

Vilde Cathea Normann

Strategic Communication on TikTok

Formal and Informal Practices with Platform
Vernacular Deciding "*the Dos and Don'ts*"

Master's thesis in Media, Communication and Information
Technology

Supervisor: Kristine Ask

June 2024

Vilde Cathea Normann

Strategic Communication on TikTok

Formal and Informal Practices with Platform
Vernacular Deciding "*the Dos and Don'ts*"

Master's thesis in Media, Communication and Information Technology
Supervisor: Kristine Ask
June 2024

Norwegian University of Science and Technology
Faculty of Social and Educational Sciences
Department of Sociology and Political Science



Norwegian University of
Science and Technology

Foreword

Thank you to my supervisor, Kristine Ask, for providing me with the best advice, your positive energy, and, importantly, for relating to my student problems — we students tend to like that.

I also want to say thank you to:

All the participants of this study. Your insights and experiences have been a major component of this study.

My coworkers and my workplace for the past three years, Britannia Hotel, for being flexible and providing a fantastic work environment.

My family and friends for supporting me throughout the years. Mom, thank you for always listening and helping me, even if it's 3 a.m. To my aunt, Cecilie, thank you for your encouragement and for "finding it entertaining" to read through my texts whenever I needed it. I still don't believe you, although I am very grateful for being so kind.

Iselin, you have been my rock and roommate for the last four years. Thank you for bringing sunshine daily, being (the self-pronounced) "glue" in the group, and for your advice on literally everything. We have been together through it all, including our first day as students, COVID-19, and all the struggles along the way. It has truly been a ride, and I am so grateful that this is not the end.

Trondheim, June 2024

Vilde Cathea Normann

Sammendrag

Tema for denne masteroppgaven er strategisk kommunikasjon på TikTok; en plattform som har posisjonert seg som et av de mest populære sosiale mediene, spesielt blant de yngre generasjonene. TikTok skiller seg fra de tradisjonelle formatene til andre store sosiale medier, som tradisjonelt har vektlagt likes og følgere over tid, for å oppnå økt synlighet og engasjement. På TikTok, er synlighet og engasjement avhengig av spesifikke trekk i hvert enkelt innhold. Plattformens «For deg», er tilknyttet TikToks algoritme, som favoriserer bruk av plattformens unike formater. På linje med at sosiale medier spiller en betydelig rolle i moderne digital kommunikasjon, har organisasjoner gradvis etablert seg på TikTok, som gir dem en unik mulighet til å få kontakt med deres yngre målgrupper på mer personlige og engasjerende måter. I den sammenheng er det interessant å spørre: hva skjer når formelle institusjoner som NTNU tar i bruk plattformen, både i form av formelle og uformelle tilnærminger? Hva kommuniserer de til publikummet deres, og hvordan oppfattes det?

Disse spørsmålene understreker hensikten med studien i denne oppgaven; å gi innsikt i formell og uformell kommunikasjonspraksis på TikTok, ved å se nærmere på hvordan NTNU er representert på TikTok og hva det kan lære oss om formell og uformell kommunikasjon på plattformen. For å besvare forskningsspørsmålene har det blitt brukt kombinerte kvalitative metoder. Først ble det gjort en innholdsanalyse av NTNU-relaterte TikTok-kontoer, NTNUs offisielle konto og to studentdrevne kontoer, for å identifisere relevante kategorier. Deretter ble det gjennomført tre fokusgruppeintervjuer for å utforske studenter og fremtidige studenters oppfatninger av innholdet fra disse kontoene. Ved å analysere TikTok som en multimodal plattform, og funn ut fra teorien «Affordances» og tidligere litteratur, viser funnene at den offisielle kontoens innsats for å promotere seg selv ble oppfattet som formell og "reklameaktig", fordi kontoens innhold ikke samsvarte med plattformens typiske stil. Dette førte til at innholdet mislyktes i å imøtekomme målgruppens forventinger. I kontrast utnyttet de studentdrevne kontoene i større grad plattformens typiske trender og presenterte oftere humoristisk innhold. Dette fanget deltakernes oppmerksomhet mer effektivt, særlig studentene som oppfattet innholdet som relaterbart til studentkulturen blant dem. Bredere implikasjoner av denne studien er at organisasjoner bør tilpasse kommunikasjonsstrategier til TikToks uformelle, trend-baserte innholdsformat for å engasjere publikummet deres effektivt, da det viste seg at tradisjonelle og mer formelle promoteringsmetoder ble mindre verdsatt på TikTok.

Abstract

The theme of this thesis is strategic communication on TikTok; a platform that has positioned itself as one of the most popular social media platforms, especially among younger generations. TikTok moves away from the traditional metrics of other social media, which have traditionally emphasized likes and followers over time for increased visibility and engagement. On TikTok, visibility and engagement depend on features employed in each content. The platform's "For You Page" relies on TikTok's algorithm, which emphasizes the use of the platform's unique formats. As social media plays a significant part in modern digital communication, organizations have gradually established themselves on TikTok, offering them a unique opportunity to connect with their younger audience in more personal and engaging ways. What happens when formal institutions like NTNU engage with the platform, using both formal and informal approaches? What do they communicate to their student audience, and how is it perceived?

These questions underscore the purpose of this study: to provide insights into formal and informal communication practices on TikTok by exploring *how NTNU is represented on TikTok and what it can teach us about formal and informal ways of communication on the platform*. To answer the research objective a combination of qualitative methods was employed. First, a content analysis of three NTNU-related TikTok accounts, including the official account and two student-driven accounts, was carried out to identify relevant categories. Next, three focus group interviews were conducted to explore students' and future students' perceptions of the accounts' content. Analyzed as a multimodal platform, through the perspective of affordances and highlighted by previous literature, the findings show that the official account's efforts to promote themselves were perceived as "advertisement-like", as it did not align with the platform's typical content style, thereby failing to meet the expectations of their target audience. In contrast, the informal approach provided by the student-driven accounts, to a larger extent, utilized the platform's trends and often presented humorous content perceived by participants as relatable to the student culture among them. The broader implication of this study is that organizations should adapt their communication strategies to align with TikTok's informal, trend-driven content style to effectively engage their audiences, as traditional and formal promotional approaches have proven themselves to be unappreciated on TikTok.

Table of Contents

1 Introduction	1
1.1 Research Question and Objectives.....	1
1.2 Formal Communication on a Personal Platform.....	2
1.3 Promotional and Informative Content.....	3
1.4 Contextualization of TikTok and its Features.....	3
1.4.1 TikTok as a Digital Platform and Social Media.....	4
1.4.2 Algorithm: Personalized “For You Page” (FYP).....	5
1.5 Relatability: through Intimacy and Authenticity.....	6
1.6 Appealing to the Algorithm through Trends.....	6
1.7 Summary of the Introduction and Thesis Structure.....	7
2 Theoretical Framework: Between Platforms and Users	8
2.1 Affordances.....	8
2.2 Multimodal Platform: A Distinct Platform Vernacular.....	8
2.3 Imagined and Vernacular Affordances: Explaining Expectations and Audience Perception.....	9
2.4 Summary.....	10
3 Methods	10
3.1 Selection.....	11
3.1.1 Selected content.....	11
3.1.2 Selection of Focus Group Participants.....	12
3.2 Collecting Data.....	14
3.2.1 Multimodal Content Analysis.....	14
3.2.2 Conducting Focus Groups.....	15
3.3 Ethical Considerations and Data Processing.....	16
3.3.1 Summative Processing of Content Data.....	16
3.3.2 Focus Group Data: Stepwise-Deductive Inductive Method (SDI).....	16
3.4 Research Quality: Validity, Reliability, and Generalizability.....	17
3.5 Summary.....	18
4 Content Analysis: the findings	19
4.1 Relatable Content.....	19
4.2 Informative content.....	21
4.3 Promotional Content.....	23
4.4 Trends and Memes.....	25
4.5 Summary.....	26

<i>5 NTNU the official account: a perceived advertisement.....</i>	<i>27</i>
5.1 Promotion of NTNU: "You perceive it as an advertisement".....	27
5.2 Stronger appeal to "those who may already have made up their mind".....	29
5.3 Promotional content + trends and humor = engaging as "it's very TikTok"	30
5.4 Summary.....	31
<i>6 Student-driven Accounts</i>	<i>31</i>
6.1 Expectation of student-life humor: "I also had to "Kont", LOL".....	31
6.2 Expectation of Trends: "It makes it catchier".....	34
6.3 Student Identity and Community: "the feeling of being a student".....	35
6.3.1 Established Norms and Culture: becomes "fun to pay a little extra attention".	37
6.4 Summary.....	38
<i>7 Conclusion.....</i>	<i>38</i>
7.1 How Is NTNU Represented on TikTok?.....	38
7.2 Implications of Formal and Informal Communication	39
7.3 Future Research.....	40
<i>Literature.....</i>	<i>42</i>
<i>Tables</i>	<i>46</i>
Table 1: Examples extracted from template for content analysis.....	46
Table 2: Example extracted from template from transcript.....	47
Table 3: Example extracted from template with empirical codes from transcript	48
<i>Attachments.....</i>	<i>49</i>
A1: Information- and consent letter for participants.....	49
A2: Interview guide for focus groups.....	51

List of abbreviations

FYP	For You Page (TikTok)
NTNU	The Norwegian University of Science and Technology
SS	@ntnu Samfunn (TikTok)
ST	@ntnu Teknologi og Realfag (TikTok)
UGC	User-generated content

Tables

Table 1	Examples extracted from template for content analysis
Table 2	Example extracted from template from transcript
Table 3	Example extracted from template with empirical codes from transcript

Tables included in text

Table 1.1	Descriptive overview of content selection
Table 1.2	Presentation of the Informants

Attachments

A1	Information- and consent letter for participants
A2	Interview guide for focus groups

1 Introduction

In the world of social media, where trends shift at the speed of a swipe, understanding the dynamic of communication that happens on these platforms is essential. Social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and, more recently, TikTok have introduced new forms of interpersonal digital communication that enable users to create, share, and engage with content (Croteau & Hoynes, 2019, p. 328). Although social network sites are primarily used for entertainment, they have also crossed organizational boundaries (Leon, 2021, p. 271). The change from traditional media to social media platforms has altered how information is spread and challenged established practices and frameworks within organizational communication (Badham et al., 2024, p. 2). Social media has enabled a way of strengthening relations between organizations and their audiences by creating engaging content that fosters community in a more direct, casual, and personal way, making it more effective than traditional media (Papasolomou & Melanthiou, 2012, pp. 325-326). Social media has already changed how organizations engage with audiences by increasing connectivity, linking people to each other, connecting people to content, and connecting creators to people (Croteau & Hoynes, 2019, p. 328). Yet, the newest addition to this sphere, TikTok, seems to take this shifting landscape one step further.

Today, TikTok has transformed into a vibrant space for storytelling, community, and brand building, particularly attracting younger generations (Bray, 2022). Therefore, it seems only reasonable that Norwegian universities are utilizing TikTok to reach out to their student audience, considering that 208,000 Norwegian students fall within the group TikTok's most active users globally, between the ages of 18 and 25 (DBH, 2023; Li et al. 2021, p. 262). Hence, the platform provides an opportunity to engage their student audience more directly and employ different recruitment and connection strategies.

1.1 Research Question and Objectives

As organizations become part of TikTok, they balance between maintaining their professional identity and embracing content creation on the platform. To explore these new configurations, I have studied how The Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) employs communication strategies and branding on TikTok through the research question: *How is NTNU represented on TikTok, and what can it teach us about formal and informal ways of communication on the platform?*

NTNU, established in 1996, is Norway's largest educational institution, with 43,882 students, 9159 employees, and 398 study programs primarily focused on research and education (NTNUa, NTNUb, n.d.). NTNU also have a main official account and several student-driven accounts on TikTok. Therefore, NTNU serves as useful case for this study, aiming to reveal effective practices that could have implications for institutions or organizations navigating the TikTok environment to reach their desired audiences.

This study was driven by a dual curiosity: exploring the target audience's perception and exploring the complex characteristics of the content on the platform. Employing a combination of qualitative methods helped gain a deeper understanding of the objective. The methods used were content analysis and focus group interviews with students and high school students, aged 18-25. By combining methods, the content analysis outcome could serve as context for the audience's perceptions (McQuail & Deuze, 2020, p. 401). Moreover, I have explored the communication of three NTNU-related accounts on TikTok

and how these are perceived by the audiences to get in-depth insights into the platform, the content shared, and the reactions from viewers. The goal was to reveal potential distinctions between the approaches of the accounts. The analyzed accounts are NTNU's official account, as well as two of the student-driven supplementary accounts, NTNU Technology and Natural Sciences (ST) and NTNU Society (SS) to compare different ways of mediating student life at NTNU.

1.2 Formal Communication on a Personal Platform

TikTok's emphasis on authentic user-generated content (UGC) might present challenges for organizations. UGC generates "communicative" intimacies between content creators and followers, contributing to a growing reliance on performances of relatability to promote audience engagement (Abidin, 2020, p. 83). TikTok stands out as a personal platform where users can express themselves and find content that resonates with their personal experiences (Sot, 2022, p. 1491). The platform's personalized design raises central questions about how organizations on the platform can effectively engage without disrupting TikTok's inherent sense of intimacy and authenticity. Once confined to traditional mediums, strategic communication has now expanded to encompass digital platforms' dynamic and fast-paced environment (Nicolaou, 2022, p. 18-19). Strategic communication means any organization purposefully using communication to reach its goals (Hallahan et al., 2007, p. 3). As the younger generations who have grown up in the digital environment gravitate toward these platforms, organizations need to understand their target groups and alter their communication strategies to remain relevant and impactful. Herewith, Leon (2021) describes two different "affect" cultures, which in this thesis are operationalized as representing formal and informal approaches to communication on social media. Official accounts offer a public digital affect culture by representing the organization's *formal* and "controlled" messaging, revealing intended communication strategies, branding efforts, and the image an organization wants to project. In contrast, *informal* accounts offer a private digital affect culture that provides an environment that promotes interactions among the audiences and focuses on exploiting their alignment and sentiment of belonging (p. 271).

The need to explore the communication on formal (official) communication in comparison to informal (unofficial) on TikTok is twofold: 1) there is a significant gap in research, not only regarding influential social media platforms like TikTok but also the broader topic of formal versus formal approaches to communication; 2) despite both providing environments that "support member engagement," they often employ different approaches (Leon, 2021, p. 271). Analyzing NTNU's different communication approaches on TikTok can provide insights into both formal and informal practices on the platform.

Additionally, previous studies have encouraged more research within the scope of official and unofficial approaches in social media, as well as the perception of user groups (Leon, 2021, p. 282; Zulli & Zulli, 2022, p. 1887). Still, there is a noteworthy gap in research on TikTok and perceptions of content, yet an even larger gap in studies on how differing approaches between accounts are interpreted. As TikTok continues to shape online culture and norms, its potential as a platform beyond personal use cannot be overlooked, especially with its target audience corresponding with the largest user group on TikTok. As universities seek to connect with current and future students in an increasingly digital world, exploring their perceptions of NTNU's communication and presence on one of the most popular digital platforms is essential. Furthermore, social media can provide

organizations with a great opportunity to reach their target audiences and maintain relationships with them. For universities, social media presence stimulates both current and future students' curiosity, sparking interest not only in technologies and innovations but also in student life, university events, the admissions process, showcasing the benefits of studying at the university (Zailskaite-Jakstem & Kuvykaite, 2012, p. 182).

Therefore, this study could have important implications for institutions like NTNU and organizations in general that are present on TikTok seeking to recruit new students or reach their desired audiences. This study reveals that understanding the way the audiences within the platform's largest age group perceive and interpret content, might make it easier to strategically alter content to match with what they perceive as engaging in the future. It is also important to note that TikTok exists in the dynamic scope of social media, which is algorithm-based and constantly shifting, as platforms are "increasingly adaptive, learning, responsive, and changing along with the users they share an environment with" (Bucher & Helmond, 2017, p. 27). This implies that what holds true as the recipe of success today may have changed in a year.

1.3 Promotional and Informative Content

In the previous section, formal and informal communication on platforms were operationalized. In this context, promotional and informative approaches on digital platforms are commonly perceived as formal, in terms of branding corresponding with traditional advertising (McQuail & Deuze, 2020, p. 587). Furthermore, previous literature has often used "promotional" and "informative" content interchangeably (Basch et al., 2021; O'Donnell et al., 2023; Tan & Weinreich, 2021). However, these types of content can exist independently, as well as informative content can also serve promotional purposes and vice versa. Promotional appeals resonate with advertising in its aim of forming positive associations and encouraging the audience's behavior (McQuail & Deuze, 2020, p. 588). Such an advertising appeal can be linked to the audience's information search and is an attempt at creativity that affects consumer's attitudes toward a specific product or service (Akbari, 2015, p. 480). Informative content aims to provide information so that future students can make informed decisions about their education (Li et al., 2021, p. 262).

As young people are interested in new opportunities, this interest pushes institutions to seek more competitive advantages for promoting their programs (Zailskaite-Jakste & Kuvykaite, 2012, p. 175). Studies have suggested that 14% of Gen Z respondents use TikTok as their primary source of information, explained by evidence that young people prefer to learn about health from short, engaging videos rather than text (O'donnel et al., 2023, p. 540). It has also been claimed that audiences not already involved with what is presented are more easily persuaded by content that aims to evoke feelings, aspirations, and desires through visualizations to create a deeper connection with consumers (Johar & Sirgy, 1991, p. 31). Yet, as McQuail & Deuze (2020, p. 587) emphasize, the content presented in a traditional "advertising" or obviously promotional format is typically unwanted by its audience and often regarded as misleading and manipulative.

