

**Virality and Contagion – A Study on Social Consumer Behavior and the Cultural
Significance of TikTok**

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to research the use of indirect marketing on the video-focused social networking service, TikTok. The service makes it easy for companies and celebrities to use the platform to post videos that blend in with all the other videos on the app. As the app is used to pass time or gain entertainment, companies and celebrities can easily use indirect marketing approaches on the app to reach a target audience that might not be as easy to reach with traditional marketing approaches.

While there are many other social media platforms that companies can use for marketing, we have chosen TikTok for two reasons. The first reason is that TikTok has massively risen in popularity, but is still relatively new, and there is a lack of extensive research in that area. Companies and celebrities are active on Instagram, Twitter and other social media platforms, but TikTok is not easily compared to those, which is the second reason we have chosen it: TikTok instantaneously starts playing videos when you open the app, and it creates content specifically tailored just for the user on a 'For You' Page, which is where companies and celebrities benefit from an indirectness of merely posting entertaining videos that blend in with all the other videos. We find it interesting to research an app that lets the user get lost in a sea of many videos, where marketing content is easy to disguise.

In order to analyze the digital marketing approaches on TikTok, we use several theories on digital marketing as well as video-driven marketing. In this instance we have mainly used David Meerman Scott, who argues that the web can propel a brand or company to fame for free. Additionally, we also use theories on collective behavior including contagion theory and virality. Mainly, we use Tony D. Sampson's description about how a crowd can cause a hypnotic impact on individuals, where he regards virality as a part of that, along with the social tendency herd or cascade. In this paper, we regard the audience of the videos on TikTok as the crowd that can cause impact on each other or be encouraged into contagious behavior themselves.

Our main argument in this paper is that companies and celebrities can post videos on TikTok to cause contagious effects, feelings, and emotions. In that regard, we discuss the mob mentality that connects with contagious behavior, where we analyze examples of that mentality. We use the mentioned theories to analyze several videos posted by both companies and celebrities, whom we regard under the same category in terms of marketing approaches. Lastly, we discuss the main differences between the analyzed videos, the use of emotion in

the videos with connection to contagion, and the main target audience on TikTok: Gen Z. With the help of Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model, we conclude that the chosen companies and celebrities attempt to mirror Gen Z's mode of communication, which we discuss in the discussion section. Furthermore, Hall's theory helps conclude that the many indirect messages in the videos are expected to be easily decoded by Gen Z users on TikTok. This leads to another discussion on the societal influence TikTok can have due to contagious behavior, including mob mentality.

We have chosen to analyze videos by four American celebrities, three American companies, and one British company. We draw on the American and British cultural context, though we recognize that the videos have a viral reach outside of the US. The analyzed videos represent a 'text', where the social context is the way that the videos affect American and British culture with collective behavior as well as marketing and its social significance. Contagious theory and virality are more important than the marketing approaches, though they are used to reach a conclusion about the cultural significance.

Based on our analysis of the videos, we conclude that both companies and celebrities benefit from encouraging contagious behavior, while simultaneously using indirect marketing approaches to catch the attention of the audience. Despite the fact that companies and celebrities certainly use direct approaches as well, the indirect approaches are easily disguised on an app such as TikTok, where the main purpose is to scroll from one video to the other. The theories that we use about collective behavior speak to the cultural significance of the indirect marketing and other content on TikTok and help conclude that the app can drive culture through trends that resonate far beyond the app itself.

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1.0. Introduction

Traditional marketing – marketing that is not online – used to be enough to catch people’s attention. Living in a digital age, where most people easily spend time online with devices in their pockets, marketing must develop into becoming digital as well. This has happened organically, as everything else is moving online. While traditional marketing works just fine, companies can greatly benefit from using digital approaches such as video driven marketing, as people who are not exposed to traditional marketing, such as TV commercials, might be exposed through digital means. With endless social media platforms available for video uploads, it should not be too difficult for companies to join in on the uses of the internet and sell more products.

Unfortunately, the many online options have left users with the feeling of being annoyed. The common pop-up ad, or the annoying YouTube ad that shows up before you watch the video you want, are examples of annoying marketing tactics and practices that have slowly stopped working on an audience. The obviousness in a direct marketing approach, which is more typical in traditional marketing, seems to drive customers away and merely annoy the audience. The main issue in this paper is to research how indirect approaches using social media work on customers, instead of the obvious marketing approaches, which might seem more annoying. While approaches on social media can be direct and annoying as well, the claim in this paper is that the indirect approaches work better – and they do so with the help of consumer behavior on social media. Watching endless videos on an app makes it less apparent that the video you are watching is an advertisement, as it might merely blend in with all the other videos on the app.

Indirect approaches can arguably be seen everywhere on social media, but especially on TikTok. TikTok is a social media platform that recently has grown massively in popularity. It is a video-focused social networking service, which became available worldwide in 2018 and saw a significant increase in popularity during the coronavirus (COVID-19) with a growth of 180 percent among 15-25-year-old users (Ceci 2018). During the pandemic outbreak, people were forced to work and study from home with a lot of time to use the app while quarantining. The popularity of TikTok has forced many companies and celebrities to join and use the platform to post videos with trending content. While the videos are meant to entertain the users, there is a definite element of marketing to it as well.

The point of the app is to create, share, and discover short videos with a maximum of three minutes, where the app allows for all users to create videos and share them across a

community. The most seen content on the app is videos with singing, dancing, comedy, and lip-syncing, which are posted by users among 15-25 years. The main users are commonly known as Generation Z (Gen Z), which is the demographic cohort succeeding millennials. Gen Zers are born between the late 1990s and the early 2010s. In this paper, we will return to the importance of this generation with regards to TikTok and indirect marketing in the discussion section.

The networking service is a great example of how one video can spread to a worldwide audience in a short period of time, making it a perfect platform for companies, social influencers, or celebrities to use for their own gain to advertise, though in an indirect way. A great example is how a singer can create a dance of their song, post the dance on TikTok, and make the song go viral (and make more money), as people post videos of dancing the same dance to that one song.

In this paper, we will research the aspect of indirect marketing on TikTok by analyzing videos posted by certain companies and celebrities. The thesis statement is the following: With the use of contagion theory and virality, we will research how the chosen companies and celebrities post videos with a disguised intention of marketing a product or brand. With the use of humor, awareness of viral trends and elicitation of emotion, the companies and celebrities attempt to benefit from social contagious user behavior to market themselves. Digital marketing on social media greatly benefits from encouraging contagious behavior, which is not something that is typically seen with traditional marketing. Asking the users to share, like, or comment on your video is a typical example of encouraging contagious behavior whilst benefiting from the subsequent virality that might follow. Living in a digital age, this type of marketing is everywhere – the question is, how indirect can the approaches be, and do they work?

2.0. Methodology

In this section, we will explain the methods used in this paper. We describe what we have done to answer the research question and main issue in this paper, as well as how we have done it. First, we explain what TikTok is as we analyze videos from the platform. Next, we explain the process of categorizing the chosen videos as well as the process of archiving. Lastly, we elaborate on the following methods used: multimodal analysis, comparative analysis, and Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model of communication.

2.1. Introduction to TikTok

As mentioned, TikTok is a video-focused social networking service, which hosts a variety of short-form user videos. The content of the videos is different in genres such as pranks, stunts, tricks, jokes, dances, and other forms of entertainment (Bailey 2020).

TikTok has become the “fastest growing social media app” (Geyser 2021) with over 100 million users. Furthermore, Geyser states that TikTok was the most-downloaded photo and video app in the Apple store, globally (2021), with over 500 million monthly active users, “... the US being the most popular country where it has been downloaded over 80 million times” (Geyser 2021). Its popularity makes it the perfect social media app to use in this paper, as it is ideal for companies and other brands and celebrities to use in connection to marketing.

TikTok has several editing features which enable users to incorporate songs, effects, and filters onto their videos. The videos that show up on each user's app are ranked and recommended to the user based on an analysis of their interests. With the help of a recommendation mechanism or algorithm, the tag for each video is calculated, which is designed to “classify videos according to category characteristics. Then, it maps the tag of the video to the users who have the same tag” (Chen et al 2). Thus, users on TikTok watch filtered out videos on their feeds based on their interactions – which makes the experience personalized and more engaging. The algorithm based on data recommendations helps meet a user's needs and goals – and helps companies, who post videos on TikTok, reach their target group much faster. The algorithm is based on demographics and other videos that the user has ‘liked’, watched, or commented on which creates a so-called ‘For You’ page catering to the individual user. Though many social media platforms offer similar services, TikTok proves a unique ability to browse and watch content, where your attention is easily caught, which makes it perfect for indirect marketing. Users consume content from the minute they open the

app, as the videos appear instantaneously – thus, users are immediately met with videos from both celebrities, companies, and social influencers, as well as other users. A bonus for the companies, who use indirect marketing, is the cross-promotion TikTok allows for both Facebook, Twitter, Email, and Instant messaging. The cross-promotion means that under each video, there is a clear ‘share’ button, where you can see the logo of Twitter or Facebook for instance, giving you the easy ability to share through those apps – which creates the perfect opportunity to promote videos and create more engagement on the platform as well as encouraging others to share, like, and comment.

