



Replicating the Atmosphere of a Gift Shop into the Digital Space

What makes good TikTok marketing good?

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis was commissioned by a gift & design shop in Amsterdam called By Popular Demand. By Popular Demand wanted to have a TikTok account of their own, accompanied with successful content to gain visibility in younger customer groups. The objective was to create successful marketing content for the business while figuring out what kind of content TikTok users engage with from businesses.

Studies into successful businesses on TikTok were made in addition to studies into digital marketing theories, digital marketing, social media marketing and TikTok marketing. New business marketing content for By Popular Demand was created with the help of marketing theories and TikTok case studies. The results were analysed with the help of TikTok statistics, confirming the validity of the marketing theories. The theories as well as the created videos helped understand what makes TikTok marketing successful, leading to the creation of engaging TikTok videos for By Popular Demand.

The findings show that business marketing content on TikTok should resemble most of all the other content on TikTok. Entertaining, authentic and trend-following. Advertising on TikTok shouldn't look like advertising, it should be fun and engaging, like the other popular content on TikTok.

Key words: marketing, tiktok, statistics, brand personality, perceived similarity, soft-sell, hard-sell

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1 INTRODUCTION

With the world turning more digital each day, more and more importance is placed on businesses' online marketing. Social media marketing is growing as more people shop online and buying processes are starting from the internet. So what makes businesses stand out in social media apps, specifically TikTok, where genuine human connection and entertainment is its core purpose? Finding out what makes good online marketing, specifically on the social media platform TikTok, good, is complex. The same marketing rules that work on most social medias do not work on TikTok. TikTok craves authentic, entertaining human moments. How can a business fit into that while still promoting itself? The atmosphere in the physical shop can be amazing, with laughter being heard in between aisles, but how is that replicated into the digital space as an engaging and attractive business TikTok account?

The thesis begins with Chapter 2 further explaining the thesis topic, its objectives, concepts and applicable marketing theories. The commissioner By Popular Demand will also be introduced here. Explaining the working methods and the thesis process wraps up the chapter. Chapter 3 will introduce case studies relevant to the thesis topic, as well as By Popular Demand's competitor It's a Present!. The thesis will continue with the analysis of the case studies in Chapter 4 with the help of applicable marketing theories presented in Chapter 2. The results of the analysis of the case studies will be used to create TikTok content for By Popular Demand. 6 of those TikTok videos created for By Popular Demand will be analysed with the help of analytics. Based on information gathered from the case studies, the marketing theories and the statistics of the created TikTok videos, recommendations to creating successful TikTok content will be presented in Chapter 5.

2 THESIS PLAN

2.1 Thesis topic

In a world where the importance of an online presence, whether it be of people or businesses, is growing every day, no one wants to risk going unseen. Especially for businesses, being seen and staying relevant throughout the years is essential for long-term success. The topic of this thesis has to do with exactly that: Creating successful social media marketing on a currently relevant platform, TikTok.

The thesis will delve in social media marketing, especially TikTok-marketing, the importance of it for businesses, successful TikTok-marketing content and the statistics behind them. By creating new marketing content for the commissioner, new insight will be gain into the statistics of the content and how it ties into having a successful online presence. Ultimately helping to understand how to create good marketing content on TikTok.

Creating TikTok content has been a want for the commissioner. The physical store gets plenty of compliments and is liked by many and coming into the store is a fun and positive experience for people. Replicating that to the online space would be ideal. The business currently uses Instagram as their social media marketing platform but wishes to be more seen by younger generations. This would attract more customers to the store, ultimately leading to higher sales revenue. TikTok being one of the most used social media apps by the Generation Z (Statista, 2024a) and the 5th most popular social media app worldwide (Statista, 2025), it is a good platform to focus on for marketing purposes.

Kotler, Armstrong, Harris and He (2020, pp. 519–520) remark that with the growing usage of online spaces, the number of online purchases is also growing. In the UK over 40 million people make regular purchases online, and in the US the amount is 50% of households. Growing online purchases lead businesses to also market online, and social media marketing has its advantages: interactivity, speed, engagement capabilities and cost-effectiveness. Engaging social media

marketing campaigns can have a noticeable impact on the business, and because of that it is worthwhile for businesses to pay attention to it. (Kotler et al. 2020, p. 519–520, 525–528.)

Reviews, recommendations, perceived popularity all play a big part in the buying decision, especially with younger generations. The more the business is in the online space with successful content, the more customers think of buying the company's products/services. Being present online is even seen as a must in today's market (Botelho Pires et al. 2024, ch.4).

2.2 Thesis objective, purpose and research questions

The objective of the thesis is to create successful marketing content for the commissioner. This includes finding out what makes social media marketing content successful and figuring out what type of business marketing content users engage with on social media platforms, in order to create successful content for the store.

The thesis objective formulated as a question is therefore: *“How to create successful marketing content for the store By Popular Demand?”*

The sub-questions of the thesis objective are: *“What makes TikTok marketing content successful?”* and *“What kind of business marketing content users engage with?”*.

Knowing how to create successful marketing content for the commissioner not only helps the commissioner, but also gives plenty of insight on how to create successful and engaging content for other similar businesses. It helps with understanding the larger picture with social media marketing and current customer behaviour. Having a good overview on the multiple different aspects that affect customer decisions is important for any business. Researching previous successful campaigns/behaviour from businesses on TikTok is also key. Knowing what type of marketing content users engage with directly helps with making content and ultimately leads to more visibility, engagement and lastly store visits.

2.3 Concepts

The main concepts relating to the thesis topic will be explained in this section. The thesis commissioner will also be presented in this chapter.

2.3.1 Digital marketing

Digital marketing is, as its name suggests, marketing in the digital space. It is engaging customers with the help of digital content: photographs, videos and even music. In today's world, where 46% of the world's population is online (Kotler et al., 2020, p. 519) and the market leader social network currently has 3 billion monthly active users (Statista, 2025), digital marketing is definitely not something to overlook. It has even become "the fastest-growing form of marketing" (Kotler, 2020, p. 517). Digital marketing has evolved into an important part of a business' success: more than half of all US retail sales were either made online or were influenced by the internet (Kotler, 2020, p. 520).

Online marketing is a great, low-cost and efficient way to share marketing content. Unlike traditional marketing, digital marketing can target specific groups more easily, and offer lots of flexibility. Digital marketing strategies can be adjusted quickly to better fit the current online space, following trends and conversations. It makes online marketing is not only a good way to reach customers, but also a good way to create community on social media. Customers nowadays love looking up reviews and recommendations about products before purchase, and social media makes sharing that information easy. All in all, having successful digital marketing content can make the buying decision much easier, which leads to more sales. (Kotler, 2020, pp. 518–520.)

Botelho Pires, Duarte Santos and Veiga Pereira (2024, ch.1) remind how digital marketing allows for worldwide visibility for businesses, a possibility for going international and gaining new audiences. A store in the Netherlands, could reach and find new customers for example from a small town in China or Argentina (Botelho Pires et al., 2024, ch.1).

Companies reach out to customers with the help of different online platforms, often using multiple different platforms, with the hope of being seen by the most amount of people, solving customer needs and facilitating buying processes (Kotler et al., 2020, pp. 23–25, 519–520). Being seen by multiple people online who are travelling to the city where the store is located, could increase their want to visit the store. Familiarity with a brand/store will eventually lead to more purchases (Kotler, 2020, p. 578).

There are many different types of digital marketing, each of them working well for different situations and needs. According to Gustavsen (2024) those categories are affiliate marketing, content marketing, email marketing, marketing analytics, mobile marketing, pay-per-click, search engine optimization and social media marketing. This thesis will be focused on social media marketing since it is the most relevant to the thesis objective.

