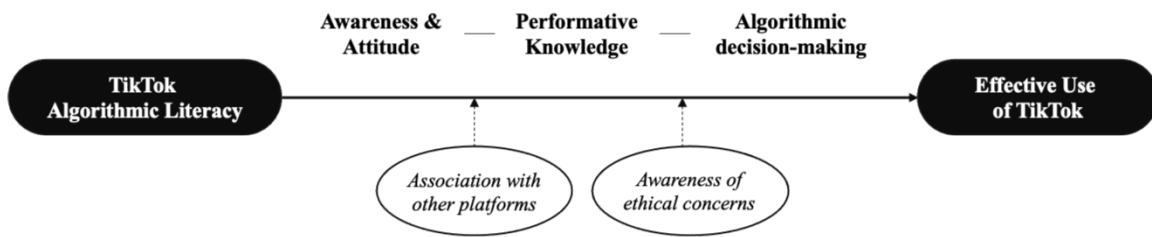


Figure 1: Initial conceptual framework

Figure 1 illustrates two major streams within the causal relationship of TikTok algorithmic literacy and the effective utilisation of the platform by global marketers that will be explored in this study. The mediator stream (see upper components in Figure 1) is an interpretation of factors that contribute to algorithm literacy by Dogruel et al. (2021, p.4): *“being aware of the use of algorithms in online applications, platforms, and services, knowing how algorithms work, being able to critically evaluate algorithmic decision-making as well as having the skills to cope with or even influence algorithmic operations”*. Meanwhile, the other stream encompasses two mediator components that we deem influential in shaping attitudes and the decision-making process of global marketing practitioners in the context of TikTok algorithm-driven systems:

- *How do marketers view TikTok algorithms in association with other social media platforms?*
- *Whether the awareness of ethical issues surrounding TikTok algorithms affect their marketing decision-making?*

The first element deals with the sense-making processes of algorithms, which Reinhard & Dervin (2012) found that individuals tend to rely on their past experiences, habits, and knowledge to assimilate information and comprehend unfamiliar situations. A research on the experience of young people with algorithmic news selection on social media (Swart, 2021) shows that platform comparison, where the respondents evaluate how algorithmic logics function differently across platforms, is essential for their sense-making processes. Since the duty of global marketers involves the management of multiple social media tools, the notion of TikTok algorithmic differentiation from other social media systems can alter their knowledge and approach.

The second moderator relationship that we wish to examine is the impact of ethical awareness on global marketers' decision making when utilising TikTok. Prior to taking action, a person needs to develop awareness towards an object. When one's attitudes are weak or ambivalent, engaging in political behaviour driven by thoughtful engagement is unlikely to occur (Basinger & Lavine, 2005). Hence, awareness formation about ethical issues concerning TikTok algorithms becomes an initial step before any meaningful implementation can be anticipated. This corresponds to the first stage of the four-component framework for conceptualizing ethical decision-making in business (Schwartz, 2016; Rest, 1986).

This initial conceptual framework serves as a guideline for formulating questionnaires and conducting semi-structured interviews as well as facilitating our preliminary analysis. It is crucial to acknowledge that our model is subject to modification or refinement as we progress with the research.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Scientific approach

Before delving into the methodological approach employed in this research, this chapter first examines the philosophical stances and assumptions adopted in the study. These factors are crucial to consider as they shape the researchers' perspectives on their work and lay the groundwork for the methodological choices and approaches utilized during the research process (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019).

In preparing to undertake a study, it is essential to contemplate two primary philosophical concepts: ontology and epistemology. This study has been based on a relativist ontology, meaning that the authors look at the world as a reality that is socially constructed and perceived differently by individuals.

Since social phenomena are contextually bound and dependent on the observer (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015), our intention was to seek an understanding of how global marketers perceive TikTok marketing and the myths surrounding its algorithms as well as how those factors affect their profession.

The researchers' ontology serves as the basis for their epistemological assumptions in this study. Epistemology concerns the researchers' beliefs about what constitutes knowledge (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Ranging from positivism to social constructionism, there are different epistemological categories, reflecting generalized assumptions about how knowledge can be acquired (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Social constructionist researchers contend that a deeper understanding of individuals' interpretations and emotions about various experiences or phenomena yields the best knowledge (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

For this study, a social constructivist approach has been used. This approach helps to gain insight into the respondents' diverse perspectives on consumer-brand relationships, personalized marketing, and the personalization-privacy paradox. While obtaining a holistic understanding of the diverse perspectives on studied phenomena, the goal was not to identify a single truth or answer to the research question, but rather, resulting in a deeper comprehension of the topic under study.

## 3.2 Research design

Research design refers to the overall strategy of the research, varying and taking into account the philosophical position of the research (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

Since the study considers the marketer and their subjective point of view, a qualitative method has been used. To address the research problem and answer the research question, it adopts a qualitative design, which is beneficial for a study in a particular setting, aiming to give rich and detailed knowledge. Furthermore, the study is within a less-researched area. Accessibility through open-ended questions in semi-structured interviews might give the opportunity for personal, constructive insights. An inductive approach has been adapted due to the lack of theoretical models on algorithmic literacy. The data has been coded and condensed to derive meaning (Creswell, 2009).

### 3.2.1 Method

#### 3.2.2 Semi-structured interviews

In qualitative research, the most common method of collecting empirical data is through in-depth interviews, which were used in this study. Through interviews, researchers are given access to the world of the respondents, allowing them to gain an in-depth understanding of the respondents' opinions and perceptions of various phenomena (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014). Interviewing method is commonly used in market research in addition to academia and social sciences.

The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured approach, which involves starting with specific themes that are to be addressed using an interview guide, rather than relying on predetermined questions (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). The advantage of semi-structured interviews is that respondents have the freedom to express themselves in their own way, leading to more profound discussions and fresh perspectives (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015), which was the goal of this study.

Questions for the study were drawn on the thematic framework generated from literature and were answered by the recruited individuals. Questions were open-ended, allowing a more rich discussion and allowing individuals to put insights into their own words. The researcher followed the structure in each interview, and occasionally followed up with additional,

encouraging the interviewee to cover the topic widely, or provide more detailed information (Adams, 2015).

This qualitative, exploratory study draws upon semi-structured, in-depth interviews with a diverse group of:

- 12 Marketing Communication practitioners whose past work or current job frequently engage with marketing on social media platforms and no direct work experience on TikTok was required. Since this paper aims to contribute to global branding and marketing practices, we only target for-profit enterprises and paid positions.
- Interviewees were selected from the list “Countries with the largest TikTok audience as of January 2023” by Statista. The rapid growth of the app and frequent use among local consumers lead to new scope for marcom people, making them an interesting demographic for studying algorithmic experiences.

The sampling was done through the strata. A snowballing method was used to reach the audience. The non-probability sampling helped reach a specific population (global marketers) and allowed us to reach hidden populations in a shorter amount of time. Through snowball sampling, recruited participants recommended to us other potential referrals. After that, the appropriate connections were chosen to fit the aim and objective of the study (Dudovskiy, n.d.).

- Reaching out to former colleagues and their referrals, connections on LinkedIn, Facebook community group for MarCom professionals in Europe
- Participants were equally represented in terms of gender and countries (3 people per each country) to avoid bias in that concern.
- Interviewees were working for global advertising agencies, multinational corporations and marketing departments for international universities
- Recruited individuals were within the age gap between 25 - 32 years old.

### 3.3.3 Interview guide

As Nowel et al. (2017, p.1) describe, “qualitative research intends to generate knowledge grounded in human experience”. Twelve semi-structured interviews, averaging duration of 60 minutes, were conducted by two authors in April 2023. Guest, Bunce & Johnson (2006) argues the number twelve is efficient, as the frequency of new themes identified decreases afterwards.

Additionally, stable coding definitions are formed during that amount (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006), which is suitable for our study that uses thematic analysis.

In each interview session, both of the authors presented with one leading the conversation and the other taking notes. To mitigate bias, each author took turns in being the host and carried out interviews with participants who were not from their own connections.

- The research required reach to global markets. For this reason, the qualitative interviews were conducted online via Microsoft Teams. Teams allowed for screen sharing on both desktops/ laptops and smartphones. This made participation in the research more convenient for some participants, eliminating travelling time and being able to participate from the comfort of their homes. Another advantage was the possibility to make screen recordings, providing detailed information on users' tactics around algorithms that might not have been obtained as easily in-person.
- The interview consisted of three sections: the first two sections were conducted using a list of open-ended questions on (1) Awareness of Algorithmic Literacy and (2) Algorithmic Factors that challenge MarCom work on TikTok; then, in the final section, the authors asked follow-up questions to probe for further detail based on the answers of each respondent.

### 3.3.4 Sampling method & sample

For the study, we have used a *Stratified sample*. The technique stratifies the population (global marketers) into subgroups, different in critical ways to answer our research question. For our study, the distinction of each stratum lies within the preceded perception and judgement towards presented information. Individual marketers within these strata (countries where TikTok is popular) are chosen (Dudovskiy, 2020).

All companies and organizations involved in this study are globally present. To be involved, their brand has to have a global reach. Additionally, the organizations are selected under the condition that they use TikTok in their marketing communication or are currently planning to implement it.



**Table 1: The study's respondents**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Company / Brand</b>
A	United Kingdom	Business Investment
B	United Kingdom	Int. British University
C	United Kingdom	Int. Trade and Development
D	Vietnam	Multinational Electronics Corporation
E	Vietnam	Global cosmetics company
F	Vietnam	Global advertising agency
G	Czech Republic	Formula company
H	Czech Republic	Digital agency
I	Czech Republic	Global food chain
J	Netherlands	Int. Education company
K	Netherlands	Global cosmetics company
L	Netherlands	Digital agency

### 3.4 Analysis of empirical material

The thematic analysis puts data into patterns, from which new knowledge arises to make sense of social phenomena or insights (Sybing, 2023). As Nowel et al. (2017, p.79) define, a thematic analysis is used to "identify, analyse, organise, describe, and report themes in a dataset". Data will be transcribed from the recording of the interviews in the form of text (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007) and a trustworthy thematic analysis shall be conducted systematically (Nowel et al., 2017).

Consistency of coding within shall be retained throughout the empirical material. The benefit of the thematic analysis lies in its "flexibility and accessibility". In this study, the researchers used a bottom-up approach (Clarke & Braun, 2013). In inductive coding, the researcher starts with initial topics but no theory. Questions tailored in the semi-structured interviews are based on the literature, but the inductive analysis builds on themes in the text (Anderson & Johnson, 2016). Themes within the analysis are not always visible. In inductive coding, researchers play

a central role in finding them, which can be individually affected by their perception of the topic (Sybing, 2023).

Before starting the analysis, the saved audio recording from Microsoft Teams got transcribed again in paragraphs. To analyse the data accordingly, the process was split into six phases (Clarke & Braun, 2013; Nowel et al., 2017): In the first phase, the researcher gets familiar with the data. As a part of this process, we created a document for each participant, which included note-taking and key takeaways from the interview. Researchers have re-read the transcription to generate notes, looking analytically beyond the surface. During the second phase, initial codes are generated. The analysis is done systematically to answer the research question (Clarke & Braun, 2013). This phase is called Open coding, where researchers generate topics (Stearns, 2017). Since manual coding is time-consuming, within the first round of coding, software for qualitative analysis, ATLAS.ti, has been used. The program is commonly used for thematic analysis and helps to identify the initial codes appearing in the transcribed dataset. Furthermore, using a program as a start could reduce bias in the researcher's perception (Sybing, 2023). Thirdly, the appearing codes combine into themes and patterns. Codes refer to a single topic, whether themes cover multiple codes and their meaning. Some codes get dismissed if they do not appear in the dataset consistently. Themes are identified through patterns in the coding and put clusters of codes recurring throughout the sample (Stearns, 2017).

These identified themes are under review for accuracy and represent the text as a whole. Significant themes get identified and defined. A *final thematic scheme* was developed at this stage:

THEMES	EXAMPLE FROM INTERVIEW
Algorithmic literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>“I think it's still not 100% clear, but it's been a little bit revealed by TikTok”</i></li> <li>● <i>“Creators spreading awareness on what is changing on TikTok are helpful to me</i></li> <li>● <i>“The algorithm is dangerous”</i></li> </ul>
Marketer - Consumer Awareness Gaps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>“You're using my location and probably age”</i></li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>“Changes that I made is that in hashtag usage”</i></li> <li>● <i>“I know it's based on actually like 3 pillars or like well those pillars, what they rate 1 is actually how the person has the app set up”</i></li> </ul>
Ethical perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>“They don't care about your data privacy”</i></li> <li>● <i>“Can be violent information and get viral quickly”</i></li> <li>● <i>“Misinformation is everywhere”</i></li> </ul>
Associations with other social media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>“Whereas with Instagram, it's so well edited”</i></li> <li>● <i>“We found out that our audience on TikTok was between the age of 10 to 15, compared to Facebook”</i></li> <li>● <i>“We all have been on Facebook, we all have Instagram. Why care about TikTok and data now?”</i></li> </ul>

After the themes are analyzed, the researcher can go further with the analysis and interpret the themes identified. Findings get reported (Braun & Clerke, 2006).

### 3.5 Methodology review

#### 3.5.1 Trustworthiness

As Nowel et al., 2017 (p.1) describe, “it is imperative that qualitative research is conducted rigorously and methodically to yield meaningful and useful results”. Trustworthiness shall be considered to build the scientific method in the case of a qualitative study, putting confidence into the data (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019).