During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, people were quarantined in their homes, which allowed for a great opportunity to use the app. The aim of the paper is to research the way that brands and celebrities use the social media platform for indirect marketing. While we are aware that we could have chosen a number of other social media platforms for this particular research, due to the growing popularity of TikTok, it is often considered to have a big impact on consumers for marketing, as many companies are active there in ways they have not been on other platforms. Additionally, it is not possible to easily archive videos from Instagram, Facebook, and other platforms, whereas TikTok easily gives the user several options for archiving. Other than the ‘liked’ page, where all the liked videos are saved, each video has a ‘download’ button which saves the video in a file on the device that one is using. This makes archiving easier and makes it possible to analyze the videos for this research paper.

2.1.1. Categories and Archiving

The videos that we will mention in this paper are all saved as files in a Google Drive and listed with weblinks in the appendix at the bottom of this paper.

We have chosen to divide the videos that we want to analyze into the following categories: Cosmetics companies including Rare Beauty and Fenty Beauty; celebrities including Hailey Bieber, Will Smith, Selena Gomez, and Jason Derulo; purposefully selected companies including Ryanair and Duolingo, which have shown up on our own “For You” page. The categories are based on a matter of our interest, and a matter of how many of the companies we have been exposed to ourselves on TikTok. Creating the categories makes the analyzing process easier and more structured, which helps create a thorough conclusion of the research.

The categories we have chosen are based on our own 'For You' page on TikTok. This means that we have been exposed to these videos from all those users, both celebrities and companies. As we both live in Denmark, it speaks to a certain degree of success that their marketing has reached us. We thought it would be interesting to analyze these specific companies and celebrities, as their marketing has reached their target group and is seemingly successful in both the US and other countries.

The videos are analyzed comparatively, where we investigate differences, similarities, and other types of patterns regarding the marketing aspect. For instance, whether they are using tutorials, trending memes, or dances, as well as if they are using the same characteristics of a viral video such as humor, elicitation of emotion, the encouragement of contagious behavior. All those characteristics all help further analyze the way the brand or celebrity is marketing a specific product or their brand. This is further elaborated below in the section about comparative analysis.

2.2. Analyzing the Data

We have found 58 videos from several user accounts on the platform; 27 videos posted by chosen celebrities, and 31 videos posted by chosen companies. We have chosen the specific accounts to analyze for two reasons. The first reason is that they are all prominent on the app and have gained viral attention with their content, which is why they are more interesting to research regarding how the virality aspect has been used. The second reason is that we have been exposed to their content on our own 'For You' pages, which is why we thought it to be interesting to research those accounts.

The analysis section includes an elaborate analysis of the videos, where we research the specific way the company or celebrity uses TikTok to indirectly market a specific product or brand, as well as the way they encourage contagious behavior. This is done with the help of a multimodal analysis and a comparative analysis, which are elaborated below.

2.2.1. Multimodal Analysis

As a video-focused networking site, TikTok is an example of multimodality, where there is an interplay between different representational modes such as images, videos, and written or spoken words. In order to analyze the videos in the analysis section, we performed a multimodal analysis, where we interpreted and made sense of qualitative data in the videos, which mix verbal and nonverbal forms of information. A multimodal analysis helps us create

a more systematic way of researching the semiotic modes in the videos we have chosen, to further conclude how the brands or the companies market themselves indirectly.

According to John Bateman it is “difficult to find cases of communication and action that do *not* involve multimodality” (7). The term is a way of characterizing communicative situations “which rely upon combinations of different ‘forms’ of communications to be effective” (Bateman 7). For instance, TV programs use spoken language, pictures, and texts; books use written language, pictures, diagrams, page composition and so on; talking to someone in a cafeteria brings together spoken language “with a host of bodily capabilities and postures” (Bateman 7); and computer games show representations of any of those things while including movement and actions as well.

The multimodality of social media is a phenomenon which has become “an integral part of our lives” (Bateman 355). Platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter have become prime players in the cultural stage “as well as sources of news for many” (Bateman 355). The most interesting aspect worth noting about social media in this paper is that the roles of producers and consumers are not distanced from each other as they are in printed or broadcast news. This has a profound effect on the communicative situations and our participation in them (Bateman 355), which we analyze with the help of Stuart Hall’s encoding/decoding model, which is elaborated below.

Kress and Van Leeuwen coined the term ‘multimodal analysis (Machin & Mayr 7) for visual communication. The point of a multimodal analysis is to “identify and reveal [communicative choices] through a careful process of description guided by the tools provided” (Machin & Mayr 9). In this paper, the essential aspect for the use of this type of analysis is the visual communication in the videos we have chosen: “visual communication, as well as language, both *shapes* and *is shaped* by society.

2.2.2. Encoding and Decoding

In order to analyze the chosen videos properly, we use Stuart Hall’s encoding/decoding model of communication, which imparts a semiotic framework on communication studies. The model was first developed by scholar Stuart Hall in 1973, when he offered a theoretical approach of how messages in the media are produced, disseminated, and interpreted. Hall proposes that an audience member can play an active role in decoding a message, as the audience member relies on his own social context (Hall 5), which is why the audience member is capable of interpreting the message.

Encoding is the production of the message. In the case of TikTok and the research in this paper, the encoder is the creator of the video posted on TikTok. The process of encoding includes using verbal symbols such as words, signs, images, video; and non-verbal symbols such as face expressions or hand gestures. These symbols are used in a way that he or she believes the receiver/encoder will understand.

While decoding a message, you extract a meaning of the message in the way that makes most sense to you. It is about the understanding of what you already know, based on the information that you are given throughout the message being received. This means that decoding can have both verbal and non-verbal forms of communication, as decoding behavior without the use of words means observing body language and the associated emotions. The decoding of a message is how to understand and interpret a given message. The important part about decoding is that a receiver/decoder does not necessarily decode a message the same way that the sender/encoder was trying to convey, which is when misunderstandings arise: “‘Distortion’ or ‘misunderstandings’ arise from the lack of equivalence between the two sides in the communicative exchange” (Hall 4).

With “decoding” there are three ways an audience member might decode any given message: “This first is dominant or preferred readings, in which the message is decoded with the same meaning as was intended when it was encoded” (Adrienne 593). The second way is a negotiated reading, which involves a mixture of preferred and resistant readings. The third is the oppositional reading “in which the audience member decodes the message in the opposite way as was intended by the producer” (Adrienne 593).

In this paper, the concept of encoding and decoding is relevant and interesting to bring up regarding TikTok, as the encoder of a message can be both the encoder and the decoder. Hall’s model works under the assumption that we are aware of the conditions of production, while our point in this paper is that by using TikTok, you are not directly as aware of the marketing. This leads to an interesting variation of his model, which is mentioned in the analysis section.

2.2.3. Comparative Analysis

Analyzing the chosen TikTok videos with a multimodal analysis can help us understand how certain companies, celebrities, and brands choose to market themselves indirectly on the social media platform. However, to arrive at a more thorough conclusion for this research, we have conducted a comparative analysis.

A comparative analysis is the process of comparing one thing to another to distinguish the similarities and differences. In this case, we have compared the videos in each respectable category, and additionally compared the differences and similarities between the three categories. The similarities and differences include how the companies/celebrities interact with their followers, how they establish points of contact, their use of trendy/viral sounds, the use of indirect and direct marketing, as well as the use of humor and other emotions, and the way that they all encourage contagious behavior and try to benefit from it. These factors are relevant to be able to conclude if the (indirect) marketing strategies are comparable, and whether they indicate a certain way to behave on the app. It also helps distinguish a certain pattern in the way that the brands, celebrities, or companies market themselves.

Conducting a comparative analysis is a great way of gaining a better understanding of a certain problem – in this case, how different companies use indirect marketing on TikTok as well as how they benefit from encouraging contagious behavior. By comparing the chosen data from both the videos and the multimodal analysis, we can provide a context for the analysis, so the differences and similarities in the relationships between data sets are clearer. The analysis will be more in-depth which helps provide a more thorough conclusion.

A comparative analysis includes pattern analysis, where we identify the patterns or trends in the videos. For instance, we look into whether or not the videos in the chosen categories all use memes, sounds, or contextual references to popular culture. Moreover, we conduct data filtering, because we chose to divide videos into categories of three as mentioned above to make it easier to analyze and conclude an answer to the issue.