2.3.2 Social media marketing

Social media marketing is the type of digital marketing that online users are the most familiar with. It is the most visible type of digital marketing, including advertising with social media posts, campaigns and everything else done via social media channels. However, social media marketing is much more than just uploading generic marketing content on the business' profile. (Gustavsen, 2024.)

Creating content is of course one of the main parts of social media marketing, and while it seems simple, it involves many different moving parts. Hinson (2024, ch.1) mentions multiple, including: the audience, consistency, storytelling, engagement and analytics amongst others. With the help of analytics, it is possible to understand exactly what the audience is liking. This then also pinpoints areas of improvement, which with time and constant adjusting and analyzing helps improve the content (Hinson, 2024, ch.1). Building strategies on how to continue based on the analytics from previous content uploads helps (Gustavsen, 2024).

Analytics is an important tool in understanding what the businesses audience wants to see from them. Statistics from the created TikTok content for By Popular

Demand will be analyzed. Along with other tools and theories, it will be useful with creating successful content.

Kotler et al. (2020, p. 24) describes online social media as a digital home of sorts, where various information and moments in life can be shared, helping people to connect with one another. This allows marketers to join the discussions and link relevant brands/products to ongoing conversations (Kotler et al., 2020, p. 24). Even the smallest action, such as leaving a comment or like, can make a difference when the timing and space is correct and relevant (Hinson, 2024, ch.1). Examples of different social media success stories will be mentioned in Chapter 3 TikTok case studies. Choosing the correct social media platform for the company is important in order to best reach their target customer group (Hinson, 2024, ch.1). Even though social media platforms Facebook, Instagram, Whatsapp, X (formerly Twitter) and TikTok all have an impressive amount of users, the age of the users differ strongly from platform to platform (Statista, 2024b). If the company's target customer group would for example be Baby Boomers, X (Twitter) and TikTok would not be the best platform to reach them. And for younger Gen Z customers, reaching them would be easiest in platforms like Instagram and TikTok (Statista, 2024b).

2.3.3 TikTok

TikTok is a social media platform that focuses mainly on short-form video content. It is one of the most used social media apps by the Generation Z (Statista, 2024a) and the 5th most popular social media app worldwide (Statista, 2025). It started in China in 2016 as an app called Douyin and gained worldwide popularity in 2018 when merging with another social media platform, Musical.ly. That brought the music aspect to TikTok, which together with the video content made a winning combination. In such a short time, TikTok has already amassed over 2 billion users worldwide in 2024. One billion users TikTok reached in around 3 years. In comparison, market leader Facebook took 4 years to reach 1 billion users, and Instagram took around 6 years. This makes TikTok one of the fastest-growing brands in the world. (Yellowhead, 2025.)

The fast growth is not the only area where TikTok is breaking records. TikTok was the most downloaded app of 2022 and has reached the list of most downloaded apps for the past decade even before its recent release. TikTok has a higher engagement rate than other major platforms, and 90% of its users use the app daily. (Yellowhead, 2025.)

TikTok is a social media app that relies heavily on music and different sounds. Merging with Musical.ly allowed users to use popular songs on their video content, and soon one of the main types of content on TikTok would be dance videos. Users around the world would record themselves dancing to their favourite songs. With time other types of content would start to come in too, but the importance of sounds and music stayed. Users would record their own videos, and the sound in those videos could be reused in different videos. For example jokes, questions, funny clips of conversations or just background noises of a video could be used as the sound of a completely different video. Some of these sounds become very popular, creating trends inside the app. Following these trends helps making the content more successful. Knowing the importance of TikTok sounds is essential for creating successful content. (Digital twenty four, n.d..)

All in all, TikTok is full of impressive statistics and is growing in such a speed that might leave current market leaders behind in a couple years' time. Marketing on TikTok is at its best creative and authentic, reaching a wide audience. It is the chosen social media platform, and its main user group will be kept in mind when creating social media content for By Popular Demand. It is essential to be familiar with the platform, its users, and the style of communicating in the platform to best reach the desired audience.

2.3.4 By Popular Demand

The thesis commissioner, By Popular Demand is a gift & design store located right in the centre of Amsterdam. A big space equipped with large floor-to-ceiling windows in a high-traffic crossing. Due to the good location and eye-catching window displays, By Popular Demand gets a steady flow of customers all year long. The store is liked by both locals and tourists for its large variety of fun, quirky

gift items but also high-end design products. It is common to hear customers giggle at products in between store shelves. With free gift packaging, By Popular Demand becomes a popular spot for getting gifts for any occasion.

The product offering is vast, and changes often. This means there is something new to look at with almost every visit. The store sells everything from baby clothes, kitchen supplies, stationery to high-end watches and wallets. The sold brands vary from big global companies to products crafted by small businesses. New potential best-seller products are scouted on various different fairs around the world as well as online. By Popular Demand stands out from the rest of its competitors by having new and original products sold.

By Popular Demand has an online store, a Facebook-page as well as an Instagram-account. The Instagram page is regularly updated and has currently 1747 followers. However, most of the time and resources go to the upkeep and care of the actual brick-and-mortar store of By Popular Demand. The store can get really busy with customers, and after all the store-related tasks, not much time and resources are left for the online presence of the brand. The business also sees the physical store as their main priority. Because of this for example the product offering on the businesses online store is limited. Despite acknowledging the brick-and-mortar store being the main priority for the business at the moment, there is a want for a TikTok account. This would help gain attention from younger customer groups as well as international audiences. The TikTok content would be done mostly during a working day, in between other tasks. Filming for a TikTok video will be put on hold if there are customers waiting. This will be also kept in mind when creating content for the company's TikTok account.

Since tourists are a big part of the customer group at By Popular Demand, it will need to be kept in mind with the creation of content. Content could be made to specifically cater to international watchers. For example the known dutch little rabbit Nintje, also known as Miffy, is wildly popular also in Japan. A Miffy plush has won the Grand Prize in the Imported Products Popularity Contest at the 100th Tokyo International Gift Show Autumn 2025 (Spacejoy.tokyo, 2025). The specific

winner Miffy plush from Just Dutch is sold at By Popular Demand. Creating content with it could possibly attract international customers who are looking for the specific plush in Amsterdam.

2.4 Marketing theories applicable

Theories that are relevant to the thesis topic and applicable when creating social media content will be explained in this sub-chapter. These theories will later on be used to analyze TikTok case studies and By Popular Demand's competitor's TikTok videos, in addition to being used for the creation of TikTok videos.

2.4.1 Brand personality

Several research have been done on the links between a brand having human-like characteristics, described as a brand personality by Aaker (1997, p. 347), and positive customer associations. Aaker created a framework which consists of 5 dimensions, which are sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness (Aaker, 1997, p. 347). The dimensions are described with different facets, for example down-to-earth, honest, wholesome and cheerful describe sincerity, and daring, spirited, imaginative and up-to-date describe excitement (Aaker, 1997, p. 352). While Aaker's research was mostly created to develop a reliable and generalizable way to measure and categorize a brand's personality, Aaker's study led to other important research between the links of brand personality and customer behavior (Aaker, 1997, p. 347; Dahl, 2021, p. 58).

One research found positive connections between a brand having a strong personality and brand loyalty. Attractiveness, distinctiveness and self-expressiveness were also all found to be important aspects to a brand personality. These findings highlight the importance of unique, customer-centric marketing. It increases brand identification, which in turn increases brand loyalty. Customers like their brands to feel human and relatable and after finding a brand that they connect with, they tend to have long-term relationships with the brand. Having a strong brand personality also helps with differentiating from other similar brands.