Nowel et al. (2017) define three criteria for meeting a trustworthy study:

- **Credibility** - the recognizability between the reader and the experience when they encounter it. Refers to the congruence of findings and builds confidence in data.
- **Transferability** - the ability to transfer the findings to another study. Rich descriptions provided by the researcher help case-to-case transferability for qualitative research.
- **Dependability** - deriving precise conclusions from the data, including establishing a systematic process that led to these conclusions.

- Confirmability - lack of personal bias from the researcher reflected in the data analysis. These criteria were taken into consideration during the whole analysis process. By all means, trustworthiness is desirable to get approval from various stakeholders (Nowel et al., 2017).

### 3.5.2 Ethical principles

Researchers have an ethical duty to the participants in the study, especially when participants reveal valuable information (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Before conducting each interview, participants were informed about the purpose of the study and reminded that the data was collected solely for the thesis.

All the data about the participants were gathered professionally. Anonymity is essential in qualitative research. Since the interviewees are working professionals, all the names were anonymized in the thesis to protect their identity. Names of the companies have been hidden and replaced with short descriptions (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). All participants recorded their consent to participate in the study before the start of each interview. During the interview, participants were reminded to leave out any information that could be too personal or any information that could potentially harm them (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019).

All the recordings were stored on a private computer, in secured files of the researcher and shall not be shared with any external parties. The only condition would be after the personal approval of the participant involved. Thus, the information has been stored securely (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019).

### 3.5.3 Limitations of methodology

A qualitative study offers richer insights in a somewhat subjective manner. Emphasis on in-depth information needs statistical objectivity (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). That is why in qualitative studies, trustworthiness is addressed rather than reliability and viability (that is quantitative). Therefore, the results of this study are not generalizable to the entire population and are executed in a particular setting (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). However, the methodology has been designed carefully to generate knowledge that can be legitimate and theoretical (Nowel et al., 2017).

The respondents' level of knowledge might differ within the strata (based on countries). The strata include professionals across industries, all working for global brands. Some respondents

were executives, while others were social media managers, which could affect their level of knowledge (Dudovskiy, 2020).

Regarding the analysis section, Nowel et al. (2017, p.3) state that the flexibility of thematic analysis has its disadvantages, as "it can lead to inconsistency and a lack of coherence when developing themes derived from the research data". For this reason, the researchers must be consistent throughout the whole analysis. Moreover, researchers must avoid too much subjective interpretation as they generate and work with the themes. A trustworthy thematic analysis must be conducted systematically (Nowel et al., 2017).

Since we are conducting interviews with participants from diverse linguistic backgrounds, some nuances could be lost due to language barriers (Kakilla, 2021). To counter this, our respondents confirmed during the recruitment period for the study that they are comfortable in the English language. Since one participant did not feel comfortable, the interview was conducted in Czech (one of the interviewers is a native speaker). However, according to Kakilla (2021), detail can get lost in translation. The transcript was translated word-by-word to English to address that issue and analyzed in the same systematic approach. In addition, if any participant was unsure about the translation of specific terms due to linguistic barriers, one of the conductors was capable of either translating to their native language (Czech or Vietnamese) or clarifying the question in English.

## 4. Analysis of empirical findings

### 4.1 TikTok algorithmic literacy

#### 4.1.1 Overall attitudes

##### *Positive viewpoint*

Some of the marketers had positive attitudes towards algorithmic recommendations on TikTok. One of the reasons from the marketing point of view was the highly targeted personalisation. Posts reached a higher audience, possibly without investing a higher budget. Moreover, if a video performed well initially, it would likely go viral quickly. Another pleasant thing about the algorithm was on a personal level (impact on consumers and marketer as a consumer)—particularly the ability to get recommendations for inspirational content or content valuable in everyday life. Due to the advanced recommendation system, the selection was appropriate.

##### *Negative viewpoint*

Marketers who showed a negative attitude towards the algorithmic recommendations were also likely to take a critical stance on the platform overall, taking a critical stance. Overall, participants talked about addiction (especially for youth) and the negative cultural effect it has within society (“people dance on the street”), and too much data was revealed. Marketers were more or less aware of how TikTok impacts the consumer in terms of consumption of the short videos (addictive behaviour) or other ethical concerns (data privacy).

##### *Mixed viewpoint*

Mixed attitudes involve downsides and positives (Gran, Booth & Bucher, 2021). Generally speaking, marketers who took an attitude (positive/negative) towards algorithmic recommendations overall covered some opposing views. In that sense, they were primarily literate about the opposite perspective. Other mixed attitudes looked like taking a hostile stance against TikTok personally but defined it as beneficial for their marketing campaign.

Some global marketers expressed anxiety relevant to the future of social media in general. For instance, **Participant H** (CZ) stated there will come something “crazier within the next two years, and that gives them anxiety.” He followed up by saying that the best approach on a personal level is to ignore the development. As a marketer, he needs to adapt to market changes,

even if it goes against his ethics as a user (mixed attitude). **Participant A (UK)** thought the algorithmic recommendations were “dangerous” since the system gets too much information about the self through swiping. In her opinion, it can predict thinking.

However, this anxiety was not shared by all participants. **Participant A (NL)** was excited about the platform's potential educational purpose, including discovering easy tutorials. Participants from Vietnam were mostly pragmatic about its usage. **Participant D (VN)** stated that in Vietnam, TikTok is trying to cultivate its image by pushing more meaningful content, such as promoting national heritage and culture.

#### 4.1.2 Opaqueness in knowledge and imagined understanding

The theme of algorithmic literacy on the Tik-Tok algorithms by the marketer was discussed in each interview. When marketers were asked to do self-reflection, most of them described their knowledge above an average user. Some of them were able to describe algorithmic nuance in detail. However, there are some uncertainties and differentiation.

According to the majority, one must educate oneself on the algorithm to enhance performance at their job. Numerous ways help marketers with algorithmic literacy. Some states read articles and report online on the updates. Others (**Participant G, H**) follow creators' content focused on social media education, which covers the algorithm. **Participant D (VN)** said he depends on a group on Facebook which consists of Tik-Tok experts, to get updates on the algorithm.

In some countries (mentioned by Vietnam and the Czech Republic), TikTok provides training to bigger corporations. The training covers the platform overall but also digs into algorithmic literacy. This is provided once in a couple of months when there are changes in the usage. Not all countries (Vietnam and Czech in this study) are involved, and only certain brands are. About half of the participants did not mention any knowledge of that. The rest actively seek additional ways to gain education (apart from experience). Due to the inconsistency, there is an unevenness of literacy among organisations. Within some, there are ongoing discussions on algorithmic updates and trending content on TikTok:

***H (CZ):** I know that when I read some reports and we talk about it at work a lot, doing profiles and giving each other tips. I think it's still not 100% clear, but it's been a little bit like revealed by TikTok. I think they published some kind of report, like how it works and what they're focusing on.*

*F (VN): They never talk about the algorithms, only mention that it is managed by their headquarter in Singapore and through an AI tool. They never reveal why different countries have different algorithms.*

A recurring theme in their speech was a knowledge gap in the function of algorithms. Better personalisation only sometimes equals better performance in targeting certain audiences. Moreover, even when marketers do get training, there is uncertainty about algorithmic literacy. Participant **H (CZ)**, who adjusted the communication strategy to the guidelines provided by TikTok, said he sometimes shared perfectly tailored content that got dismissed.

As a result, due to the difficulty reading of the algorithm, marketers experience complications in their performance:

*A (NL): But sometimes when I do my job and I know how to make the video, I know which sound to use, I still don't get the fuse that I want and I'm like what's going on? What am I missing? So that is something that's why I would say 50/50.*

*H (CZ): I'm pretty sure that we had zero on it and we had more than like a million videos and it was just nothing. And like what? I found it interesting that getting 1,000,000 views on this platform was pretty easy because we were able to reach it after one month.*

Additionally, according to the interviewees, it was possible for some videos to reach very high numbers without any logical premise why this particular piece performed well.

On the positive side, some videos are capable of reaching very high numbers organically without paid advertising:

*G (NL): A few videos did pretty well for us, maybe like half a million viewers but that was like so like people in my team were so confused. Because you normally pay quite a lot to advertise on Facebook and Instagram.*

Moreover, high views on one video do not necessarily equal increasing followers on the account, as the platform serves videos rapidly.

*E (VN): Nothing with algorithms is transparent. If you look at the content creator channel, insights such as 'what is the average age that the content reaches?', It's a*



*blind box for us on Tiktok whether the content from creators can reach the right audience of luxury brands like us.*

Another grey area within the algorithmic realm mentioned by many participants was unwritten regulation/rules. To some extent, TikTok published “Community Guidelines” (TikTok, 2023), but some marketers seemed to have encountered blind spots. Most marketers seemed to be careful about “what not to include”. **Participant H (CZ)** said she considers the algorithmic rules when creating videos so that she does not violate the policy (managing an account for a SPA brand, beware of showing nakedness etc.). She further mentioned that TikTok removed the sound from her video, which she did not comprehend. However, it did not have a big impact on her account. **Participant K (NL)** talked about creatives getting shadowbanned from TikTok, which is the restriction of visibility for certain accounts for violation of Guidelines (Geyser, 2023):

***K (NL):** But a shadow band, I see a lot of creatives being shadowbanned, and I think that's also maybe something with the algorithm. I don't know how it works. It's still a bit of a Gray area for me. It's very hard to understand. Like when do you get shadow banned?*

As the participant hinted, some creators get shadowbanned without getting an explanation from TikTok. Moreover, they might notice the implementation by seeing their reach drop suddenly (Geyser, 2023).

#### 4.1.3 Perspectives of TikTok algorithmic impact on consumer

As Shin et. al (2022, p.2) describe, the integration of algorithms raises ethical and privacy concerns. Awareness of users (marketers in this case) affects behaviour, and behaviour online affects algorithms. On a personal level, a minority were not in favour of the platform due to its fast-paced culture. Four stated the effect selected content could have on the younger generation, which is to some of the participants their target group on Tik-Tok. On Facebook, the audience is more mature and has different preferences. First concern regarding the young audience was due to the exposure of unethical content.

Second concern regarding the effect on Gen Z was the impact of addiction. Combining the short attention span with profiting on attention got mentioned in sources concerning TikTok as addictive (Qin et. al, 2022; Petrillo, 2022; Zhao, 2021). Some marketers (**B, C, K**) have shown concern that this combination can be more harmful than on other platforms. **Participant B**

(UK) talked specifically about how the platform can decrease the attention span of individuals. Four participants were concerned about the impact of the shortened attention span on the younger generation (children and teenagers).

These ideas reflect previous articles on TikTok (Fallon, 2022), its short attention span due to the length of videos, as well as discussion on possible additivity (Qin et. al, 2022). However, to pose a contradiction, marketers **J and K** (NL) saw a positive impact of high personalisation in the easy accessibility of relevant content to our interest, which might help individuals develop personal skills.

Due to the shorter average length of videos (15 seconds) published on TikTok, marketers highlighted the need to grab the users attention within three seconds. The need to grab attention has been recommended to some of the global marketers (Vietnam and Czech Republic) by TikTok, during the training provided. To adapt to this programming, one needs to grab the user's attention in the first three seconds. **Participant F** (Vietnam) defined the need for “yelling” by the influencer, especially at the start of the video.

## 4.2 The marketer - consumer awareness gaps

### 4.2.1 The ambiguity of TikTok algorithmic practices

Another theme of TikTok algorithmic literacy that emerged during the interviews was the uneven understanding of how TikTok algorithms work in picking up user behaviours to curate 'For You' pages between global marketers and consumers. It has been communicated by TikTok themselves that the recommendation system would collect several data points such as *user interactions on the app* (video engagement and creation, following accounts), *video details* (captions, sounds, hashtags), *account settings* (language preference, country device type) (TikTok, 2020). Meanwhile, a study by Klug et al. (2021) identified that three decisive factors for a video to be on trend assumed by their participants, who's following bases range from standard users (300) to TikTok influencers (450k), were *video engagement*, *posting time* and *piling up hashtags* in the caption. However, the responses indicated that the marketers had different experiences with the machine. A majority of respondents confirmed the effectiveness of incorporating a particular sound and set of hashtags into the content:

**K (NL):** *I feel like you really need to know what to use so you can make full use of the algorithm. If you just upload a video with any song and any hashtag, the algorithm is not gonna pick you up.*

**B (UK):** *First and foremost, one of the changes that I made is in hashtag usage, making sure to kind of tailor the hashtags to the specific audience that I wanted to reach. I make sure to make the video as engaging as possible and to use some of the trending sounds which also help reaching a wider audience.*

**F (VN):** *Trending hashtags and music are 100% sure that will contribute most to the visibility of the videos. Posting time does affect but not much.*

However, some of the other respondents could not fully relate to these tactics as one marketing manager spoke about her observation of TikTok changing their market strategy and one digital lead expressed his uncertainty when it came to hashtag usage.