3.0. Theory Section

In this section we explain the theoretical background of the main issues in this paper. To obtain a more thorough analysis and conclusion of how TikTok is used for indirect marketing, we have, firstly, explained what marketing is with emphasis on how traditional and digital marketing differ from each other. Secondly, we have narrowed it down to elaborate on video-driven marketing with specific focus on TikTok. To understand the aspect of indirect marketing on the app, we have also explained the role of social media in society, and how companies and celebrities use it as a marketing tool. Lastly, in order to conduct a more thorough analysis, we have explained contagion theory and virality with emphasis on contagious consumer behavior. We believe that this theoretical approach is more interesting than other approaches. Other linear approaches might be considered more outdated and do

not speak to contagion as much as we want to. We believe that Stuart Hall's notion of using your frame of knowledge to decode a message is more interesting to use in this paper, when connected with collective contagion theory and indirect marketing. We think it is interesting to research how indirect messages are used to create virality – and virality is contagious behavior, which we think is a more interesting theory to use.

3.1. What is Marketing?

In order to research how celebrities and companies use social media for the purpose of indirectly marketing themselves, it is important to understand the term 'marketing'. In this paper, with marketing through TikTok, the social media platform is "the communication channel linking a product or service to the targeted customers (or patrons)" (Lee 169). Scholar Deborah Lee argues that the process of marketing is not about selling a product but about defining "how the product or service meets those needs" (169). Additionally, she argues that the heart of the concept of marketing research is the "need to identify user needs" (Lee 170), which might be handing out a survey, asking potential users what they want and how they perceive the product. In the case of TikTok, a company might research user-needs by looking through the comments section on each of their videos or watching video reviews. This will be researched in the analysis section. Marketing does not only apply to companies who want to sell a certain product, but it can also be applied to celebrities, who market themselves to gain more popularity and success. Furthermore, celebrities can also use marketing for the purpose of selling a product they have created. An example in the analysis section is the singer and actress, Selena Gomez, who not only markets the TV series she stars in, but also the cosmetics brand she has created: Rare Beauty. This is elaborated in the analysis section.

Lastly, Deborah Lee mentions "the four Ps of marketing": product, promotion, price, and place (170), which is a model developed for the for-profit business world.

Product refers to both the service being provided and the "underlying need it fulfills" (Lee 170) for the user.

Promotion is about reaching target markets, which Lee exemplifies with the use of social media. Lee argues that the role of social media is "an important one and raises interesting issues related to viral marketing" (171), which she defines as "the use of social

media to spread a marketing message” (Lee 171). The notion of virality is explained further down in the theory section.

Price refers to the explicit prices: “what people pay for a service [...] or implicit prices [what do people have to give up to use a service]” (Lee 171). Implicit prices might include high tech concepts such as “a lengthy or cumbersome authentication process for online access to information” (Lee 171).

Place is an important element of a marketing plan, in terms of both the perception and branding of a company. Lee exemplifies this with the marketing of a library where it can be “both a physical and virtual place” (Lee 171). With TikTok, the place contributes to the marketing discussion based on the matter of feeling comfortable. When using the app, you are in your own home base and there is a degree of familiarity. This familiarity is contrasted with marketing through a physical place, for instance with a billboard outside. While using TikTok, you are at home and looking up things that you want to be looking up. Furthermore, marketing on the app is positioned there by marketing people through an algorithm, where there are certain types of content in videos that you most likely will enjoy – whereas this degree of familiarity is not there when you see a billboard outside or even with placement ads on a webpage.

3.1.1. Traditional Marketing and Digital Marketing

In his book, *The New Rules of Marketing & PR* (2017), David Meerman Scott describes the difference between traditional marketing and digital marketing. Based on his book, traditional marketing is marketing that is not online, where digital marketing is the opposite. Scott exemplifies digital marketing with a company’s website advertising their product to him rather than building a relationship with him, which made him realize the importance of companies connecting with consumers: “It just didn’t feel authentic. [...] They were luring me in with one-way messages, not educating me about the companies’ products. Guess what? When I arrive at a site, you don’t need to grab my attention; you already have it!” (16).

With traditional marketing, Scott demonstrates with the time that his daughter was about to choose a university to attend. He describes some universities’ advertising efforts as “completely wasted” (Scott 17) on his daughter, with their mass production of “glossy brochures with hundreds of pages” (Scott 17), which they received in the mail. By then, his daughter had done digital research and chosen a university.

Both examples exhibit that neither form of marketing is without its faults; though a successful example of the digital kind, is how Scott's daughter did her own research on the web and finally chose a university fit to tailor her needs based on what she read online. This is not to say that Scott's main argument is that traditional marketing is not working, but merely that "the web has changed the rules" (17) – and organizations that understand this can develop relationships directly with "consumers like you and me" (Scott 17).

While Scott's argument is that the web changed the rules of marketing, traditional marketing is still continuously used everywhere. A simple example is the number of circulars people receive with their daily mail, despite the many digital substitutes.

The messages in an advertisement should be product-focused, one-way spin. Elaborating on that statement, Scott writes that advertisers can no longer break through with "dumbed-down broadcasts about their wonderful products" (20), as the average person sees hundreds of seller-spun commercial messages per day: "People just don't trust them. We turn them off in our minds, if we notice them at all" (Scott 20). This is particularly interesting to include in the analysis of the videos in the analyses section. The main argument is that the web is different from traditional marketing; instead of one-way interruption with company to consumer, web marketing is about "delivering useful content at just the precise moment a buyer needs it. It's about interaction, information, education, and choice" (Scott 20).

Digital marketing allows for companies to easily reach masses of consumers: "those ads that were sent via direct mail marketing can now be emailed, the television ads people didn't stop to watch can play, while a consumer scrolls through a website; and while these consumers can still choose to ignore them, marketers are saving money by choosing these digital methods over traditional marketing methods" (Azpeitia 12). According to Teresa Guarda et al, social media currently has a high number of users, "resulting in changes in behavior and relationships between companies, consumers and followers" (35). This has resulted in significant growth of companies who adhere to digital marketing strategies, "resulting in greater attention from brands for this medium, as it is through it that the company and its positioning can be presented, or even develop a relationship with the consumer" (Guarda et al 35). This is also seen with the high number of celebrities, who have joined TikTok to market themselves and their careers through the app, which is exemplified in the analysis section.

Although digital marketing has been around for many years in some form or other, social media changed the game. As we live in a digital age, social media has become more popular each day, and is used by most people all over the world. This creates the perfect opportunities for digital marketing, which is why the next section is about social media and the role it plays in society.

3.2. Marketing via TikTok

According to Statista, a global business data platform, the most popular content categories on TikTok worldwide as of July 2020 is the following: entertainment with 535 billion hashtag views; dances with 181 billion hashtag views; pranks with 79 billion hashtag views; fitness/sports with 57 billion hashtag views; home reno/DIY with 39 billion hashtag views; beauty/skincare with 33 billion hashtag views; fashion with 27 billion hashtag views; recipes/cooking with 18 billion hashtag views; life hacks/advice etc. with 13 billion hashtag views; pets with 10 billion hashtag views, and outdoors with 2 billion hashtag views. This goes to show that the app has garnered a massive amount of users and amount of context, which makes it relevant to use in this paper.

Guarda et al call TikTok the “latest revolution in social media” (35) and argue that its success is due to the fact that the application has “a touch of creativity and self-expression and also a touch of digital marketing” (35). It offers not only the ability to upload and edit videos with a variety of themes, but also the possibility to create a collaboration with another user.

While Instagram has been a favored platform for brand advertising, TikTok surpassed Instagram in 2019 when it exceeded 1.5 billion downloads and joined the list of the most downloaded applications of the decade (Guarda et al 36). Today, it is the fastest growing social network with more than 500 million daily active users (Guarda et al 36). As of April 2020, the app was the worldwide most popular social network and is available in 154 countries and in 75 different languages, being in the top 25 in 135 of those countries (Guarda et al 39). This has given businesses the perfect opportunity to collaborate with influencers in over 154 countries. In the U.S. alone, TikTok has 100 million active monthly users with 62 % of those users being between the ages of 10 to 29 (Azpeitia 21)

In March 2020, TikTok was downloaded more than 2 billion times worldwide: 32 % comes from Asia Pacific Region, 12 % from North America, 11 % from Middle East and Africa, 10 % from Latin America, and 10 % from Europe, being 55 % female users and 45 %

male users (Guarda et al 39). According to Guarda et al, TikTok is largely driven by the young Generation Z, as 41 % of users are between 16 and 24 years old (39).

3.2.1. The Role of Social Media in Society

The role of social media has over the past years exceeded its expectations and grown to have a much larger platform and voice in our current society. This has been shown in ways such as the constant and frequent updates of information, different perspectives of said information, and the ability to have your voice heard. This makes for a platform full of various voices, people, and now businesses. Small companies are now able to take their business to a larger and global scale, and larger companies have the opportunity to reach a larger audience, which we exemplify in the analysis section. The sheer magnitude of several companies that can be found on various social media platforms, such as Instagram, Facebook, and more importantly in our case TikTok, promoting their products, brand, or people is growing more and more every day.