1.4 Contextualization of TikTok and its Features

TikTok, owned by the Chinese company ByteDance, is a newcomer in the field of social media (Serrano et al., 2020, s. 2). Over the past few years, TikTok has proven to influence and shape media consumption, especially among the younger generations across the

world. Since its initial launch in China in 2016, followed by being globally available in 2018, TikTok has experienced an exceptional surge in popularity (Zulli & Zulli, 2022, p. 1873). According to Wallaroo's TikTok statistics (2023), the app had accumulated 2.7 billion downloads globally, including an extra 315 million in the first quarter of 2020. As of 2023, there were 1.26 million active Norwegian users on TikTok, with 50% of them aged 18-29 (Ipsos, 2023). Thus, TikTok has also proven itself important in Norway, even affecting national school elections, as observed in the Conservative Party success in marketing themselves effectively on the platform (Hvitmyhr & Vik, 2023).

Research on TikTok has explored various aspects affecting communication dynamics within the platform, such as attention economy, algorithmic influence, and user motivations (Abidin, 2020; Issar, 2023; Schellewald, 2023; Scherr & Wang, 2021; Sot, 2022). Further in this chapter, I have established a framework describing TikTok's success, based on previous literature, starting with TikTok as a social media platform, its significance and algorithmic function.

1.4.1 TikTok as a Digital Platform and Social Media

TikTok is a data driven platform, automated, and organized through interfaces and algorithms, serving as a programmable digital structure that facilitates interactions among users, including corporate entities and public bodies, online (Van Dijk et al., 2018, p. 4; p. 9). TikTok is also a social media considering that the platform is "a virtual place where people share; everybody and anybody can share anything anywhere anytime." (Joosten, 2012, p. 12). Among other widespread social media, such as Instagram and Facebook, TikTok is "the leading destination for short-form mobile video" with a mission "to inspire creativity and bring joy" through authentic and entertaining short-video content up to 3 minutes (TikTok, 2023). Users on the platform primarily share self-made short videos, often of themselves doing an activity and including music (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023). The videos could be displayed very simply, as users can easily post a short clip of whatever they like, or they could be made more advanced by incorporating audio, texting, and pictures (Serrano et al., 2020, s. 2).

The platform's adaptable and authentic content emphasizes trend-based virality. Established platforms traditionally have focused on long-term visibility, depending on a coherent online persona and accumulation of likes and followers (Abidin, 2020, p. 79). With staged, professional, and aesthetically pleasing content, they often portray an idealized version of reality (Schellewald, 2023, p. 1575). In contrast, the accumulation of fame and virality on TikTok is driven by the performance of individual posts and the content's rapid adaption to the latest trends (Abidin, 2020, p. 79). In this way, traditional metrics of communication success, such as follower count, have been replaced with the focus on content quality based on the virality, or widespread, of its format (Croteau & Hoynes, 2019, p. 297). TikTok's unique features and qualities have been common explanations for its success, gaining even greater power during the COVID-19 pandemic (Abidin, 2020, p. 23; Sot, 2022, p. 1492; Zhang et al., 2022, p. 4). Much like Zoom became the savior of online workplaces, TikTok offered a virtual sanctuary for people seeking an escape from the confines of their homes that came along with physical isolation and a surplus of free time (Cribb, 2023; Zulli & Zulli, 2022, p. 1875). Like other platforms, TikTok allows other users to like, share, or comment on individual posts. However, the further process is what makes it unique. The communicative affordances, such as appreciative comments and likes, combined with the TikTok algorithm's effectiveness, contribute to cultivating an authentic

environment, as it brings together people who mutually support and appreciate each other's work and content (Sot,2022, p. 1501). Users tend to find comfort and connection through TikTok's intimate and relatable content, as it generates a sense of belonging (Sot, 2022, p. 1500; Schellewald, 2023, p. 1575). Hence, the platforms offer a unique and authentic way of using social media that's different from the usual.

Still, the platform's rapid rise to popularity has not gone unnoticed, inspiring other social media platforms. The success of the platform's short-form video format has assigned TikTok a pioneering role, with Instagram introducing Reels and YouTube adding Shorts mirroring the popular structure of TikTok (Thang et al., 2023, p. 1). This mimicking underscores the platform's significant influence in shaping contemporary digital content creation and consumption trends.

1.4.2 Algorithm: Personalized "For You Page" (FYP)

According to Schellewald (2023, p. 1573), users acknowledge TikTok and the For You Page (FYP) as an online environment that affords the kind of creative dynamics through "its relentless chaos that is hard to grasp and keep up with at the source".

The algorithmic FYP is an essential part of TikTok, a complex platform with its function not being easily understood, which necessitates further explanation of this algorithm. Generally, computer algorithms facilitate how digital technologies collect data about users, sort and make sense of these data, and generate predictions about the user's future behavior or make suggestions about how the user should behave (Lupton, 2013, p. 11). TikTok's technical feature involves the FYP algorithm, whose perceived efficiency equally generates intimacy among geographically distant individuals through hashtags and trends (Sot, 2022, p. 1493). TikTok's famous FYP is an algorithm that makes it possible for anyone to be visible to millions in just seconds. It is a personal algorithm that is best described by its usage:

"TikTok users ... are actively and very quickly adapting from the latest trends and viral practices on TikTok, to attempt varieties of styles- across hashtags, keywords, filters, audio memes, narrative memes - to aim for the For You Page, or the 'golden ticket' that would allow one to gain an immense number of followers overnight. The platform logics of TikTok force internet celebrity aspirants to actively seek out, learn, participate in, and engage in these what is 'going viral' at the moment in order to remain visible to others on the app" - Crystal Abidin (2020, p. 80)

Instead of relying on follow functions, TikTok uses its algorithm to promote engaging content to a wider audience (Abidin, 2020, p. 83). At the same time, users have shown awareness of the algorithm, leveraging it to their advantage (Schellewald, 2023, p. 1577). This often involves scrolling past content that does not resonate with them and prioritizing content that aligns with their personal preferences. This means that the popularity of a video is determined more by how engaging it is, and how much it resonates with viewers; opposite to what is observed on other platforms where the creator's overall popularity or the number of likes they've received in the past determines its audience. This way, the FYP on TikTok has facilitated a shift from a traditional focus on the creators to a focus on the content itself - from valuing followers to prioritizing high-quality TikTok-styled content.

1.5 Relatability: through Intimacy and Authenticity

As established, the FYP algorithm prioritizes personalized content embracing relatability. The basic concept of relatability is content that connects with a broader audience on a common, everyday level (Abidin, 2020, p. 83). Traditionally, attainment has been based on long-term engagement focusing on persona-based or profile-anchored fame (Abidin, 2020, p. 79). The presentation of a perfect and desirable lifestyle, as seen on Instagram, has shifted with TikTok; crafting a relatable presentation that is both entertaining and accessible, with a heightened worth on making audiences relate to the content (Abidin, 2020, p. 83, Schellewald, 2023, p. 1575). Thus, on TikTok, the focus is more on the individual pieces of content rather than the creators themselves. Relatable content could be viewed as content that instantly feels like it was made just for you – relatable, engaging, and “hitting all the right notes.”

Key findings across multiple literature on the subject are that TikTok affords users a personal sanctuary, often provoking “addictive” attachment (Schellewald, 2023, p. 1573; Sot, 2022, p. 1491; Scherr & Wang, 2021, p. 7). Sot (2022, p. 1491) argues, based on its relatable character, that “TikTok’s ability to generate intimacies plays a pivotal role in users’ choices of detaching themselves from other platforms” and that TikTok affords the users with a “safe space”. This argument further distinguishes the intimacy aspect as an occurrence originating in the heat of the COVID-19 pandemic and during a time where “the entry of lockdowns and physical distancing” more than ever made it a necessity to establish connections with others, which led to an increase in the use of social media platforms such as TikTok, to “cultivate a sense of belonging, closeness among physically remote individuals” (Sot, 2022, p. 1493). Relatability is not just a desire; it is a driving force behind the engaging content.

Authenticity is an integral part of the relatability, as it encompasses how being genuine and true in different ways naturally forms connections with others. Perceptions such as truthfulness, fact, honesty, genuineness, trustworthiness, and actuality make audiences believe in what they see (Alhouti & Johnson, 2022, p. 1130). Although there are varying definitions of authenticity depending on circumstance, the definition applied to this study is formulated by Enli (2015, p. 3 in Reade, 2021, p. 537) as a “communicative process” reflected in “choices users make to appear “real” to others such as disclosing informational or intimate details”. There is a belief that authenticity is always shaped in relation to others, whether online or offline, as users carefully choose what to show or hide based on their audience (Maverick & Boyd, 2010, p. 124). In the context of social media, authentic content has been identified by a digital marketing strategist as “sharing your successes as well as your struggles, your highs, and your lows” (McDougall, 2023). Building upon this premise, authentic content could be described as content perceived as “real and genuine” and in relevance to this study, content that depicts the honest experiences of students themselves by being transparent about a circumstance.

1.6 Appealing to the Algorithm through Trends

As the last section outlined relatability, a way of employing this is by using trends. Examining trending content on TikTok may offer organizations an understanding of how their audiences receive and process information in the messages within their content (Galangam & Jia, 2021, p. 981). One of the reasons for this being that TikTok trends, memes, or phrases have become a common way of relating to people (Schellewald, 2023, p. 1579). The logic of video creation on TikTok is suggested by Zulli & Zulli (2021, p. 1881)

to be “both based in and geared toward the memetic process”. This means that content creation on the platform could be compared to the creation of memes, especially in terms of trends. In this context, a “meme” is described as a piece of content, like jokes or imitation, spread on the internet as a shared social phenomenon facilitating normativity (Ask & Abidin, 2018, p. 836). Memes can be trending, whereas TikTok trends can emerge as reaction videos, sounds, images, dancing challenges to a new trending sound, or humorous satire or cut-outs of memes in video format (see SS V4).

In practice, trends strategically leverage popular sociotechnical templates to enhance visibility on the platform's algorithm (Issar, 2023, p. 9). By using trends, the average user's content is more likely to be discovered, liked, and shared, specifically if the sounds and effects are linked and replicated to an already popular video (Zulli & Zulli, 2022, p. 1881). TikTok makes this content creation simple by making sounds and names of the effects used in all content visible; the recreation of trending content becomes more accessible for other users, whereas content becomes popular and trending the more it is replicated (Zulli & Zulli, 2022, p. 1881). Thus, the success of a TikTok video is associated with the content and sound choices that the user has made, either by recreating another user's video idea or pioneering with own content ideas that can be recreated (Galea, 2024, p. 542). In other words, if a user creates a TikTok where they dance accompanied by a trending song the video might be discovered, the choreography copied and recognized by others that may give credit to the creator, further boosting the engagement and their following (Scherr & Wang, 2021, p. 2; Zulli & Zulli, 2022, p. 1881). This way, trends are highly effective at capturing the algorithm's attention, thereby increasing the likelihood of videos appearing on the FYP and gaining wider visibility. For organizations on TikTok this means that they must not only reach audiences, but also gain the attention of the algorithm.

1.7 Summary of the Introduction and Thesis Structure

The introduction chapter have presented the impact of social media platforms, particularly TikTok, on organizational communication. It emphasizes the shift from social media platforms based on followers and likes, to a platform of algorithmic curation, highlighting the challenges and opportunities in engaging with audiences on TikTok. The importance of understanding the modern communication on this platform, the influence of user-generated content, and the need for organizations to adapt their communication strategies to the digital environment, are central and core concepts that are explored further throughout this thesis.

The thesis is structured into seven overall chapters, starting with an introduction that have outlined the research objectives, contextualized communication on social media platforms, and offered an overview of TikTok. In the following chapter two, the theoretical framework examines the theory of affordances and TikTok as a multimodal platform, to highlight the findings in this study. Chapter three describes the methods used and choices made, including selection, data collection, ethical considerations, data processing and research quality. Chapter four introduces findings from the qualitative content analysis, while chapters five and six discuss findings from focus group interviews on content from NTNU's official account and the related student-driven accounts. The analyses highlight perceptions and expectations, which are underscored by previous literature and theory. Finally, the thesis concludes with a summary of the findings, implications of the study and suggestions to future research.

2 Theoretical Framework: Between Platforms and Users

This chapter introduces a theoretical framework of affordances to explain and highlight the study's findings. It is divided into three sections. The first section introduces the theory of affordances. Next, the term platform vernacular, considering TikTok's multimodality, is described to highlight the findings from content analysis later. The final third section more thoroughly outlines the imagined and vernacular affordances primarily utilized to explain perceptions of content.

2.1 Affordances

Affordance theory is useful for getting a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamic that lies between social media and the relations between technology and its users. Affordances pay attention to new dynamics or types of communicative practices and social interactions that various features afford (Bucher and Helmond, 2017, p. 11). Originally, the theory was introduced by James Gibson (1979), referring to the relationship between animals and the environment, suggesting that rather than perceiving the environment directly, it's perceived through the potential affordances it enables (Bucher & Helmond, 2017, p. 4-5). Gibson meant that what people perceive visually informs behavior and that the behavior is controlled by perceptions (Wells, 2002, p. 12). In social media, affordances describe the potential actions and interactions that a platform enables or constraints for its users (Bucher and Helmond, 2017, p. 12). *High-level affordances* are the kinds of dynamics and conditions enabled by technical devices, while *low-level affordances* are typically located in the medium's materiality, in specific features, buttons, screens, and platforms (Bucher and Helmond, 2017, p. 11). This study emphasizes high-level affordances by focusing on the broader dynamics among audiences and communicative outcomes enabled by TikTok, which are not defined by individual buttons (Bucher & Helmond, 2017, p. 12). It's crucial to recognize that affordances are multi-layered and not experienced in isolation but as interconnected, existing across various levels and platforms (Bucher & Helmond, 2017, p. 15). While consistently considering the multifaceted nature of affordances, this present research focuses on the uniqueness of TikTok (Bucher & Helmond, 2017, p. 16). Correspondingly, the relevant affordances in this study exist mainly within the scope of TikTok's 1) technology affordances such as algorithms, the secret messages from objects that help us figure out what we can do with them, and "there to be actively explored," 2) communicative affordances in describing how technology alters communication practices, 3) vernacular affordances about how people use and understand technology based on their own experiences, and 4) imagined affordances acknowledging the influence of user perceptions and expectations on social media platforms (Bucher & Helmond, 2017, p. 7; p. 9; p. 11; p. 14-15). As illustrated in Chapter 1, technology and communicative affordances are the facilitators of communication on TikTok. Further, this chapter will demonstrate how communication and its perceptions are best highlighted by the vernacular and imagined affordances on the platform.

2.2 Multimodal Platform: A Distinct Platform Vernacular

As already acknowledged, TikTok is a complex platform with several affordances. These affordances contribute to a distinct platform vernacular affecting the advanced algorithm. Insights from Gibbs et al. (2015) and Zhao & Abidin (2023) provide a framework that makes understanding the platforms environment and the interaction with its affordances comprehensible.

The term “platform vernacular” was coined by Gibbs et al. (2015). They emphasized that each platform develops a distinct vernacular that has developed over time through design, appropriation, and use. Their study on Instagram practices reveals how the platform-specific features shape user behavior, leading to a shift from formal institutionalized rituals to more personalized expressions, “offering a broader understanding of how platform vernaculars are shaped through the logics of architecture and use” (p. 257). Furthermore, TikTok offers multimodal approaches to content creation, as described by Zhao & Abidin (2023, p. 2). They have explored the strategic utilization of TikTok vernacular – the unique style, language, and cultural elements commonly used and understood within the TikTok community, such as curated images, creative audio uses of sound and audio memes, and visual effects to communicate narratives on the platform. Moreover, they describe TikTok’s multimodality as the platform’s capacity to enable the creative construction of various personalized audiovisual narratives and to convey content that is both highly informational and educational, as well as lighthearted and playful in its tone.

Together, insights from Zhao & Abidin (2023) and Gibbs et al. (2015) underscore the importance of tailoring content to fit the style and the norms on the digital platform regardless of the message being communicated, to facilitate discussions on topics to make it more accessible and engaging.

2.3 Imagined and Vernacular Affordances: Explaining Expectations and Audience Perception

Having established TikTok as a fruitful terrain to examine platform vernaculars, this section further and more thoroughly explores vernacular and imagined affordances as essential aspects shaping the audiences’ perceptions. The vernacular affordances examine how students and future students interpreted and engaged with the formats and content on TikTok related to NTNU and the varying ways of relating to the content. Bucher and Helmond (2017, p. 15) suggest vernacular affordances as acknowledging that users may emphasize different aspects of a platform’s capabilities based on their own experiences. They imply that researchers or designers cannot dictate the action possibilities of social media platforms; rather, these possibilities vary among audiences who emphasize different vernacular affordances, only becoming apparent through discussions about their interactions with the platform. Thus, in this study, serving as an extension of vernacular affordances, imagined affordances consider the broader context of the audience’s expectations and beliefs regarding TikTok. According to Bucher and Helmond (2017, p. 14) imagined affordances offer a deeper insight into how users perceive and engage with technology. Unlike traditional notions of affordances, focusing on the objective features of a technology, imagined affordances consider users’ perceptions, attitudes, and expectations. They suggest that users’ beliefs and expectations shape usage and how they approach the platform. Accordingly, this understanding extends to algorithmic features on social media platforms, where users’ expectations can impact their interactions, contributing to the system’s algorithmic loop, as seen in TikTok’s FYP. The imagined affordances of TikTok were contemplated to play a pivotal role in understanding how users perceive TikTok content, as it appeared in the analysis that the students had expectations of imagined affordances, such as humor and trends, that affected their perceptions of the content. Consequently, the perspective of imagined affordances offered an understanding of how students and future students expected from the content shared on the platform as well as how they envisioned TikTok’s potential for communication from NTNU.