**E (VN):** *During 2021 - 2022, hashtags really drove the virality of content through, you know, hashtag challenges, but now livestream and TikTok shops are taking more space. I don't think TikTok Vietnam is pushing hashtags as hard as before.*

**J (NL):** *I don't think this is the biggest thing. A lot of tiktoks go viral without a single hashtag and I haven't noticed myself that it really makes a difference.*

**D (VN):** *I once asked TikTok if hashtags really work but they only gave me a basic guideline about headline and hashtag usage. So for brands, we have to collaborate with influencers because they know better how virality works on TikTok.*

Even among the respondents themselves, there was a disparity in awareness and knowledge of how TikTok trends were constituted. Most marketers from the Netherlands and UK identified viral videos on TikTok as primarily coming from users due to the personalisation aspect of TikTok, for example, one respondent recognized that videos on her personal account usually performed better than the ones she published for a brand account.

**K (NL):** *It's way easier for an individual to run a TikTok account because it's personal and people like it. I feel these work better than the branding ones. So for me like, I get picked up in the algorithm pretty fast because it's like personalised.*

On the contrary, another perspective of TikTok vitality scheme brought up by other respondents was that part of the trends are, in fact, mediated by TikTok and commercial brands. Two marketers in Vietnam mentioned about a group of creators hatched by TikTok for the purpose of pushing and capitalising on trends. One of them (participant E) stressed on the fact

that normal users could not recognize the difference between organically trending videos and intentionally boosted ones on their feeds.

*F (VN): Each season, the TikTok operation team will assign a specific hashtag or topic to a group of hot creators. They classify those creators into levels based on their followers and content categories like food, beauty, travel. Each group has different suggestions and will be rewarded by TikTok if they can make those ideas viral.*

*E (VN): Automatically the videos by those influencers will be pushed views. From the perspective of consumers, you may see the content as organic but it's really not. In the back-end, those videos are actually being pushed by TikTok.*

Interestingly, one Czech respondent shared a similar speculation but he emphasized that the moderation of viral content on the app was more apparent in the US and Asian markets.

*H (CZ): They have people manually choosing which videos should go on trend in the US and some big markets in Asia. Basically, I think 100% of ideas come from users but trending videos are sometimes boosted or selected by TikTok. In Czech, big brands like McDonald's also try to create their own trend by setting up a huge media budget and production.*

On the same topic, one participant who is working simultaneously in the UK and China unveiled that the practice was not only applied for hot TikTokers' videos but for users with interesting content as well.

*C (UK): I heard from a friend who is working at TikTok that for the first half an hour or so, if your video doesn't get many views and TikTok thinks the content is good, they will help you a bit with the algorithm.*

To summarize, the respondents of this study expressed a varied perspective of personalisation on the app as a result of TikTok's different strategic approach to each market. Despite their contradicting experiences with the platform and some blind spots mentioned in the previous part, in most cases, these marketers demonstrated a high-levelled awareness of the algorithmic and surveillance mechanics behind TikTok trending videos. This was essential to identify a “structural and persistent gap” (Van Dijk, 2020) between the professionals who use the app for capitalisation and those who consume for entertainment purposes.

#### 4.2.2 Agency and responsibility

While discussing marketers' perspective on how TikTok algorithms affect consumers, one particular theme occurred was about “*Who should be accountable for the unethical practices of TikTok algorithms?*”. Roberge and Seyfert (2016) argued that the ambiguity of algorithmic circuits, which take place between human and non-human actors, made it difficult to locate agency and responsibility. The most common response from participants was that consumers should take responsibility for their choice of platform and content consumption.

***B (UK):** So you are aware and if you don't want to be tracked, you just don't download social networks as a whole. To be fair, not TikTok expect not only TikTok, but all the other socials.*

***E (VN):** I think it's a skill for users to filter the kind of information they watch. At the end of the day, it's about people's choice to believe in the negative or positive aspect of a brand on social media.*

According to some interviewees, the algorithmic content mediation on TikTok was a value co-creation between technology and users. Since consumers also had the ability to influence the recommendation system, they were supposed to be aware of their choice of data sharing and action on the platform, as expressed by **participant B**.

***B (UK):** People are also altering and creating the algorithm. It's up to them to ensure that it is as ethical as possible and use the data for the stated purposes.*

On the contrary, **participant A** gravitated towards the essential role of government in regulating unethical practices as she believed individuals could not “avoid” the pervasiveness of algorithms.

***A (UK):** I think that the responsibility is on governments. As a user, you can't really influence that, the algorithm just gets you. You can't avoid it. It's calculating your watching time. It's calculating everything, every move that you are doing. Every second every move on the platform is calculated.*

Another point of view was by **participant H**, who emphasized that TikTok should pay attention to their content and users governance due to its massive base of younger audience.

To summarize, the majority of marketers in this study agreed that consumers could make active choices in content consumption while giving feedback, such as skipping, liking, commenting, to the TikTok algorithmic circuit.

#### 4.2.3 “Grey zones” in ethical awareness

It was evident throughout the interviews that the majority of participants did not immediately associate negative traits that they raised when sharing about their perspectives of the TikTok algorithm or its impact on consumers with ethical issues. Some of the problems mentioned were delimiting horizons of content, misinformation, favouritism toward certain groups of creator, which was expressed like this:

***K (NL):** When I like a certain trend I get more of those trends. A bit sad because then my For You page only has those videos, but I wanna see everything. I wanna see all the kinds of videos, not just the ones that are similar to what I liked.*

***E (VN):** Short form video is sometimes good as it can make the information go fast. But it means even false content about somebody or something, or can be violent information, still go viral quickly. At the moment, people don't spend 30 min to listen to the whole story but only 3 min to hear part of the story or listen to what the creators deliver then the information they receive can be so wrong.*

***F (VN):** I feel that they favor a certain type of entertainment content and also some creator stereotypes like those flashy, noisy, attention seekers.*

From the perspective of ethics, the imbalance of power between producers (TikTok users) and personalisation technology owners (TikTok and marketers) poses a challenge to achieve fairness in digital spaces. Fairness means promoting equitable treatment, free from discrimination and bias, while ensuring equal opportunities for all (Kuksa, Fisher & Kent, 2022). As mentioned above, several participants (F, E, C, I) all spoke about the regulation of trends by TikTok, which was oblivious to consumers, yet they did not include the practice when being asked about their awareness of ethical concerns circulating around TikTok algorithms. In fact, most respondents requested authors to recite some examples so that they could give a proper judgment on each case. Yet there was participant J who brought up a nuanced description of the ‘echo chamber’ effect (Kitchens, Johnson & Gray, 2020) that hurt consumers’ worldview and ability to think critically.

**J (NL):** *It really puts people in an echo chamber, which can definitely be unethical on a personal level when people get the idea they need to buy certain things or look or act a certain way. I genuinely think most people on TikTok forget that other people see completely different things and it makes you think that everyone thinks the same way, so you really starts lacking the ability to put things into perspective, to be critical.*

The debate surrounding personalisation strategy such as to what extent data collection forms an invasion of privacy and whether the perceived risks outweigh the apparent benefits has received heavy attention lately (Lee & Rha, 2016; Hayes et al., 2021). The researchers of this study proceeded to ask the participants about their attitudes towards the TikTok data security dispute in the US. Most stated that they had heard about it on the news but only three among all participants (D, A, H) felt truly concerned:

**A (UK):** *I think that the TikTok can be very dangerous in some ways. For a company that is government funded, they have too much data. It's also a very competitive environment and I also don't know how people are going to start using the data against each other.*

**D (VN):** *Data privacy on TikTok is not secured. If I just talk with friends about Lego cars, the app will immediately recommend the content with the product. I find it annoying when my feed is flooded with commercial ads.*

Some acknowledged both sides of the issue, appreciating the fact that data mining on the app could benefit brands in terms of gathering insights to measure sentiment and deliver better personalisation.

**E (VN):** *From the consumer perspective, yes I feel concerned about my personal interest and other information can be taken advantage of for a lot of purposes. But as a marketer, to some extent, these data are quite helpful for brands. They provide insights that help us achieve our marketing objectives. It depends on to whom they disclose the information to.*

A greater number of respondents identified consumer data privacy as a 'black box', meaning the threats of the problem were unclear, and insignificant to their scope of work.

**B (UK):** *I am not so sure because it's yeah, you know, it is kind of tracking your behavior online. I am not sure how ethical it is in terms of privacy.*

*I (CZ): I know some universities in Czech have concerns about TikTok's connection with the Chinese government. And some reporters wrote about TikTok with negative things. However, it is just a speculation so it won't affect my job.*

*J (NL): If you're talking about being unethical on a 'privacy and safety' level, then I'm not sure. I personally don't know what either company does with your data, although I would think that TikTok has more data available per user because of how smart its algorithm is.*

*F (VN): It doesn't bother Vietnamese consumers at all because basically the government doesn't care about our data privacy. Our data is already lost before TikTok enters the market.*

In an algorithmically-driven environment where 'selective sharing' is fostered, misinformation including false belief, fake news, post-truth and other uncertain reality is quickly repeated and transformed into a widespread consensus (Foster, 2021). In response to this phenomena from an ethical perspective, only a few marketers considered it as an important risk to consumers or brands. Since the beauty industry placed an emphasis on scientific information accuracy, participant E from a global beauty brand was particularly disturbed by the presence of "self-claimed doctors" giving false statements on TikTok. Two factors that magnified the problem indicated by her were: the algorithm made these people become viral and more influential in a short amount of time; a lack of profile authentication from the app made it difficult for brands and consumers to check the experts' qualifications.

*E (VN): There are so many self-claimed doctors on TikTok that we can't check their qualifications. They just wear a blouse and call themselves a doctor, providing prescription, product reviews. And lots of users believe in and make a purchase based on their recommendations. We don't know if those doctors are qualified or the information they give is accurate.*

However, the majority of respondents exhibited a neutral attitude toward misinformation on TikTok based on a shared agreement that it was a common issue of all platforms. Similar to this point of view, the ubiquity of misinformation was proven to be high across social media according to a recent systematic review in health care (Suarez-Lledo & Alvarez-Galvez, 2021). Interestingly, when it comes to problematic issues concerning TikTok algorithms, more than half of participants brought up other platforms, mostly Meta-owned ones, as a reference to



justify what was happening on TikTok. Some prominent expressions from the participants were:

***F (VN):** I think the fake news problem is all over social media platforms, not TikTok specifically.*

***I (CZ):** It is definitely a big issue but I think misinformation is everywhere on the internet, especially about American companies.*

In brief, the majority of marketers in this study, though claimed to be aware of few ethical criticisms revolving around TikTok algorithms, were uncertain about the impact of those issues on consumers and brands. Most of them drew on past experiences with other pre-established systems (Reinhard & Dervin, 2012) for a moral evaluation, which will be explored in the following section.

### 4.3 Association with other social media platforms

#### 4.3.1 Reference for the performance of tasks

Another occurring theme during the interviews was the one of comparison with other social media platforms, especially owned by Meta. Algorithms on Tik-Tok were described as more advanced and better with personalisation overall. However, targeting does not get necessary easier because of some degree of algorithmic unclarity.

***B (UK):** If I compare it to Instagram, I think that the TikTok algorithm is much better at personalizing. I know it took the Instagram reuse page much longer to personalise my propositions. So I think that the TikTok algorithm is better at pinpointing.*

One marketer stressed on the fact that the TikTok algorithmic design delivered a better user experience in the context of ads and branded content as you could swipe to skip instantly.

***D (VN):** All platforms are already flooded with commercial ads. I find it annoying but TikTok I think is still better than Meta or YouTube. Because you can skip ads immediately, it feels more comfortable.*

Most marketers evaluated their struggle in adopting algorithms across social media platforms based on practical incidents in content creation, ads solution and overall measure of success. Different objectives and communication paths were defined for Facebook and TikTok by

participants from Vietnam (D, F) and Czech (I) as they found the Facebook algorithm more predictable and manageable in terms of content visibility and social sentiment.

***D (VN):** And the data from Facebook and YouTube is easy, but for TikTok, they said that it's really difficult to follow its rhythm. And it's also a challenge for when, when we prove that our campaign is successful on technology is really a challenge because we don't have any like any measurement.*

Shin et. al (2022) includes content selection in the algorithmic mediation. While Tiktok's virality-driven environment put a stress on “entertaining” or “meaningful” content with impressive opening, advertising videos were confirmed not to work well on this platform. The main reason described by respondents was that the user experience design on TikTok combined with its infinite stream of personalised videos made consumers more aware of ads. With Meta, marketers felt more confident in planning KPI and executing commercial tasks as they could utilise ads solutions to boost reach and engagement. Meanwhile, undefined rules in the TikTok recommendation system had driven participants to rely more on influencers’ expertise to achieve better visibility.

***K (NL):** To gain more likes and make the TikTok algorithms recommend your video more, normally the influencer will give you the recommendation. So how should you do the contents or you are the one who gives them the right directions or you collaborate together.*

Some practitioners considered Meta as a source of reference to figure out how to work with TikTok algorithms. **Participant G and E** identified a tendency of imitation and differentiation between platforms in order to compete with each other.

***G (CZ):** Instagram and the rest of the like of these global social media tried to copy and imitate these algorithms. And this term is like from a point of view of the user, I experienced that. I was feeling like that I'm in a bubble while using these media.*

***E (VN):** The rise of Tiktok has influenced other platforms as well. On Facebook more than a year ago, they still prioritize group and community content on the user's feed. But that's not the case today, they come back to push people who you know or follow. I think that's how they differentiate themselves from TikTok.*

During the interviews, marketers were descriptive of the way they need to adjust their content to the algorithmic recommendation and “image” of the platform. TikTok as a platform is suitable for more funny and entertaining content. **Participant K** (NL) described the higher “authenticity” of the videos that get popular on the platform in comparison to Instagram. In her opinion, the overall content shared on Instagram is generally more edited. When working with Instagram, marketers have to be more perfectionist in comparison to TikTok, where posts are rough and authentic.