In the article “The Role of Media in the Construction of Social Reality” by Vanja Nišić and Divna Plavšić, it is explained how the “image of reality” has constructed the everyday man’s life as unimaginable without mass media (73). They go on to explain how mass media is “not only news and information, they are not mere entertainment, and they are not powerful educational tool, they are all that together, and more than that, they are the instrument of social control by special interest group, individuals, institutions, and countries” (Nišić & Plavšić 74). This statement is similar to David Scott’s earlier-mentioned notion about how web marketing is about delivering useful content with interaction, information, and education. Thus, both Nišić, Plavšić and Scott agree that this makes social media an excellent tool for marketing, which we will further research in our analysis section of this paper.

3.2.2. How Companies use Social Media as a Marketing Tool

As mentioned earlier, the evolution of social media has contributed to the evolution of marketing. On several social media platforms exist many forms of marketing strategies – however, something they have in common is the need for engagement (Azpeitia 14). Scholar Janell Azpeitia goes into detail how marketing is used to put emphasis on impressions, e.g., the amount of people who saw said advertisement. Nevertheless, during recent times, social media puts emphasis on engagement and now companies want to engage with their audience

though different challenges, contests, promotions, articles, videos, and many other options (Azpeitia 15). According to scholars Todd Kelsey and Brandon Lyon, mentioned by Azpeitia, the point is to have people talking to you, with you and talking to other people, meaning it is about having people spreading word of mouth to others to create a larger engagement (Azpeitia 15). This is an element of social media marketing which is crucial. Azpeitia describes this as no greater way to reach a new audience than to have them praise the company's products – and to do so, an advertisement must reach a significant amount of people, which is done by having a video go viral (Azpeitia 14-15). In the discussion of word of mouth and virality, Azpeitia mentions a scholar by the name of Steve Jurvetson, who in 1990 described 'viral marketing' as “network-enhanced word of mouth” (15).

Additionally, as easy as it is to gain a large number of admirers on social media, it is just as easy to attract a lot of critics (Azpeitia 15). For this matter, Azpeitia mentions psychologist Jeanne Croteau, who discusses how difficult it is to change people's minds after it has been formed. She explains how people on social media use tools to influence other people's experiences with a brand, topic, product and much more (Azpeitia 15). It does not take much for people to share their thoughts and feelings on certain topics online, and it has the potential to reach a large audience. Therefore, there are pros and cons to having a business online; when the response is positive, the business could be booming and flourishing, however, as Azpeitia puts it, “the mob mentality” on social media platforms can have a negative impact on anyone and any business on these platforms (15). The mob mentality is easily connected to contagion and virality, which is explained further down. The point of it is how people are easily influenced by others into liking or disliking a product of a celebrity, which we exemplify in the analysis section, specifically in the analysis of Hailey Bieber.

Despite the mob mentality, there are solutions and ways for handling such responses. As mentioned earlier, engagement is important, especially between consumer and supplier. Azpeitia suggests creating social media accounts which are “interactive and give consumers the satisfaction of quick responses” (15), which can be done by replying to comments on their page in real time to show that they are engaged and reachable (Azpeitia 15). This can create a good relationship between consumer and supplier, as well as giving the opportunity to handle backlash or the mob mentality in a good manner, to uphold their good relationship.

3.2.3. Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing is “one of the fastest growing segments in the world” (Guarda et al 36). It is the strategy by which it is possible to use social networks “as tools for promoting a brand, products, or services” (Guarda et al 36). It can also be a tool for a celebrity to promote a new film or series, or for a singer to challenge users to a dance in order to promote his or her new song.

A characteristic of social media marketing is that it works as relationship marketing: “the main objective is to create a point of contact with your potential customers, and it is only after the creation of these relationship bonds that one starts to take more incisive actions” (Guarda et al 37) – it is about bringing consumers closer and creating relationships bond in modern digital marketing. On TikTok, companies who create an account can easily comment and share on other videos, which we will show in the analysis section. It is, thus, easier to create a relationship and bond with the users on the platform. In many cases, when a social media account is created for a company, brand, or celebrity, they have a digital media manager, who has experience and is educated in managing and creating content for the account. The best means of managing and creating content is to market research and find your target audience (Azpeitia 16). As Azpeitia explains, “a business can curate, create, or collaborate for fresh new content to stay relevant in an environment of constant change” (16). She continues by elaborating how creating original content can have a positive effect, if the company gathers information about their target audience and uses the information to create content that will catch their attention (Azpeitia 16). This can be achieved in many ways: they could directly ask their audience, giving the audience a chance to be active with the company, brand, or in some cases with celebrities; there are also cases where companies collaborate with other celebrities, or their target audience to curate more traffic on their account and engagement (Azpeitia 16). Whatever the strategy is, the goal is to tell a story through their content that will make their target audience invest time and money on their business, product, or person of which they are promoting (Azpeitia 16). Although much emphasis is on the content, it is just as important to understand where to place such content “in order for their target audience to see it and engage with it” (Azpeitia 16). This could be having their content target current trends of subject, sounds, or dances in the case of TikTok.

A social network is the ideal channel for creating these points of contact, which is why the number of companies that seek social media to promote their product and services is increasing (Guarda et al 37). Promoting on the internet is a great way for companies to get

closer to the target audience in a more “personal, directed, and segmented way” (Guarda et al 37).

3.2.4. The Use of TikTok for Marketing

The platform TikTok, much like many other social media platforms, gives the user the opportunity for freedom and creativity, whether they choose to post and create homemade videos, dancing or singing videos, skits, or videos related to their business. The platform gives the possibility for options and creativity. Some of the more common types of content found on TikTok are the so-called TikTok Challenges. A TikTok challenge is a call to take a form of action and record it in a TikTok video. Typically, the challenge originates from a viral video with a song, dance move, movie quote etc., and is connected to a defining hashtag that goes viral with the challenge itself. Challenging users to dance, react, or sing is a way to encourage users to create their own videos and post them on the app. For instance, a singer can create a challenge with a dance made for a specific song, as a way to promote the song, which will often result in a lot of traffic, as many users want to recreate the dance (Azpeitia 20). This is exemplified specifically with the analysis of Hailey Bieber and Jason Derulo.

Challenges are a creative way for users to participate in a trend that the masses are flocking towards, which relates to the statement above about creating a point of contact with potential customers. The point of contact is easily created with these kinds of videos with dances or challenges, which will be exemplified in the analysis section. It also shows how companies and celebrities benefit from the tendency to herd or cascade, which is proven by Stanley Milgram’s theory about contagion. The bonus of achieving the point of contact through a challenge is also going viral, which is typically a positive thing for the company.

TikTok uses hashtags from local trends to “suggest topics for content for its users, helping to capitalize on local trends and generate viral content for the platform” (Guarda et al 38). With the use of personalized recommendations to each user, TikTok ensures that users are always up to date on the latest videos and “never stop having ideas for creating videos. Using these techniques, TikTok was able to obtain localization on a global scale” (Guarda et al 38). The app can be regarded as being influencer centered, meaning that it focuses on the content creators on the platform, and users can then follow the creators that hold their interest (Azpeitia 21). An essential tactic in the strategy of geographic expansion of TikTok is the use of celebrities (Guarda et al 38). Celebrities and influencers use the platform and generate

viral content: “these celebrities not only publish content on TikTok, but also promote TikTok on other social media channels” (Guarda et al 38).

Azpeitia argues that TikTok opens up a “new avenue for businesses to collaborate with influencers that reach the brand’s target audience” (21). This could mean that the influencer makes related content for the company or brand to pull a larger and new audience from said influencer. According to scholar Genoveva, who mentions Sekhorn, Bickart, Trudel and Fournier, “influencers have a 40 % influence on user awareness” (274), meaning that they can easily influence users into buying things. In the instance of influencer, celebrities are often also viewed as influencers – in this paper, we use the example of Hailey Bieber and Jason Derulo in our analysis. Not only do celebrities use the app, but they are also seen promoting the platform on other social media channels. This is particularly important, when it is noted that 38 % of the users on TikTok trust in celebrity recommendations (Guarda et al 39).

3.3. Video Driven Marketing

According to David Meerman Scott, videos “use emotion to tell stories in ways that most other forms of marketing cannot” (95): “If you create an interesting story, others will share it for you” (Scott 96). This is particularly relevant when it comes to viral marketing, as it shows how virality helps spread a ‘story’ you advertise. The story is essentially what helps companies create the point of contact with the potential customers, which is mentioned earlier. After creating a story and a point of contact, the user is easily persuaded into taking incisive actions, for instance with buying the product that is marketed.