2.4 Summary

The findings of my content analysis will be explained with the concept of affordances as a backdrop and provide a comprehensive framework to understand the identified features of TikTok content, what they enable, and their potential constraints. Additionally, this chapter acknowledges TikTok as a multimodal platform, affording many different audiovisual narratives while also highlighting these features of TikTok as platform-dependent considerations. This adds a more detailed perspective to the content analysis and how communication could and potentially already is adjusted to fit the platform. Lastly, the imagined and vernacular affordances provide a beneficial framework for the analysis of the focus group discussions. It focuses on users' perceptions and expectations and provides a perspective on the platform-specific social environment and how students and future students engage with NTNU-related TikTok content based on their expectations formed by both previous and current experiences with TikTok content.

3 Methods

Building upon the assessment of TikTok's unique features as a way of communication, the focus now shifts to how this study has explored this further and the methods used. This thesis investigates NTNU-related accounts on TikTok, its content appeal, and perceptions of it. To do so, the study employs a qualitative method, combining content analysis and focus group interviews. Qualitative research focuses on the mechanisms behind people's perception of reality and its effects, focusing on insights and explanations (Tjora, 2020, p. 29). In this thesis, qualitative content analysis has been used to categorize NTNU-related TikTok content into themes or patterns to understand the underlying messages (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). The method is beneficial to analyze the narratives and trends within TikTok content systematically. Additionally, focus group interviews consists of several informants in groups to discuss one or more themes or focuses (Tjora, 2020, p. 123). The focus groups gave participants the opportunity to motivate each other to discuss different aspects of their experiences and perceptions related to TikTok content (Tjora, 2020, p. 124). Consequently, the dual method in this study facilitates a thorough exploration of students' perceptions and experiences with TikTok communication.

In conducting this research, my joint role as a regular TikTok user, a student, and a researcher has played a central part in shaping my approach and understanding. This is important to establish before going further into the outlining of the methods, as it has shaped my approach. As an active TikTok user since 2019, being within the age group of TikTok's largest audience, I have gained substantial insights into the platform and its format. In this study, I have used my background knowledge to its advantage and chosen to emphasize the natural conversation, taking on the role of an active interviewer. I experienced this as beneficial as my participation helped respondents to talk about their situations, actions, and feelings, and shared experiences provided specific examples for questions and answers to revolve around (Holstein & Gubrium. 1995, p. 44). Hence, the active position allowed me to articulate their experiences in a way relevant to the research question, as I could understand the platform-specific terms and resonate with student-related topics brought up in discussions. The implications of my existing knowledge and experience with TikTok have been considered further in section 3.4.

3.1 Selection

In this section, I have outlined the study's selection and the logic behind it. First, I have explained the selection of videos included in the content analysis, following a description of the content used as stimuli in the focus groups and presentation in Table 1.1. Next, I have explained the selection of participants following a demographic presentation in Table 1.2.

3.1.1 Selected content

The content analysis included the 20 most recent videos from NTNU’s official account, ST and SS. Forming a selection of the latest videos from each account ensured a representation of the account's content resembling the present content as much as possible. The content selection is based on its relevance to NTNU as a case study. Consequently, the selected content offers a comprehensive understanding of patterns and insights that might not have been apparent otherwise. Further examination of the content collection and processing is explained in the following chapters 3.2 and 3.3.

The video content used in the interviews is categorized by its attributes, presentation, use of TikTok trends, engagement metrics, and length. The table below summarizes nine videos, three from each account. Videos range from six to 55 seconds and feature humorous, relatable, and promotional characteristics. They include student interviews, day-in-the-life clips, and humorous takes on students’ academic stresses, often utilizing trending TikTok formats and music.

Table 1.1: descriptive overview over content selection for interviews

Presented content	Insights	@ntnu (the official account)	@ntnu society (SS)	@ntnu technology and natural sciences (ST)
Video 1	Attribute	Promotional	Relatable, humor	Relatable, humor
	Presentation	NTNU's various studies/locations, activities.	Boy dressed as a girl to the text "POV: indok-guys after gender points adjustments"	Three slides: 1) Group of four students having a conversation in the university park. Text: "Me: I just love studying at NTNU", 2) Male student looking down judgmentally. Text: "Bff: but you boil in all subjects", 3) Female student smiling with a carelessness look up holding an iPad. Text: "Yes, and?".
	TikTok trend	None	"POV"-trend, audio	Audio
	Engagement	2789 likes, disabled comment section, saved 6 times, shared by 56. (November 28th, 2023)	224 likes, 6447 views, 3 comments, saved by 7, shared by 19. (January 12th, 2024)	444 likes, 15 300 views, 6 comments, saved by 7, shared by 9. (January 15th, 2024)
	Length	16 seconds	5 seconds	Undefined
Video 2	Attribute	Promotional, authentic	Relatable, humor	Relatable, humor
	Presentation	Student interviewing students on Gløshaugen "what is the best thing about NTNU?"	A focused female student sets up her computer and begins to write. A text on the screen advises, "Start early, think smart" and the caption reads, "Good luck with exams 🍀🍀".	Drake cut-out video placed in front of Gløshaugen speaking in clear speech to "haters", gesturing to "camera", before taking a final sip of his drink.
	TikTok trend	"Microphone trend"		Audio, meme
	Engagement	6491 views, 110 likes, 4 comments, shared by 21 (March 28th, 2023)	1134 likes, 50 554 views, 5 comments, saved by 61, shared by 182 (December 7th, 2023)	459 likes, 6550 views, 3 comments, saved by 18, shared by 17 (January 12th, 2024)
	Length	55 seconds	6 seconds	19 seconds
Video 3	Attribute	Promotional, humor	Relatable, humor	Promotional, authentic
	Engagement	Norwegian celeb advises applying to NTNU to avoid being a "slob."	Female student at a Christmas party sips wine then mimes to the audio clip with the text "When you're at a party and no one remembers where you study".	Female student brings the audience along on her first day at Microsoft, from outside the building until she enters, she films on the office, break area, coffee station, and new modern premises to show off the workplace.
	TikTok trend	"Glitter emojis"	Audio	Audio
	Engagement	82 266 views, 1837 likes, 24 comments, saved by 90, shared by 227. (March 26th, 2023)	400 likes, 14 218 views, 4 comments, saved by 11, shared by 4 (December 23rd, 2023)	146 likes, 7083 views, 2 comments, saved by 3, shared by 0. (December 20th, 2023)
	Length	15 seconds	9 seconds	20 seconds

3.1.2 Selection of Focus Group Participants

Furthermore, the focus group selection is divided into three strategically chosen “mini-focus groups” with 3 to 6 participants (Krueger (1994) Tjora, 2020, p. 124). This selection allowed me to get more in-depth information from the group and individuals within the suggested 1–2-hour timeframe for focus groups (Greenbaum, 1998, p. 2). The groups recruited in this study are relatively homogenous based on their resemblance to the main user group of TikTok. To qualify as an informant, the individuals needed to meet certain criteria: they had to be familiar with TikTok, fall within the age group of TikTok's largest user base (18-25 years), have student status connected to programs in NTNU campus Dragvoll or Gløshaugen, or be enrolled in high school. Meeting the criteria, the group selection was confined to people who could provide the highest-quality discussion about the topic being researched (Greenbaum, 1998, p. 2).

The recruited participants represent three different student populations: one from Dragvoll, one from Gløshaugen, and one from high school. I recruited four participants in each of the groups from Dragvoll and Gløshaugen and three in the high school group. I utilized my network to find potential candidates by reaching out to people in my own student network through friends and acquaintances in different locations to get me in touch with potential informants. The recruitment of NTNU students went fast, and I was able to conduct both interviews within a week. I chose to recruit students from Dragvoll and Gløshaugen based on a common perception that they, the two largest NTNU campuses, might have different perspectives due to the different academic fields that dominate each of the schools, as articulated in UA (2022), as well as the campuses association with each of the accounts and their content. The people who run the official NTNU account suggested I also recruit high school students, given NTNU’s main accounts' emphasis on recruitment through TikTok. Finding students from high school nearby in Trondheim was significantly more challenging since I did not know anyone with connections there. I therefore recruited a focus group with participants located across the country, by reaching out to my peripheral network, asking them if they knew any high schoolers fitting the given criteria. The widespread location led to the interview being arranged digitally on Microsoft Teams. I also required the participants to be at the minimum age of 18, as they represent the primary user demographic of TikTok and are near the process of applying to university.

The NTNU students showed a stronger motivation to participate in the interviews. The stronger motivation may stem from several factors, including personal interest in the topic, connecting with a community that shares similar experiences, and supporting the cause by helping a fellow student along the way (Wolgemuth et al., 2015, p. 358). I considered the higher motivation among the NTNU students to be a combination of them being more comfortable and familiar with the university environment, making them more open to participating in interviews conducted by a fellow student. I also experienced the conversation flow to be more natural and lighthearted in both focus groups from the university, as they more comfortably made jokes and added to each other’s arguments. The high school group appeared slightly more tense. I consider this to be due to the interview being conducted via video call on Teams, which, in contrast to what is suggested in Tjora (2020, p. 121), contributes to a less natural environment. Yet, much of the tension wore off as we got into the discussions.

In table 1.2 student demographics are presented. To maintain anonymity, informants are referred to by pseudonyms. Each pseudonym's first letter matches the NTNU campus's first letter attended by the students. For the high school group, pseudonyms begin with the

first letter signifying their high school status. Demographic information such as gender, age, study field, and education level, along with TikTok usage and direct experience, is included to provide context on how participants engage and perceive content on the platform. These categorizations aim to make participant's perspectives more accessible to readers and are based on oral information retrieved from the transcript.

Table 1.2 Presentation of the Informants

Presentation of informants composition				
Demographics	Gender	Age	Field of study and education level	TikTok use and direct experience Multiple times daily/Daily/Occasionally/ Deleted the app/ Never used it
Focus Group 1 – Gløshaugen				
Student 1 (S1) "Gina"	Female	21	Construction (Byggteknikk), 2nd year	Occasionally
Student 2 (S2) "Grete"	Female	21	Mechanical (Maskinteknikk), 2nd year	Multiple times daily
Student 3 (S3) "Gustav"	Male	20	Computer Science, 2nd year	Regularly
Student 4 (S4) "Geir"	Male	23	Computer Science 2nd year	Occasionally
Focus Group 2 – Dragvoll (Trondheim)				
Student 5 (S5) "Diana"	Female	24	Political Science, Master (graduating)	Multiple times daily
Student 6 (S6) "Didrik"	Male	22	Psychology, 1-year study programme	Deleted the app
Student 7 (S7) "Dagny"	Female	25	Sociology, Master (graduating)	Multiple times daily
Student 8 (S8) "Desiree"	Female	23	Political Science, Master (graduating)	Multiple times daily
High School students (HS) – Teams (Fredrikstad and Bardufoss)				
HS1 (E1) "Hans"	Male	18	Specialization in general studies, natural sciences (realfag), VG3 (graduating)	Multiple times daily
HS2 (E2) "Harald"	Male	20	Specialization in general studies, add-on (påbygg), VG3 (graduating)	Never used it
HS3 (E3) "Hilde"	Female	18	Specialization in general studies, social studies (Societysfag), VG3 (graduating)	Regularly

Before focusing on the content and related questions, all the informants verified that they had heard of TikTok and that they were familiar with the overall concept and functionalities of the platform. In previous studies on TikTok, both Schellewald (2023) and Scherr & Wang (2021) reported that their participants described using the app as addictive and time-consuming. When asked about their experience with TikTok, many of the participants said they started using it because they were bored during the pandemic or because they were influenced by their friends sending them content from the app. Correspondingly, as the app affected the informant's time and energy due to its addictive nature, the tendencies caused some of the students to try to avoid using TikTok or to delete it. Still, most of the

participants said they used it multiple times of day or regularly. Gina and Geir said they used TikTok occasionally, while Didrik and Harald had used it significantly less than the others. Didrik said he decided to delete the app completely when NTNU came out with a message about “computer dangers and such” but elaborated that “mostly it was because I noticed that it was taking up more and more time from my day” in which the High School student Harald had never used the app to avoid the time-consuming patterns that he had observed in his surroundings, as an effect of using TikTok.

All the participants were familiar with the NTNU University. The associations with NTNU among the attending students were overall positive, describing the university as “a little prestigious” with a “very good environment” and “high academic level”. The High School students expectedly stated less familiarity with the university than the students attending NTNU but knew about the university either from their connections attendance or the university visiting their school. When asked about NTNU’s presence on TikTok, all the university students had seen content from at least one of the NTNU-related accounts. Although Harald said, “I actually think I’ve seen it, that it just popped up”, none of the High School students could confirm to had seen their content beforehand. As a repercussion of watching and discussing the content, most of the participants perceived a significant value of the content and NTNU being visible both in an official and student-driven way, often emphasized by the students from Dragvoll as having a loneliness-reducing effect and by the High School students as insightful in different ways.

3.2 Collecting Data

Following the mapping and selection of data, the next step involved the actual collection process. In this section, I have described the methods used for data collection, why they were employed, and the trajectory of the data collection process.

3.2.1 Multimodal Content Analysis

The aim of the qualitative content analysis is to give an overview of the varying degrees of representation of TikTok’s platform vernacular. It has already been established that TikTok is a multimodal platform. As suggested by Serafini and Reid (2023, p. 624) this requires a multimodal approach to content analysis, considering the relationships between the various media and modes used in the representation and communication within the content.

I started collecting the data by conducting a preliminary review of the content of each account, taking notes to reveal the account’s emphasis, and getting an overview of the type of content common on their pages. I noticed recurring themes and observed that the content could be categorized into distinct groups based on their primary messaging and purpose. I gathered the data from all three accounts by collecting videos and their included engagement metrics, such as likes, shares, comments, and any associated text. Each video was placed into a table (Table 1) with markers presenting the collected data’s main messages, visuals, audio, length, trends used, and engagement metrics. Audio was also labeled as trending based on high metrics, as the frequency of use displayed when you click on the bottom-right icon on TikTok’s interface. This way, I attained a systematic structure suitable for further analysis and interpretation.

3.2.2 Conducting Focus Groups

Before conducting the focus group interviews, I prepared the interview guide and nine videos in total, three from each of the analyzed accounts that were presented to the informants. It was used to beneficially structure the interviews, but not as a rigid plan, as the goal was a free and informal discussion (Tjora, 2020, p. 153; p. 158). The interview guide (A2) consisted of four parts that involved gathering demographic information, student status, and thoughts about being a student at NTNU or associations when interviewing high school students to uncover any attitudes that might influence their responses. I also conducted test interviews to ensure that the interview guide facilitated a natural and informal interview experience (Tjora, 2020, pp. 158-159). Testing the interview guide ensured that I could effectively capture participants' true and honest perspectives without interrupting the conversation flow. Interviews were primarily conducted on campus (familiar environment, see Tjora, 2020, p. 121), while the high school students were interviewed virtually on Microsoft Teams.

After confirming with all participants that they were fine with the location, I conducted the physical interviews at NTNU, at campuses the participants belonged to and were familiar with, contributing to a relaxed atmosphere and safe environment where the participants already are more likely to feel comfortable (Tjora, 2020, p. 122). I also considered that the interviews were conducted in the middle of the day, likely between students' classes, which made the nearby location more convenient for everyone. The last interview with the high schoolers was conducted on Teams, post-school hours, thereby naturally cultivating a more comfortable setting for them as well. I used my phone to capture everything being said, enabling me to maintain focus on the discussion (Tjora, 2020, p. 166). I supplemented this by taking some notes to ensure comprehensive documentation. I informed and asked for permission from the participants about the recording process, specifying that it would be deleted afterward. I ensured that all participants approved of this procedure, which they did. I kept my recorder discretely placed so it did not attract disrupting attention.

When conducting the interviews, I was an "active moderator", asking questions and ensuring that the conversations stuck to the topic (Tjora, 2020, p. 124). Additionally, I repeated the information during the recruitment about the research project and their rights to free and informed consent.

I began the discussions with warm-up questions about TikTok usage to make participants comfortable in the group setting and to uncover relevant background variables (Tjora, 2020, p. 145-146). These questions included content preferences, usage frequency, and views on TikTok in comparison with other social media. I found that the warm-up part helped to build a dynamic within the group and eased any tension that was present. The main interview was divided into two parts: one focusing on the official NTNU account and the other on student-driven accounts, ST, and SS, encouraging the participants to reflect in more detail on specific areas of the research topic (Tjora, 2020, p. 146). After watching a selection of video content from the accounts, participants discussed their current and previous experiences and perceptions. I began asking a broad question about their initial thoughts and experienced that the participants quickly engaged, contributing to further discussion of the content. Finally, the rounding part helped "normalize" the discussion by shifting the focus back to a general level (Tjora, 2020, p. 146). Here, I asked for overall impressions and additional remarks, provided information about the research process, and

eventually, their rights to withdraw at any time. Each interview lasted 50 minutes to an hour, with additional time allocated for further thoughts at the end of discussions.

Overall, I consider that the interview structure and choices made allowed me to explore experiences and perceptions associated with the accounts, providing me with a comprehensive understanding of the participants' varied engagements and the level of effectiveness of formal accounts and more informal accounts on the platform.

3.3 Ethical Considerations and Data Processing

As the research project processes personal data, I made sure to have approved permission to carry out the research from the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research (SIKT) in advance (Ref. nr. 187071). Recording and storing the data is aligned with the SIKT assessment and was deleted after transcription. Confidentiality was further ensured by assigning pseudonyms to participants, minimizing the risk of identification (Roth & Unger, 2018, p. 8). I kept in mind that research projects that involve active participation require participants informed and free consent, with the right to withdraw before, during, and after the interview without consequences (Tjora, 2020, p. 47). I asked all participants about their consent and informed them about their rights in the information- and consent letter (A1) they received in advance and orally, before and after their participation. All participants consented and confirmed that they were informed about their participation. Even though the analyzed TikTok accounts are public for anyone to see, they display individual identities, potentially without their awareness of being included in my study. As a precautionary measure, all faces have been obscured.