***K (NL):** We're so into Instagram like we're always like having these perfectly created captions and like content and cover photos and everything. And then on TikTok, you gotta let that go. Which sometimes is still a bit hard because you still want to look professional.*

Additional perspective towards the overall “brand” of content published is that marketers need to adapt to this type of content (or formatting) to get boosted by the algorithms. **Interviewee (H)** defined the platform as “crazy” and consisting of “funny videos”. Tik-Tok has previously started as a musical.ly, a platform for lip-syncing, and the culture developed from that, arguably having influence beyond, in fashion and music (Karalyte, 2020).

According to **Interviewee I** (UK), Instagram can be a very serious platform (also in terms of content creation), whereas Tik-Tok is only suitable for certain brands:

***A (UK):** Official account for the royal family is on TikTok. Ohh I don't think that it's appropriate but it's on TikTok. I don't know how it works for them. Royal family? I'm not sure if it's appropriate. It has to punch you to the face to interest people. So there's two options. They're gonna make fun of it. King Charles is gonna be dancing on the horse. Or it's not gonna work.*

Combining certain brands (Royal Family) with the nature of the platform might lead to brand associations that could be, on the contrary, harmful to the brand. For instance, it might be less beneficial for luxury brands, as **Participant E** (VN) defined for their company. Other participants saw TikTok as more suitable for certain products, due to the target audience present.

Another example was discussed by **Participant H**. The company moved from the platform due to its target audience and the form of content:

*H (CZ): But yeah, that was another reason why we moved from the platform. Because for us, it was hard to make normal content. Like a picture is something that is pretty dead on TikTok. So we've been forced to like making the yeah, the Tik Tok. And for our workflow it was hard.*

*H (CZ): Because our target audience in a formula team, it was mainly older. But like on the Tik Tok, we found out that our audience was between the ages of 10 to 10 to 15. So it wasn't something in which we were interested.*

It was confirmed by practitioners that working with TikTok posed more complicated and time-consuming technological challenges in content moderation and measure of success due to its video-centric nature (Gray & Suzor, 2020). **Participant E** shed light on this matter by tracing back to her experience with crisis management on multiple platforms.

*E (VN): With fake brand pages or posts about the products, we can take action to take them down very fast because Meta controls all accounts. Also the content on meta are mostly post-based so we can find the tool to scan the text and find negative keywords. But for TikTok everything is played in the video, there's not even a caption for the video so if the same thing happens on TikTok, even the platform can't detect and take down those fake videos.*

To conclude, not only did the unique algorithmic architecture on TikTok force brands to reinvent branding methods but the tension between it and other social media competitors also added more complexity to the job of global marketers. Constant adaptation to changes in the context of algorithmic logics and channel differentiation strategies was required across all digital platforms.

#### 4.3.2 Situational factor to justify ethical concerns

Overall, marketers had to be encouraged to talk at length on ethical criticism towards TikTok. According to the Four Component Model by James Rest, people will go through four stages of ethical decision-making, in which after recognizing a moral issue, they will consider various factors and principles to determine what is morally right or wrong (Crane et al., 2019). It was noticeable during the interviews that most participants made moral reasoning on the basis of precedent cases on Meta-owned platforms, especially in the context of data privacy, misinformation and negative impact on consumer behaviour.

***K (NL):** Heard about the US wanting to ban? I think there's already one state that's banning TikTok because of privacy. To be fair, we've all been on Facebook. We're on Instagram. You know, everything is on the table. Why care about Tik Tok now? You know I don't get it.*

***F (VN):** I think the TikTok algorithm is not the root cause of shifting consumer behavior. It has been laid down by other older and bigger ones like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram. Tiktok is only the booster to make the transition faster.*

As an expert in performance marketing, **participant D** exhibited a strong concern toward data privacy yet he found the exploitation of user data on TikTok less severe than Meta. In response to this perspective, the reason given by respondents was based upon the evaluation of ads cultivation on those platforms, as well as the comparison in functionality between Meta business suite and TikTok business center. Since Meta offered more advanced insight tools for businesses to capitalise on user data, some interviewees considered it as more unethical than or equally unethical to TikTok.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1 TikTok literacy: Challenges from the DIY

Some scholars (Bucher, 2017; Cotter & Reisdorf, 2020; Swart, 2021) characterise building algorithmic literacy as "learning by doing". The algorithms are understood through the use and expertise (Blank & Dutton, 2012). In our study, some marketers confirmed that, saying they gain knowledge of the algorithm from experience (professional and personal). However, many identified additional ways to gain algorithmic literacy in their job, such as relying on the influencer and a network of social media experts. Moreover, they revealed that TikTok does invest in training about the platform to sell itself to companies (the case of VN and CZ in this study). Due to the inconsistency of access to information on the algorithm, some marketers had contradicting views, or were unaware of some updates.

With the increased power these systems possess in society (Bitzer, 2022) and the impact on the individual, the rules behind them often remain hidden or "black-boxed" (Lomborg & Kapsch, 2019). Another dimension of the discussion was the TikTok algorithm transparency. Marketers can talk about the TikTok algorithm at length, describe its technical nuances (not every participant) and have an overall attitude towards it. Nevertheless, a common theme during the study was opaqueness in algorithmic understanding. Regarding transparency, marketers talked about regulations and shadowbanning of content without explanation. According to the marketer, it had to do with algorithmic content scanning. Even though TikTok provides Guidelines on that matter, occasional instances were unreasonable. This significant grey area identified by the marketer may affect the performance in their job when content gets taken down.

Furthermore, when designing the platform's content, they consider the regulations set by TikTok, which are getting checked by the algorithm. However, there are some grey areas and a need for more transparency compared to other platforms. Regarding the utilisation of TikTok, lack of communication on algorithmic rules posed challenges to the utilisation since there were cases when their content got taken down without any premise.

## 5.2 Associations with other social media platforms

Some authors (Hern, 2022; Zhao, 2021) discussed how the decentralised algorithm model differentiates TikTok from other platforms and gives it a competitive advantage through higher personalisation. Patterns were found in the speech of many marketers' insights about higher personalisation of the platform compared to Meta, its benefits and disadvantages for the marketer. Swart (2021, p.8) describes that while algorithmic awareness was context-dependent, the more platforms participants used, the more elaborate they could reflect on what algorithms are and do. Awareness came from experience and comparison with other platforms. These previous experiences helped the marketer to understand the additional nuances of TikTok with comparison.

The lesser transparency of the TikTok algorithm possessed difficulties. Regarding the discussion on transparency, marketers highlighted the need for more access to insights compared to Meta. At the end of 2022, TikTok introduced analysis tools, which serve creators to assess data on demographics and reach. Meta has had a more developed system in that area called Business Suite, which marketers described as helpful.

Moreover, participants were descriptive of how content recommendations and trends differ between platforms. In that sense, TikTok brand content has to adjust to match the 'image' of the platform (entertaining, funny, etc.), while on Meta, they have their own spaces to communicate about the business. Furthermore, the TikTok brand could be more suitable for certain brands and products.

Authors (Bhandari & Bimo, 2022; Xu & Zhang, 2019) discuss the TikTok algorithm as user-driven, leading to a very higher level of personalisation compared to others. However, this paper adds another suggestion to the previous research: the virality of content in specific countries influenced by the TikTok company itself, which contradicts the fully "user-driven" recommendation. In the case of Vietnam, marketers claimed TikTok pushes more educational content to the brand itself (4.1.1). Additionally, some marketers explained how TikTok pushes certain topics. In that sense, the algorithm would not be purely data-driven, but the designer pushes the influence of certain content. That has not been said about any other platforms.

### 5.3 Ethical perspectives of TikTok algorithms

Generally, ethical criticism surrounding TikTok business and its algorithmic manipulations do not show a dominant influence on global marketers in terms of attitudes and platform usage. Thus, the empirical insight has disclosed a discrepancy between ethical awareness and the actual implementation of marketing ethics, evoking a challenge for corporations when confronted with algorithmic dilemmas in future. For a more comprehensive understanding of how ethical decision-making can be achieved in practical endeavours, an investigation into practitioners' reasoning is required. Given a large amount of literature recognizing the interplay of individual, situational and socio-cultural factors in ethical judgment processes (Moraes, Kerrigan & McCann, 2020), we will follow that multifaceted structure to discuss in-depth the perspectives of our respondents.

#### 5.3.1 Individual factors

Individual factors in this paper are identified as global marketers' acquired attitudes and knowledge through training and experiences with TikTok algorithms. The empirical findings have revealed a certain degree of muddiness in TikTok algorithmic literacy and “moral imagination” (Crane et al., 2019, p.156) that influenced global marketers' attitudes towards ethical issues.

*Algorithmic literacy concerning ethical practices:* The opaqueness in TikTok algorithmic literacy was prevalent in all interviews, followed by an insufficient understanding of how ethical dilemmas, such as data security, algorithmic and human biases on TikTok, can hurt brands and consumers. Similar to consumers, most practitioners found it challenging to make sense of highly technical topics (Kuksa, Fisher & Kent, 2022) regardless of their expertise, for instance, the repackaging and dissemination of user data. The concept of “nothing is transparent” is widely accepted among the professionals when discussing social media algorithms. Uncommunicated rules and the ongoing generation of trends under TikTok algorithmic governance compel marketers to continuously update their knowledge and skills primarily on a test and learn basis. However, there is a lack of extensive training programs focusing on marketing ethics, particularly concerning the ethical practices of algorithms. The neglect of ethical decision-making in marketing training can reinforce the perception that ethical considerations are irrelevant in the business domain (Crane et al.,2019).



*Unavailable space for moral imagination:* This factor is referred to “a sense of the varieties of possibilities and moral consequences of their decisions, the ability to imagine a wide range of possible issues, consequences, and solutions” (Werhane, 1998, p.76). Practicing moral imagination enables individuals to see beyond the day-to-day realities and reflect about an ethical dilemma from different alternatives and perspectives (Crane et al., 2019). As a large part of the personalising technologies remains unnoticed (Zuboff, 2019), it constitutes a sense of powerlessness (Kuksa, Fisher & Kent, 2022), convincing practitioners that they can not make any change to the algorithmic circuits. This perception, partly derived from their past experiences with other social media platforms, has weakened their attitudes towards ethical concerns surrounding TikTok algorithmic logics. As a result, the space for the recognition of ethical issues and the evaluation of moral consequences was not fostered. For instance, during the interviews, marketers perceived consumers' data privacy as an enigmatic issue, where the associated threats were unclear and deemed insignificant to their scopes.

### 5.3.2 Situational factors

The interplay of individualism and collectivism deal with beliefs about the priority of individual versus group interests, which affects ethical decision-making (Kuksa, I., Fisher, T. and Kent, A., 2022). According to consumer culture theory, consumers construct their identities and their relationship with groups and social institutions individually and collectively through shared symbols, values and experiences (Belk, 1988, p.160). Ethical framing is incorporated in these artifacts, resulting in “multiple ethical selves” (Crane et al., 2019, p. 157). The empirical analysis strongly demonstrated the significant impact of situational factors on shaping practitioners' ethical decision-making. In most interviews, participants sought instruction from their surrounding environment to rationalize their perspectives of ethical issues caused by TikTok business and its algorithms. A shift of responsibility, social weighting and appeal to higher loyalties are some common themes identified.

*A shift of responsibility:* “Consumers should be responsible for their choice of platform and content consumption” was the most common narrative given by the global marketers of this study, which corresponds to the political ideology of neoliberalism. In the context of neoliberalism, there is an emphasis on individual responsibility for solving social issues and achieving their own well-being (Harvey, 2007). It encourages personal choices, self-reliance, and individual agency. However, the shift of accountability from institution to individual is a subject of debate among critics as it often overlooks systemic barriers and social inequalities

that can significantly impact an individual's opportunities and outcome (CCT, 2018). With regard to social media spaces, Van Dijk (2019, 2020) refers to the structural disparities between social groups as “digital divide”, a concept that will be further explored in this paper.

*Social weighting:* In order to moderate the salience of ethical concerns in relation with TikTok algorithms, marketers exercised selective social comparison (Crane et al., 2019). This concept in social psychology involves choosing a specific reference group for comparison in certain domains or specific attributes, rather than engaging in a broader evaluation for the purpose of restoring threatened self-esteem and regaining positive affect (Johnson & Knobloch-Westerwick, 2014). Regarding the governance of consumer data and privacy issues on TikTok, the participants depend on the normalized practices by Facebook and Google algorithmic systems to downplay the intensity of the issue.

*Appeal to higher loyalties:* Often used in discussions about ethical decision-making, appeal to higher loyalties refers to a strategy where people claim that they put aside personal value or interest in favor of upholding a greater cause or shared principle (Crane et al., 2019). The benefits of personalisation to marketing activities, such as more precise ads targeting and better product offerings, were utilized by respondents as an overarching value to belittle their personal data privacy concern as TikTok users themselves.