Many companies create videos to “showcase their expertise and provide valuable information to buyers in an easy-to-understand medium” (Scott 97). The interview format is very popular, because it is easy to interview guests and post the resulting video; the guest, or influencer, is bringing their audience to the video, resulting in more traffic for the brand – this is an example of cross-pollinating, where both the interviewer and the interviewee is benefiting; the interviewee grows in popularity for being included in a popular account on TikTok, while the interviewer also gain more popularity from mentioning this interviewee. Other common forms of online videos include humor-based approaches “frequently used to try to garner many views or even go viral, product overviews, and executive speeches” (Scott 97).

Scott goes on to explain “the power of YouTube” (100) and how marketing through videos on the media can drive a business and be “a brilliant asset” (100). He exemplifies with how a construction company can appeal to potential clients with details about how the trim around a particular window needs to be slightly different from other windows, which can easily be shown in detail in a video: “that’s something most homeowners probably wouldn’t care about, but in my case it ends up being a 15-minute discussion before breakfast” (Scott 100).

Scott’s explanation of ‘the power of YouTube’ fits perfectly with TikTok as well and its increase in popularity, which is due to several factors: “easy use; sponsoring celebrities; and focus on localized content. Tiktok simplified the creation and sharing of videos” (Guarda et al 37). All a user needs to do is record anything they want in their daily routines and publish instantly. While it is not easy to go viral – as it mostly happens by accident – TikTok provides the perfect platform to do so. Due to the short format, “neither the video creation nor the viewing process takes much time or effort” (Guarda et al 37). Additionally, the short video content is played as soon as the user opens the app, as the videos start playing one by one: “the viewer gets lost in a sea of content with funny and addictive videos. Due to the addictive nature of the content type, it is very easy for watching random videos for hours” (Guarda et al 37). This notion itself makes it the perfect platform for indirect marketing with or without the use of virality.

A video is a great format to use humor, and Scott wants to challenge the assumption that marketing must be “dreadfully boring” (101) and without humor. The argument is that marketers seem to forget that what all marketers need to do is “communicate to *people*. People want to do business with people, and the [...] companies that understand that develop a following” (Scott 101). If companies treat buyers like human beings, it will gain them more success in the end. TikTok is a brilliant tool because the platform is less formal and easily engaged through humor. As mentioned earlier, the fact that many users are not aware that they are being marketed too makes it even more of a brilliant tool, due to the short-form videos and the quick option of swiping from one video to the other.

3.4. Collective Behavior: Contagion Theory and Virality

As we research the way that social media users are exposed to indirect marketing, we find it is relevant to talk about collective behavior and contagion theory.

The noun “contagion” is often connected to the spread of a disease by close contact between people, which is also the official definition (“Contagion”). However, it is also defined as “something bad that spreads quickly by being passed from person to person” (“Contagion”).

Contagion theory is a theory of collective behavior that explains how a crowd can cause a “hypnotic” (Sampson 79) impact on individuals, as the crowd is influenced by individuals. The concept of contagion first became popular as both “a descriptive and explanatory device for social, as opposed to biological, phenomena in the late 19th century” (Marsden 1998). Historian and philosopher, Gustave Le Bon, developed the theory in 1885 as a reflection of political and social opinions – however, empirical research into the phenomenon first began in the 1950s (Marsden 1998). One of the “clearest and most inclusive” (Marsden 1998) definitions of social contagion is proposed by The Handbook of Social Psychology, where the term is held to be “the spread of affect or behavior from one crowd participant to another; one person serves as the stimulus for the imitative actions of another” (Marsden 1998).

Social contagion research can be broken down into two major areas: studies investigating emotional contagion, which is the spread of mood and affect through populations by simple exposure; and studies investigating behavioral contagion, which is the spread of behaviors through populations by simple exposure. Behavioral contagion is especially relevant in the analysis section when it comes to researching how certain products or videos from TikTok go viral. The way it often works is with a review of a certain beauty product or a dance to a certain song; the review can be about how great the skin coverage of a foundation is, which leads to many people wanting to buy it and try – and then they review the product themselves, making the product go viral. The dance can be to a song by a singer, who is popular already, but the singer can create a point of contact with his followers by ‘challenging’ them to dance the same dance to this song, maybe even with the promise of sharing the videos he likes. The promise of more attention from a beloved celebrity might cause enough reason to do the dance challenge and share the video, which other people will see, and then follow suit, creating a behavioral contagion.

Behavioral contagion research can be broken down into six broad areas based on the nature of the behavior that is spread: hysterical contagions, deliberate self-harm contagions, contagions of aggression, rule violation contagions, consumer behavior contagions, and

financial contagions (Marsden 1998). As consumer behavior contagion is the most relevant one when it comes to indirect marketing via social media, this is the only category that will be used and mentioned in the analysis section. Furthermore, Paul Marsden states that the contagious properties of consumer behavior can result in “the spread of consumer fashions and fads through populations in a manner more indicative of an influence epidemic than rational behaviour” (1998). This is discussed more in the discussion section.

According to *Endemic: Essays in Contagion Theory* (2016), there has been “a peculiar way” (Nixon & Servitje vi) in which the idea of contagion compels, as etymologically, from Latin, *con* means ‘together with’ and *tangere* means ‘to touch’. Thus, the word itself suggests the primal contact of a touch. ‘Contagious’ means communicable by contact, a subset of the broader term ‘infectious’. Additionally, according to the foreword, ‘contagious’ spoke as much about “the powerful circulations of ideas, emotions, or affects as about disease agents” (Nixon & Servitje vi) from at least the seventeenth century and especially in conjunction with revolutions. “Contagion tells us about the many ways in which we are in contact; it shows us whom we have touched both literally and figuratively, or more to the point, it blurs the distinction between them” (Nixon & Servitje vi). This notion is especially important when it comes to researching social media and virality – the latter term is explained further down in the theory section.

At the turn of the twentieth century, early sociologists coined the term ‘social contagion’, which is used to express “the material impact of the circulation of concepts and beliefs” (Nixon & Servitje vi). The authors argue that contagion is not just ‘in the air’; “it is endemic to our contemporary culture” (Nixon & Servitje 1). Furthermore, they argue that ‘endemic’ “probes the depths of the notion that ‘going viral’ is a pervasively endemic (post)modern condition” (Nixon & Servitje 3), as its discourse thoroughly structures our world that it is endemic to our process of social construction.

While Nixon & Servitje use a more critical approach towards virality and contagion, Tony D. Sampson uses a more descriptive one. According to his book, *Virality: Contagion Theory in the Age of Networks* (2012), the age of globalization is synonymous with the age of contagion. Sampson defines the age of contagion as an age in which “increased contact with the Other has rekindled anxieties concerning the spreading of disease and corruption since

permeable boundaries of the nation-state can no longer function as a colonial hygiene shield” (2).

While the adjective ‘viral’ is defined as “like or cause by a virus” (Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries), it is also defined as an adjective “used to describe a piece of information, a video, an image, etc. that is sent rapidly over the internet and seen by large numbers of people within a short time” (“Viral”). This term is important in this paper, as the purpose of posting videos on social media is for them to go viral or at least get enough attention to produce sales or publicity. This will be elaborated in the analysis section, where we will analyze how specific products have gone viral on TikTok – for instance with the use of memes. A meme is defined as “an image, a video, a piece of text, etc. that is passed very quickly from one internet user to another, often with slight changes that make it humorous” (“Meme”).

Sampson argues that ‘virality’ and ‘meme’ are “the marketing buzzwords of the network age” [and] have been conjured up from an assortment of crude renderings of evolutionary theory, powerful computer-assisted contagion modeling, and business trends” (2). Contagion models, financial crisis, social influence, innovations, fashions, and fads, and human emotions are understood to “... spread universally like viruses across networks” (Sampson 2). In this paper, the theory of contagion is relevant when it comes to analyzing how companies and celebrities use connectivity to their benefit.

Medical metaphors and biological analogies are used to underpin the phenomenon of virality. In Sampson’s book, he argues that this causes an “overgeneralization that network capitalism, or indeed resistance to it, *spreads like a disease*[and] inadequately describes the politics of the network age” (2). Sampson wishes to unravel the many discourse and rhetorical references to viral disease and highlight how discourse is intimately interwoven with a prediscursive flow of “contagious effect, feelings, and emotions” (Sampson 3).

Sampson mentions an experiment done in 1968 by social psychologist Stanley Milgram, which was intended to understand how social influence spreads through the urban crowd. The experiment was designed to stimulate the imitative behaviors of individuals as they encountered a crowd. An actor was planted on a busy street corner and told to look up at a tall building. A few of the passers-by noticed and looked up, too. Next, Milgram increased the number of actors to five to gauge how this increase in stimulus would influence the decision-making process of the passers-by (Sampson 50). 20 percent of them looked up in the first test, while the number jumped to 80 percent when the five actors appeared on the street

corner. Based on the experiment, Milgram deduced that “the individual makes a *contagious assumption* based on the quantity of evidence that there is something worth looking up at” (Sampson 51). The individual’s imitation of others is largely dependent on his cognitive assessment of the magnitude of social influence.