3.3.1 Summative Processing of Content Data

I conducted the qualitative content analysis using a summative approach (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1283-1284). From the preliminary overview in Chapter 3.2, I categorized the material into three main groups: relatable, informative, and promotional. The categories were labeled to reflect the main message of the content. Utilizing the template (Table 1), I searched for the number of occurrences of the general categories using the "Command + F" function. Each category displayed varying degrees of trends, humor, or authenticity; I repeated the process using these features as keywords. Searching for "trends" enabled me to systematically assess how often and what trends were used for each account, as it had its own dedicated section. "Humor" and "authenticity" were additional layers to the main messages section used to describe in what way the content was relatable, promotional, or informative. For instance, the context became clearer as I identified that "this content is *relatable* by its use of *humor* and display of *trends*," or this content is exclusively *informative* in its display but includes a *trending* sound". Hence, I did not count the frequency of keywords to infer meaning alone; rather, it aimed to identify patterns within the data to contextualize the codes, enabling further interpretation of the context associated with the words (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1285). This way of processing the data provided me not only with a contextual understanding, combining both latent and manifest content but also gave me an overview of what categorized content types were most common within each account.

3.3.2 Focus Group Data: Stepwise-Deductive Inductive Method (SDI)

I assessed and analyzed the focus group data using the stepwise-deductive inductive method (SDI model). The model is categorized into six steps, which allowed me to work inductively upward from 1) collecting data, 2) processing the data, 3) coding the empirical

findings, 4) grouping of codes, 5) developing concepts, and 6) discussing the concepts, before finally 7) applying feasible theory. After working through all the steps, the following steps backward allowed me to systematically “check” the process deductively from the theoretical to the empirical (Tjora, 2020, p. 18). When data was collected, I coded the data into themes resembling the ones identified in the content analysis (Table 1) that I contextualized and discussed further in chapters 5 and 6. I coded manually, assisted by the "command + F" function in Word to search for specific reference points and citations in the data transcript. I marked all sequences, making it easier to look up the broader context of each coded sequence I retrieved. This simplified the deductive process when exploring the feasibility of the theoretical framework to explain the findings and their relationship with previous literature.

The findings have been translated from Norwegian to English. Although some elements might have been lost in translation, prioritizing the accurate reproduction of the content over perfectly replicating the grammar ensured that culture and practice were truly reflected. Also, emphasizing the content of what people were saying rather than the focus on predefined variables ensured that the analysis remained grounded in the lived experiences (Tjora, 2020, p. 201). I experienced SDI as a valuable tool for analyzing the interviews, as it opened for gradually new understandings.

3.4 Research Quality: Validity, Reliability, and Generalizability

In this section, I have outlined the measures taken to ensure the quality of the research, focusing on validity, reliability, and generalizability while also acknowledging potential personal influences in the research process through reflexivity.

Evaluating the *validity* means establishing a connection between the obtained data and the research objectives and goals by asking whether the answer from the findings answers to the questions are that are aimed to be answered (Tjora, 2020, p. 232). This study has used methods that are established within previous studies of TikTok (Eriksson, 2021; Issar, 2023; Lookingbill, 2022; Siles et al., 2022). Combining the methods provided a clear understanding of communication on the platform and contextual factors, examining users' relationship with TikTok and their perceptions of the content. Accordingly, I was able to find answers that sufficiently explained the research goal. They provided significant insights into formal and informal communication on the platform, thereby strengthening the validity of the findings.

Reliability in qualitative research means evaluating if there is a consistent relation between empirical data, analysis, and outcomes without any personal, political, or other influence that has not been accounted for (Tjora, 2020, p. 264). In this research, I have maintained as objective as possible, used methods supported by previous literature, and aimed for transparency in my research, providing as good insights into the research process and the findings as possible (Tjora, 2020, p. 248). The iterative nature of the SDI method simplified this process by offering a detailed and accessible overview for further interpretations.

Furthermore, reflexivity is important. This involves reflecting on personal influences as they may impact the research's quality (Tjora, 2020, p. 250). I am both a student and an active user of TikTok. This could potentially have led to preconceptions that influenced my analysis and interpretation of the data, and my active position may have directed the conversation in specific ways. Complete neutrality is, however, impossible and not

necessarily beneficial, so accounting for personal knowledge and its impact on the research process is important (Tjora, 2020, p. 235). The active interviewer's engagement can enhance the relevance and depth of the data collected despite the risk of influencing the direction of the conversation (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, pp. 38-39). Therefore, I would argue that my proficiency with TikTok allowed me to engage with the participants on their level and accurately interpret their responses. While being aware of potential influences when interpreting the data, I experienced that my previous knowledge of TikTok allowed me to view the content in a broader context, which was beneficial for the accurate interpretation of its messages and affordances. I consistently reflected on my personal interpretations of the content and the participants' responses, trying to mitigate possible biases during data collection and in the following analysis. The students interviewed did not appear to have underlying motives, and their responses were often consistent across interviews. This strengthens the reliability of the interpretations made in this study, as the data collection reflects genuine perspectives rather than influenced responses.

Generalizability is considered as the research's external validity, meaning if the research can be proven valid beyond the scope of this exact research (Tjora, 2020, p. 231). A conceptual generalization is the goal with SDI, where the present research findings are compared to typologies, models, terms, or metaphors from previous research (Tjora, 2020, p. 245). I would argue that the results from the data analysis correspond to previous research with the significance of relatability, authenticity, and humor in content preferences, strengthening the generalizability of this research. Still, it is essential to acknowledge the potential limitations in concluding these findings beyond the specific context of NTNU's TikTok content. Factors such as cultural differences, audience demographics, and platform trends can significantly influence content preferences and perceptions. While the findings may hold relevance within the context of NTNU's TikTok presence, their applicability to other universities or social media platforms may require further investigation and consideration of these contextual factors, as discussed in Chapter 7.

3.5 Summary

This chapter has provided a descriptive overview of the research process and the choices made. Combining methods contributed to a systematic overview of NTNU's current communication on TikTok by exploring and identifying the participants' perceptions based on findings from the categories detected in the content analysis. Data collected from three strategically chosen focus groups representing three different student populations were used to discuss NTNU-related content on TikTok. The content analysis examined each account's 20 most recent videos, using a summative approach to identify categories and use of platform vernacular. The SDI method used for analysis made the findings accessible, as the connections between the content categories and the focus group insights were displayed systematically and clearly.

4 Content Analysis: the findings

As presented in Chapter 2, TikTok is considered a multimodal platform with various features, including a unique style, language, curated images, creative audio, and visual effects, used as a way of communication. A diverse blend of these features is common within successful content (TikTok, 2021). Therefore, when analyzing the content in this chapter, it's important to note that even if a particular content fits into one category, it often includes elements from other categories too.

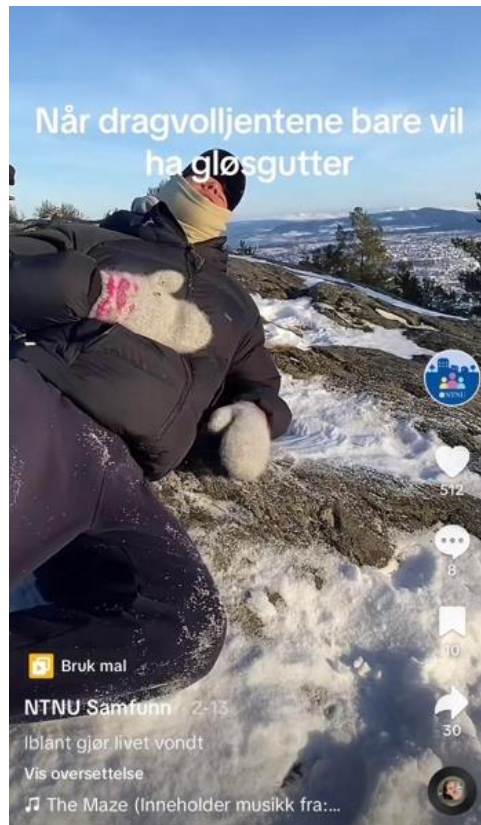
Examining the findings, I have decided to emphasize the typical content within each category, in which of the accounts' categories are the most prominent, while also recognizing irregularities. Further, all videos included are referenced according to their chronically ordered position in the template (Table 1), marked by the first letter of the accounts at the end. For instance, "v3s" symbolizes video three from the SS account, "v3t" would be content from ST, and "v3n" from NTNU. By analyzing the content, I gained insights into the approaches and trends used by these accounts to engage their audience. This analysis is useful for understanding the different approaches the accounts take in promoting university-related content and humor and the use of popular TikTok trends such as sounds, emojis, formats, movements, and memes.

4.1 Relatable Content

According to the analysis, relatable content connects with the audience on a personal level, addressing common experiences, frustrations, or situations often faced by students. Resonating with Ask & Abidin's (2018, p. 841) study, humor seemed to "fuel the memes' virality by expanding their relatability." This means that many relatable student experiences were humorously communicated in a meme-like, satirical manner that highlighted the comical aspects of situations that, in a way, could be tough in real life.

Most of SS's content aimed to be relatable to students often by using humor, both on a general level and through internal jokes. Their content is generally relatable to students addressing thematic such as financial life struggles as being a student is hard financially (v1s), relating to those who are afraid to ask questions in lectures or seminars because they fear coming off as dumb (v17s), or relating to the feeling of coming home to free food and low expenses (v19s). The other portion is more specifically related to the students attending NTNU. One example is the video about the happiness NTNU students experience when it's Cinnamon Bun Wednesday, illustrated through a TikTok dance (v14s) or relatable through memes about students who tend to complain about the cold weather in Trondheim (v16s). Another example is even more specific to Dragvoll. They are relating to the frustration that the boys attending the Gløshaugen Campus supposedly have a greater appeal to the Dragvoll girls than the Dragvoll boys (v6s). As illustrated in the screenshot from the video later below, the video depicts a warmly dressed male student outdoors, with the background overlooking Trondheim, as he slowly lies down on a rocky slope while clutching his heart and pretending to "die", with the text "when Dragvoll girls only want Gløshaugen guys" inserted above him. Consequently, the caption reads, "Sometimes life hurts." Matching the 12-second video's rather dramatic acting, the audio is a cinematic violin to further illuminate the devastating feeling.

SS V6:



Translated image text:

"When the Dragvoll girls only want "Gløsguys" (Gløshaugen guys)

The video above suggests an established "inside joke" about how male students on Dragvoll must struggle for the female's attention.

A lot of similar traits from SS are found in ST's content. Their content is more generally relatable to students through their content, such as demonstrating the frustration of being the only one pulling the weight in a group project, as well as the feeling of joy when the others have no choice but to do something (v5t). Another more delimited example of the video relating to those on the "inside," being enrolled students, is the one the informants were presented with, relating to all those who "boil," meaning copying others' assignments to get through their studies. It is a term known to be familiar to students pursuing civil engineering degrees at NTNU (v16t) (Monsen, 2011).

The official NTNU account also contains relatable content, but its main objective differs. For instance, there is a video (v7n) where students from NTNU Aalesund talk about what they dislike the most about their student town. Anyone with similar experiences may relate to their answers. However, the primary purpose is to provide realistic insights about student life by asking the students directly. SS, on the other hand, aims to engage its audience with relatable humorous content, while the official account does not have this objective directly.

Overall, relatable content in the context of this study is mainly related to student life humor, as this was a prominent feature across the accounts. Although relatable or humorous content was identified in all the accounts' content, it dominated most of the content on SS's account and was also prevalent in ST's content. These accounts employed the TikTok vernacular to address themes such as financial struggles, academic frustrations,

and campus-specific experiences in a comic or satirical manner to engage and connect with their audience.

In contrast, the official NTNU account lacked relatable content. Although some videos used humor, the videos were primarily focused on authentic insights about student life or recruitment rather than relatable engagement. For instance, in one of their videos, there was a humorous exchange between a female student and a famous Norwegian figure, Fritz Aanes, at the "winter conference" (v13n). Aanes responded to the student's question about future studies with sarcasm and wit, suggesting that individuals unsure of their life direction should consider applying to NTNU to avoid becoming what he terms a "slob". This kind of content was humorous about student life, yet not directly relatable compared to the other content in this category. The content was entertaining as it utilized the multimodality of the platform and its vernacular. For instance, while the exchange was humorous, it was more about directly promoting NTNU by making a celebrity tell the audience to apply to NTNU in a humorous way and employing trends rather than intentionally being funny and relating to everyday student experiences.

4.2 Informative content

The content categorized as informative has spreading information about NTNU as its main goal. Informative content primarily aims to be informative and give insights on what to expect. In some contexts, it could also be considered promotional material for NTNU, considering videos that could be encouraging to give potential students an overview of the programs and what they involve. However, the differences are significant in this analysis. Promotional content, discussed in 4.3, is better understood as branding that provides little information to present NTNU positively. The informative content gives insights into specific areas of NTNU and its programs.

For instance, the official NTNU account has a series called "Where Can You Find the Best Study Spots at NTNU?" with "Part 1" focused on Dragvoll. They also have videos in a more documentary form (v16n), aiming to help guide those unsure about their choice of study by providing insights into the experience of someone who has gone through a specific course. The descriptive caption "Part 1 | Help to choose a course of study? Hear how Sinthu (19) ended up choosing interaction design and how she thinks the study is 🧑🎓🧑🎓" reveals the trajectory of the 40-second-long video. It showcases a student who talks about what she is studying and why, followed by a video clip that provides insights into everything from everyday student life to the study environment, with festivities and activities. Simultaneously, as she talks, she alternates throughout the video between being the subject in focus and sharing her experiences visually. The student shared her experience of discovering her interest in UX design, her thoughts on the study, and her satisfaction with attending it. The content also highlighted specific trends, such as the use of trending background tracks and trending emojis placed alongside certain words to emphasize them as displayed. This is one example where NTNU has utilized the platform vernacular and promoted itself through a more informal approach:

NTNU V16:



Translated image text (headlines): "The 1st year on interaction design" | "Happy"

ST also provided similar insightful content as the video from NTNU above, e.g., the video presented to the informants where a female student brings the viewers along to her day at her career-relevant workplace (v18t). Still, they also include informative content related to technological and natural science education. They offer a variety of educational content such as documentaries and informative slides about different study programs, such as "Electrical Engineering, three-year bachelor" (v12n) or "Industrial Design, five-year master". The videos are decorated with appropriate icons that represent each program and provide information about learning outcomes, location, study environment, admission requirements, and other relevant details. In one video, viewers were also encouraged to engage with NTNU through interactive content, such as events and live streams, to foster inclusivity and participation.

ST V12:



Translated image text (headlines): “Electrical Engineer: 3-year bachelor” | “The program structure and information”

Overall, both NTNU's official and ST accounts provide informative and insightful content that is useful for students, particularly future students. ST's approach is more targeted towards technical and scientific studies. At the same time, NTNU offers a broader range of content, including music, natural life, and chemistry, presented in a video format. Both accounts use trending TikTok music for a higher appeal to the audience. Yet, the SS account does not directly offer informative content. Nonetheless, some of their relatable content could be insightful for future students as it gives valuable insights into a student's daily struggles and typical experiences.

4.3 Promotional Content

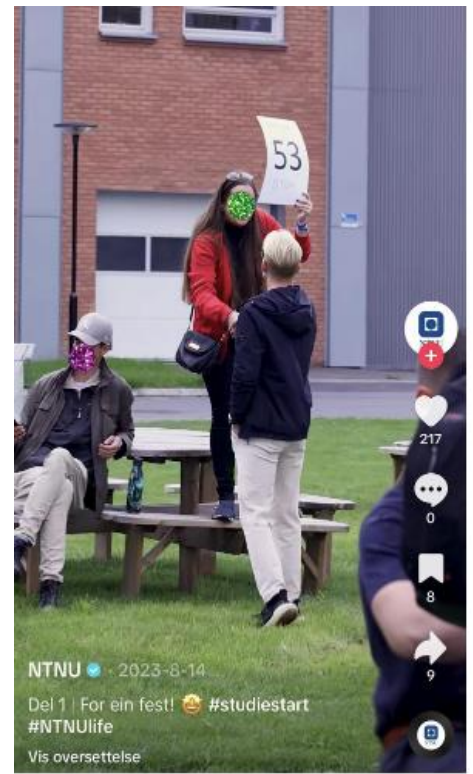
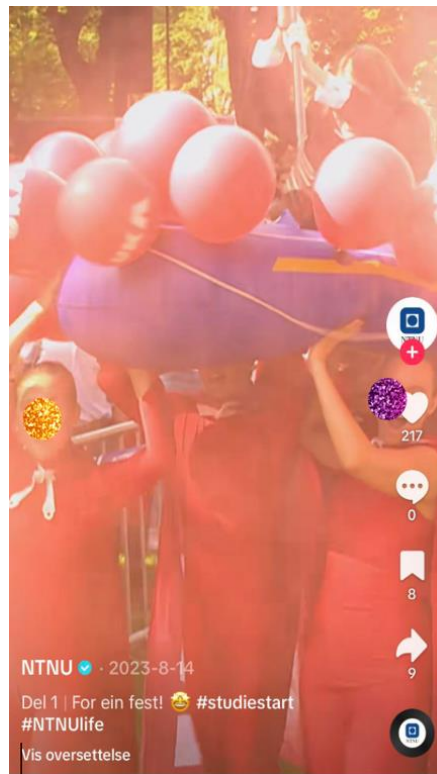
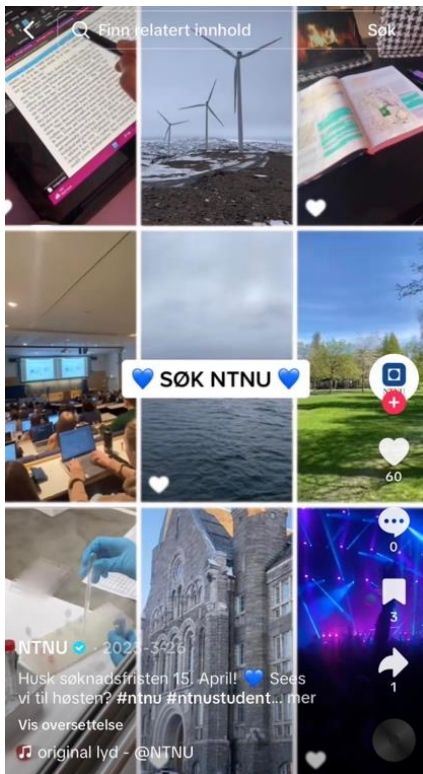
NTNU, like many other organizations, has incorporated TikTok into its social media strategy to enhance its brand (Bray, 2022). This section examines the promotional content as it is aimed at showcasing, or “branding”, the university. Most of the identified content within NTNU's official account is designed to promote the university and attract potential students. It seemed as if the message was to get future students' attention and make them consider NTNU as a desirable university to pursue their education. For instance, the content typically showcased the campus facilities, study programs, and achievements, not providing direct information as the promotional content does, but more to show off what possibilities and experiences come with being a student at the university.