### 5.3.3 Socio-cultural factors

For addressing black-box algorithms, it is suggested that researchers consider the wider cultural implications associated with algorithmic systems (Lloyd, 2019). Since this study adopted a global marketing approach with participants working in four different countries, a variety of opinions and approaches concerning the ethical aspect of TikTok algorithms have shown up. Elements of socio-cultural environment such as social norms, common beliefs, cultural setting and social pressures (Kornilaki & Font, 2019) can affect how individuals perceive, interpret and evaluate moral standards. With respect to data security, content safety and bias, the majority of marketers working in European markets (The Netherlands, UK, Czech) expressed their unease on a broader scale, taking into account the impact on younger generations or the entire society. Contrarily, Vietnamese participants envisioned the consequences of those issues in a more pragmatic manner, concerning direct effects on their brands, such as brand safety, or marketing executions, such as users' response to excessive commercial advertisements.

Numerous cross-cultural studies conducted across European countries, Australia, India and Egypt, have illuminated a variation of perspective regarding unethical consumer behavior (Agnihotri & Bhattacharya, 2019). Furthermore, as revealed in the interviews, the scale of TikTok business in certain markets has strategic implications on how they operate the algorithmic and non-algorithmic governing systems. When confronted with practices of unfairness, for example, the case of human intervention in TikTok's recommendation system in Vietnam, none of the respondents exhibited negative feelings towards the practice, or concerned about its potential impact on consumers' well-being. In fact, two of them considered human content moderation as an effective governance strategy to cultivate a more meaningful and healthy environment on TikTok. On the other hand, the practitioners in the Netherlands, UK and Czech have not observed any evidence of such manipulations.

#### 5.4 Marketer-consumer divide

Another theme emerged from the analysis is the perspective disparity between global marketers and consumers with respect to the impact of algorithms on users, as well as the tension between agency and structure. Prior study in consumers' privacy boundaries indicate that consumers exhibit a certain sensitivity towards the disclosure of personal information (Jacobson, Gruzd & Hernández-García, 2020). In fact, they are aware of the trade-off between privacy and personalisation, and quite critical in evaluating their willingness to cast aside some of their privacy under specific conditions and terms for personal comfort (Zoupos & Spais, 2022). On the other hand, privacy concerns triggered by excessive personalized ads might lead to negative attitudes towards the ads and brands (Kim et al., 2022). Driven by the realization that their personal information is openly accessed and utilized for marketing purposes, consumers feel the urge to resist the ad message (Baek & Morimoto, 2012). On the other hand, half of the participants in this research overlook the issue, stating that personal data security was not concerned among consumers since they were all exposed to Meta and the consequences of the issue was not comprehensible. Some marketers relied on their personal experiences as TikTok users themselves to justify their observations. In brief, this suggests an expectation gap between marketers, who employ algorithm-mediated social networking sites to collect user data and turn it into personalising services, and consumers, who are the data owners.

Regarding the accountability for TikTok content consumption, the majority of practitioners believe that every individual has their own agency to select and moderate their online experiences. However, the ideology of digital divide suggests that consumers may be less

aware of the effect of algorithms on their behaviour, and other algorithmic implications. In their empirical research, Van Deursen (2015) and Van Dijk (2019) discuss digital inequalities in which uneven distribution of digital resources leads to the disparities in awareness, access, skill and adoption of digital media among different social groups. Van Dijk (2020) once again examines the structural and persistent gap between primary user groups who have more or earlier access to ‘capital-enhancing applications’ and those who mainly use digital media for entertainment purposes. In the context of this study, global marketers, as a representation of primary groups, are benefiting more due to the fact that they have more comprehensive understanding of technologies, and exclusive access to resources such as marketing tools and network. Research by Cotter and Reisdorf (2020) also indicated that demographic distinctions have contributed to the reemergence of digital divide in understanding algorithmic systems. As certain communication and strategic digital skills are required for one to cope with misinformation on the internet (Van Dijk, 2020), consumers are more vulnerable to unethical marketing tactics such as bait advertising, false claims, or fake news. Hence, there is the need for improved communication and mutual understanding between marketers and consumers to bridge the digital divide, fostering better brand-consumer relationships.

### 5.5 Model proposition

The analysis has brought forth that the effective utilization of TikTok regarding algorithmic literacy for marketing practitioners should be treated as a circular process. Due to the uncertain and shifting nature of TikTok algorithm-driven system, the ongoing interrelation between platform literacy and employment is mediated by the uniqueness of the social media environment at targeted countries and constant adaptation to brand image and communication strategy. Hence, we revisit the initial conceptual framework for modifications and suggest a new model as shown below.

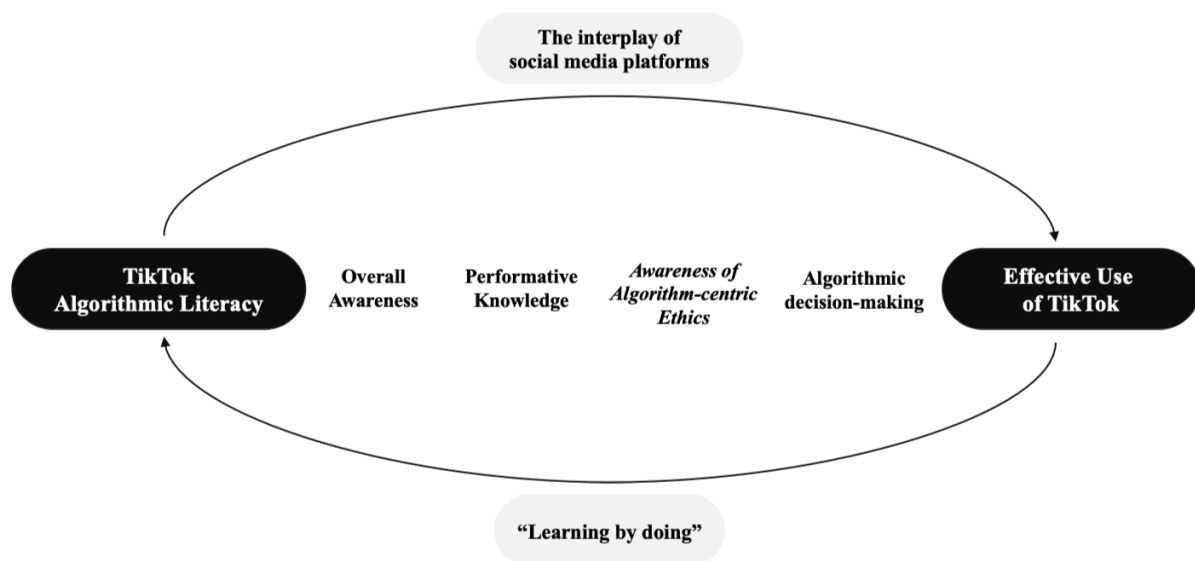


Figure 2: Proposed framework

Figure 2 illustrates two major flows that foster the relationship: (1) *the literary flow* (straight line) represents a step-by-step process for the adoption of TikTok algorithmic literacy, (2) *the contextual flow* (circular lines) articulates the interconnection between literacy adoption and the efficacy in usage influenced by environmental factors (social media landscape) and pragmatic factors (learning by doing). In the matter of literacy adoption, we would like to argue that the understanding of ethics concerning TikTok algorithms should be incorporated in the process for the purpose of forging both effective and ethical marketing decisions. As to the contextual mediation, the interplay of TikTok and other competitive social networking platforms produces a continuous tension that significantly influences the marketing communications strategy. This environmental mediator is distinctive for each market, relying on a multitude of factors such as the scale of TikTok business and its regional strategy and the global competition scene between social media platforms. While implementing marketing activities on TikTok, the global professionals also need to improvise their tactics based on practical situations, local strategy of their own brand or organization, and algorithmic trends by TikTok. Those accumulated “learning by doing” (Bucher, 2017; Cotter & Reisdorf 2020; including Swart, 2021) contributing back to the richness of literacy.

## 6. Findings & Conclusion

### 6.1 Conclusion

This study aimed to research the role of algorithmic literacy for global marketers, specifically in the case of TikTok. TikTok uses a unique recommendation algorithm that helped its popularisation, being at the core of its competitive advantage. In addition to its effective strategic usefulness, there is an ethical dimension to its transparency. After a systematic literature review, a research design has been tailored in order to answer the following research question:

- ❖ *How does algorithmic literacy challenge TikTok's utilisation for global marketers, taking into account ethical concerns?*

Through the thematic analysis, the qualitative research came to key findings. The global marketer described her algorithmic literacy as "above an average user". Different ways to help the marketer gain literacy were identified to enhance performance when working with TikTok. Such went beyond practical knowledge ("learning by doing"). Some conducted personal research on the topic by reading blogs or following creators. Other managers gained literacy through cooperation with the influencer since they seemed more knowledgeable.

A key finding was that TikTok provides training to more prominent companies in certain countries (Vietnam and the Czech Republic). The training covers content creation concerning algorithmic literacy, aiming to familiarise the marketer with the platform.

A further dimension of algorithmic literacy we defined was the attitudes (positive/negative/mixed) towards the algorithm and the grounded knowledge behind them. Ethical concerns covered the impact of algorithms on the consumer, the broader society, and data privacy. Ethical criticism surrounding TikTok business and its algorithmic manipulations do not show a dominant influence (with exceptions) on global marketers in terms of attitudes and platform usage. However, the marketer has shown awareness, even though the marketer needs to be reminded of some examples to talk at length about these. In the case of Vietnam, there was a lesser concern about data privacy than in other countries.

Another finding was that of transparency. Some suggested that TikTok pushed certain topics on the platform. Hence, the algorithm and content pushed and published might not be fully data-driven. Even though some marketers were capable and descriptive with the algorithmic rules, a grey area has been identified concerning the algorithms and their metrics. This builds on some concerns regarding algorithmic rules, as there seems to be a need for algorithmic literacy in society overall (Silva et al., 2022).

Last but not least, TikTok has been compared to other platforms, especially those owned by Meta. The marketer gained additional knowledge of the algorithm by comparing the algorithmic functions. Additionally, the marketer built up and compared ethical criticisms that other platforms face, specifically regarding data privacy issues.

## 6.2 Theoretical & managerial implications

Bowman & Swart (2020) discussed the notion of causal ambiguity, which pertains to a lack of comprehension and insight into the mechanisms of things, specifically about the relations between cause and effect. Contemporary marketing and everyday life have been codified into social media algorithms, triggering the widespread of causal ambiguity and a sense of uncertainty among practitioners. Thus, the subject of this study is relevant to both academia and industry managers given by its contribution to theoretical and managerial insights.

As presented through the proposed framework, the theoretical implications in this paper help identify the interconnection between TikTok algorithmic literacy and the effective use of the platform in organizations, shedding light to how contextual factors affect the relationship. Positioned between the realms of brands and consumers, practitioners have offered novel perspectives to the scholarship of TikTok marketing regarding algorithm literature and the adoption of marketing ethics. Based on the findings, higher algorithmic awareness among global marketers does not correspond to the same level of ethical understanding and judgment. The marketer-consumer gap, as a result of digital divide, is also identified as a threat to the implementation of marketing ethics concerning algorithms. From a global perspective, the study acknowledges the socio-cultural and socio-economic discrepancies in awareness observed between countries in the context of TikTok algorithms and associated ethical issues. Hence, in order to foster theoretical frameworks and principles for a healthy algorithmic environment, researchers are recommended to revisit the definition of TikTok algorithmic literacy and examine it in a wider cultural context. Furthermore, it is of importance to take into account the tension between TikTok and other social media platforms for the evaluation of the

impact of new technology as well as the investigation of algorithmic culture and users' mediated behaviours.

On the other hand, this study has managerial implications that can provide global corporations with helpful insights. As discussed above, an absence of proper training within the organization on social media algorithms, compelling marketers to acquire literacy on a test and learn basis, can lead to inconsistent assumptions and biases in assessing recommendation systems, ads performance tracking, and attention engineering. Silva, Chen and Zhu (2022) argued that establishing a fundamental knowledge of the objectives pursued by algorithmic producers and associated impacts on society is one of the pathways to attain algorithmic literacy. Most practitioners lack awareness of how algorithms impact consumers and often overlook the ethical implications associated with TikTok algorithmic practices. There is a space for organizational education on marketing ethics concerning algorithms to enhance the employees' ethical framing and handling of ethical dilemmas (Crane et al., 2019). Given insights on TikTok' diverse market operations, particularly in content governance and manipulations, global brands that incorporate the platform into their communication strategies are required to customize their approach to suit each market preference.

Finally, as mandated by the political ideology of neoliberalism, social problems should be a shared responsibility among governments, corporations, and individuals (CCT, 2018). Due to the complex and interconnected nature of social media platforms, it is crucial for policy makers to carefully examine the competitive landscape when addressing the governance of algorithms. The tendency of imitation and differentiation in algorithmic logics across platforms can complicate the market dynamics, making it challenging to recognize unethical practices, including the exploitation of user data and the harm of algorithmic "eco chamber" on consumers, and to promote a safe and trustworthy digital environment.

### 6.3 Limitations & Future research

Although the findings help to enlighten a less-researched temporary topic, some limitations were found. This study is qualitative, and so it examines the phenomena in a rather smaller sample, with three respondents from each country. Hence, it cannot be generalized to the entire population in a country, but it aims to give specific in-depth insights (Bell et al., 2019).

Companies selected for the study possess global brands, but there is a wide range between industries (for instance, electronic devices and hair cosmetics). Furthermore, marketing



strategies among these companies might differ. Therefore, the future researcher might benefit from recruiting individuals focused on a specific country and/or industry.