Creating such a personality is difficult with traditional marketing, as it requires a lot of time and high repetition, making it very expensive. However, on social media platforms this is much more attainable. Creating content for social media doesn't have to cost anything, and high repetition is easy to attain with small frequent updates. Social media users are even able to communicate and interact with brands just like they would with any other accounts, which highly increases the "human" feel of the brand. (Kim et al., 2001, pp. 195–205; Dahl, 2021, pp. 59–70.)

The presence of human-like attributes, such as relatability and humor will be searched in the TikTok case studies in later chapters, as well as in By Popular Demand's competitors' content. Brand personality is also a key aspect that will be included in the creation of By Popular Demand's own TikTok videos.

2.4.2 Soft-sell and hard-sell

Okazaki et al. (2010) researched the impact of soft-sell and hard-sell marketing techniques on customer behavior and attitudes (Okazaki et al., 2010, p. 5). Soft-selling was categorized by "dimensions of feeling, implicitness and image" whereas hard-sell was categorized by "thinking, explicitness and fact" (Okazaki et al., 2010, p. 9). Meaning that soft-sell advertising is more based on creating an atmosphere, a feeling with the promotion being more subtle. Hard-sell is more direct with clear promotion intentions, usually based on facts and statistics about the product. The study researched effects such as attitude, believability, irritation and buying intent of soft-sell and hard-sell advertising content on customers (Okazaki et al., 2010, p. 17). The research results show that hard-sell advertisement was found to be more irritating but also more believable than soft-sell ads (Okazaki et al., 2010, p. 17). Soft-sell advertisement on the other hand created a more positive attitude to the ad (Okazaki et al., 2010, p. 17).

Neither advertisement techniques are inherently bad nor harmful. Hard-sell promotion works well when the purpose is to convince the customer of a superior product, whereas soft-sell might be a better approach for creating generally positive customer attitudes (Okazaki et al., 2010, p. 17). For social media marketing,

creating positive impressions is key, as it increases engagement. Therefore, soft-sell approaches are found to be more effective when promoting on online spaces (Dahl, 2021, p. 60).

2.4.3 Perceived similarity

It is generally thought that the more expertise one has, the more positively their message will be received. That for example a message of skincare practices by a dermatologist will be received with higher trust and positivity than a similar message made by a bartender. However, there is a theory that contradicts this: the perceived similarity theory.

Perceived similarity means the phenomenon where watchers prefer content that reflect their own experiences or that are made by people similar to the watchers themselves rather than experts (Dahl, 2021, p. 170). Paek et al. (2011, p. 179) studied how viewers' attitudes changed depending on if the video producer was a similar peer or an expert. The research results lined up with perceived similarity, and also introduced three well-known classical theoretical frameworks to further explain the results and why they happened (Paek et al., 2011, p. 179; Dahl, 2021, p. 170). These theories are Kelman's source attractiveness model, the social influence theory and the reference group theory. All these models are relevant to the thesis topic and will be explained shortly below.

According to Kelman's source attractiveness model, watchers, message recipients, react more positively to messages given by people similar to themselves (Kelman, 1961, pp. 68–70; Paek et al., 2011, p. 164; Dahl, 2021, p. 170). High schoolers relate more to other students than for example elderly people, and thus evaluate their message in a more positive light (Kelman, 1961, pp. 68–70; Paek et al., 2011, p. 164).

Social influence theory means the tendency of young people to behave and make decisions in similar ways than their peers (Moscovici, 1985, as cited in Dahl, 2021, p. 170). This happens because of a need for conformity, common in young

people (Moscovici, 1985, as cited in Dahl, 2021, p. 170). The social influence theory therefore applies more to younger audiences (Dahl, 2021, p. 170).

Lastly the reference group theory by Sherif and Sherif (1964, as cited in Paek et al., 2011, p. 164 and Dahl, 2021, p. 170) explains that perceived similarity is how members of a group recognize a person as being part of their reference group. And once the group recognizes someone as “their own” it influences their attitudes towards the message (Paek et al., 2011, p. 164).

2.5 Working methods and data

The data used in this thesis will be pre-existing data: the various case studies as well as the analytics collected from the TikTok videos created for the company. The presented case studies will be analysed with the help of the marketing theories presented at the beginning of this thesis. For the analytics, TikTok offers thorough statistics for every piece of posted content, including information such as video view count, retention rate and traffic sources. The engagement rate of the videos will also be calculated (Brand24, 2024). The information will be analysed and used to create the next content. Repeating this process will lead to understanding what works best in this specific environment, allowing for the business to create successful TikTok content.

Pre-existing data, also called secondary data, is information that already exists, possible results from other studies. Using secondary data is more time- and cost-efficient than primary data, and Kotler et al. (2020, 115) also mentions how using secondary data can provide information that would otherwise be impossible to collect. Using pre-existing data in this thesis allows for a more thorough analysis into successful TikTok accounts as well as the created TikTok video content and their statistics, which is why it was chosen as the main data type.

2.6 Thesis process

The thesis will proceed with the introduction of TikTok case studies. Later on, the case studies will be analysed with the help of the marketing theories introduced in Chapter 2.4. The marketing theories and case studies will give enough information to start creating TikTok content for By Popular Demand. 6 of these videos will be analysed after the case studies with the help of the marketing theories and information gathered from the case studies. The statistics of those videos will also be analysed, and based on all that information, it will be possible to form recommendations into what makes TikTok marketing content successful. The recommendations will be composed on Chapter 5.

3 TIKTOK CASE STUDIES

TikTok has had many successful business marketing cases on its platform. In this chapter, a few of them will be presented as they give valuable information into the nature of TikTok and successful business behaviour on the platform. Why the TikTok accounts are doing well on the social media platform will be analysed in the next chapter.

3.1 Duolingo

Duolingo is a language learning app with over 103 million monthly active users and over 950 million downloads. It is the world's leading mobile learning platform. Duolingo has courses available in a total of 41 different languages, including some lesser-known languages such as Welsh and Latin. (Curry 2025, Duolingo 2024.)

One of the most memorable things about Duolingo is their bright green owl mascot, Duo. Duo is known for making humorous, passive aggressive remarks to users, reminding them to complete their daily language lessons. The humorous personality of this brands mascot has led to multiple jokes and viral moments in social media, contributing to Duolingo's popularity. This popularity however took off in a completely new level once Duolingo started creating short-form video content on TikTok.

Duolingo's social media coordinator, Zaria Parvez, started creating content featuring the large owl mascot Duo. The first video featuring Duo got more than triple the amount of views than their previous best-performing video on TikTok did. It didn't take long for a video to reach over 3.5 million views with 730.000 likes, and Parvez knew they had found a working formula for successful content. (Crewe n.d..)

Duolingo's TikTok videos are outside of the box and even absurd at times. The videos are meant to be funny and memorable, instead of focused on advertising.

Duo has been seen doing viral trends, playing basketball, chasing after people and much more. This playful and sarcastic brand personality can also be seen in other Duolingo's online interactions, with social media comments and replies to other users echoing Duo's personality.

3.2 Dr. Miami

Another wildly successful TikTok marketing story is the story of Dr. Miami, Dr. Michael Salzhauer, a cosmetic and reconstructive surgeon from Miami. Dr. Miami hired Santina Rizzi as a social media personality for his business, and what Rizzi and Salzhauer created reshaped Dr. Miami's social presence and ensured continued success for the company. (The Social Standard, 2023; Forrest, 2024.)