For instance, one of the videos had a straightforward message: a five-second video displaying the text “Apply to NTNU” with two blue hearts on each side in front of a collage of 9 videos, showing the different possibilities and aspects of NTNU playing in the background (v14n). The official account also promoted NTNU in an unexplicit, but still “showy” way by exhibiting matriculation and what the beginning of student life at NTNU

might look like for many students through several professionally shot short clips with upbeat electronic music. The video (v4n) includes 20 different clips of student engagement, such as UKA, events, sponsor week programs, choirs, and concerts. The video's caption says "What a festivity! 🥳", while the text at the beginning shows matriculation, the formal process of enrolling in a university.

NTNU V14:

NTNU V4:



Translated image text NV14: "Apply to NTNU"

Through promotional content, the NTNU account subtly but effectively promotes the university by providing an eye-catching glimpse into an exciting student life at the university. However, there is no presence of TikTok vernacular, like humor or trends. In contrast, SS's account had no direct promotional content. Instead, the content focused more on relatability through humor and satire. The videos aim to poke fun at the quirks and characteristics of being an NTNU or Dragvoll student rather than explicitly promoting the university or its programs. For instance, one video makes fun of Dragvoll's more peripheral location than other campuses (v20s). This could even have an opposite effect from the content that, in this context, is considered promotional content for future students considering study programs on the Dragvoll Campus. The ST account also included promotional content, as some of the content showcased the various opportunities available to NTNU students, such as possible workplaces. This content did this while still employing the platform vernacular, for example by using the "vlogging a day in my life" trend and emojis.

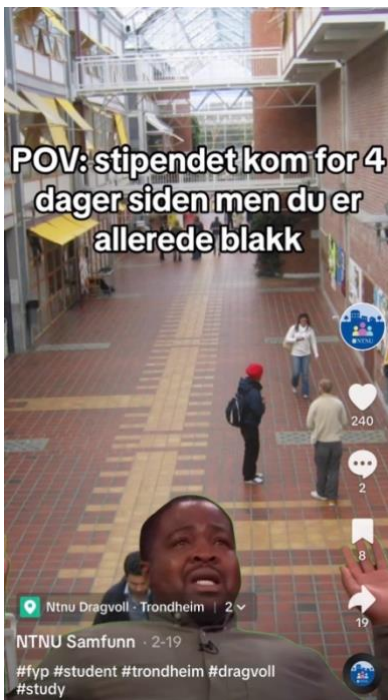
4.4 Trends and Memes

TikTok trends reflect the most popular content on the platform, including sounds, emojis, formats, movements, and memes (Zulli & Zulli, 2022, p. 1881). Representing the multimodality of TikTok, a lot of content that uses trends or trending rhetoric is also to be found within the other categories.

All three accounts feature content using trends but to varying degrees. Among the identified trends were trending sounds, either popular songs from famous artists or sounds used a lot on the app lately. Another trend is placing emojis on each side of specific words to enhance them, most commonly using the sparkle emoji "✨". Among the trends within the content format and structuring are the "microphone trend", which involves interviewing someone with a smaller microphone often an earpiece, and the "POV trend" which stands for "Point of View", where the audience sees the transmitter's perspective displayed humorously, there is "vlogging" when documenting an experience either in forms of an exchange abroad or a "day in my life", and also there is a trend using the function of "picture swiping", enabling the audience to swipe through several picture slides. Lastly, a lot of the content included memes, which must be transmitted for them to gain cultural significance (Zulli & Zulli, 2022, p. 1881). In the analyzed content, memes typically involved extracted clips from videos or an image transferred onto a new background to create humorous or creative juxtapositions in reference to an experience. Reflected in these multimodal approaches, this content added an extra layer of visual engagement to the conveyed message.

The two clips below exemplify how both the "POV" trend, "picture swiping" and the use of memes are usually conveyed, in which both videos also use trending sounds. Additionally, these are examples of videos emphasizing the multimodality of TikTok through generous use of its common vernacular and by providing relatable content that represents a combination of features such as humor, trends, and popular sounds. In an 11-second-long video (V4) from the SS account the trends are showcased by using a photo from inside Campus Dragvoll with a cut-out video meme that's crying, along with the text "POV: the study grant came 4 days ago but you are already broke" and a trending audio saying "I'm done, cut the show" used in various other settings on the platform. In video V3 from ST, there are two images organized in slides with a swipe function: The first picture shows a "lecturer" with his hands slightly out and up at head height towards the hall, with the text "Lecturer: It looks like you understand this very well, so we'll move on", second picture/slide shows two hamsters at the front of a lecture hall with big eyes, one with a pink cap and the other with a pink bow pasted over himself with the text "Me and BFF who have not understood anything throughout the lecture" along with the caption "Always difficult when you don't have a specific question you're wondering about... 😞 😞".

SS V4:



ST V3:



Furthermore, all three accounts frequently used trends. However, SS and ST on a larger scale than NTNU. Out of the trends most apparent in most of SS's videos, were trending sounds, memes, and the "POV-trend", both explicit and inexplicitly being most used. The trend with "picture swiping" was the most used trend among the ST account's content, followed by trending sounds, memes, and the "POV-trend". Other trends that were used but on a smaller level, were the "vlogging" or "day in my life" trend. In contrast to the other two accounts, NTNU did not have any meme-based content, but frequently used trending sounds, the "microphone trend" and mostly emojis, in terms of the trend with the sparkle emoji.

4.5 Summary

The content analysis revealed central findings about the approaches and trends utilized by the university related TikTok accounts. Three broader, central content categories were identified: relatable, promotional, and informative. I also discovered additional formats and devices that shape the platform vernacular, existent to different extents across all content types, including authenticity, humor, and trends. The use of trending sounds, emojis, formats, movements, and memes were frequent across all accounts, illustrating TikTok content's multimodality. Informative content primarily aims to be informative and give insights on what to expect, it also could be considered to serve as promotional material for NTNU, considering videos that could be encouraging to give potential students an overview of the programs and what they involve. counts, indicating the importance of aligning content with popular TikTok trends to maximize audience engagement. The analysis showed that while the NTNU account focused on promotional content to attract potential students, the student-driven accounts prioritized humor and satire resonating with the university community, especially SS. Overall, the content analysis provided valuable insights into university-related social media content's diverse approaches and trends.

5 NTNU the official account: a perceived advertisement

This chapter examines NTNU's official account and analyzes the findings of the focus groups. As discovered in Chapter 4, NTNU's official account tends to present formal messages to showcase the institution and achieve its desired image (Leon, 2021, pp. 270; 281). Therefore, this section sheds light on the effectiveness of NTNU's formal communication. The aim is to reveal its audience's perceptions of its promotional and informative messaging on a platform known for its informal, authentic content.

The chapter is divided into three parts: the first discusses how the participants engaged with the content, viewing it as an advertisement; the second focuses on the promotional content effectiveness, based on perceptions, particularly among future students; and the findings in the last part reflect how trend familiarity and humor played a significant part in engagement with the content across all groups. The findings are highlighted by previous literature and the theoretical framework of affordances provided in Chapter 2, including references to findings from the content analysis in Chapter 4.

5.1 Promotion of NTNU: "You perceive it as an advertisement"

Considering the similarities between TikTok's primary audience and NTNU's target demographic, Gen Z, it seems like a "no-brainer" that the platform is a perfect place for NTNU to gain more visibility and promote itself effectively. As detected in the content analysis, most of NTNU's content is categorized as promotional or informative, aiming to capture potential students' attention and encourage them to consider NTNU as their preferred university. The question is, are they currently doing this effectively?

Particularly, the official accounts promotional approach within their content, was recognized as a consensual perception across all focus groups. Dagny, immediately identified NTNU's approach as meant for external audiences, not existing students at NTNU, signaling that the content format may not appeal as much to her personally, as its goals were recruitment benefits. She said, "I notice very well that it is an organization that had made it [the TikTok], that somehow seeks to appeal to outsiders," referring to future students before she further described the content as "advertisement-like." It was further suggested that NTNU had succeeded in being visible, while the interest in their content seemed minimal. The Gløshaugen students agreed with Dagny, referring to the content as an advertisement before further elaborating that it is content that they were likely to scroll past:

Interviewer: *how did you consider it as an advertising format?*

Gustav: *right away, you perceive it as an advertisement.*

Gina: *I was going to say, it is probably not what you would like to watch going on TikTok. It is not what you want to watch. It may be like, okay, there is one [video] like that, and then you scroll past it. There is no interest in it.*

The discussions suggest that students find the promotional content uninteresting and are, therefore, reluctant to engage with it because they perceive it as advertising. This view reoccurred later in the discussion, as Geir explicitly stated that he "zoned out" when he noticed that it was an "advertising video," referring to the first video presented. His statement insinuates boredom and disinterest associated with NTNU's promotional content.

The findings imply that NTNU's promotional content needs to align with the relatable experience expected of TikTok, making the students likely to dismiss it as advertising, leading to minimal interest and engagement. This aligns with Hallahan et al.'s (2007, p. 10) statement that people do not necessarily differentiate between their perceptions of various forms of organizational communication. Conversely, these perceptions could affect the official account's visibility. Many young adults, persistent users of platforms like TikTok, have developed strategies to navigate and alter the algorithm to their advantage and personal content preferences (Schellewald, 2023, p. 1577). This algorithm awareness is significant as TikTok filters and promotes content personalized to user engagement, with the FYP algorithm being known for its adaptability to user preferences (Zulli & Zulli, 2022, p. 1878). As Diana stated, "You find out very quickly if there is something you like in a video. If you find it interesting, watch and check them out further, and they receive more attention". She implied that content boring the audiences gets "canceled out", meaning that the perceptions of NTNU's "advertising" appeal may work against the university when using the platform for promotional purposes.

Additionally, such behavior applies to advertising formats in general; when audiences are irritated by advertising, they are more likely to avoid it (Niu et al., 2021, pp. 1-2). Gina underscored this finding in further detail by saying, "it might not be what you want to see when you go on TikTok," describing her behavior when faced with the content by saying, "... ok, there is one of those, completely fine, and then you move on. No interest in it". Essentially, Gina suggested that the promotional NTNU content contradicts the vernacular expected, what she is used to seeing on the platform, causing a disconnect and expressing that it interrupts her browsing experience.

The promotional content of NTNU might fail to meet the students' imagined affordances of TikTok, as they expect a TikTok vernacular incorporating formats and traits typical for the content on the platform. People on TikTok users prefer easily understood messages and fun and entertaining videos. They do not seem to enjoy content that feels too formal or serious. If the content looks too much like a traditional advertisement, it might not work well on TikTok, as the platform shapes how content is perceived (Li et al., 2021, p. 268; Voorveld et al., 2018, p. 51). Therefore, based on the disconnect with the platform's vernacular affordances, emphasizing authentic, humorous, and relatable content, the findings suggest that students find that kind of content disengaging, as it does not align with the reasons they use the platform.

Expanding on the notion, the students perceived the promotional content as aimed at future students rather than themselves. Students' common perceptions of the content were often considered in terms of "people would like ..." or "some would find it ..." and so on, usually referring to another, explaining that future students, like high schoolers, would probably like it more. The question is, would high schoolers find content that current students expressed disinterest or boredom with more engaging?

5.2 Stronger appeal to “those who may already have made up their mind”

Paying attention to the high schoolers' perspectives, it appeared that the NTNU students' perception was neither entirely accurate nor completely wrong. For instance, Hans viewed the content as valuable, contributing to awareness about NTNU's opportunities. He also envisioned the content as appealing to future students like himself by providing a glimpse into campus life. Hilde initially referred to the videos as “trendy” and “effective” while later suggesting that the content could reinforce interest in NTNU for those already considering it. In this light, the NTNU student groups' perceptions were accurate because when finding social media advertising (a common perception of promotional content) relevant, entertaining, or informative, the audience may feel less invaded and more receptive (Ha & McCann, 2008, p. 573). Generally, the high schoolers suggested that the content could enhance the initial first impression, admiring the use of the “microphone trend” in the second video, finding it authentic and sincere, as it involved asking NTNU students unexpectedly about their favorite aspects of the university, instead of arranging a sit-down interview with them, as Harald explained it. He expressed his experience with the content by saying, “I thought it was really nice all of it.” Harald's initial reaction to the official account's content stood out as significantly more positive than the rest of the high school group. His different perception might be considered due to a lack of imagined affordances, as he had never used TikTok and may not be as familiar with the platform.

Further, the high school group also expressed a sense of disconnection from the content. They perceived the content, as reflected above in what Hilde said, as not appealing to them directly. Instead, the high schoolers, similarly to the NTNU student groups, worded themselves by saying things like “people that considered NTNU would probably ...” potentially weakening the appeal of the NTNU TikTok account when in a promotional format:

Hans: *I think it works/functions a bit in that you are more aware of what opportunities you have. Since these videos pro a lot of information about what it's like at NTNU, it somehow becomes a more interesting option.*

Hilde: *I think perhaps also that if you are already a little interested, possibly not yet decided [university], but have heard a lot about NTNU, and if you think “that's the place for me”, and watch a video like that [on the FYP], it probably appeals more to those who may already have made up their mind a bit that studying there is something they want.*

Despite his earlier positive perceptions, Harald questioned the demand for such content before, recognizing its usefulness when available. Although the high schoolers didn't perceive the content directly as advertising, they didn't necessarily want to see it in their feed either. Instead, they considered it a valuable source to gather insights from, but under the circumstance of considering the university. As a result, promotional content might connect better with high schoolers by giving them a glimpse into life at NTNU and potentially shaping their decision-making process. Still, they contradicted themselves somewhat, as none of them viewed TikTok as one of their sources for information about NTNU, limiting the content's effectiveness for informative purposes. This indicates that while high schoolers appreciated the information provided, they were not particularly attracted to it or motivated to engage.

5.3 Promotional content + trends and humor = engaging as “it's very TikTok”

As seen in the previous section, the promotional appeal of NTNU's content led all groups to perceive it as targeting audiences other than themselves directly. However, videos that integrated popular trends and humor, such as “the microphone trend” in NTNU's second video and the textual trend with glitter emojis on each side of the word “slob”, seemed more appealing as they were recognizable to the participants. Gina expressed her liking for humor and NTNU's content that featured a specific trend. Gustav emphasized that this type of content fits in with TikTok's typical vernacular as it resonates with the platform's multimodality:

Gina: *We've all said we would like to watch something fun. And maybe something like the thirds video we watched, it was a bit funny, like “If you've been sitting on your ass for three years, start studying and don't be a slob”.*

Gustav: *And when he said “slob”, the text popped up (gesticulates with hands), and with those emojis (referring to glitter emojis on both sides). It's very TikTok, you know.*

Gina: *Yeah, it is a trend with the text and the emojis.*

The students had previously noted that NTNU's official account content was not what they would like to see, but the integration of TikTok's vernacular affordances, such as trends and humor, enhanced their experience with the content. Nevertheless, although the participants were able to pinpoint some aspects of NTNU's content they found more appealing, the overall perception seemed to stay the same. This aligns with the notion that Gen Z audiences are quick to detect inauthenticity or misalignment between messaging and its reality, often leading to students perceiving all promotional content as the same and considering it unengaging advertising (Francis & Hoefel, 2018, p. 9). Ultimately, this suggests that while integrating trends and humor can temporarily boost engagement, if not consistent, the perceptions will remain a significant barrier to genuinely connecting with NTNU's audiences.

Although the inclusion of trends was acknowledged, additional findings suggested that some of the trends featured on the official account fall short due to TikTok's constantly evolving algorithm and the audience's adaptability with expectations for continuous change. While NTNU's trend-based content resonated with the participant's expectations and imagined affordances; some, like Hanne, expressed fatigue by repetitive trends she had already seen multiple times before. On TikTok, trends often fade or are replaced by new ones within a short period of time (Schellewald, 2021, pp. 1440-1441). Likewise, repeated trends or creative implementations could likely lead to saturation effects, which may harm perceived creativity and authenticity, ultimately negatively affecting brand evaluation over time (Chu, Deng, & Mundel, 2022, p. 13). Thus, while users seek an “escape” from boredom on the platform, these findings imply that outdated trends fail to fulfill this need.