The study hinted at a different landscape of algorithmic literacy in the case of TikTok between countries due to TikTok training provided, popularity on the market, etc. In the bigger picture, there is potential for comparison between global markets in the future. Additionally, the study uses only semi-structured interviews for methods. For future research, a multi-method approach could be added (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). Moreover, there are options to execute this quantitatively to add generalizability to the results (for instance, surveying).

Another common shortcoming was the need for more time. For this particular study, the recruitment period took longer than expected. In this step, reaching marketing executives in target countries and extensive networking was time-consuming. Furthermore, scheduling the interviews required adaptation to time zone differences, specifically for the case of Vietnam and the United Kingdom. Thus, this added time pressure for the analysis part (McGrath et al., 2018).

## Reference list

Adams, W.C. (2015) ‘Conducting semi-structured interviews’, *Handbook of Practical Program Evaluation*, pp. 492–505. Available at:

<https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119171386.ch19> (Accessed: 10 Apr 2023)

Agnihotri, A. and Bhattacharya, S., 2019. Unethical consumer behavior: The role of institutional and socio-cultural factors. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*. Available at:

<https://doi.org/10.1108/JCM-02-2017-2093> (Accessed: 20 May, 2023)

Agung, N.F.A. (2019) “Opportunities and Challenges of Instagram Algorithm in Improving Competitive Advantage,” *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology*, 4(1), pp. 743–746. Available: <https://ijisrt.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/IJISRT19JA125.pdf> (Accessed: 10 Apr 2023)

Ahmed, A. (2023) *TikTok’s latest keyword insights feature gives advertisers the inside scoop on top-leading ad copy*, *Digital Information World*. Available at:

<https://www.digitalinformationworld.com/2023/03/tiktoks-latest-keyword-insights-feature.html> (Accessed: 24 May 2023).

Al Jazeera. (2023, March 16). China: US spreading disinformation and suppressing TikTok, *Technology News | Al Jazeera*. Al Jazeera. Available at:

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/3/16/china-us-spreading-disinformation-and-suppressing-tiktok> (Accessed: 28 Mar 2023)

Augustinus, M. (2022) *What do we talk about when we talk about algorithmic literacy?*

Thesis., University of Boras. Available: <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1732027&dswid=7942> (Accessed: 2 Apr 2023)

Barnhart, B. (2022) *How to rise above social media algorithms*, *Sprout Social*. Available at:

<https://sproutsocial.com/insights/social-media-algorithms/> (Accessed: Apr 3, 2023).

Baek, T.H. and Morimoto, M., 2012. Stay away from me. *Journal of advertising*, 41(1), pp.59-76. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2753/JOA0091-3367410105> (Accessed: 27 May 2023)

Belk, R.W., 1988. Possessions and the extended self. *Journal of consumer research*, 15(2), pp.139-168. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1086/209154> (Accessed: 2 Apr 2023)

Bell, E., Bryman, A., & Harley, B. (2019). *Business Research Methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 5th edition. Available at: <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,uid&db=cat07147a&AN=Iub.7297257&site=eds-live&scope=site> (Accessed: 22 Mar 2023)

Bhandari, A. and Bimo, S., 2022. Why's everyone on TikTok now? The algorithmized self and the future of self-making on social media. *Social Media+ Society*, 8(1), p.20563051221086241. Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/20563051221086241> (Accessed: 22 Mar 2023)

Biddle, S., Solon, O., & McCormick, R. (2020, March 16). TikTok told moderators to suppress posts by "ugly" people and the poor to attract more users, according to a report. NBC News. Available at: <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/tech-news/tiktok-told-moderators-suppress-posts-ugly-people-poor-attract-more-n1161966> (Accessed: 14 Mar 2023)

Biddle, R., Joshi, A., Liu, S., Paris, C. and Xu, G., 2020, April. Leveraging sentiment distributions to distinguish figurative from literal health reports on Twitter. In *Proceedings of the web conference 2020* (pp. 1217-1227). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1145/3366423.3380198> (Accessed: 2 Apr 2023)

Bitzer, T., 2022. Algorithmic Transparency in Action: How and Why Do Companies Disclose Information on Algorithms?. Available at: [https://aisel.aisnet.org/amcis2022/sig\\_odis/sig\\_odis/8/](https://aisel.aisnet.org/amcis2022/sig_odis/sig_odis/8/) (Accessed: 2 Apr 2023)

Blank, G. and Dutton, W.H., 2012. Age and trust in the Internet: The centrality of experience and attitudes toward technology in Britain. *Social Science Computer Review*, 30(2), pp.135-151. Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0894439310396186> (Accessed: 7 Apr 2023)

Boeker, M. and Urman, A., 2022, April. An Empirical Investigation of Personalization Factors on TikTok. In *Proceedings of the ACM Web Conference 2022* (pp. 2298-2309). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1145/3485447.3512102> (Accessed: 27 Mar 2023)

Bossetta, M. (2018) “The digital architectures of social media: Comparing political campaigning on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat in the 2016 U.S. election,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 95(2), pp. 471–496. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077699018763307> (Accessed: 18 Apr 2023)

Bowman, C. and Swart, J., 2020. Managing embedded creative work: the challenge of causal ambiguity. In *The Future of Creative Work* (pp. 189-210). Edward Elgar Publishing. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781839101106.00021> (Accessed: 7 Apr 2023)

Braun, V. and Clarke, V., 2006. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2), pp.77-101. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1191/1478088706QP063OA> (Accessed: 14 Mar 2023)

Bruns, A. (2019). Are filter bubbles real? John Wiley. Available at: <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ludwig.lub.lu.se/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,uid&db=cat07147a&AN=lub.5405243&site=eds-live&scope=site> (Accessed: 20 Apr 2023)

Bucher, T., 2017. The algorithmic imaginary: Exploring the ordinary affects of Facebook algorithms. *Information, communication & society*, 20(1), pp.30-44. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2016.1154086> (Accessed: 2 May 2023)

Bucher, T. (2018). *If... then: Algorithmic power and politics*. New York: Oxford University Press. Available at: <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ludwig.lub.lu.se/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,uid&db=cms&AN=139171963&site=eds-live&scope=site> (Accessed: 11 May 2023)

Buller, A. (no date) *TikTok is the future of global marketing*, LS. Available at: <https://www.lSnglobal.com/youth/article/25099/tiktok-is-the-future-of-global-marketing> (Accessed: 23 May 2023).

CB Insights (2021) *What are psychographics?*, CB Insights Research. Available at: <https://www.cbinsights.com/research/what-is-psychographics/> (Accessed: 24 May 2023).

Ceci, L. and 5, S. (2022) *Number of global TikTok users 2025*, Statista. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1327116/number-of-global-tiktok-users/> (Accessed: 24 May 2023).

Chan, K. (2023) *Here are the countries that have bans on TikTok*, AP NEWS. Associated Press. Available at: <https://apnews.com/article/tiktok-ban-privacy-cybersecurity-bytedance-china-2dce297f0aed056efe53309bbcd44a04> (Accessed: April 3, 2023).

Cheney-Lippold, J., 2017. We are data. In *We Are Data*. New York University Press. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.18574/nyu/9781479888702.001.0001> (Accessed: 7 Apr 2023)

Cohen, D. (2023) *Unpacking the recent flood of TikTok bans*, *The Cut*. Available at: <https://www.thecut.com/2023/03/tiktok-bans-what-to-know.html> (Accessed: April 3, 2023).

Cotter, K., & Reisdorf, B. C. (2020). Algorithmic Knowledge Gaps: A New Dimension of (Digital) Inequality. *International Journal of Communication*, 14, 745-765. Available at: <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/12450/2952> (Accessed: 5 May 2023)

Council, F.A. (2016) *Councilpost: Capitalizing on Instagram's new algorithm*, *Forbes*. Forbes Magazine. Available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesagencycouncil/2016/09/06/capitalizing-on-instagrams-new-algorithm/?sh=40a1dae1dbc7> (Accessed: April 3, 2023).

Crane, A., Matten, D., Glozer, S. and Spence, L.J., 2019. *Business ethics: Managing corporate citizenship and sustainability in the age of globalization*. Oxford University Press, USA. Available at: <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,uid&db=cat07147a&AN= lub.6327033&site=eds-live&scope=site> (Accessed: 15 May 2023).

Cramer, J., Van Der Heijden, A. and Jonker, J., 2006. Corporate social responsibility: making sense through thinking and acting. *Business Ethics: A European Review*, 15(4), pp.380-389. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8608.2006.00459.x> (Accessed: 24 May 2023)

Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. 3rd ed. Los Angeles, Sage. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1453/jsas.v4i2.1313> (Accessed: 30 Mar 2023)

Deming, C. (2023) *TikTok creators contemplate life after possible ban: 'it all can be taken away'*, *The Wall Street Journal*. Dow Jones & Company. Available at: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/tiktok-creators-contemplate-life-after-possible-ban-it-all-can-be-taken-away-35070fc2> (Accessed: April 3, 2023).

Depounti, I., Saukko, P. and Natale, S. (2022) 'Ideal Technologies, ideal women: AI and gender imaginaries in redditors' discussions on the Replika Bot Girlfriend', *Media, Culture & Society*, 45(4), pp. 720–736. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/01634437221119021> (Accessed: 5 May 2023)

DeVito, M.A., Gergle, D. and Birnholtz, J., 2017, May. " Algorithms ruin everything" #RIPTwitter, Folk Theories, and Resistance to Algorithmic Change in Social Media. In *Proceedings of the 2017 CHI conference on human factors in computing systems* (pp. 3163-3174). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1145/3025453.3025659> (Accessed: 22 Apr 2023)

DeVos, A., Dhabalia, A., Shen, H., Holstein, K. and Eslami, M., 2022, April. Toward User-Driven Algorithm Auditing: Investigating users' strategies for uncovering harmful algorithmic behavior. In *Proceedings of the 2022 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (pp. 1-19). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1145/3491102.3517441> (Accessed: 22 Apr 2023)

Dholakia, U. (2015) *The perils of algorithm-based marketing*, *Harvard Business Review*. Available at: <https://hbr.org/2015/06/the-perils-of-algorithm-based-marketing> (Accessed: 24 May 2023)

Dudovskiy J. *Snowball sampling* (n.d.) *Research*. Available at: <https://research-methodology.net/sampling-in-primary-data-collection/snowball-sampling/> (Accessed: 22 May 2023)

Dudovskiy, J. (2020) *Stratified sampling - research methodology*, *Research*. Available at: <https://research-methodology.net/sampling-in-primary-data-collection/stratified-sampling/> (Accessed: 10 May 2023)

Duffy, B.E. and Meisner, C., 2023. Platform governance at the margins: Social media creators' experiences with algorithmic (in) visibility. *Media, Culture & Society*, 45(2), pp.285-304. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448211095798> (Accessed: 12 May 2023)

Easterby-Smith, M., Jaspersen, L.J., Thorpe, R. and Valizade, D., 2021. *Management and business research*. Sage. Available at: <https://search-ebshost-com.ludwig.lub.lu.se/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,uid&db=cat07147a&AN=lub.6961960&site=eds-live&scope=site> (Accessed: 22 Mar 2023)

Ehlers, K. (2022). *Council post: How brands can leverage TikTok*, *Forbes*. Available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesagencycouncil/2021/07/26/how-brands-can-leverage-tiktok/?sh=454b4f473b9d> (Accessed: 24 May 2023)

Eslami, A.A., Rabiei, L., Afzali, S.M., Hamidizadeh, S. and Masoudi, R., 2016. The effectiveness of assertiveness training on the levels of stress, anxiety, and depression of high school students. *Iranian Red Crescent Medical Journal*, 18(1). Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4752719/> (Accessed: 15 May 2023)

Eslami, M., Rickman, A., Vaccaro, K., Aleyasen, A., Vuong, A., Karahalios, K., Hamilton, K. and Sandvig, C., (2015), "I always assumed that I wasn't really that close to [her]" Reasoning about Invisible Algorithms in News Feeds. In *Proceedings of the 33rd annual ACM conference on human factors in computing systems* (pp. 153-162). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1145/2702123.2702556> (Accessed: 15 May 2023)

Foster, C.L., 2022. Truth as social practice in a digital era: iteration as persuasion. *AI & SOCIETY*, pp.1-15. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00146-022-01272-2> (Accessed: 21 May 2023)

Geyser, W. (2023) *Everything you need to know about tiktok shadow ban*, *Influencer Marketing Hub*. Available at: <https://influencermarketinghub.com/tiktok-shadow-ban/> (Accessed: 28 May 2023)

Goldhaber, M., 2006. The value of openness in an attention economy. Available at: <https://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/download/1334/1254?inline=1> (Accessed: 19 Apr 2023)

Gorwa, R., Binns, R. and Katzenbach, C., 2020. Algorithmic content moderation: Technical and political challenges in the automation of platform governance. *Big Data & Society*, 7(1), p.2053951719897945. Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/2053951719897945> (Accessed: 4 May 2023)

Goulet, D., 1997. Development ethics: a new discipline. *International Journal of Social Economics*. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/03068299710193543> (Accessed: 17 May 2023)

Gran, A.B., Booth, P. and Bucher, T., 2021. To be or not to be algorithm aware: a question of a new digital divide?. *Information, Communication & Society*, 24(12), pp.1779-1796. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2020.1736124> (Accessed: 13 Apr 2023)

Grandinetti, J., 2021. Examining embedded apparatuses of AI in Facebook and TikTok. *Ai & Society*, pp.1-14. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00146-021-01270-5> (Accessed: 28 Apr 2023)

Gray, J.E. and Suzor, N.P., 2020. Playing with machines: Using machine learning to understand automated copyright enforcement at scale. *Big Data & Society*, 7(1), p.2053951720919963. Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/2053951720919963> (Accessed: 12 Apr 2023)

Guest, G., Bunce, A. and Johnson, L., 2006. How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field methods*, 18(1), pp.59-82. Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1525822X05279903> (Accessed: 30 Mar 2023)

Haenlein, M., Anadol, E., Farnsworth, T., Hugo, H., Hunichen, J., & Welte, D. (2020). Navigating the New Era of Influencer Marketing: How to be Successful on Instagram, TikTok, & Co. *California Management Review*, 63(1), 5–25. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0008125620958166> (Accessed: 22 April 2023)

Hargittai, E., Gruber, J., Djukaric, T., Fuchs, J. and Brombach, L., 2020. Black box measures? How to study people's algorithm skills. *Information, Communication & Society*, 23(5), pp.764-775. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2020.1713846> (Accessed: 19 May 2023)

Harvey, D., 2007. *A brief history of neoliberalism*. Oxford University Press, USA. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1944-8287.2006.tb00327.x> (Accessed: 22 May 2023)

Harwell, D. and Romm, T. (2019) *TikTok's Beijing roots fuel censorship suspicion as it builds a huge U.S. audience*, *The Washington Post*. WP Company. Available at:



<https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2019/09/15/tiktoks-beijing-roots-fuel-censorship-suspicion-it-builds-huge-us-audience/> (Accessed: April 3, 2023).