Rizzi and Salzhauer started creating TikTok content together, showcasing their personalities in an entertaining way. Rizzi described it being similar to creating television series characters: creating stories and personifying the business and the people behind it. Their videos consisted of following trends, making jokes and videos relating to plastic surgery. The humour used was clever, "unprofessional" and occasionally contained mature themes, all targeted towards their target audience, young women. Completely differentiating from other plastic surgeons and their online presence. (The Social Standard, 2023; Forrest, 2024.)

3.3 It's a Present!

It's a Present! is a competing gift store company with stores in multiple cities in the Netherlands. The product offering is ultimately quite similar to By Popular Demand, but without the added high-end product offering, and focusing more on decoration. Colourful, fun and funky describes their products well. It's a Present! for example doesn't sell stationery, accessories or kitchen supplies. Name-brand items such as Stanley-cups, Casio-watches and Secrid-wallets are also products that differentiate By Popular Demand from It's a Present!.

It's a Present! has very successful TikTok and Instagram pages which are worth studying, given it being one of By Popular Demands biggest competitors. Research will be focused on It's a Present!'s TikTok account, since that is more relevant to the thesis topic.

The account @itsapresent has 39.4 thousand followers on TikTok and a total of 691.3 thousand likes. It is a lot, which means they have created successful TikTok content. In the next chapter It's a Present!'s TikTok videos and their marketing strategies will be analysed.

4 ANALYSIS & STATISTICS OF CASE STUDIES AND CREATED TIKTOK VIDEOS FOR BY POPULAR DEMAND

This chapter begins with explaining the validity, reliability & limitations of the pre-existing data, and follows with the analysis of the case studies presented earlier. The findings from the analysis will be used to create TikTok video content for By Popular Demand. 6 created TikTok videos will be shortly explained and lastly the results & statistics of the created videos for the business will be shared.

4.1 Validity, reliability & limitations

Analysing similar companies' TikTok accounts and videos to understand their reasons for success is a great way to see how various marketing strategies work in practise. It shows first-hand what types of videos have done well on the platform, and which type of videos have not. However, there are limitations to the reliability of it: for example, It's a Present!'s TikTok videos give lots of insight since it is a similar company in the same city, but it is beneficial to have content tailored specifically to the business to reduce the amount of possible mistakes. By Popular Demand's customer group might be different than It's a Present!'s which could mean some content work better for them than they would for By Popular Demand. Some case companies are also in a totally different field, which may affect the audience behaviour. The varying TikTok marketing budgets, the brand popularity and resources all affect the results of marketing efforts greatly. This is important to keep in mind while comparing the statistics of case company videos to the created videos for By Popular Demand.

The results, analytics, of the created content for By Popular Demand will on the other hand give valid results on what works on By Popular Demand's own account. The created content also tests the validity of the marketing theories one more time in this specific space. Being able to analyse created videos immediately gives information on what works. This makes the results valid and reliable. Limitations to this does however apply, due to the fast-changing nature of TikTok. What works right now, might not work in two years or even in a month.

4.2 Case studies

The analysis of the videos from the case study companies will be shared below. The findings from these case studies will be used in the creation of TikTok videos for By Popular Demand.

4.2.1 Duolingo

Duolingo rose to success by making playful, funny videos with their bright green owl mascot. Elements from all the previously mentioned marketing theories, brand personality, soft-sell and perceived similarity, can be seen in Duolingo's TikTok marketing, contributing to its success.

Duolingo created entertainment rather than advertisement. Duolingo also had a clear brand personality, and their brand communication on all their platforms matched it. This creates an authentic and entertaining image for the brand, which works well in a platform like TikTok. The brand personality theory and Kim et al.'s (2001) study show the positive correlations between a brand having a strong personality and positive customer associations (Aaker, 1997, p. 347; Kim et al., 2001, pp. 195–205). Social media users already aware of Duolingo and its personality from previous brand interactions, would already know what to expect from their social media presence. A well-established brand personality like this also helps with differentiation, further increasing brand loyalty (Dahl, 2021, pp. 59–70). It would make Duolingo be the first app that comes to mind when thinking about learning a language, and that's a sign of a successful marketing technique (Crewe n.d.).

Their content also followed soft-sell principles rather than hard-sell, which according to the research results by Okazaki et al. (2010) created more positive customer attitudes than hard-sell approaches, and were especially effective on social media platforms (Okazaki et al., 2010, p. 5; Dahl, 2021, p. 60). Instead of traditional promotional content, users want to be entertained and see authenticity from businesses. Hard-sell approaches were found to be irritating, and that is not wanted in a social media platform filled with fun content (Okazaki et al., 2010, p.

17). By creating entertaining and engaging soft-sell content, Duolingo was able to gather lots of attention from social media users. Even though Duolingo's videos were not exactly promoting a product, they created strong positive connections to the brand.

Perceived similarity also helped make Duolingo's content so intriguing. Content made by people similar to their watchers is preferred especially by younger audiences, meaning young people react more positively to content made by other young people (Dahl, 2021, p. 170). This is true also according to Kelman's source attractiveness model, which says that messages are received more positively when it is delivered by someone similar to the receiver (Kelman, 1961, pp. 68–70; Paek et al., 2011, p. 164; Dahl, 2021, p. 170). Also the reference group theory presents that once a group recognizes someone as belonging to their group, it affects the way the message is received (Sherif & Sherif, 1964, as cited in Paek et al., 2011, p. 164 and Dahl, 2021, p. 170). Zaria Parvez, Duolingo's social media coordinator was 23-years old when she started working at Duolingo (Crewe, n.d.). She herself was part of the target audience group and was therefore able to capture audiences of young people for Duolingo (Crewe, n.d.).

For By Popular Demand's content, creating entertaining rather than promotional content would work very well. It would fit the atmosphere of a giftshop selling funny items. Establishing brand personality, soft-sell approaches and perceived similarity will therefore be included in the created TikTok content.

4.2.2 Dr. Miami

Dr. Miami and Rizzi succeeded in making watchers feel like friends. They got to see and know the people behind the business almost like they were movie characters. Rizzi has created an online persona for Dr. Miami that is authentic, relatable and funny, showcasing his personality instead of promoting his services. This is another good example in brand personality and its benefits. A strong brand personality helps with differentiation and leads to increased brand loyalty, which is especially important for businesses like plastic surgery clinics (Kim et al., 2001,

pp. 195–205; Dahl, 2021, pp. 59–70). Social media users get to know the characters, the people behind the business, and as a result feel more trust and connection towards the business (Kim et al., 2001, pp. 204–205; Dahl, 2021, p. 59; The Social Standard, 2023). It allows users from everywhere around the world to connect with him, without having to even meet him in person. This, in addition to having a strong brand personality, makes him stand out from other medical professionals and lead to him getting more plastic surgery appointments (The Social Standard, 2023).

Feeling a connection towards the business and the people behind it, makes the buying decision easier and more pleasant (Kim et al., 2001, pp. 204–205; Dahl, 2021, p. 59). This is especially the case with plastic surgeries that might otherwise feel intimidating and even scary. Trust is especially important for clients of any medical and/or surgical procedures (The Social Standard, 2023). Seeing the surgeon joke around on social media about current viral moments can make the appointment seem more relaxed, making the buying decision easier (Kim et al., 2001, pp. 204–205; Dahl, 2021, p. 59; The Social Standard, 2023; Forrest, 2024).