Stanley Milgram’s work has helped confirm the tendency to herd or cascade, “particularly in times of bubble building and subsequent financial crisis but also during the spreading of fashion and fads” (Sampson 51). This conclusion is especially relevant to keep in mind in the analysis of TikTok videos.

Milgram further concludes that it is “the evolutionary propensity of individuals to obey rather than to imitate that matters [as] imitation leads to conformity, but obedience ultimately requires the distinct social action of the individual” (Sampson 52). Sampson describes Milgram as an “authentic viral marketer” (52) as he planted suggestibility – via the points of fascination provided by the skyward looking actors – into the neurological, biological, and sociological composition of the crowd. Thus, Milgram was not merely an observer; he controlled the involuntary, semiconscious, and imitate response induced in his experiment. While social conformity is linked to authority and obedience in many of Milgram’s other experiments, the triggering of crowd contagion in Manhattan was socially engineered, which should not invalidate the conclusion any less.

David Meerman Scott argues that the web can “propel a brand or company to fame and fortune for free” (Scott 109): “Whatever you call it— viral, buzz, or word-of-mouth marketing— having other people tell your story drives action” (Scott 109). He states that many viral phenomena start innocently: someone creates a funny video clip, or story to amuse friends; the person sends it to another one, and that person sends it to yet another, and on and on: “the creator might have expected to reach at most a few dozen friends, but the result is something more” (Scott 108-109).

Some companies try to create a viral campaign while others try to specialize in the area – “but when organizations set out to go viral, the vast majority of campaigns fail” (Scott 110). Even worse than that, some companies set up fake viral campaigns and employ people, who are in some way compensated to write about a product. However, these fake viral campaigns rarely succeed and may even cause great harm to reputations, as “the web is hyperefficient at collective investigative reporting and smoking out trickery” (Scott 110). In order to create a viral video, one needs “a huge amount of good luck and perfect timing [...].

A sort of homemade feel seems to work, while slick and polished usually doesn't" (Scott 110). This connects with the aspect of indirect marketing, as it must be less formal and look a certain way to not put too much attention on the fact that it is an ad. What makes TikTok famous is especially the way that everyone can make a video and post it; and homemade videos are typically less slick and polished. In the analysis section, we will look more into how companies and celebrities try to 'fit in' with this type of videos that seem less polished, adding to the element of indirect marketing. Nevertheless, the formula for a viral video is simple, according to Scott:

"A combination of some great (and free) web content (a video, a blog entry, or an e-book) that is groundbreaking or amazing or hilarious or involves a celebrity, plus a network of people to light the fire, and all with the links that make it very easy to share" (110).

The formula is perfect for a platform such as TikTok, where web content can both involve humor, celebrities, and a huge network to 'light the fire' as well as a 'share' button. The statement of 'lighting a fire' is directly related to virality and the contagious behavior of making something go viral. However, companies need to monitor the web, because their products may go viral in either a positive or a negative light. Reviews on TikTok are popular and can be both good and bad. A product or brand can go viral due to a bad review, which can cause harm to the reputation of the company. If a celebrity posts a video saying or doing something insensitive, the celebrity can go viral for that insensitive thing, which can cause harm to the career of that celebrity. Therefore, companies and celebrities need to monitor the web for negative as well as positive virality.

Conclusively, Scott states in his book that viral marketing is "one of the most exciting and powerful ways" (122) to reach an audience. While it is not easy to harness the power to go viral, any organization has the power to become famous on the internet and use that fame to produce more traffic for themselves. In the analysis section, we will look into how companies and celebrities use TikTok videos to market themselves and make their products or brands go viral, which we relate to crowd theory in how people share the videos.

4.0. Analysis Section

The analysis section is divided into the sections in which we have chosen to divide the categories. First, we analyze videos from cosmetics companies including Fenty Beauty and

Rare Beauty. Second, we analyze videos from celebrities including Selena Gomez, Will Smith, Hailey Bieber, and Jason Derulo. Third, we analyze videos from purposefully selected companies including Duolingo and Ryanair.

The celebrities are referenced with their first names in this paper, as the viewer of their videos feels more on a first-name basis. The familiarity that one is positioned in by watching their videos makes it easier to refer to them by their first name. More importantly, we mention both Hailey Bieber and Justin Bieber as well as Will Smith and Jada Pinkett Smith which is why it is easier to refer to all celebrities by their first names or full names to avoid confusion.

All the videos mentioned in the analysis can be found in the appendix at the end of the paper. The best way to view the videos is to press the link that goes to the TikTok website, as it shows the caption to the video as well as the number of likes and comments. However, we have also uploaded the videos to Google Drive, to which we have attached a weblink in the appendix in case the videos are deleted from the TikTok account. The video files do not include the video captions, likes or comments, as they cannot be filed.

4.1. Cosmetics Companies

The first category we have chosen is cosmetics companies, where we have chosen Fenty Beauty and Rare Beauty. In the sections below, we explain more about each company and analyze the chosen videos from each company's account. We have chosen Fenty Beauty and Rare Beauty specifically, because they are both extremely prominent on TikTok and have shown up on our own 'For You' pages. Products from both companies have gone viral, which makes them more interesting to analyze in the case of contagion and the aspect of virality. Analyzing this company gives an idea on how they achieved their prominence on TikTok.

4.1.1 Fenty Beauty

Fenty Beauty is a cosmetics brand that launched on September 8, 2017. The brand was founded by Rihanna, a famous Barbadian singer, actress, fashion designer, and businesswoman. While she goes by the name Rihanna, her full name is Robyn Rihanna Fenty, which is an inspiration for the name of the cosmetics brand. Based on the Fenty Beauty website, the brand is particularly focusing on a broad inclusiveness across skin tones and gender (Fentybeauty.com, About), which is something they are widely known for. According to Dirk Winifred, Rihanna launched the makeup line so that "women everywhere

would be included” (2020). On the website of Fenty Beauty at the time of launch, it used to say that Rihanna has been a fan of makeup for a long time, but “being a black woman, she has seen a lack of products targeted toward women with darker shades” (Winifred 2020). Thus, she created Fenty Beauty, which focuses on a wide range of traditionally hard-to-match skin tones, creating formulas that work for all skin types and coming up with universal shades. The company famously launched the brand with over 40 shades of foundation, which has attracted fans everywhere (Winifred 2020).

At the time of writing, Fenty Beauty has 1,2 million followers on TikTok and 17,6 million likes (Screenshot 1). This shows that 1,2 million people willingly follow the content on this page and supposedly like it.

The account posts regularly and has already posted many videos. Many of the videos seem to include Rihanna, which is not surprising, as her celebrity status might attract followers and more consumers to the account. The first example is in FentyVideo1, which is a video from International Women’s Day on March 8. The video features a clip of Rihanna talking about how she wants women to



Screenshot 1

feel confident and sexy “no matter what size they are, no matter what shade of nude they are, no matter what their personality is, their race is, their religion. I want women to feel confident and sexy because that’s who we are, and we deserve to feel like that” (FentyVideo1). This video shows the users what the purpose of the brand is and how they can feel “confident and sexy” when they use Fenty Beauty. A similar example is seen in FentyVideo2, which is a video of Rihanna doing a tutorial on how to get “the Fenty Face”. “Fenty Face” is a term for how your face looks after applying Fenty Beauty makeup to your face. On their website, Fenty Beauty writes the following: “Share your photos and tag #FENTYFACE and @FENTYBEAUTY on Instagram for a chance to be featured” (Fentybeauty.com, #FentyFace). On TikTok it seems to be the same concept, as the account comments on videos with the tag. This is both an example of encouraging contagious behavior (the posting of videos using the tag) and an example of how they create a point of contact with their consumers with whom they interact with the use of the tag.

The comment about feeling confident and sexy in FentyVideo1 and mentioning “the Fenty Face” in FentyVideo2 are both important points of the respective videos. They both show people how to use the product, which the brand is selling. In FentyVideo2, Rihanna says, “I still get freaked out of how good this is” after using a product to contour her face. This fits well with Deborah Lee’s statement in the theory section about how companies should show how a certain product meets a user’s needs. By claiming that the makeup is good to such an extent that Rihanna still gets “freaked out” over it, while simultaneously showing how to use it and how it looks on, the cosmetics brand easily shows the followers of their account – and the supposed consumers – how the product fits a user’s needs. Similarly, by claiming that she wants to make women feel “confident and sexy”, Rihanna is directly addressing the users who have the need to feel that way.