Hemker, S., Herrando, C. and Constantinides, E., 2021. The transformation of data marketing: how an ethical lens on consumer data collection shapes the future of marketing. *Sustainability*, 13(20), p.11208. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/su132011208> (Accessed: 27 May 2023)

Hern, A. (2022, July 2). How TikTok's algorithm made it a success: 'It pushes the boundaries'. The Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2020/jul/02/how-tiktoks-algorithm-made-it-a-success-it-pushes-the-boundaries> (Accessed: 23 Mar 2023)

Hill, C. (2023) *The Instagram algorithm: How it works and strategies for 2023*, Sprout Social. Available at: <https://sproutsocial.com/insights/instagram-algorithm/> (Accessed: Apr 3, 2023)

Hutchinson, A. (2023) *TikTok officials are discussing new, algorithmic transparency measures with US Government*, Social Media Today. Available at: <https://www.socialmediatoday.com/news/TikTok-Discusses-Algorithmic-Insight-in-Negotiations-with-US/640454/> (Accessed: 28 May 2023).

Jacobson, J., Gruzd, A. and Hernández-García, Á., 2020. Social media marketing: Who is watching the watchers?. *Journal of retailing and consumer services*, 53, p.101774. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2019.03.001> (Accessed: 26 May 2023)

Johnson, B.K. and Knobloch-Westerwick, S., 2014. Glancing up or down: Mood management and selective social comparisons on social networking sites. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 41, pp.33-39. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2014.09.009> (Accessed: 19 May 2023)

Kakilla, C., 2021. Strengths and weaknesses of semi-structured Interviews in Qualitative research: A critical essay. Available: <https://doi.org/10.20944/preprints202106.0491.v1> (Accessed: 5 May 2023)

Karizat, N., Delmonaco, D., Eslami, M. and Andalibi, N., 2021. Algorithmic folk theories and identity: How TikTok users co-produce Knowledge of identity and engage in algorithmic

resistance. *Proceedings of the ACM on human-computer interaction*, 5(CSCW2), pp.1-44. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1145/3476046> (Accessed: 22 May 2023)

Kay, M., Matuszek, C. and Munson, S.A., 2015, April. Unequal representation and gender stereotypes in image search results for occupations. In *Proceedings of the 33rd annual acm conference on human factors in computing systems* (pp. 3819-3828). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1145/2702123.2702520> (Accessed: 5 May 2023)

Khan, R. (2020) *Tiktok: Why is everyone in a tizzy?*, *Forbes*. Available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/roomykhan/2020/09/19/tiktok-why-is-everyone-in-a-tizzy/?sh=5763c36633d5> (Accessed: 24 May 2023)

Kitchens, B., Johnson, S.L. and Gray, P., 2020. Understanding Echo Chambers and Filter Bubbles: The Impact of Social Media on Diversification and Partisan Shifts in News Consumption. *MIS quarterly*, 44(4). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.25300/MISQ/2020/16371> (Accessed: 19 May 2023)

Klug, D., Qin, Y., Evans, M. and Kaufman, G., 2021, June. Trick and please. A mixed-method study on user assumptions about the TikTok algorithm. In *13th ACM Web Science Conference 2021* (pp. 84-92). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1145/3447535.3462512> (Accessed: 15 May 2023)

Kornilaki, M. and Font, X., 2019. Normative influences: How socio-cultural and industrial norms influence the adoption of sustainability practices. A grounded theory of Cretan, small tourism firms. *Journal of environmental management*, 230, pp.183-189. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvman.2018.09.064> (Accessed: 28 Apr 2023)

Köver, C. and Reuter, M., 2019. TikTok curbed reach for people with disabilities. Available at: <https://netzpolitik.org/2019/discrimination-tiktok-curbed-reach-for-people-with-disabilities/> (Accessed: 5 Apr 2023)

Kozyreva, A., Miltgen, C. L., & Stockemer, P. (2021). Public attitudes towards algorithmic personalization and use of personal data online: Evidence from Germany, Great Britain, and the United States. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 8(1). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-021-00787-w> (Accessed: 7 May 2023)

Kuksa, I., Fisher, T. and Kent, A., 2022. *Understanding personalisation: new aspects of design and consumption*. Chandos Publishing. Available at: <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,uid&db=cat02271a&AN=atoz.ebs100865342e&site=eds-live&scope=site> (Accessed: 21 Apr 2023)

Kvale, S., and Brinkmann, S. (2014). *Den kvalitative forskningsintervjun (The Qualitative Research Interview)*. Lund: Studentlitteratur. Available at: <https://www.studentlitteratur.se/#9789144101675/Den+kvalitativa+forskningsintervjun> (Accessed: 22 Apr 2023)

Liao, S. (2020, March 16). TikTok is reportedly censoring posts that mention Tiananmen Square, Tibetan independence, or the Falun Gong. Business Insider. Available at: <https://www.businessinsider.com/tiktok-censorship-users-deemed-ugly-overweight-or-disabled-2020-3?r=US&IR=T> (Accessed: 22 Apr 2023)

Lin, H.-C., Swarna, H. and Bruning, P.F. (2017) 'Taking a global view on Brand Post popularity: Six Social Media Brand Post Practices for Global Markets', *Business Horizons*, 60(5), pp. 621–633. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2017.05.006> (Accessed: 5 May 2023)

Lee, M.K., Kusbit, D., Metsky, E. and Dabbish, L., 2015, April. Working with machines: The impact of algorithmic and data-driven management on human workers. In *Proceedings of the 33rd annual ACM conference on human factors in computing systems* (pp. 1603-1612). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1145/2702123.2702548> (Accessed: 17 May 2023)

Leech, N.L. and Onwuegbuzie, A.J. (2007) 'A typology of mixed methods research designs', *Quality & Quantity*, 43(2), pp. 265–275. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-007-9105-3> (Accessed: 12 Apr 2023)

Lomborg, S. and Kapsch, P.H. (2019) 'Decoding algorithms', *Media, Culture & Society*, 42(5), pp. 745–761. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443719855301> (Accessed: 23 May 2023)

Lustig, C., Pine, K., Nardi, B., Irani, L., Lee, M.K., Nafus, D. and Sandvig, C., 2016, May. Algorithmic authority: the ethics, politics, and economics of algorithms that interpret, decide, and manage. In *Proceedings of the 2016 CHI Conference Extended Abstracts on Human*

*Factors in Computing Systems* (pp. 1057-1062). Available at:  
<https://doi.org/10.1145/2851581.2886426> (Accessed: 27 May 2023)

Maheshwari, S. and Holpuch, A. (2023) *Why countries are trying to ban TikTok*, *The New York Times*. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/article/tiktok-ban.html> (Accessed: 24 May 2023)

McGrath, C., Palmgren, P.J. and Liljedahl, M. (2018) 'Twelve tips for conducting qualitative research interviews', *Medical Teacher*, 41(9), pp. 1002–1006. Available at:  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0142159X.2018.1497149> (Accessed: 5 May 2023)

Milmo, D. and Hern, A. (2023) *TikTok: Why the app with 1BN users faces a fight for its existence*, *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media. Available at:  
<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2023/mar/31/tiktok-why-the-app-with-1bn-users-faces-a-fight-for-its-existence> (Accessed: April 3, 2023).

Morales, M. and Ladhari, R., 2011. Comparative cross-cultural service quality: an assessment of research methodology. *Journal of Service Management*, 22(2), pp.241-265. Available at:  
<https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/09564231111124244/full/html>  
(Accessed: 11 May 2023)

Moraes, C., Kerrigan, F. and McCann, R. (2019) 'Positive shock: A consumer ethical judgement perspective', *Journal of Business Ethics*, 165(4), pp. 735–751. Available at:  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-018-4092-y> (Accessed: 26 May 2023)

NBC News. (n.d.). TikTok algorithm error sparks allegations of racial bias. NBC News. Available at: <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/tech-news/tiktok-algorithm-error-sparks-allegations-racial-bias-n1273031> (Accessed: 30 Apr 2023)

Neubaum, S. (2020). Examining the Ethical Dilemmas of Advertising on TikTok. Journalism Student Works. Retrieved from <https://scholarworks.uark.edu/jourstuwo/2> (Accessed: 20 May 2023)

The New York Times. (n.d.). What is TikTok and Why is it So Popular Among Teens? The New York Times. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/article/tiktok-ban.html> (Accessed: 3 Apr 2023)

Neill, A. and Schibrowsky, J.A., 2007. Research on marketing ethics: A systematic review of the literature. *Journal of macromarketing*, 27(3), pp.256-273. Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0276146707304733> (Accessed: 26 May 2023)

Nowell, L.S. et al. (2017) 'Thematic analysis', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16(1), p. 160940691773384. Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1609406917733847> (Accessed: 25 May 2023)

Ohlheiser, A. (2021) *The beauty of TikTok's secret, surprising, and eerily accurate recommendation algorithms*, *MIT Technology Review*. Available at: <https://www.technologyreview.com/2021/02/24/1017814/tiktok-algorithm-famous-social-media/> (Accessed: 29 May 2023)

Petrillo (2022) *What makes TikTok so addictive?: An analysis of the mechanisms underlying the world's latest social media craze*, *Brown Undergraduate Journal of Public Health*. Available at: <https://sites.brown.edu/publichealthjournal/2021/12/13/tiktok/> (Accessed: 24 May 2023).

Protobrand. (2021). What makes TikTok tick: The science behind one of the world's fastest-growing apps. Protobrand. Available at: <https://protobrand.com/what-makes-tiktok-tick-the-science-behind-one-of-the-worlds-fastest-growing-apps/> (Accessed: 21 Apr 2023)

Qin, Y., Omar, B. and Musetti, A. (2022) 'The addiction behavior of short-form video app TikTok: The Information Quality and System Quality Perspective', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847> (Accessed: 19 Apr 2023)

Rainie L., Anderson J. (2017) *Theme 7: The need grows for algorithmic literacy, transparency and oversight*, *Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech*. Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2017/02/08/theme-7-the-need-grows-for-algorithmic-literacy-transparency-and-oversight/> (Accessed: 24 May 2023).