Having a young female, Rizzi, as a social media personality also allows for the perceived similarity theories, Kelman's source attractiveness model, social influence theory and reference group theory to come into play. Like in Duolingo's case, Dr. Miami knew to hire someone from their target customer audience to be their social media person. It makes the target group, young women, react to the videos more positively and be more inclined to book an appointment at Dr. Miami's clinic (Moscovici, 1985, as cited in Dahl, 2021, p. 170; The Social Standard, 2023).

A takeaway for By Popular Demand's content would be to create media personalities of one or more employee at the store. Showing little pieces of employees' personalities and quirks will make watchers feel more familiarity to the brand and its employees. If multiple employees are in on the content, it could even start to feel like tv-series characters, like Rizzi described (The Social Standard 2023). This is also confirmed with brand personality and perceived similarity theories. (Moscovici, 1985, as cited in Dahl, 2021, p. 170; Kim et al., 2001, pp. 204–205; Dahl, 2021, p. 59; The Social Standard, 2023.)

4.2.3 It's a Present!

It's a Present!'s most successful video has 1.8 million views, 231 thousand likes and 483 comments with an engagement rate of 14.18%. The video was posted in 2023, and it was following a TikTok trend of that time. The video is funny, and promotion of the store is not its main purpose. This is similar to Duolingo's TikTok videos. Upon researching more of @itsapresent's successful TikTok -videos, most of its successful posts are either funny or following trends. Many of them also include human actors/employees in the videos. There are also videos that are more promotional in nature, such as showcasing a specific product and how it works, but also those videos include trending music in the background. This shows the importance of using trending sounds/music in the TikTok content. Their newer content has changed a little, possibly due to personnel change, and is not performing as well as before. The new content doesn't use trending sounds, and the content is mainly focused on promotion rather than entertainment. (Itsapresent, 2025.)

The new content from It's a Present follows more the principles of hard-sell than soft-sell. Hard-sell approaches being seen as more irritating explains the lower engagement on those videos (Okazaki et al., 2010, p. 17). Their successful videos are more soft-sell in nature, and show more personality. Using trends also helps create more perceived similarity (Dahl, 2021, p. 170). Including these theories into the creation of TikTok videos helps with a more positive reaction to the video, leading to more engagement (Okazaki et al., 2010, p. 17; Dahl, 2021, p. 170). It is also worthwhile to notice the frequency in which @itsapresent is posting videos. New videos are posted at least twice a week, sometimes more often (Itsapresent, 2025). Posting frequently is beneficial especially on a platform like TikTok, more posts mean more opportunities for users to discover the business.

It's a Present!'s videos confirm what Duolingo's and Dr. Miami's TikTok case studies told. Entertainment over promotion and showing personality and human faces over "soulless" advertising (Kim et al., 2001, pp. 195–205; Dahl, 2021, pp. 59–70). These are important aspects that will be incorporated into By Popular Demand's own TikTok content.

4.2.4 Conclusions

In all of these cases, businesses prioritized engagement and the entertainment value of their TikTok content over promotional content. Personality is prioritized over product, since the businesses know that personality is what creates long-lasting customer relations (Kim et al., 2001, pp. 204–205; Forrest, 2024). Perceived similarity is also a big factor in the success of the content. Having someone similar to the target audience group make content has positive effects in how the video is perceived (Kelman, 1961, pp. 68–70; Paek et al., 2011, p. 164).

Users go on a social media app like TikTok for entertainment and authenticity. Hard-sell, overly polished content doesn't work well in a social media platform that is so fast paced (Okazaki et al., 2010, p. 17). To be able to keep up with current trends and conversations, businesses need to be able to react quickly, and do it while showing personality (Kim et al., 2001, pp. 204–205). This is not possible if the content needs to go through several different refining processes inside the business.

Different social media apps need different approaches. For TikTok, authenticity, entertainment value and engagement are all very important. Advertising shouldn't be the main objective, but rather something that comes naturally when users feel connected to the content (Dahl, 2021, p. 60). These are the key take-aways that will also be kept in mind while creating TikTok content.

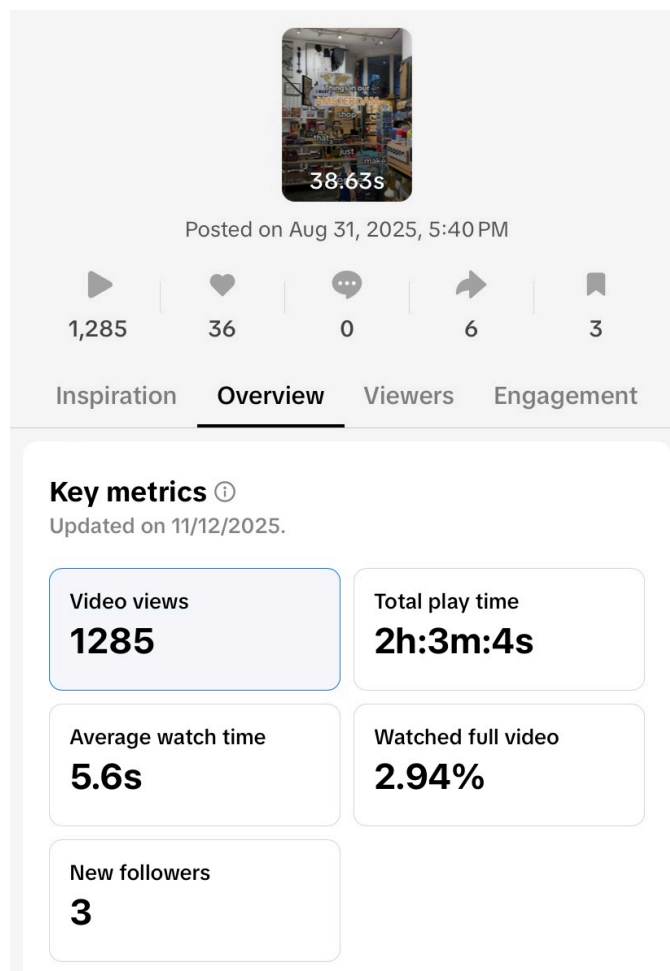
4.3 TikTok videos

Starting from a completely empty account, a couple different style videos were posted first to get a better grasp at how the audience reacts. The videos will be analysed in the order they were posted, from oldest to newest. Due to the large number of videos posted and the repetitiveness of some, 6 of the most important ones are further analysed. These are videos that got a high or low number of views/likes. These videos will be analysed with analytics provided by TikTok. In addition, the engagement rate of the videos will be calculated. The engagement

rate includes dividing total interactions of a video by the total view count and multiplying it by 100 (Brand24 2024). The higher the engagement rate, the better.

4.3.1 Video 1

The first TikTok video posted on the businesses account, @bpdamsterdam, was a video mixing humour with promotional content. Brand personality aspects were added by including humour in the content (Dahl, 2021, pp. 59–70). The video showed the interior of the store while highlighting some funny products sold. The store location as Amsterdam was also emphasized in the video, hoping it would lead to reach people interested in Amsterdam-specific content and/or live in Amsterdam. The video got 1285 views, 36 likes, 6 shares and 3 saves which can be seen on Picture 1. The engagement rate for TikTok 1 is 3.50%. The video did give the account 3 new followers (Picture 1). This however could also be the business employees following the account at the start of creating a new profile.