Another important point of FentyVideo2 is when Rihanna ends the tutorial by announcing that the brand is now sold in Ulta Beauty, which is an American chain of beauty stores. This is not only marketing for the brand itself but for Ulta Beauty as well, as it is mentioned in both the video and the caption of the video as a tag. This allows for users to easily click on the name of the brand and be directed over to their page and website to buy the product, benefiting both the company and the chain. Furthermore, the video appears to be a normal tutorial, which is one of the popular types of content on TikTok. It draws the users in with that fact before it changes into Rihanna announcing their partnership with the American chain of beauty stores.

Tutorials on how to use their products is a major part of the content on the company’s page. It is a great way to market their products by showing followers and consumers how to use the products. In FentyVideo3, they have not merely made a tutorial; they are sharing a ‘blushhack’ where you can combine two of their products into something more. By sharing a ‘beautyhack’, Fenty Beauty follows Janell Azpeitia’s statement in the theory section about engaging with their audience. Sharing tricks and hacks is something we do with our friends, which is why this reaches the audience and followers on a more personal level, whilst simultaneously advertising two of their products. This is also a great way of making people buy and praise their products without actually saying “buy this product here”, which is the element of indirect marketing. Moreover, beauty hacks tend to go viral on TikTok, and while this video is posted by the company’s account, it is a homemade video belonging to a different account. Fenty Beauty merely shares the video on their page, which is why it does not seem neither slick nor polished, adhering to David Scott’s statement in the theory section;

thus, the video has a higher chance of going viral as it at least has the typical markers as other viral videos.

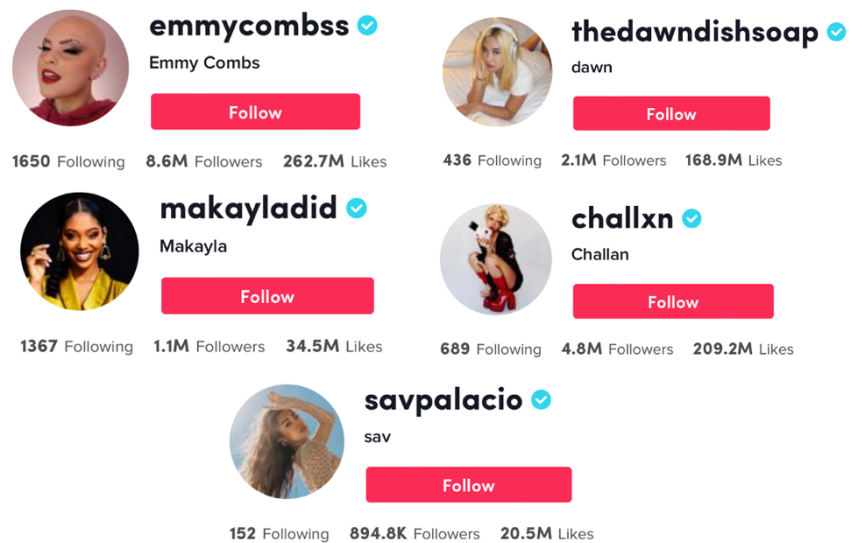
TikTok House: #fentybeautyhouse

In 2020 Rihanna opened a Fenty Beauty “TikTok House”, which she describes as being “a platform for the next wave of content creators” (Gardner 2020).

She chose five TikTok creators to move into a house for a short period of time and “use the space to create the popular videos found on the app” (Gardner 2020). According to Gardner’s article “What’s a TikTok House—And Why Does Rihanna Have One?” it is claimed that these so-called TikTok Houses “have been popping up in places like Los Angeles, where creators often live together and use the space to create the popular videos found on the app” (2020). The chosen TikTok creators are the following: @emmycombss, @makayladid, @savpalacio, @challxn and @thedawndishsoap. At the time of writing, the five creators have more than 17 million followers combined (Screenshot 2). All the chosen TikTok creators are supposed to post videos from the house and tag the beauty brand on the app. They have

video-ready natural light, beauty stations, and makeup pantries which they can use as much as they want for beauty videos and tutorials.

Subsequently, the Fenty Beauty account will share the videos, which the creators



Screenshot 2

make, so the 1,2 million followers can see them. Simultaneously, the creators’ combined followers of 17 million people will see the videos as well. This way of marketing their products on TikTok is the perfect way to gain commercial success. The TikTok Houses are a perfect example of the ‘change in behavior’ between companies and followers/consumers, mentioned by Teresa Guarda et al in the theory section. Guarda et al claim that many companies adhere to digital marketing strategies that result in greater attention for the brands,

which is easily achieved with a TikTok House. The success of this marketing strategy is difficult to measure, though at the time of writing, the “fentybeautyhouse” hashtag has more than 103.2 million views. Based on that fact alone, the brand achieved commercial success. While a view counts as a new view the second time you watch it, 103.3 million views still indicate that many users on the app watched the videos with tag and that they reached a large audience.

When you search for the hashtag, the following text accompanies the search result: “The housemates are showing off their tips and tricks for a flawless Fenty Face, and we can’t wait to see your #FENTYBEAUTYHOUSE-inspired looks!” (Fentybeauty.com, #FentyFace). This means that not only do the House members use the tag, but other followers might use the tag as well to show off looks inspired by the looks from the members in the House. Furthermore, it spreads contagious behavior, as it encourages people to ‘share’ their looks with products from the brand. The encouragement is based on the assumption that many of their followers will want attention from the brand, which is why even more people will post videos and create more publicity around the products. This also exemplifies the way that producers and consumers are not distanced from each other on TikTok, as they are in printed or broadcast news. The audience’s participation in communicative situations on TikTok (such as posting a video) makes it less easy to distinguish the roles, as the users both post videos for Fenty Beauty, and are included in the encoding process, but are simultaneously affected by other videos also posted by Fenty Beauty.

An example of a video from the House is seen in FentyVideo4, where a girl uses the body luminizer and claims that she “literally looks like [she] came from a tropical vacation” (FentyVideo4). The video is similar to a typical video with beauty content, where a girl shows excitement about a product, she is trying for the first time. The difference here is that the video is posted by a user collaborating with a company, though it is not directly mentioned in the video. The users watch the video and might be intrigued, see the tag of the company name and go to their profile to buy the product. Furthermore, the TikTok House is a way for the brand to engage with their audience in a different way than with traditional marketing, much like Janell Azpeitia’s statement in the theory section. Larger engagement is created as the Fenty Beauty account reposts videos that other creators have posted. The videos are tutorials about how great the products are, and how nice they look on the face and body. By collaborating with popular TikTok creators, Fenty automatically seems more credible, as the brand is not the one posting about how great the products are; other people

are instead. According to Azpeitia, this is a crucial element of social marketing, as the brand is reaching a new audience – the creator’s followers – to have them praise the company’s products. While Azpeitia’s comment is followed up with the claim that this is done with having a product go viral, it can easily be applied to the notion of TikTok Houses as well.

Additionally, both the use of the #fentybeautyhouse tag and the collaboration with popular TikTok creators is a way to further ensure a possibility of a product going viral. While it is not something you can plan, having ordinary users post videos on the app plays into the “homemade” feel that David Scott mentions. When a user scrolls through TikTok and sees a video posted by one of the creators from the House, it would not seem like a slick and polished video, which makes it more possible to go viral. The indirect marketing is that the creators from the House are not Fenty Beauty themselves, and not celebrities either, which makes them more credible for users, who believe them when they say how good the product is. The excitement in a video with a good review can be contagious as well, where their emotions encourage behavioral contagion and make the users take more incisive action such as buying the product in question.

While it is never possible to plan virality, Fenty Beauty succeeded in their attempt. Many of their products went viral after they started posting on TikTok; according to Catherine Kulke’s article “TikTok Made Me Buy It: The 6 Most Viral TikTok Beauty Products”, Fenty Beauty Stunna Lip Paint went viral thanks to its “distinctive, prism-shaped tube and highly pigmented paint” (2021), which inspired a trend in which influencers apply the product stroke by stroke to various songs: “Buoyed by its popularity on the platform, the Stunna Lip Paint powered \$23.2M EMV of Fenty Beauty’s \$581.1M EMV total from February 2020 to January 2021” (Kulke 2021). EMV means Ending Market Value and signifies the value of something at the end of an investment period.

The sentence “TikTok Made Me Buy It” in the headline of the mentioned article is inspired by a trend on the app, where people see someone recommend a beauty product or gadget, “and the next thing you know, you’re hitting up your favorite online retailer to grab it” (Vincent 2021). At the time of writing, the trend has over 19.9 billion views, which confirms how massive the trend is. Furthermore, it correlates to Azpeitia’s statement in the theory section about people on social media having the tools to influence others’ experiences with brands, topics, products, and more. The claim that TikTok “makes” anyone buy anything confirms how big of an influence companies or celebrities can have on the app.

More importantly, it describes the contagious behavior that exists on the app; one user describing how good a product is tempts many other users to go buy it while blaming TikTok. This phenomenon is discussed in more detail in the discussion section.