Reinhard, C.D. and Dervin, B., 2012. Comparing situated sense-making processes in virtual worlds: Application of Dervin's Sense-Making Methodology to media reception situations. *Convergence*, 18(1), pp.27-48. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856511419914> (Accessed: 17 May 2023)

- Rennstam, J. and Wästerfors, D., 2018. *Analyze!: crafting your data in qualitative research*. Studentlitteratur AB. Available at: <https://lup.lub.lu.se/record/3005d226-667c-4e47-b2b3-39e0a374c57f> (Accessed: 17 Apr 2023)
- Ren, Y., Qi, W. and Fan, M., 2021, December. The Development of Tik Tok's Global Market. In *2021 3rd International Conference on Economic Management and Cultural Industry (ICEMCI 2021)* (pp. 2779-2784). Atlantis Press. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.211209.452> (Accessed: 12 May 2023)
- Roberge, J. and Seyfert, R., 2016. What are algorithmic cultures?. In *Algorithmic cultures* (pp. 13-37). Routledge. Available at: <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781315658698-7/algorithmic-cultures-jonathan-roberge-robert-seyfert> (Accessed: 28 Apr 2023)
- Rowley, J., 2008. Understanding digital content marketing. *Journal of marketing management*, 24(5-6), pp.517-540. Available: <https://doi.org/10.1362/026725708X325977> (Accessed: 22 Apr 2023)
- Ryan, G.W. and Bernard, H.R. (2003) 'Techniques to identify themes', *Field Methods*, 15(1), pp. 85–109. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822x02239569> (Accessed: 11 May 2023)
- Sashi, C.M. (2012) 'Customer engagement, buyer-seller relationships, and Social Media', *Management Decision*, 50(2), pp. 253–272. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/00251741211203551> (Accessed: 26 May 2023)
- Savolainen, L. (2022) 'The Shadow Banning Controversy: Perceived governance and algorithmic folklore', *Media, Culture & Society*, 44(6), pp. 1091–1109. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/01634437221077174> (Accessed: 20 May 2023)
- Schellewald, B. (2021). Communicative Forms on TikTok: Perspectives From Digital Ethnography. *International Journal of Communication*, 15, 1861-1881. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2021.120633> (Accessed: 2 May 2023)
- Sharma, P., Tam, J.L. and Kim, N., 2009. Demystifying intercultural service encounters: Toward a comprehensive conceptual framework. *Journal of Service Research*, 12(2), pp.227-242. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1094670509338312> (Accessed: 23 May 2023)

Shin, D., Kee, K.F. and Shin, E.Y. (2022) ‘Algorithm awareness: Why user awareness is critical for personal privacy in the adoption of algorithmic platforms?’, *International Journal of Information Management*, 65, p. 102494. Available at:

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2022.102494> (Accessed: 13 May 2023)

Siles, I., Valerio-Alfaro, L. and Meléndez-Moran, A. (2022) ‘Learning to like TikTok . . . and not: Algorithm awareness as process’, *New Media & Society*, p. 146144482211389.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448221138973> (Accessed: 30 Apr 2023)

Silva, D.E., Chen, C. and Zhu, Y. (2022) “Facets of Algorithmic Literacy: Information, experience, and individual factors predict attitudes toward algorithmic systems,” *New Media & Society*, p. 146144482210980. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448221098042> (Accessed: 17 May 2023)

Simpson, E. and Semaan, B., 2021. For You, or For "You"? Everyday LGBTQ+ Encounters with TikTok. *Proceedings of the ACM on human-computer interaction*, 4(CSCW3), pp.1-34.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1145/3432951> (Accessed: 10 May 2023)

Six, N. (2022) *Instagram algorithm changes confuse content creators*, *Le Monde.fr*.

Available at: [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/pixels/article/2022/09/22/instagram-s-algorithm-changes-confuse-and-distress-small-content-creators\\_5997905\\_13.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/pixels/article/2022/09/22/instagram-s-algorithm-changes-confuse-and-distress-small-content-creators_5997905_13.html) (Accessed: 24 May 2023)

Smith, H.J., Milberg, S.J. and Burke, S.J., 1996. Information privacy: Measuring individuals' concerns about organizational practices. *MIS quarterly*, pp.167-196. Available at:

<https://doi.org/10.2307/249477> (Accessed: 10 May 2023)

Southern, M.G. (2022) *TikTok's new tool gives businesses helpful audience insights*, *Search Engine Journal*. Available at: <https://www.searchenginejournal.com/tiktoks-new-tool-gives-businesses-helpful-audience-insights/471974/#close> (Accessed: 24 May 2023)

Spohr, D. (2017). Fake news and ideological polarization. *Business Information Review*, 34(3), 150–160. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0266382117722446> (Accessed: 30 Mar 2023)

Sybing, R. (2023) *Thematic analysis: What is it? how to do it?*, *ATLAS.ti*. Available at:

<https://atlasti.com/research-hub/thematic-analysis> (Accessed: 22 May 2023)



Stearns, S. (2017) *Thematic analysis, Thematic Analysis - an overview* | *ScienceDirect Topics*. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/thematic-analysis> (Accessed: 24 May 2023)

Suarez-Lledo, V. and Alvarez-Galvez, J., 2021. Prevalence of health misinformation on social media: systematic review. *Journal of medical Internet research*, 23(1), p.17187. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2196/17187> (Accessed: 22 May 2023)

Swart, J. (2021) “Experiencing algorithms: How young people understand, feel about, and engage with algorithmic news selection on social media,” *Social Media + Society*, 7(2), p. 205630512110088. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051211008828> (Accessed: 14 Apr 2023)

Tanveer, M., Ahmad, A.R., Mahmood, H. and Haq, I.U., 2021. Role of ethical marketing in driving consumer brand relationships and brand loyalty: A sustainable marketing approach. *Sustainability*, 13(12), p.6839. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13126839> (Accessed: 22 May 2023)

Thumlert, K., McBride, M., Tomin, B., Nolan, J., Lotherington, H. and Boreland, T., 2022. ALGORITHMIC LITERACIES: IDENTIFYING EDUCATIONAL MODELS AND HEURISTICS FOR ENGAGING THE CHALLENGE OF ALGORITHMIC CULTURE. *Digital Culture & Education*, 14(4). Available at: <https://www.digitalcultureandeducation.com/volume-14-4> (Accessed: 27 May 2023)

TikTok (n.d) *Case studies: Success stories and inspirational brand results* (no date) *TikTok For Business*. Available at: <https://www.tiktok.com/business/en-US/inspiration> (Accessed: 24 May 2023)

TikTok (2023) Community Guidelines, TikTok. Available at: <https://www.tiktok.com/community-guidelines/cs-cz/> (Accessed: 24 May 2023)

TikTok (2019) *How Tiktok recommends videos #ForYou, Newsroom*. Available at: <https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/how-tiktok-recommends-videos-for-you> (Accessed: 10 May 2023)



TikTok (n.d) *TikTok for Business: Marketing & Advertising on TikTok* (no date) *Get your business discovered on TikTok*. Available at:

[https://getstarted.tiktok.com/gofulltiktok?attr\\_source=google&attr\\_medium=search-br-ad&attr\\_adgroup\\_id=133157245190&attr\\_term=tiktok+marketing&no\\_parent\\_redirect=1&gclid=CjwKCAjwgqejBhBAEiwAuWHioNi3sDsQnX3\\_7-iLLKb\\_nmdLLMawQg5Wwnsw0P81SpWY4IjWJyo9sRoCBuEQAvD\\_BwE&lang=en](https://getstarted.tiktok.com/gofulltiktok?attr_source=google&attr_medium=search-br-ad&attr_adgroup_id=133157245190&attr_term=tiktok+marketing&no_parent_redirect=1&gclid=CjwKCAjwgqejBhBAEiwAuWHioNi3sDsQnX3_7-iLLKb_nmdLLMawQg5Wwnsw0P81SpWY4IjWJyo9sRoCBuEQAvD_BwE&lang=en)

(Accessed: 24 May 2023)

Tufekci, Z. (n.d.). How aspiring influencers are forced to fight the algorithm. MIT Technology Review. Available at:

<https://www.technologyreview.com/2022/09/06/1048303/aspiring-influencers-forced-to-fight-algorithm/> (Accessed: 26 Apr 2023)

TikTok creators contemplate life after possible ban: 'It all can be taken away'. (n.d.). The Wall Street Journal. Available at: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/tiktok-creators-contemplate-life-after-possible-ban-it-all-can-be-taken-away-35070fc2> (Accessed: 2 Apr 2023)

The University of Alaska Fairbanks. (n.d.). Algorithmic Accountability. Rasmuson Library Research Guides. Available at: <https://library.uaf.eu/c.php?g=1225901&p=8997995> (Accessed: 12 May 2023)

Utpal, D.M. (2015) 'Perils of Algorithm Based Marketing', *Harvard Business Review*, 17 June. Available at: <https://hbr.org/2015/06/the-perils-of-algorithm-based-marketing> (Accessed: 15 Apr 2023)

Van Deursen, A.J. and Van Dijk, J.A., 2015. Toward a multifaceted model of internet access for understanding digital divides: An empirical investigation. *The Information Society*, 31(5), pp.379-391. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01972243.2015.1069770> (Accessed: 27 March 2023)

Van Deursen, A.J. and Van Dijk, J.A., 2019. The first-level digital divide shifts from inequalities in physical access to inequalities in material access. *New media & society*, 21(2), pp.354-375. Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1461444818797082> (Accessed: 27 March 2023)

- Van Dijk, J., 2020. *The digital divide*. John Wiley & Sons. Available at: <https://ludwig.lub.lu.se/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,uid&db=cat07147a&AN=lub.5418850&site=eds-live&scope=site> (Accessed: 21 March 2023)
- Wahid, R. *et al.* (2022) ‘Becoming tiktok famous: Strategies for global brands to engage consumers in an emerging market’, *Journal of International Marketing*, 31(1), pp. 106–123. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1069031x221129554> (Accessed: 30 Mar 2023)
- Werhane, P.H., 1998. Moral imagination and the search for ethical decision-making in management. *Business Ethics Quarterly*, 8(S1), pp.75-98. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1052150X00400084> (Accessed: 30 Apr 2023)
- Wheeler, T. (2022) *Using "public interest algorithms" to tackle the problems created by social media algorithms*, Brookings. Brookings. Available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/techtank/2017/11/01/using-public-interest-algorithms-to-tackle-the-problems-created-by-social-media-algorithms/> (Accessed: April 3, 2023).
- Willson, M., 2017. Algorithms (and the) everyday. *Information, Communication & Society*, 20(1), pp.137-150. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2016.1200645> (Accessed: 3 Apr 2023)
- Wood, R., 2021. ‘What I’m not gonna buy’: Algorithmic culture jamming and anti-consumer politics on YouTube. *New media & society*, 23(9), pp.2754-2772. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820939446> (Accessed: 23 Apr 2023)
- Xu, L., Yan, X. and Zhang, Z. (2019) ‘Research on the causes of the “Tik Tok” app becoming popular and the existing problems’, *Journal of Advanced Management Science*, pp. 59–63. doi:10.18178/joams.7.2.59-63. Available at: <http://www.joams.com/uploadfile/2019/0613/20190613034911476.pdf> (Accessed: 17 May 2023)
- Yan, J., Liu, N., Wang, G., Zhang, W., Jiang, Y. and Chen, Z., 2009, April. How much can behavioral targeting help online advertising?. In *Proceedings of the 18th international conference on World wide web* (pp. 261-270). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1145/1526709.1526745> (Accessed: 30 Apr 2023)

Zarsky, T., 2016. The trouble with algorithmic decisions: An analytic road map to examine efficiency and fairness in automated and opaque decision making. *Science, Technology, & Human Values*, 41(1), pp.118-132. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0162243915605575> (Accessed: 28 May 2023)

Zeng, J. and Kaye, D.B.V. (2022) 'From content moderation to *visibility moderation*: A case study of platform governance on TikTok', *Policy & Internet*, 14(1), pp. 79–95. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/poi3.287> (Accessed: 30 Apr 2023)

Zhang, J., Beatty, S.E. and Walsh, G., 2008. Review and future directions of cross-cultural consumer services research. *Journal of Business Research*, 61(3), pp.211-224. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2007.06.003> (Accessed: 22 May 2023)

Zhao, Z. (2021) 'Analysis on the “Douyin (Tiktok) mania” phenomenon based on recommendation algorithms', *E3S Web of Conferences*, 235, p. 03029. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1051/e3sconf/202123503029> (Accessed: 10 May 2023)

ZNFrontier (2019) *How TikTok captured the global market share in 2 years only* (2019) ZNFrontier. Available at: <https://www.znfrontier.com/insights/how-bytedance-tiktok-captured-the-global-market-in-2-years/> (Accessed: 24 May 2023)

Zoupos, D. and Spais, G., 2022. Digital marketing of nutraceutical and pharmaceutical supplements: marketing ethics and consumer comfort. *Journal of Marketing Analytics*, pp.1-21. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41270-022-00206-2> (Accessed: 29 May 2023)

Zuboff, S., 2015. Big other: surveillance capitalism and the prospects of an information civilization. *Journal of information technology*, 30(1), pp.75-89. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1057/jit.2015.5> (Accessed: 11 Mar 2023)

# APPENDIX A

## Interview Guide

- ❖ How semi-structured interviews are conducted.
- ❖ Ethical principles: requirements of information, consent, confidentiality, and use.
- ❖ Informative questions: name, age, gender, and employment.

## Questionnaire Structure

### *Part I - Overall awareness & attitude*

1. If you had to do self-reflection, how do you consider yourself aware of algorithms on Tik-Tok? Why?
2. What factors contribute to the personalised content (organic content & ads) on TikTok from your understanding & experience?
3. What factors contribute to the pushing mechanisms for the trending page from your experience/understanding as a marketer?
  - Video engagement
  - Hashtags
  - Posting time
4. What is your attitude towards algorithms on Tik-Tok from the point of view of a marketer (Negative / Positive / Mixed)? And why?

### *Part II - Ethical awareness*

5. What is your attitude towards the impact of Tiktok algorithms on consumers (Negative / Positive / Mixed)? And why?
6. To what extent are you aware of the unethical practices concerning the TikTok algorithms? Can you name a few examples?
  - Misinformation and fake news
  - Data privacy issue
  - Content bias

7. What is your attitude towards the impact of those criticism on your decision of incorporating TikTok as a part of marcom strategy (Negative / Positive / Mixed)? And why?

➤ Who should be accountable for the unethical practices of TikTok algorithms?

***Part III - Performative knowledge***

8. How do your brand adapt marcom or content strategy to the TikTok algorithms?

➤ How do you see the potentiality of Tiktok as a marcom platform in country X?

➤ How does user-generated content can affect brand safety on TikTok?

9. Could you compare the differences in algorithms between TikTok and other social media platforms?

➤ How do the differences affect your brand and marketing activities?

➤ In terms of algorithmic governance, do you find TikTok more ethical than other social media platforms? And why?