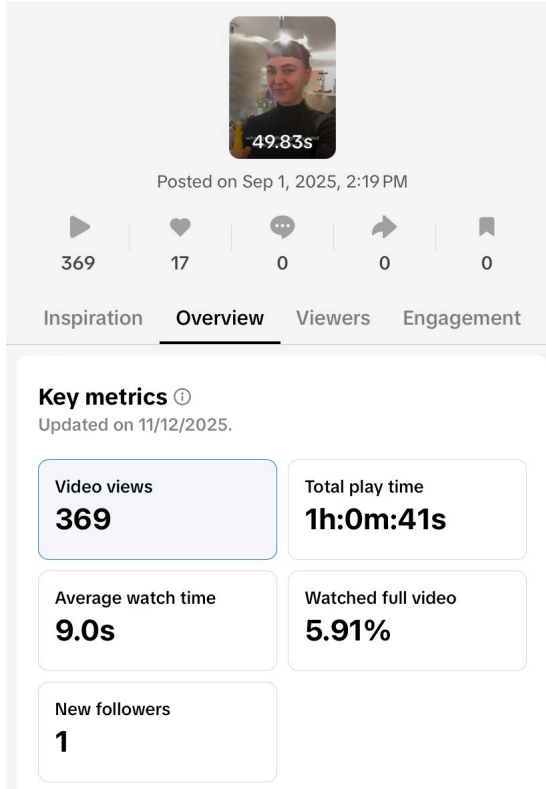


The average watch time of the video is 5.6 seconds, which later on turns out to be quite high (Picture 1). This means that the editing of the video was engaging enough to keep users watching. The low percentage of users watching the video till the end, 2.94%, however tells that the content wasn't engaging or interesting enough after 5 seconds (Picture 1). Keeping users entertained till the end of the video will lead to more engagement and views.

PICTURE 1. Key metrics of video 1.

4.3.2 Video 2

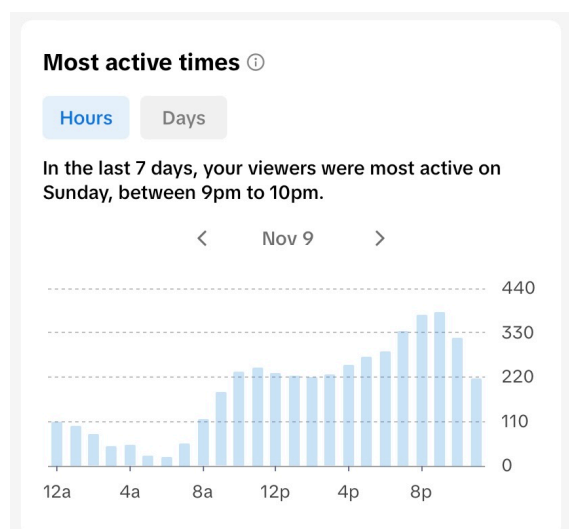
For the second post, a similar entertaining video was created. Drawing from the Dr. Miami case and perceived similarity theories, an employee acted on the video. Having a human face and voice on a video allows for viewers to feel more connected according to perceived similarity theories, source attractiveness model and reference group theory (Kelman, 1961, pp. 68–70; Sherif & Sherif, 1964, as cited in Paek et al., 2011, p. 164; Paek et al., 2011, p. 164; Dahl, 2021, p. 170). This was proved beneficial also on It's a Present!'s videos. On video 2, an employee went around the store dusting, and provided funny comments on a voice-



PICTURE 2. Key metrics of video 2.

TikTok uses early view velocity in their algorithm, which benefits the videos that get views quickly after posting (Parikh 2025). This could mean that the video was posted on a wrong time. Video 2 was posted at 2.19pm, when Picture 3 shows viewers being most active at 9-10pm (Picture 2, Picture 3).

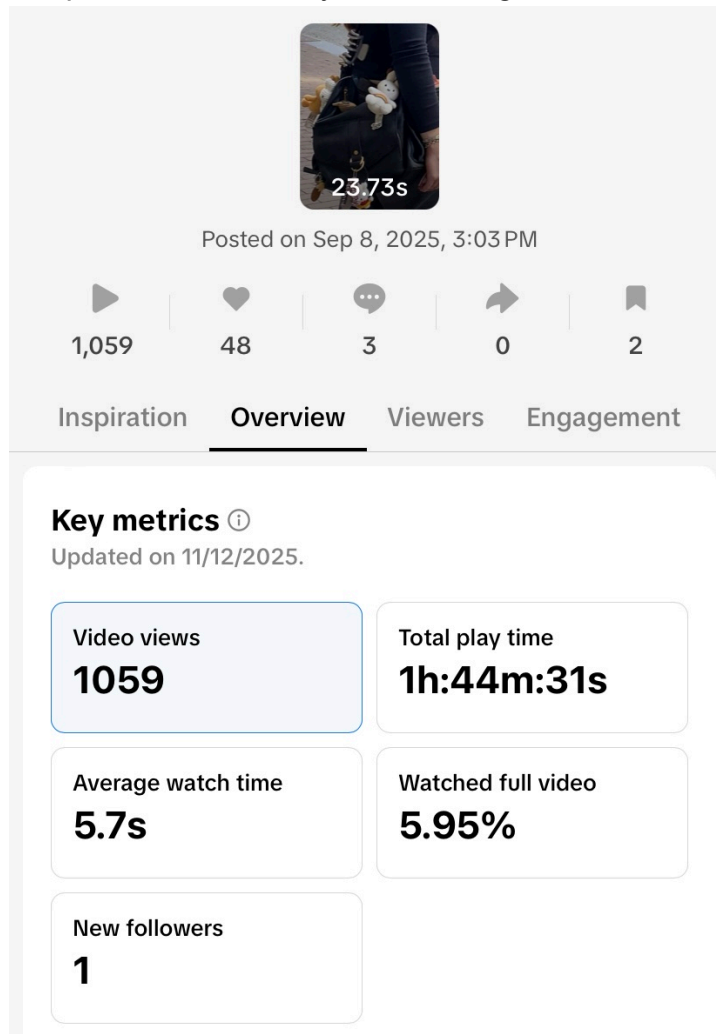
over. This also allowed for the soft-selling of products, since lots of products were showcased without clear promotion (Okazaki et al., 2010, p. 9). The video got 369 views, 17 likes and has an engagement rate of 4.61% (Picture 2). The average watch time and amount of users watching the video till the end is higher than in the previous video (Picture 1, Picture 2). However video 2 got considerably less views, which is one of the most important statistic especially for a business account. The goal is to get lots of views to be seen by potential customers.



PICTURE 3. Most active times.

4.3.3 Video 3

Video 3 was the best performing video for a while. The video was following a popular trend at the moment: bag charms. It featured a trending sound and an actor wearing a bag completely covered in bag charms. Multiple popular Miffy-keychains and other colourful charms. This video included aspects of soft-sell and perceived similarity. The video got 1059 views, 48 likes, 3 comments, 2 saves



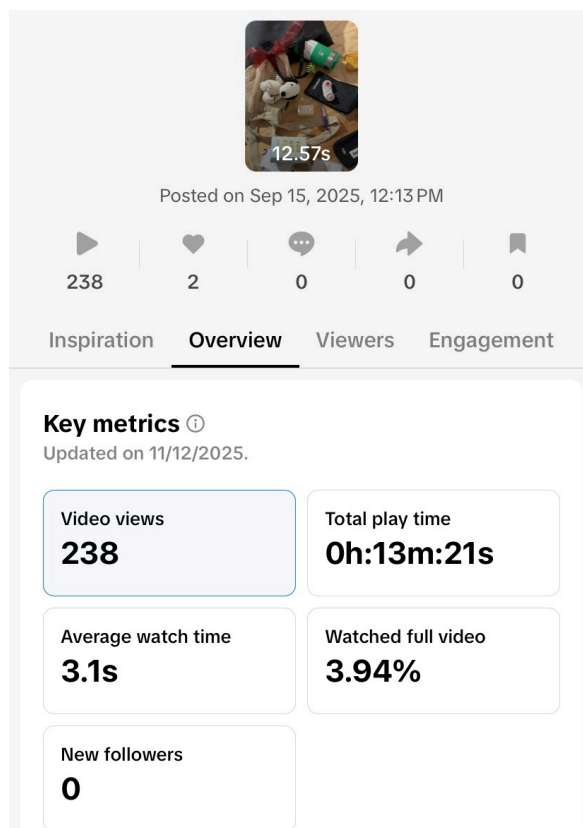
and an engagement rate of 5% (Picture 4). The amount of viewers who watched the video completely, 5.95%, is also the highest so far (Picture 4). The success of this video could be explained with the use of the trending subject, bag charms, in the video. This would align with information found on It's a Present!'s TikTok videos. Trending topics and sounds generate more views and engagement. The video was also posted slightly later than video 2 (Picture 2, Picture 4).