5.4 Summary

The findings in this chapter reflect the target audience's ability to develop their point of view quickly as a determinant of their overall content perception. Imagined affordances, which shape the participant's expectations and perceptions, played a significant role in how they interacted with the content when those expectations were not met (Bucher & Helmond, 2017, p. 14). The NTNU students immediately identified a disconnect with the content, as their imagined affordances regarding relatability and inclusion of humor and trends were displayed unsatisfactorily, leaving them uninterested in further engagement. It is implied that the imagined affordances were influenced by their previous experience with the TikTok platform vernacular. This might have caused their established insights to overshadow their present experience, or conversely, the lack of such experiences with the vernacular affordances might have led to different interpretations than the rest.

6 Student-driven Accounts

In Chapter 5, a disconnect with the promotional content was discovered, suggesting that the expectations of imagined affordances were not met due to the absence of TikTok vernacular in the official accounts' content. In this chapter, the perceptions of the "unofficial" accounts, ST and SS, are examined. These accounts' informal approach, based on their features detected through content analysis, could be considered a private digital affect culture that promotes interactions among the audiences, focusing on utilizing alignment and a sense of belonging (Leon, 2021, p. 281).

The chapter is structured into three sections, each focusing on identified influences and themes derived from focus group discussions: expectations of student-life humor, expectations of trends, and expectations of student identity and community. The first two sections discuss the findings of the student-driven accounts' correspondence to consistent expectations of platform-specific content. The last section considers what the findings suggest they achieve when their expectations are met. Similar to Chapter 5, the findings are highlighted by previous literature and from an affordances perspective while also referring to findings from the content analysis.

6.1 Expectation of student-life humor: "I also had to "Kont", LOL"

The content analysis identified a significant presence of humorous content within the student-driven accounts, which have been suggested to significantly elevate the audience's feeling of involvement, also contributing to more persuasive messaging (Wang, 2020, p. 2). Accordingly, ST and SS often addressed common student experiences using humor to highlight the comical aspects of challenging situations.

In the focus groups, the content on the student-driven accounts was often considered meme-like and not taking themselves so seriously compared to the official account's formal nature. Grete expressed a strong attraction to ST's content, admitting to watching them extensively even without following the account. She ascribed her appeal to the relatability of the content because it resonated with her. Gustav expressed a similar viewpoint, further agreed upon by all participants:

Grete: *I have watched both ST and SS. But mostly ST. I think I have watched almost all their videos ... without me following them. But it's because I like them because it's relatable *laughing*.*

Interviewer: *So, it is the fact that it's relatable that is essential?*

Grete: *Yes, on my behalf at least.*

Gustav: *Yeah, I think so.*

All participants nod their heads agreeably

This finding aligned closely with the findings of Ask & Abidin (2018) highlighting humor as an integral part of creating relatability among students. They found that students value well-crafted memes that practice honesty through humor, disclosure through deprecation, and relatability through rhetoric instead of portraying's of academic successes and healthy lifestyles (p. 845). These memetic elements work as central constituents of the vernacular affordance, as memes and jokes are common to TikTok's culture. When employed in content, such features resonate with students' imagined affordances of what the content is expected to be like. For instance, the Gløshaugen students Gustav and Geir mentioned that they appreciated that the student-driven accounts used humor, considering the content wasn't as "serious," "official," and "informative" as the official NTNU account.

Additionally, participants considered humorous TikTok videos as "the content people like the most". This could be explained by the "self-deprecating relatability" in the content fostering "ties of the union," which is especially evident among students' (Ask & Abidin, 2018, p. 837). Particularly, the NTNU students perceived the content as more authentic as it developed a connection to them on a personal level through shared experiences, often by using internal relatable jokes. An example of this was when students from Dragvoll reflected upon one of the humorous videos from ST. The video resonated with students' post-exam and cultivated a shared experience among NTNU students, proposedly the newcomers in particular:

Didrik: *There was a video I remembered watching from ST. It was a video right after the exam in Information technology. It was based on humor concerning passing the exam. I think it created a sense of community. "I am one of many studying at NTNU. I've had that exam." So, I prefer that it is there than not.*

Desiree: *I also think that what you get out of it is humor or relating, or something, might not be of high value, but like, why not?*

Diana: *... the videos were more fun during my first year, than now in my second year. Now I have kind of been through what they are trying to show ... I think that [the student-driven] videos are great for new students, to build relationships outside ... It's a good icebreaker to send a meme (TikTok) to someone ... I think it's very nice that they see that [other students] don't take themselves so seriously. I think many people think that NTNU is very big, especially Gløshaugen. The fact that they see that a Gløshaugen-student makes fun of "konting" neutralizes it a little, that "it's not that bad", kind of like "the world doesn't end since everyone has had to "kont" before".*

Here, as a previous Gløshaugen student, Didrik recalled a funny video about passing an IT exam that made him feel connected to other students who have shared the same experience. Desiree agreed, seeing value in the humor and relatability, whereas Diana found these videos valuable for new students to build connections and see that others don't take themselves too seriously. Hence, humor seemed to improve the content's relatability, making the campus seem less intimidating by showing that everyone faces challenges, exemplified in the experience of challenging situations like "konting", where students must repeat an exam. Instead of panicking when doing badly on an exam, the content inspires them to consider it light-heartedly, thinking, "I also had to kont (do it again), LOL (laughing out loud)", as Diana put it. Although the Dragvoll students suggested that the content reflected Gløshaugen culture, they still related to the content as it reflects student behavior and problems. As confirmed earlier in this thesis, students regarded NTNU as a prestigious university in which humor about student life and the stresses that come along with it serves as a sense of connection among students, who relate to shared experiences common to students. While finding the student-life humor relatable, the students' perceptions imply that although the content represents two academic and culturally different campuses, they still perceive content from both accounts as relatable because of its informal representations of life at NTNU. This could be explained by the idea that humor offers flexibility in the message, as exaggeration allows for multiple interpretations (Ask & Abidin, 2018, p. 840-841). For example, SS (V4) shows a meme about being broke after spending all their student grants at once. Some people might find it funny because they relate and usually spend all their money at once, while others relate to it because it reminds them of times when they had less money and felt anxious about it. Correspondingly, Grete described the ST account as "generally relatable for students, maybe. So, it reaches not only those within [Gløshaugen], but a lot of [those students] as well". The exaggeration or sometimes understatement in these content formats is suggested to make the videos more relatable.

Further, in terms of the high schoolers, Hans perceived SS's content as slightly more humor-based in comparison to the ST account, aligning with findings in the content analysis. Still, their overall perceptions resonated with the students, who found the student-driven content funny, resembling the effect as pointed out in section 5.3, but the opposite (Francis & Hoefel, 2018, p. 9).

In contrast, where the perceptions of high school students regarding student-driven content seemed to differ from the NTNU students, was in their personal connection to the content itself. In this context, the high schoolers' imagined affordances seemed to be more influenced by the inclusion of a TikTok vernacular rather than content being accurate to the NTNU student environment. This suggests that the student-driven content may be less relatable for future students. For instance, in one of the discussions about their perception of the content, Harald pointed out that he could recognize that it was meant to be a joke for attention, yet he could not directly consider it relatable for him. Hans answer suggested a similar perspective as he was unsure:

Harald: *I think there was a lot of that, at least in the first three, a lot of that kind of humor. Scheme. Try to be a bit funny and get a lot of attention. Just because it is a joke. But there wasn't much of it. What else did you ask too?*

Interviewer: *If you personally relate to the content?*

Hans: *I don't really know. Difficult to answer.*

Harald: *I might have noticed that there is a difference in that the student accounts appeal much more to issues that you are faced with more they reflect more of the issues that the students, or students who will become students. They encounter more of their situations.*

Harald, who has never used TikTok himself, recognized the content as resonating with common school situations despite not having direct relevance to his own experiences. Yet, it did not appear as if it was tied to his personal experiences or expectations. It is, therefore, suggested that high school students relate to the humor as part of the platform vernacular in a general sense. This finding resonates with Ask & Abidin's (2018, p. 841) study, where some participants found joy in how student problems memes described a relatable experience humorously, while others simply saw them as exaggerated for the sake of entertainment and not actually referring to real-life situations. For instance, Hans said later in the discussion that he had difficulty relating to the content, as he found it hard to pinpoint whether he personally identified with the humor presented, saying, "It's kind of a joke, but it's not something I do", followed by Hilde that acknowledged the humor as relatable in general but not directly applicable to her own experiences.

The perspectives of student-life humor highlight the variability in how humor and relatability were perceived differently between all groups and the individual participants. Generally, the students found humor in student-driven content mostly because it reflects their shared experiences and campus culture, appreciating its authenticity and relatability. In contrast, high school students, found the humor "a bit more entertaining", as Hans put it, may not perceive the content as mirroring their own experiences or expectations, often relating to it more broadly as school-related humor without specific expectations.

6.2 Expectation of Trends: "It makes it catchier"

A major part of TikTok's success can be explained by the trends that exist as part of the platform's vernacular. Trends evolve rapidly and have become significant cultural references and popular, especially among younger generations (Francis & Hoefel, 2018, p. 2). Like humorous content, trends are a part of the imagined affordances emerging through TikTok use. In the context of this study, the content analysis detected that the student-driven accounts incorporated a greater number of TikTok trends compared to the official account, utilizing trending sounds and rhetoric frequently.

The Dragvoll students perceived the student-driven accounts as fast in catching onto trends with the songs that "are hip" as Diana said. Desiree had already heard one of the videos currently trending songs, "yes, and?" by Ariana Grande, "probably 100 times" which only was released a week ago, according to Diana. Gustav from Gløshaugen said he found incorporating trends amusing and that he enjoys recognizable formats. As student-driven accounts utilize these trends, they effectively adapt to the platform's vernacular, leading to an experienced fulfillment among their audience. Additionally, the students noticed that the accounts were up to date on the latest trends, leading to a potentially more positive perception of the content in reference to the expressed fatigue with certain trends in part 5.3.

Further, the Dragvoll students suggested that trends improve the content by making it more accessible and entertaining. Didrik expressed his belief that incorporating trends enhances the quality of the content, stating "I think they get better from it. It's not

something I'm actively considering. It is just kind of a trick used to make it a little easier [for viewers] to digest". The High school students also agreed on this notion, while their discussion suggests that they primarily rely on trends as their main source of relating to the content. Hilde explains that using popular TikTok trends makes the content instantly more interesting, further mentioning some typical types of trends also inspired by Instagram. Harald adds that familiar songs make content more appealing because viewers can quickly relate to them, making the videos more engaging:

Hilde: *They also use trends that are used everywhere on TikTok, which are popular. And then it may [work] quicker that you become a little more interested when you see them.*

Interviewer: *what kind of trends have you seen?*

Hilde: *I was thinking about, similar to Instagram, there are memes and stuff. The last [video] was kind of similar to that type of content. With a GIF-sticker-like person talking, and then it is a joke added on to it. And, that "vlogging" kind of thing, "a day at NTNU".*

Interviewer: *Have you something like that before [this interview]?*

Hilde: *Yeah.*

Interviewer: *what do you think?*

Harald: *It makes it catchier. Because with the song it's like... "Yeah! I've heard that before." you relate to the video. You relate to the video faster. It adds more substance to the video hear a song, preferably a popular song as well.*

Further into the discussion, Hans also perceived trends within the content similarly to his peers while acknowledging that the student-driven accounts' use of popular sounds worked to their advantage. Toward the end, he also pointed out that one of ST's videos was valuable by offering authentic insights into working life based on the "day in my life" trend. This specific "vlog-style" content mentioned by Hans, has previously been argued as one of the most popular among younger people as it's viewed as both current and authentic (Dretsch, 2022). By keeping up and providing relatable and genuine experiences through popular trends and sounds, the findings suggest student-driven accounts are leveraging the expected vernacular and catering to their audiences' imagined affordances.

6.3 Student Identity and Community: "the feeling of being a student"

In this section, the focus is on the vernacular affordances within student-driven content as a provider of student identity and community among students. Previous studies suggest that social media users are more engaged when content allows community building (Sundar & Limperos, 2013, p. 514). Most of the student-driven accounts' content revolved around student-life topics. Based on the platform's emphasis on a relatable vernacular, the student-driven accounts might, therefore, play a crucial role in shaping student identity and building a sense of community.

The significance of student-driven content as a facilitator for student identity and community is exemplified through the participants sharing their individual experiences with the group. Gina enjoyed the visibility and thought it was fun that people could associate their content with her. Gustav appreciated the sense of connection through the feeling of relating to something that "only he as an NTNU student" could understand:

Gina: *I think visibility is kind of funny. It's like when people ask me, "where do you study?" "I study at NTNU" I can be somewhat relatable. Kind of like, "Oh, yes, I've seen them!". It's fun in that way. Additionally, I like the student-run ones; they are very relevant, and that's a bit funny.*

Gustav: *I think it's fun when I see something I am very well familiar with on TikTok, in a way that I know not many people can understand. But because I go to NTNU, I understand.*

Gina and Gustav's resonance relates to Geir's previous statement that "nobody knows what "boiling" (copying peers' work) means, as it's one of the wordings that are unique to them as students at NTNU. Hence, the internal lingo exclusive to NTNU featured in the student-driven content appeared to develop a sense of belonging and community among those familiar with it, setting them apart from others outside the university community, also resonating with the Dragvoll students expressing that the content is "being directed at them", as Desiree stated. In this circumstance, "only those with the requisite intertextual know-how will understand the joke" about "boiling" (Ask & Abidin, 2018 p. 836). Geir, for instance, had studied in Bergen but had never heard of "boiling" before he started studying at NTNU, explaining that he was confused when introduced to the term. He suggested that now, as an NTNU student, he could understand the "joke" referring to the student-driven content in general. Another example of content with similar internal jokes is illustrated (SS V6) in Chapter 4.

The student-driven content was also suggested to reduce loneliness in particular student-related situations by my interviewees. During discussions, Didrik emphasized the inclusive culture and sense of belonging, and Dagny highlighted the importance of the student experience, acknowledging the contents potential impact on the student retention rate:

Didrik: *The one for NTNU is very much about recruiting people to NTNU. This [student-driven] one appealed to people enrolled at NTNU, I would assume that they want to make people stay here. After all, it's expensive for NTNU when students leave ... So, it's about trying to uphold some kind of belonging, causing less desire to drop out.*

Dagny: *an important part of studying is the feeling of being a student.*

Didrik later expanded on the financial aspect, questioning the cost of maintaining these accounts, but ultimately saw value in their ability to generate a sense of belonging to the student community through discussion with the rest of the group. He viewed it as a "cost-benefit assessment" by elaborating on that paying a student per semester was "worth it" if it prevented even one student from dropping out. Diana agreed, stating it was worthwhile for the student environment to maintain the accounts if the costs were reasonable. Desiree laughed as she ended the conversation by noting she wasn't aware anyone was getting paid to create the content.

6.3.1 Established Norms and Culture: becomes “fun to pay a little extra attention”

In terms of student community, the students also considered student-driven content as authentic in mirroring real-life social dynamics, pointing out content based on the established internal rivalry between Gløshaugen and Dragvoll (UA, 2022). This additional layer of humor resonated well with the students and seemed to increase their engagement with the content:

Geir: *I think it's fun.*

Grete: *Yeah, it's not like you fight when you meet them in the street. It's all jokes, just for entertainment. But it's kind of fun. With a bit of petty rivalry between the TikTok accounts. And suddenly, it generates more videos on each of the accounts, somewhat responding to each other, making it a bit more fun to pay a little extra attention.*

Geir and Grete both expressed their appreciation, while Grete clarified that it was just a lighthearted and entertaining rivalry. She implied that increased engagement could lead to the accounts creating more content to compete in the rivalry. Similar viewpoints were also apparent in the Dragvoll group. This suggests that the rivalry produced a competitive “one-downmanship”, where students strive to humorously outdo each other in sharing experiences of inferiority, failure, and struggles to construct the most relatability, sympathy, attention, and engagement with other students (Ask & Abidin, 2018, p. 845). In turn, the rivalry fosters an authentic environment, as it brings together people who mutually support and appreciate each other’s work and content (Sot, 2022, p. 1501). Subsequently, accounts are in a perceived humorous competition, where it's suggested that the content making the best use of the platform affordances and vernacular achieves a stronger appeal and “wins”. As the competitive dynamic in the content reflects a well-known reality within the university culture, it also enhances the feeling of the student community by strengthening their collective identity.

Adding to this, long-term students highlighted that although they initially enjoyed the content from the student-driven accounts, their resonance with the content weakened over the years. Over time, their perception shifted as they interpreted the content based on their own context and experience (Schrøder, 2019, pp. 156-157). This suggests that the appeal of student-driven content may diminish as students' identities and community emphasis shift, making the content less relatable over time. Referring to some of the presented content, Dagny mentioned that repeatedly explaining common experiences, like where Dragvoll is, becomes tiresome. Consequently, the content becomes less relatable and less humorous as their experiences become a “worn-off” topic of discussion, contributing to a perception of its greater value among newer students. Eventually, the appeal of student-driven content may decline as students’ identities and priorities within the community change, despite the use of the platform vernacular. It is evident that ST and SS effectively provide their audience with a community of like-minded people and foster a sense of “togetherness” by understanding how to engage their student audience through the platform’s algorithm (Sot, 2022, p. 1494).

However, findings reveal that the student-driven accounts must continually adapt and make sure they represent students at various levels of their courses of study. They need

to consider the evolving needs of their audience, not just the ones new to university, to maintain engagement.