PICTURE 4. Key metrics of video 3.

Inspired by the success of a video that doesn't incorporate elements of entertainment so strongly and is mostly visually pleasing, another similar video with pretty visuals and product showcasing was created. How that video performed is going to be explained in the next chapter.

4.3.4 Video 4

Video 4 is a video that showcases sold products in a visually pleasing way. A bag is shown tipping over, and afterwards the products inside the bag are shown carefully positioned, looking as if the products happened to spill out of the bag beautifully. Products such as a Stanley cup, a Secrid wallet and Komono sunglasses were showed as products that differentiate By Popular Demand from It's a Present!. It got 238 views, 2 likes and an engagement rate of 0.84% (Picture 5). The two likes were even from store employees. This is the worst performing video created for By Popular Demand. It was posted quite early in the day, at 12.13pm, which isn't the ideal posting time but that's not the only reason for its bad numbers (Picture 3, Picture 5).



PICTURE 5. Key metrics of video 4.



PICTURE 7. Like timing.

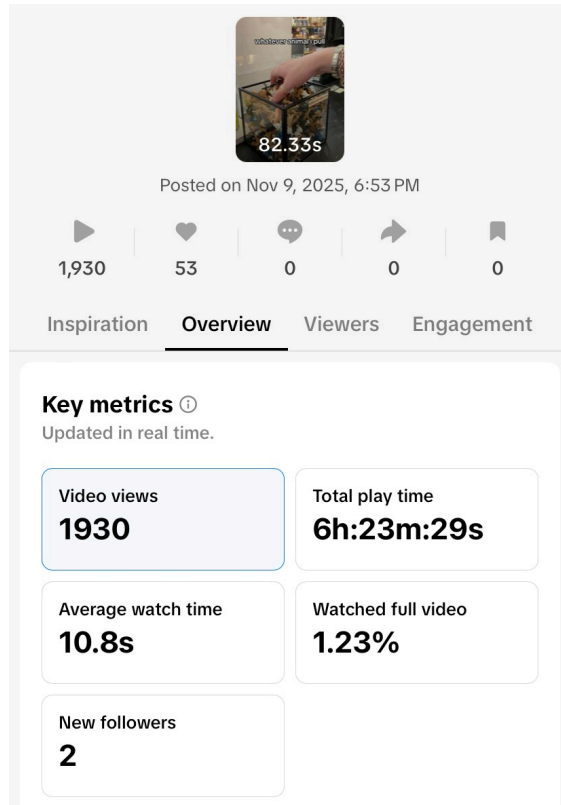
Looking into the retention rate of the video on Appendix 1., it can be seen that 75% of viewers skipped the video before even seeing the products. The 2 likes of the video were given when the products were showing, a couple more seconds more into the video (Picture 7). It can therefore be deducted that the video would need to be re-edited for it to succeed better. The products would need to be seen earlier in the video, before the average watch time 3.1 seconds, so it would be more engaging (Picture 5). Video 4 also didn't use the brand personality theory

nor perceived similarity theories. Compared to video 3, video 4 didn't show human presence, which would increase brand personality and perceived similarity (Kim et al., 2001, pp. 195–205; Dahl, 2021, p. 170). Video 4 was too void of personality, and with a slow start to the video lead it to not perform well on TikTok.

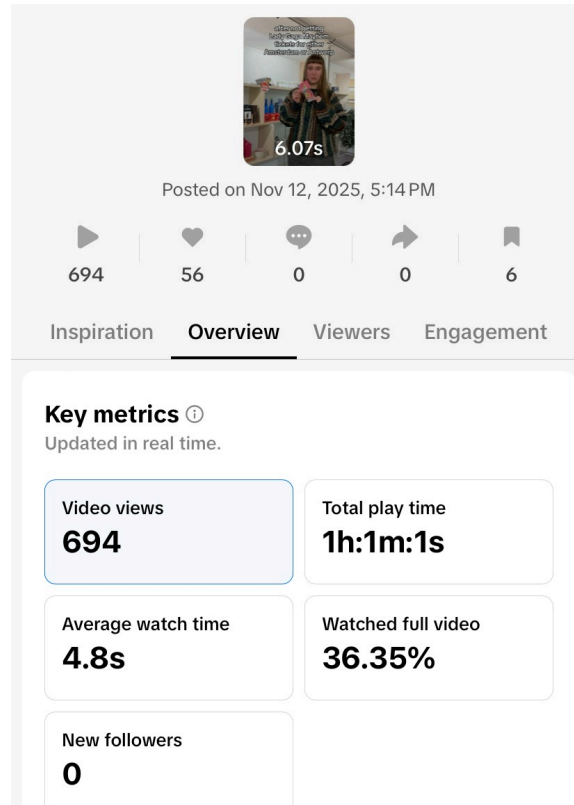
4.3.5 Video 5 and 6

Lastly, videos 5 and 6 were chosen, because they are the current best performing TikTok videos for By Popular Demand. All applicable marketing theories included in this thesis, brand personality, soft-sell approaches, perceived similarity with the source attractiveness model, social influence theory and reference group theory were included in the creation of videos 5 and 6. Video 5 starts with an actor blindly picking a tiny rubber animal from an assortment of plenty of different animals. The animal pulled, will be the theme of products searched for in the store. The video included clips of little mistakes, showing relatability and not an overly polished video (Kim et al., 2001, pp. 204–205; Dahl, 2021, p. 170). Showcasing store products in a specific category is also soft-selling and makes the video pleasing to watch (Okazaki et al., 2010, p. 17). Watchers will know the video is an ad, but since promotion of the items is not at the main focus in the video, watchers can enjoy the video while possibly seeing something interesting, prompting a store visit to By Popular Demand.

The video got 1930 views, 53 likes and an engagement rate of 2.75% (Picture 8). Video 6 is a short video combining a current trend, a music artist's concert, and a trending audio. In the video the employee is acting sad since she wasn't able to get tickets to said artist's concert. The video is short, funny and includes a product sold at the store. Video 6 got 694 views, 56 likes, 6 saves and an engagement rate of 8.93% (Picture 9). Video 5 got the most views and video 6 the highest engagement rate of the TikTok videos made for By Popular Demand (Picture 8, Picture 9). Video 6 is combining trends, brand personality, soft-sell and perceived similarity all in one. Showing an employee being sad about a concert showcases personality and a situation that many can relate to. This prompts more engagement according to brand personality and perceived similarity, and was also confirmed with the results of the video (Dahl, 2021, pp. 59–70, 170).



PICTURE 8. Key metrics of video 5.



PICTURE 9. Key metrics of video 6.

Both the videos were also posted later in the day to better fit with By Popular Demand's viewers' active times (Picture 3). With continued and consistent efforts, By Popular Demand's TikTok account will be able to grow and reach even higher numbers.

4.3.6 Conclusions

The best performing videos that were created included aspects from multiple different marketing theories. Especially brand personality and perceived similarity had a big effect into the success of the video. When a video lacked in entertainment and personality, like in video 4, the views and engagement of the video were affected in a negative way. The success of a video could be measured either with the engagement rate of the video, or the amount of views gathered. Having a lower amount of views didn't automatically mean the video did poorly, it was found to be important to also count the engagement rate of the video to better understand if the video was liked by viewers.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

Creating successful TikTok content is a process that needs lots of trying and failing before finding the formula that works for the specific situation. Some entertaining videos are also funnier than others. There however are some steps that can be followed for a higher possibility of a successful video.

The most successful TikTok videos for Duolingo, Dr. Miami and It's a Present! were all entertaining, had people in the videos, didn't focus too much on promotion and followed trends (Crewe, n.d.; The Social Standard, 2023; Forrest, 2024; Itsapresent, 2025). They included elements from brand personality, soft-sell and perceived similarity -theories. Using these marketing theories in the content creation created the most popular videos for By Popular Demand, and should therefore be used when creating marketing content on TikTok. Authentic, fun videos are what users want to see in a social media app like TikTok (Dahl, 2021, pp. 59–70). Advertising on TikTok shouldn't be too serious, and it should not feel like advertising (Okazaki et al., 2010, p.17).

In addition to making content that is entertaining, has people on them, is not too promotional and is following trends, paying attention to the posting time of the video is beneficial. One has also to be ready to move quickly and change approaches if necessary. There is no one set formula for creating successful TikTok videos, and sometimes the most surprising videos do very well or don't do well at all. Because of that a mindset of continuous improvement is needed to upkeep and maintain a successful TikTok profile. TikTok analytics also tell a lot about a video. The number of views and the engagement rate are good indicators of a successful TikTok video. The higher the number of views, the higher visibility the video got, which is important for business accounts. A high engagement rate means lots of viewers enjoyed the video and engaged with it, this leads to positive brand connections and stronger impressions. Both are important. Learning to read the numbers and their meanings tells a lot about the reasons why a video is performing the way it does.

The thesis objective formulated as a question was: *“How to create successful marketing content for the store By Popular Demand?”*

The answer to the question is to incorporate fun elements to the content and to not focus on promoting a product, but rather entertaining viewers (Okazaki et al., 2010, p. 17; Dahl, 2021, pp. 59–70). Letting viewers see the human personality behind the business to increase perceived similarity is also important as it increased positive attitudes to the videos (Dahl, 2021, p. 170). Avoiding obvious promotion of products, hard-selling, as it can be irritating on social media spaces (Okazaki et al., 2010, p. 17). Following TikTok trends and acting on them quickly and lastly to pay attention to the posting time of the content. In order to create successful marketing content that generates engagement, and ultimately more store visits, one needs to be continually aware of the online space, and adjust behaviours based on what is happening/trending/working at that moment on the platform.

As for the sub-questions: *“What makes TikTok marketing content successful?”*, using applicable marketing theories in the creation of TikTok content makes it successful. Marketing theories brand personality, soft-sell and perceived similarity was found to work especially well in the online space.

“What kind of business marketing content users engage with?”

Users engaged with business marketing content they found entertaining and/or relatable. The videos with the highest engagement rate, videos 6, 3 and 2 all had a human presence visible. Being visible in a video allows for perceived similarity theories to come into play. Seeing someone in a video similar to oneself, makes the video be evaluated in a more positive light, leading to more engagement on the video (Kelman, 1961, pp. 68–70; Paek et al., 2011, p. 164).

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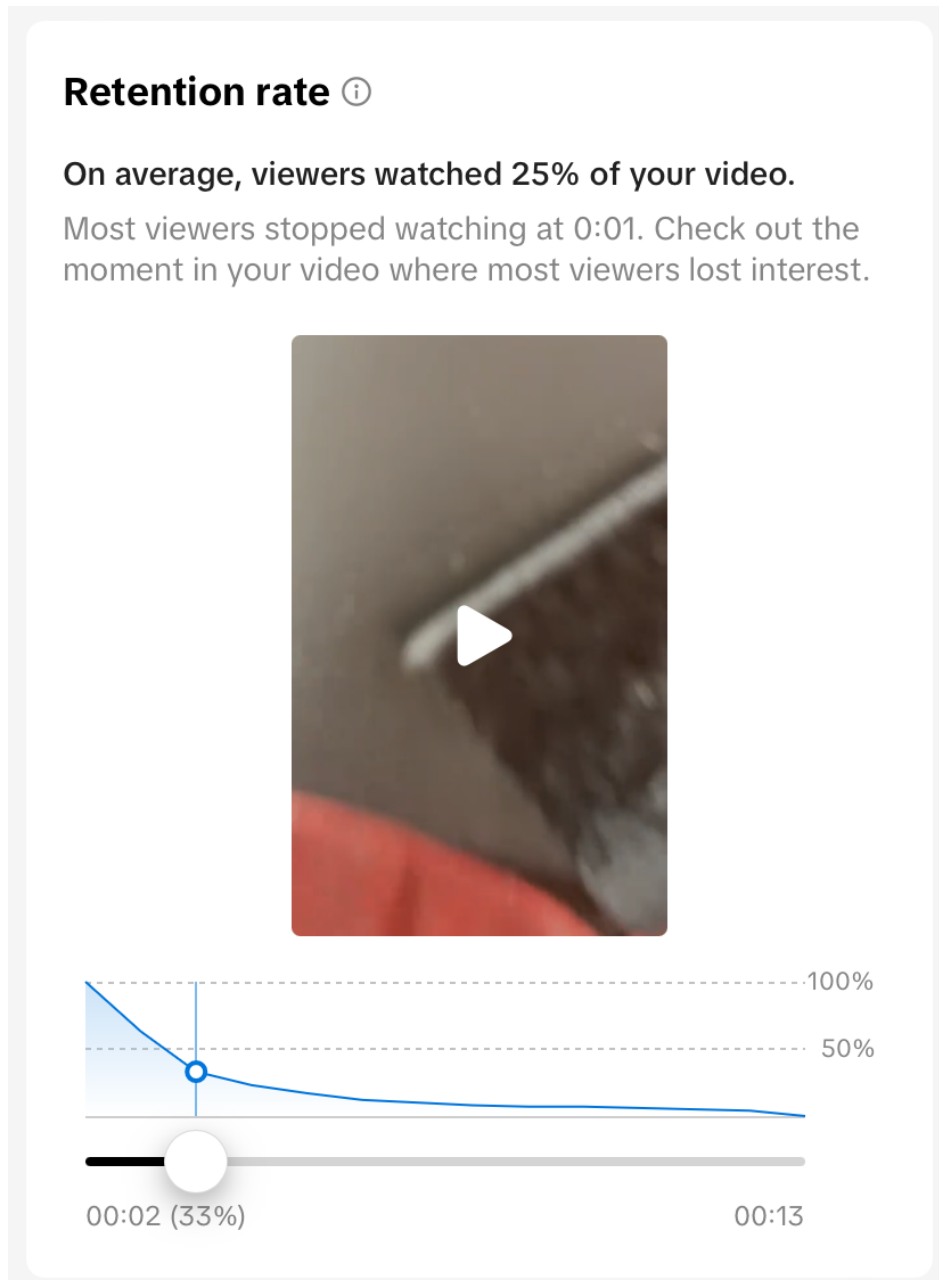
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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Picture 6. Retention rate



PICTURE 6. Retention rate.