6.4 Summary

In this chapter, I examined how the informal and relatable content of the “unofficial” student-driven accounts content, facilitated identity and student community. This chapter has highlighted how their informal content resonated with the students by reflecting on their personal experiences and connecting with them by latching on to new recognizable trends and humor. Playing a central role, the content relatability through student-life humor seemed to strengthen the current student's connection to NTNU, while high school students viewed it as more general entertainment, relating more to the trends used. The positive perception appeared to be grounded in the student-driven accounts' frequent use and adaptiveness. to TikTok's well-known vernacular, which made the content meet their expectations. Additionally, the accounts were viewed as both loneliness-reducing, and as a source of belonging; however, their strong appeal in community-building was suggested to diminish over the years as students had experienced most of the content. This implied that although the student-driven accounts were adapting to the platform vernacular and resonating with the students' imagined affordances, the situations addressed within the content needed to be adapted to showcase various stages of their time at university.

7 Conclusion

In this thesis, I have aimed to provide an explanation of the research question: *how is NTNU represented on TikTok, and what can it teach us about formal and informal ways of communication on the platform?* Employing a combination of qualitative methods, this study has provided insights into how communication works on TikTok, focusing on how NTNU is presented in a formal and informal way. In this chapter, I offer a summary of the central findings building up to the conclusion. Finally, I consider the broader implications of the findings and considerations for future research.

7.1 How Is NTNU Represented on TikTok?

First, to provide a clear answer to the research question, it is essential to start by reflecting upon the established categories fundamental to the study. A summative approach was used to emphasize TikTok's multimodality efficiently when analyzing the content. Here, three central content categories across the three accounts were identified: promotional-, relatable-, and informative content, with supplementary formats displaying authenticity, humor, and trends resembling the platform's vernacular. The official account was considered using mainly a promotional and informative approach with minimal utilization of the supplementary formats, while the student-driven accounts were relatable in their communication, utilizing the detected formats on a larger scale.

Through group discussions, the influence of imagined affordances emerged, proving to be shaped by participants' prior experience with TikTok, its unique vernacular, and NTNU-related content. Both university and high school participants' perceptions were more positive toward content that they related to and were familiar with, resembling what they usually see on the platform. They were particularly drawn to content that resonated with their own experiences, finding humor and trends especially engaging. Common to the familiar content was its frequent display of a TikTok vernacular. This implies that someone who does not use TikTok may interpret the content differently. The impact of prior

experience became especially evident when comparing participants' perceptions like Harald, who had never used TikTok, to the rest. He was generally more favorable towards promotional content than the others, whereas the rest of the participants, who regularly used TikTok, shared different and more critical views. Harald's perspective suggested that a lack of familiarity with the platform vernacular may reduce expectations, caused by an absence of imagined affordances. Still, this interesting finding must be considered carefully as one individual perception alone cannot provide general perspectives.

Moreover, informal content resonates more with TikTok's vernacular by incorporating humor, trends, and authenticity, suggesting a higher demand for student-driven accounts' content. This aligned with previous research highlighting the importance of authenticity and relatability in driving engagement on social media platforms (Ask & Abidin, 2018). The use of humor in student-driven accounts, such as meme-like jokes, not only entertained but also built a sense of community by reflecting shared experiences and campus culture, such as internal rivalry, in an authentic way. For "outsiders" not being part of the NTNU student community, the content incorporating familiar trends seemed to have the strongest appeal among the high school students, as they related primarily through trend familiarity. Incorporating trending sounds and formats added appeal and relatability to the content, improving the participant's overall experience and contributing to more positive perceptions.

Although the student-driven content was initially described as building identity and community, some students noted that this feeling diminished over time and that the content was perhaps more relevant and important for newcomers at the university. This suggests that while the content's informality and use of vernacular affordances is appreciated, ongoing communication from these accounts needs to maintain engagement and relevance for all students. In addition, both student groups from Dragvoll and Gløshaugen noted that the "Gløshaugen-directed" studies were being favorably represented in official accounts content, potentially leading to misconceptions in NTNU's promotional work. This calls for a more balanced representation of all study areas on TikTok to ensure accurate perceptions and visibility.

In conclusion, NTNU is represented as engaging when producing informal content that aligns with the vernacular on TikTok and disrupting when using formal approaches. The findings have suggested that this representation was due to the expectations of the participants significantly influencing their engagement with content. From an Affordances perspective, the participants were initially attracted to TikTok due to its specific features and vernacular, shaping their expectations of the content they would encounter on the platform in the future and creating their imagined affordances.

7.2 Implications of Formal and Informal Communication

The findings in this study have offered valuable insights into the balance organizations and institutions must navigate between maintaining their professional identity and embracing the platform's typical content, characterized as TikTok's vernacular affordances. The preference for "unofficial" and informal student-driven content underscores the importance of aligning with TikTok's vernacular to effectively engage with the audience, as a further implication that organizations need to adapt their communication strategies to the platform's unique environment.

This study has discovered that while formal communication on TikTok was perceived as advertising, there are ways for NTNU and organizations to respond to such interpretations. In this study, disengagement arises from the perceptions of content being an advertisement rather than because of its aim of promotion. TikTok explicitly says, "Don't make ads, make TikToks" (TikTok, 2021), resonating with the implication that formal types of content creation are certainly not the way to go on TikTok; the platform vernacular has disqualified it. It has been suggested that participants in this study enjoyed content that related to their personal experiences and interests, in sync with the imagined affordances related to the platform. Hence, meeting imagined affordances in branding and promotion could be done by employing UGC with a personalized and organic approach to content creation, with promotional content that blends in with the rest of the creative and authentic content that utilizes the platform's vernacular (Abidin, 2020, p. 83; Chu et al. 2022, p. 13-14).

7.3 Future Research

By exploring the formal and informal ways of communication on TikTok, this study has addressed the research question and provided a deeper understanding of NTNU's presence and its implications for organizational branding on the platform. However, this study has limited itself to the perceptions of individuals within NTNU, meaning that these findings cannot be generalized independently. Although previous studies supported findings, the small sample size does not fully represent the broader student population or the users' overall perceptions on TikTok. Future research could expand on this study by conducting quantitative studies exploring the adaptability of TikTok strategies across diverse cultural contexts and demographic groups. Moreover, this study confirmed Gibbs et al.'s (2015) notion that the platform vernacular shapes user behavior. Accordingly, it was also revealed that other social media platforms, such as Instagram and YouTube, have adopted the success of the short-form video from TikTok. Future research could take a platform-sensitive approach to affordances, as suggested by Bucher and Helmond (2017, p. 30), to further explore how a platform's infrastructure expands as technological affordances get integrated into other platforms and services and how this affects the platform from which the features originated. In other words, future studies could employ comparative studies across multiple social media to reveal the dynamics between them and how they affect each other's platform vernacular.

Additionally, while affordance theory has provided valuable insights into how formal and informal communication is perceived on TikTok and ways of using these perceptions to organizations' advantage, these findings may not have long-term value due to the constantly evolving environment of digital platforms. Just like weather forecasts, predictions about platform affordances are more reliable in the short term. This suggests that affordances are not constant; for example, Instagram's curated images resonated with audiences for a long time until TikTok introduced a more raw and authentic approach (Sot, 2022, p. 1491). This implies that platform-specific affordances are also subject to change, complicating accurate assessments in the ever-changing digital landscape. Therefore, further research could also employ a cross-sectional approach resembling Zheng et al. (2021) but focusing on the evolution of platform vernacular and affordances and how audiences gauge with them over time.

Literature

- Abidin, C. (2020). Mapping Internet Celebrity on TikTok: Exploring Attention Economies and Visibility Labours. *Cultural Science Journal*, 12(1), pp. 77–103. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5334/csci.140>
- Akbari, M. (2015). Different Impacts of Advertising Appeals on Advertising Attitude for High and Low Involvement Products. *Global Business Review*, 16(3), pp. 478–493. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0972150915569936>
- Alhouti, S. & Johnson, C. M. (2022). Web of Lies: Drivers and Consequences of Social Media (In)Authenticity. *Journal of Promotion Management*, 28(8), pp. 1129–1164, DOI: 10.1080/10496491.2021.1955077
- Ask, K., & Abidin, C. (2018). My life is a mess: Self-deprecating relatability and collective identities in the memification of student issues. *Information, Communication & Society*, 21(6), pp. 834–850. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2018.1437204>
- Badham, M., Luoma-aho, V., & Valentini, C. (2024). A revised digital media–arena framework guiding strategic communication in digital environments. *Journal of Communication Management*, 28(2), pp. 226–246 (London, England). <https://doi.org/10.1108/JCOM-03-2023-0031>
- Basch, C. H., Fera, J., Pierce, I., & Basch, C. E. (2021). Promoting Mask Use on TikTok: Descriptive, Cross-sectional Study. *JMIR Public Health and Surveillance*, 7(2), e26392–e26392. <https://doi.org/10.2196/26392>
- Bucher, T., & Helmond, A. (2017). The affordances of social media platforms. In Burgess, J., Poell, T., & Marwick (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of social media*, (pp. 233–253). London and New York: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Bray, J. (2022, may 18th). *The Power of TikTok – Brand Building Through Micro-Storytelling*. GDS. <https://gdsgroup.com/insights/article/the-power-of-tiktok-brand-building-through-micro-storytelling/>
- Chu, S. C., Deng, T., & Mundel, J. (2022). The impact of personalization on viral behavior intentions on TikTok: The role of perceived creativity, authenticity, and need for uniqueness. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 30(1), pp. 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527266.2022.2098364>
- Cribb, M. (2023). The Power of the Voice in Facilitating and Maintaining Online Presence in the Era of Zoom and Teams. *The Electronic Journal for English as a Second Language (Berkeley, Calif.)*, 27(2). <https://doi.org/10.55593/ej.27106int>
- Croteau, D., & Hoynes, W. (2019). *Media/Society: Technology, industries, content, and users* (6th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Database for statistikk om høyere utdanning (DBH). (2023). *Database for statistikk om høyere utdanning: Registrerte studenter fordelt på alder*. <https://dbh.hkdir.no/tall-og-statistikk/statistikk-meny/studenter/statistikk>
- Dretsch, K. (2022, September 22nd). *What Gen Z and Millennials want on Instagram vs. TikTok*. Poole Thought Leadership. North Carolina State University. <https://poole.ncsu.edu/thought-leadership/article/what-gen-z-and-millennials-want-on-instagram-vs-tiktok/>
- Eriksson, M. K. (2021). Algorithmic Closeness in Mourning: Vernaculars of the Hashtag #grief on TikTok. *Social Media + Society* 7(3), pp. 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051211042396>
- Francis, T., & Hoefel, F. (2018). *True Gen': Generation Z and its implications for companies*. McKinsey & Company. <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/consumer-packaged-goods/our-insights/true-gen-generation-z-and-its-implications-for-companies>
- Galamgam, J., & Jia, J. L. (2021). "Accutane Check": Insights into youth sentiment toward isotretinoin from a TikTok trend. *Pediatric Dermatology*, 38(4), pp. 980–981. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pde.14660>
- Galea, M. (2024). Inspiration or infringement? Social media 'viral' trends: a case study on TikTok. *Journal of Intellectual Property Law & Practice*, 19(6), pp. 541–546. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jiplp/jpae038>
- Greenbaum, T. L. (1998). *The Handbook for Focus Group Research* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc., <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412986151>

- Gibbs, M., Meese, J., Arnold, M., Nansen, B., & Carter, M. (2015). #Funeral and Instagram: death, social media, and platform vernacular. *Information, Communication & Society*, 18(3), pp. 255–268. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2014.987152>
- Ha, L. & McCann, K. (2008). *International Journal of Advertising*, 27(4), pp. 569-592. DOI:10.2501/S0265048708080153
- Hallahan, K., Holtzhausen, D., van Ruler, B., Verčič, D., & Sriramesh, K. (2007). Defining Strategic Communication. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 1(1), pp. 3–35. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15531180701285244>
- Holstein, J. A., & Gubrium, J. F. (1995). *The Active Interview*. SAGE Publications, Inc., <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412986120>
- Hsieh, H.-F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(9), pp. 1277–1288. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732305276687>
- Hvitmyhr, B. L. & Vik, I. (2023, September 6th). *Slitasje, skandaler og TikTok: Slik forklares ny høyrebølge*. <https://www.vg.no/nyheter/innenriks/i/P4Aw8b/hoeyreboelge-i-skolevalg-og-paa-tiktok-hva-er-aarsaken>
- Ipsos. (2023, february 5th). *Ipsos SoMe-Tracker Q4'23*. <https://www.ipsos.com/nb-no/ipsos-some-tracker-q423>
- Johar, J. S., & Sirgy, M. J. (1991). Value-Expressive versus Utilitarian Advertising Appeals: When and Why to Use Which Appeal. *Journal of Advertising*, 20(3), pp. 23–33. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.1991.10673345>
- Katainen, A., & Heikkilä, R. (2020). Analysing the ways of participating in interview settings: young people's identity performances and social class in focus groups. *Qualitative Research: QR*, 20(5), pp. 649–666. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794119891634>
- Kujur, F. & Singh, S. (2020). Visual Communication and Consumer-Brand Relationship on Social Networking Sites - Uses & Gratifications Theory Perspective. *Journal of Theoretical and Applied Electronic Commerce Research*, 15(1), pp. 30-47. Universidad de Talca - Chile
- Leon, R.-D. (2021). Sharing emotions through social media: a comparative analysis between the private and public digital affect cultures. *International Review of Sociology*, 31(2), pp. 268–286. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03906701.2021.1947952>
- Li, Y., Guan, M., Hammond, P. & Berrey, L. E. (2021). Communicating COVID-19 information on TikTok: a content analysis of TikTok videos from official accounts featured in the COVID-19 information hub, *Health Education Research*, 36(3), pp. 261-271, <https://doi.org/10.1093/her/cyab010>
- Lookingbill, V. (2022). Examining nonsuicidal self-injury content creation on TikTok through qualitative content analysis. *Library & Information Science Research*, 44(4), 101199. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lisr.2022.101199>
- McDougall, J. (2023, September 4th). *The Power of Authenticity in Social Media: More than Just Aesthetics*. LinkedIn. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/power-authenticity-social-media-more-than-just-jennifer-mcdougall/>
- McQuail, D. & Deuze, M. (2020). *Media & Mass Communication Theory* (7th ed.). SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Nicolaou, C. (2022). Generations and Branded Content from and through the Internet and Social Media: Modern Communication Strategic Techniques and Practices for Brand Sustainability—The Greek Case Study of LACTA Chocolate. *Sustainability*, 15(1), 584, pp. 1-28. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15010584>
- Niu, X., Wang, X., & Liu, Z. (2021). When I feel invaded, I will avoid it: The effect of advertising invasiveness on consumers' avoidance of social media advertising. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 58, 102320. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2020.102320>
- North, D.C. (1990). *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*. Cambridge University Press; 1990.

- Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNUa). (n.d.). *Om NTNU*.
<https://www.ntnu.no/om>
- Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNUb). (n.d.). *NTNUs historie*.
<https://www.ntnu.no/ntnus-historie>
- O'Donnell, N., Jerin, S. I., & Mu, D. (2023). Using TikTok to Educate, Influence, or Inspire? A Content Analysis of Health-Related EduTok Videos. *Journal of Health Communication*, 28(8), pp. 539–551.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10810730.2023.2234866>
- Reade, J. (2021). Keeping it raw on the 'gram: Authenticity, relatability and digital intimacy in fitness cultures on Instagram. *New Media & Society*, 23(3), pp. 535–553. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819891699>
- Roth, W. M., & von Unger, H. (2018). Current perspectives on research ethics in qualitative research. *Forum, Qualitative Social Research*, 19(3).
<https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-19.3.3155>
- Schellewald, A. (2021). Communicative forms on TikTok: Perspectives from digital ethnography. *International journal of communication*, 15, pp. 1437–1457.
 Retrieved from <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/16414/3389>
- Schellewald, A. (2023). Understanding the popularity and affordances of TikTok through user experiences. *Media, Culture & Society*, 45(8), pp. 1568–1582.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/01634437221144562>
- Scherr, S. & Wang, K. (2021). Explaining the success of social media with gratification niches: Motivations behind daytime, nighttime, and active use of TikTok in China. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 124. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2021.106893>
- Schrøder, K. C. (2019). Audience Reception Research in a Post-broadcasting Digital Age. *Television & New Media*, 20(2), pp. 155–169.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476418811114>
- Serafini, F., & Reid, S. F. (2023). Multimodal content analysis: expanding analytical approaches to content analysis. *Visual Communication*, 22(4), pp. 623–649.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1470357219864133>
- Serrano, J., Papakyriakopoulos, O., & Hegelich, S. (2020, 7.-10. Juli). Dancing to the Partisan Beat: A First Analysis of Political Communication on TikTok. *Southampton '20: 12th ACM Conference on Web Science*, pp. 1–10.
<https://doi.org/10.1145/1122445.1122456>
- Siles, I., Valerio-Alfaro, L., & Meléndez-Moran, A. (2022). Learning to like TikTok . . . And not: Algorithm awareness as process. *New Media & Society*, pp. 1–17 <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448221138973>
- Şot, İ. (2022). Fostering intimacy on TikTok: A platform that 'listens' and 'creates a safe space'. *Media, Culture & Society*, 44(8), pp. 1490–1507. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01634437221104709>
- Sundar, S. S., & Limperos, A. M. (2013). Uses and Grats 2.0: New Gratifications for New Media. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 57(4), pp. 504–525.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08838151.2013.845827>
- Tan, A. S. L., & Weinreich, E. (2021). PuffBar: how do top videos on TikTok portray Puff Bars? *Tobacco Control*, 30(6), pp. 712–713.
<https://doi.org/10.1136/tobaccocontrol-2020-055970>
- Thang, C. J., Garate, D., Thang, J., Lipoff, J. B., & Barbieri, J. S. (2023). Short-Form Medical Media: A Multi-Platform Analysis of Acne Treatment Information in TikTok Videos, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts. *JMIR Dermatology*, 6, e48140–e48140, pp. 1–4 <https://doi.org/10.2196/48140>
- TikTok for Business (TikTok). (2021, September 6th). *What we mean when we say 'Don't Make Ads'*. TikTok. <https://www.tiktok.com/business/en-US/blog/what-we-mean-when-we-say-dont-make-ads>
- Tjora, A. (2020). *Kvalitative forskningsmetoder i praksis* (3rd Edition). Gyldendal akademisk.
- Universitetsavisa (UA). (2022, november 30th). *FRAMTIDAS CAMPUS: «Det er et sosialt skille mellom studentene på Dragvoll og de på Gløshaugen»*.

- <https://www.universitetsavisa.no/campus-campusprosjektet-dragvoll/det-er-et-sosialt-skille-mellom-studentene-pa-dragvoll-og-de-pa-gloshaugen/372226>
- Voorveld, H. A. M., van Noort, G., Muntinga, D. G., & Bronner, F. (2018). Engagement with Social Media and Social Media Advertising: The Differentiating Role of Platform Type. *Journal of Advertising*, 47(1), pp. 38–54. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2017.1405754>
- Wells, A. J. (2002). Gibson's Affordances and Turing's Theory of Computation. *Ecological Psychology*, 14(3), pp. 140–180. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15326969ECO1403_3
- Wolgemuth, J. R., Erdil-Moody, Z., Opsal, T., Cross, J. E., Kaanta, T., Dickmann, E. M., & Colomer, S. (2015). Participants' experiences of the qualitative interview: considering the importance of research paradigms. *Qualitative Research*, 15(3), pp. 351-372. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794114524222>
- Zailskaite-Jakste, L., & Kuvykaite, R. (2012). Implementation of Communication in Social Media by Promoting Studies at Higher Education Institutions. *Inžinerinė Ekonomika*, 23(2), pp. 174–188. <https://doi.org/10.5755/j01.ee.23.2.1550>
- Zhao, X., & Abidin, C. (2023). The "Fox Eye" Challenge Trend: Anti-Racism Work, Platform Affordances, and the Vernacular of Gesticular Activism on TikTok. *Social Media + Society*, 9(1), pp. 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051231157590>
- Zheng, D. X., Ning, A. Y., Levoska, M. A., Xiang, L., Wong, C., & Scott, J. F. (2021). Acne and social media: A cross-sectional study of content quality on TikTok. *Pediatric Dermatology*, 38(1), pp. 336–338. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pde.14471>
- Zulli, D., & Zulli, D. J. (2022). Extending the Internet meme: Conceptualizing technological mimesis and imitation publics on the TikTok platform. *New Media & Society*, 24(8), pp. 1872–1890. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820983603>

Tables

Table 1: Examples extracted from template for content analysis

Videos		@ntnu	@ntnusamfunn	@ntnuteknologi
1	Main message	Informative video, displayed authentically, about the best reading places at NTNU Dragvoll	Relatable, using humor to demonstrate the fact that life as a student is hard financially.	Informative video for recruitment: to provide insight and information about the Geomatics Engineering course.
	Visuals	The message begins with the text "Where is the best place to study?" followed by an arrow pointing to the side. It then shows a girl who is apparently a student and who demonstrates the message in various areas of the Dragvoll Campus. It is also written that she is located at the NTNU Dragvoll campus. Caption/description: «Part 1 Where can you find the best place to study?»	First it shows an image of a female student with a pizza bowl in her hand winking at the camera with the text "If I won the lottery, I wouldn't tell anyone", and if you swipe to the left, a new image of a fridge filled with food appears with the new text "But it would be signs".	There are nine slides/images that follow each other (one by one, as you swipe left on the screen). The background of all of them is blue, with white text and icons. On the first one, it says "Geomatics Engineer – 3-year bachelor", with icons showing a large globe with other smaller icons representing, among other things, signals, sun, gears, windmills, etc. On the next slide, it says "I'm obsessed with this".
	Audio	"Upbeat" background music. Voiceover in the videos talking about how enriching and meaningful the last semester has been, how much she has grown to love student life, and how important all the relationships she has formed through the program have been for her.	CrazyToastCat «sad hamster meme sound», sad violin	None Mallorie "I am obsessed with this" A feminine voice saying "People think I'm obsessed with this, but I'm okay with it, I AM obsessed with it. And uhm, I think this is an obsession that doesn't hurt anyone.", cinematic piano music in the background
	Trends/devices	None	hamster meme, Trending sound	Trending sound, picture-swipe
	Engagement metrics: Insights (likes/ views/ comments/ published etc.)	39 likes, 4142 views, 0 comments, 1 saved, 1 shared, 28. march 2023	141 likes, 4031 views, 0 comments, 5 saved, 10 shared, 4. February 2024	25 likes, 1273 views, 12 comments, 0 saved, 0 shared, 22. February 2024
	Length	11 sec (short)	7 sec (short)	Undefined due to picture-swipe function

Note: The cutouts are from different parts of the template, and cut-outs have been done according to length. Many of the sections(videos) were too long to include and, therefore, difficult to assess as directly.

Table 2: Example extracted from template from transcript

		På hvilken måte?
984	E2: Ehh, de, sånn som det med	
985	kjønnspoeng og sånn da. Da lager det mye en vits ut av hvor viktig det er å... Dette med poeng er da. At man bytter kjønn for å få det til, på en måte. Og at, det, det er liksom en annen vinkling da. Enn det NTNU sin hovedkonto går for. Eller det viser mer hva NTNU har å tilby, kontra det og ...	
986	E3: De bruker jo også trender som er brukt overalt på TikTok da. Som er populære. Og da er det jo raskere, kanskje at man blir litt mer interessert når man ser dem. Egentlig.	
		Hva slags trender har dere sett da?
987	E3: jeg tenkte litt på det når, på Instagram, så er det jo sånn memes	
988	og sånn. Den siste var veldig lik, eg, en sånn type ting. Med en sånn GIF-klistremerkeaktig person som prater og så er det en, liksom, vits lagt opp på. Og veldig sånn den vloggen og typ av «en dag på NTNU» ja, eh.	
		Det er noe du også har sett før?
989	E3: Ja.	
990	Hva tenker du E1? Er det noen trender?	
991	E1: Det er jo litt det at de bruker de lydene. Det er jo liksom en trend	

Note: the sequences in the form of reference points are the numbers to the left.

Table 3: Example extracted from template with empirical codes from transcript

	Måten man svarer på. «Ja, det visste man jo ikke om Trondheim.» (ironisk)
Det er ikke liksom bare de kjedelige sånne reklamevideoer. (257-262)	S3: Det er ikke liksom bare de kjedelige sånne reklamevideoer. Så er det ikke bare sånn dårlig produksjon. Nei, her må man liksom se den der, den kul by. Så kan det kanskje hjelpe på at det finnes andre videoer der ute man kan få informasjon fra. V: Ser dere spesifikke trender eller elementer som skiller seg ut i de tre videoene dere så? S2: Kanskje den mikrofon-trenden. Jeg føler det er en skikkelig trend nå å gå rundt.
Det er litt variasjon i hva de legger ut, liksom. (251-256)	S3: Så det er sånn, selv om alle handler jo liksom om å formidle at "søk på NTNU", liksom. Her er det bra. Så det er liksom forskjellige typer videoer. S4: Det var bra at den var litt morsom, den nummer to liksom. Den var jo litt underholdende å se på. Det er litt variasjon i hva de legger ut, liksom. Så man får det brede aspektet. Eller man fanger liksom flere, kanskje.
(første video) Jeg skulle si at det er kanskje ikke det man har "lyst til å se" (274-279)	Så denne var mer som annonseformat? S3: Ja, du tenker med en gang at det er en annonse, ja. S1: Jeg skulle si at det er kanskje ikke det man har "lyst til å se" når man går på TikTok. Det er ikke det man har lyst til å se. Det er kanskje litt sånn, ok, der kommer en sånn, jeg la det meg helt grei, og så blar man videre. Ikke noe interesse i den.
Vi har jo alle sagt at det kanskje er noe sånn, noe morsomt. (280-284)	Hva man har lyst til å se? S1: Vi har jo alle sagt at det kanskje er noe sånn, noe morsomt. Og kanskje noe sånn som den tredje videoen vi så der, så er det en sånn ... Han var litt artig liksom, sånn ja, "hvis du har satt på ræva i tre år", så kommer han jo med, "begynne å studere liksom", "ikke være en slabbedask".

Note: empirical codes and reference points are located on the left, and cut-outs from the context within the transcript are located on the right.

Attachments

A1: Information- and consent letter for participants

Informasjonsskriv

Ønsker du å delta i forskningsprosjektet "NTNU på TikTok»?

Formål

Dette er et spørsmål til deg om å delta i et forskningsprosjekt hvor formålet er å undersøke hvordan NTNU formidles på TikTok og hvordan innholdet deres på plattformen fortolkes av studenter og VGS-elever. I dette skrivet gis informasjon om målene for prosjektet og hva deltakelse vil innebære for deg.

Hvem er ansvarlig for forskningsprosjektet?

Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelige universitet (NTNU) er ansvarlig for prosjektet.

Hvorfor får du spørsmål om å delta?

Du blir spurt om å delta fordi du er mellom 18-30 år, tilsvarende aldersgruppen som utgjør størst andel av brukere på sosiale media, i tillegg til at du enten er universitetsstudent på NTNU eller elev over 18 år på VGS. Begge anliggende antas å kunne gi verdifulle implikasjoner om strategisk kommunikasjon på sosiale medier, da TikTok en populær sosial plattform blant utvalgsgruppen. Du som er student/elev befinner deg i den mest sentrale gruppen av brukere på TikTok (18-24 år), og ansees å påvirkes av/ og påvirke kontoer som undersøkes.

Hva innebærer det for deg å delta?

Deltakelse innebærer at du møter (til gitt tidspunkt og sted) for intervju sammen med en liten gruppe andre studenter/elever, for å diskutere NTNUs konto og deres tilknyttede studentdrevne kontoer på TikTok. Intervjuet estimeres å ta mellom 1 til 1,5 time. Din deltakelse og bidrag anonymiseres, og lydopptak vil slettes umiddelbart etter de har blitt kodet og analysert. Som takk for ditt og de andre studentenes oppmøte, vil det også være kakeservering på møtestedet.

Frivillig deltakelse

Det er frivillig å delta i prosjektet. Hvis du velger å delta, kan du når som helst trekke samtykket tilbake uten å oppgi noen grunn.

Ditt personvern – hvordan dine opplysninger oppbevares og brukes

Opplysningene om deg vil kun bli brukt til formålene som fremstilt i dette skrivet. Opplysninger behandles konfidensielt og i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

Jeg som forsker er pålagt av Sikt å behandle personopplysninger i tråd med retningslinjene for informasjonssikkerhet og lagringsguider ved behandlingsansvarlig institusjon NTNU. Det innebærer ansvar for at vilkårene for personvernforordningen artikkel 5.1. d) riktighet, 5. 1. f) integritet og konfidensialitet, og 32 sikkerhet er oppfylt.

Hva skjer med personopplysningene dine når forskningsprosjektet avsluttes?

Prosjektet vil etter planen avsluttes 6. juni 2024, og datamaterialet med dine opplysninger vil være slettet innen denne dato.

Hva gir rettigheten til å behandle personopplysninger om deg?

Dine opplysninger om deg behandles basert på ditt samtykke.

Dine rettigheter

Så lenge du kan identifiseres i datamaterialet, har du rett til innsyn, retting, sletting og å sende klage til Datatilsynet.

Kontaktinformasjon for spørsmål

Kontaktperson: Vilde Cathea Normann (Masterstudent)

Telefon: +47 456 18 655

Mail: vildecn@stud.ntnu.no

Samtykkeerklæring

Jeg har mottatt og forstått informasjon om prosjektet «NTNU på TikTok» og har fått anledning til å stille spørsmål. Ved å takke ja til deltakelse samtykker du til:

Å delta i gruppeintervju med andre studenter (fokusgrupper).

At Vilde Cathea Normann kan behandle de aktuelle opplysningene oppgitt av meg til prosjektet.

Jeg samtykker til at min stemme tas opptak av og behandles frem til prosjektet er avsluttet.

(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato) ved fysisk møte:

A2: Interview guide for focus groups

Intervjuguide til fokusgrupper: masterprosjekt om TikTok

Om NTNUs tilstedeværelse på TikTok og studentenes oppfatning

Innledning:

Deler ut samtykkeskjema ved oppmøte, og venter til de har fylt ut med introduksjon.

Velkommen og introduksjon av deltakerne.

Hei og velkommen skal dere være! Mitt navn er Wilde og jeg er, som dere sikkert har fått med dere, masterstudent på mitt siste semester her på NTNU. I dag skal vi snakke litt om kommunikasjon på TikTok og i den anledning særlig i forbindelse med NTNU. Men først tenker jeg at kan vi ta en aldri så liten introduksjonsrunde slik at vi alle kan bli litt bedre kjent i forkant av diskusjonen. Så da kan vi gå i klokkeretning (velger ut en student) hvor alle kan si sitt studieprogram, navn, alder og noen tanker om det å være student på NTNU (avdekke ekstremt positive/negative holdninger som kan ha noe å si for svarene).

Etter runden:

Supert! Nå som vi alle har litt bedre kjennskap til hvem vi snakker med, skal dere selvsagt også få en kjapp oppfriskning i hva dere faktisk er med på og deres rettigheter i den forbindelse.

Kort forklaring av forskningsprosjektets formål og problemstilling.

Hovedmålet med masteroppgaven er å dykke inn i kommunikasjonen rettet mot studenter på TikTok og forstå hvordan studenter oppfatter denne kommunikasjonen. Mitt fokus er avgrenset til innhold på NTNUs offisielle TikTok-konto og de studentdrevne kontoene, og det er derfor det kun vil bli tre kontoer, @ntnu, @ntnusamfunn og @ntnueknologi, som presenteres for dere idag. TikTok er en av de nyere, men også mektigste sosiale medieplattformene, spesielt blant yngre generasjoner. Det er derfor en vesentlig arena for studentengasjement, og det er essensielt å forstå hvordan universiteter og studenter kommuniserer for å effektivt nå ut til studenter/medstudenter og hvordan deres oppfatninger av denne kommunikasjonen formes.

Personvern – om datainnsamling og ivaretagelse

Angående datainnsamling og personvern vil det først og fremst tas lydopptak, men navn samles inn til noen som helst formål i selve prosjektet. Navn vil likevel kunne komme til å nevnes i lydopptaket, men vil bli fjernet så fort dataene er transkribert og analysert. Deres deltakelse og bidrag anonymiseres dermed fullstendig, og lydopptak vil slettes umiddelbart etter de har blitt analysert og anonymisert. Dere har rett til å trekke dere når som helst, enten nå eller etterpå om dere skulle angre deres deltakelse. Da vil alt dere sier/deres bidrag i prosjektet bli slettet. Har dere da før vi starter noen spørsmål angående dette?

Oppvarmings spørsmål:

1. Hvordan begynte dere å bruke, om dere bruker, TikTok og hva slags innhold interesserer dere mest?
 - a. Oppfølging:
 - i. Hvor ofte bruker dere TikTok?
 - ii. Er TikTok deres foretrukne SoMe-plattform (sosialt medium), eller er det andre dere foretrekker? Hvorfor/ hvorfor ikke?

Tema - Del 1: NTNUs tilstedeværelse på TikTok:

2. Har NTNU sin TikTok dukket opp i deres «feed»/innholdsstrøm? I så fall hva er inntrykket?

Vise videoer (to eller tre videoer fra NTNUs konto). Viser to ganger for å sikre at de får med seg innholdet.

3. Hvordan opplever dere innholdet? Har dere sett lignende innhold før og kan dere kjenner dere igjen?
4. Ser dere spesifikke trender eller elementer som skiller seg ut?
5. Hvordan opplever dere NTNUs tilstedeværelse på TikTok i forhold til andre plattformer f.eks. Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube?
 - a. Oppfølging
 - i. Hva tror dere er formålet med å ha en offisiell konto for NTNU på TikTok? Hva tror dere forsøkes å kommuniseres?

Tema – Del 2: NTNUs studentdrevne kontoer:

6. Har dere sett studentkontoene @ntnusamfunn @ntnuteknologi?

Vise videoer (to eller tre videoer fra kontoene). Viser to ganger for å sikre at de får med seg innholdet

7. Hvordan opplever dere innholdet? Har dere sett lignende innhold før, kan dere kjenne dere igjen?

8. Ser dere spesifikke trender eller elementer som skiller seg ut?

a. Oppfølging

- i. Hva tror dere er formålet med å ha tilknyttede TikTok-kontoer som disse i tillegg til en offisiell for NTNU? Hva tror dere forsøkes å kommuniseres?

Avrundingsspørsmål:

9. Nå har dere sett innlegg fra NTNUs offisielle konto på TikTok i forhold til de tilknyttede kontoene. Hva er deres inntrykk, hvilke eventuelle likheter og forskjeller ser dere hos disse? Ser dere noen tydelige forskjeller i tilnærmingen til disse kontoene?

a. Oppfølging

- i. Hva tenker dere om at NTNU finnes på TikTok? (Deres tilstedeværelse på appen)
- ii. Opplever dere innholdet som underholdende eller verdifullt? På hvilken måte isåfall?

10. Har dere noen generelle tanker utover det som ble tatt opp i dag som dere kunne tenke dere å si noe om?

Avslutning:

Da har vi diskutert innholdet, og jeg sier meg godt fornøyd med innspillene som kom idag, . Tusen takk for deltakelse og bidragene deres.

Informasjon om videre fremgang i forskningsprosessen og tilbakemeldingsrutiner.



 **NTNU**

Norwegian University of
Science and Technology