Fenty Beauty used the virality to their benefit. In FentyVideo5, Fenty Beauty writes that they want to celebrate achieving 1 more million followers on TikTok, which is why they made an exclusive TikTok bundle of their products: “We created 2 special TikTok bundles for y’all. Inspired by you and our most viral products. This is for all the #TikTokMadeMeBuyIt Moments” (FentyVideo5). The bundle is a great example of Deborah Lee’s comment in the theory section on marketing research. Instead of handing out surveys or asking potential users about their needs, Fenty Beauty knew by merely looking at the viral trends on the app and seeing that their products were trending. Creating a bundle with products that are already selling, makes it seem like they are doing the consumers a favor, so they do not have to find the products themselves. Additionally, while it is a clear direct marketing approach when they say, “shop the tap on our profile”, the company tries to disguise this fact by claiming to merely celebrate their extra million followers by making this great offer to their consumers, while, in actuality, it is to gain them more sales. Furthermore, it is a great way to establish the point of contact, which Guarda et al mention in the theory section. By giving the customers (followers) on TikTok the desired products in one bundle, Fenty Beauty shows their followers that they are included in the sales process, which creates a bond. It also signals that they care about their consumers and their thoughts about their products, as they have been keeping up with the reviews – which, arguably, most companies do.

Using Trends to go Viral

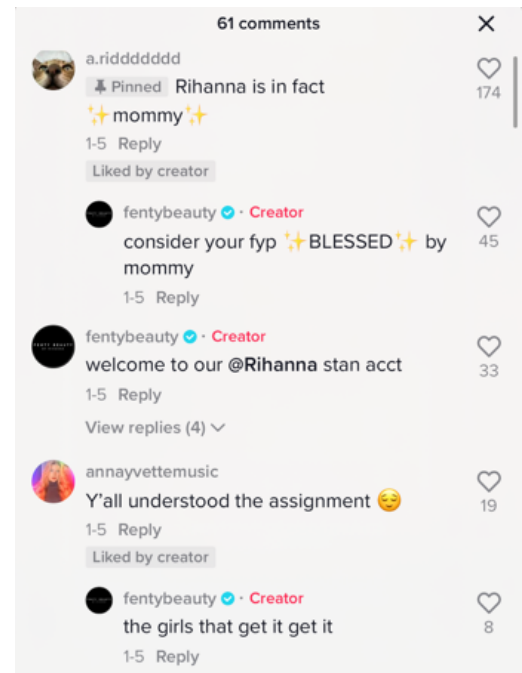
While going viral is not something you can control, using trending sounds and other trending memes in your videos goes a long way to at least put you on the TikTok map. For instance, a Brandon Yu writes in his article about “How to Go Viral on TikTok with a Trending Sound”, where he explains that the fun of the app “comes from the videos that play with the inside joke or format of a trend – often, specifically, a TikTok trending ‘sound’” (2021). Yu states that creators on TikTok can capitalize on a trending sound to gain more traction or “even go viral” (2021).

A ‘sound’ is the audio behind a TikTok video – “like music, a clip from a TV show, or a funny noise” (Yu 2021). Most importantly, the audio from an uploaded video is usable to

others “... who can then create their own videos from that same audio, either in a unique way or by playing off of the original video’s format or conceit” (Yu 2021). A trending sound, then, refers to “any specific audio that’s being used many times over by other creators in their videos – essentially, it’s a sound that has gone viral on the app” (Yu 2021). Additionally, Elissa Bain writes that “every few weeks, a new sound pops up on TikTok and completely takes over the app” (2021), which is the same thing as going viral.

Fenty Beauty uses many trending sounds on their page. For instance, in FentyVideo6, where they are promoting a lip product in a new color shade. The trending sound is of someone asking, “are you new here?”, which emphasizes that the product is new. When you click on the sound, it is evident that more than 130.1 thousand people have used this specific sound on the app, which confirms how popular the viral sound was. In FentyVideo7 they use another trending sound of a man approaching a woman and calling her ‘mommy’. According to Elissa Bain, ‘mommy’ is slang for “hot girl”: “... so he was presumably saying the girl was attractive” (2021). The phrase went viral with videos “flooding [...] of good looking women with ‘Mommy? Sorry’ comments” (Bain 2021). Over 135,9 thousand people have used the sound in videos, again confirming the popularity of the sound.

In FentyVideo7 the company refers to Rihanna as ‘mommy’ while simultaneously marketing their highlighter called “Liquid Killawat Fluid”. This follows Lee’s statement about a consumer’s needs, as the consumers can borrow some of Rihanna’s glamor by using the same products as she. Additionally, it strengthens their bond with the followers, as they use the same language and slang, which makes them more relatable for the followers. This is also confirmed in Screenshot 3, where we see the comments to FentyVideo7. While not everyone might understand the term ‘mommy’, Fenty Beauty expects their users to



Screenshot 3

immediately understand that this has nothing to do with an actual mom and more to do with ‘a hot girl’, as described above. Not many users on TikTok do not understand that reference –

the comments section is filled with people who immediately understand the reference, which is Fenty Beauty's expectation with their encoding of the video.

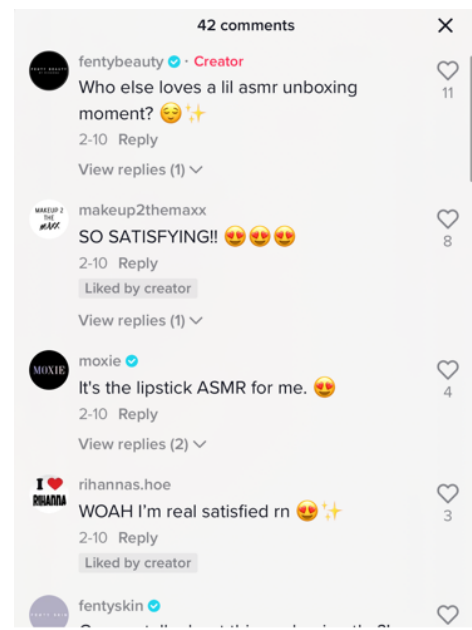
The Fenty Beauty account interacts with users and followers by answering their comments. By using slang such as “stan acct”, “blessed” with star emoticons, and other popular terms known by the typical Gen-Z-user on the app, the company creates a bigger bond with the consumers and followers. Writing “the girls that get it get it” is a reference to another popular sound on TikTok, which was also trending and had more than 69.000 videos used on the app at the time of writing. Using Stuart Hall's terms, the company expects the followers to possess a certain frame of knowledge about the popular sound, which will help them decode the video with that reference. It also allows them to borrow someone else's point of contact: the popular sound, which many people are familiar with and supposedly entertained by, based on its popularity. Using the term ‘the girls that get it, get it’ is a way of signaling exclusivity, which many might desire. When the company puts words next to star emoticons, they try to reach the target audience even more – however, it is also a way of interaction with the people already commenting. The first comment in Screenshot 3 is answered with a mirrored use of the sparkling emoticons, which creates a new point of contact with both that specific user and the other users who read the interaction. The informal register and the use of similar emoticons used by many on the app makes the company more relatable and creates a more intimate bond. Based on observations on TikTok, the use of sparkling emoticons before and after a specific word is a way of emphasizing the word, meaning that both “Mommy” and “blessed” are emphasized in the mentioned screenshots, which is, yet again, a way of emphasizing the informal register to signal a relatableness with the users.

The last example of the use of a trending sound is seen in FentyVideo8, where the sound is a woman talking about finding “your perfect lip shade”. The video is a repost of a video posted by a creator on TikTok, who shares how she thinks you find your perfect lip shade. By using both the sound and the “BeautyHack” tag in the video, Fenty Beauty attracts more followers and possibly more sales of the products in the video. It also plays into the point of contact with the sharing of beauty hacks, as it creates a closer relationship with the followers, and gets the company closer to the target audience in a more ‘personal, directed, and segmented way’, as Guarda et al argue.

Fenty Beauty uses other types of sounds than merely the trendy ones. In FentyVideo9, 10, 11, 12, and 13 we see an example of the account using a sound they posted a while back instead of a trendy sound. The sound belongs to Rihanna herself talking about how a lipstick “completely transforms a look” even if you are not wearing other makeup products: “a good, strong lipstick changes everything”. This sound is from a tutorial video they posted on their page earlier, where Rihanna herself shows how to use their products. All five videos are posted by regular accounts on the app, meaning that they all have the ‘homemade’ feel to them, which makes them both more relatable for the audience and more able to go viral, according to David Scott. Furthermore, using their own sound might make the sound go viral which makes the company, and their products, go viral as well.

While Fenty Beauty uses many trending sounds, they also use other trending aspects to market their videos and products. One of the most popular trends seems to be ASMR videos. ASMR stands for autonomous sensory meridian response and can be featured in several aspects: “anything, really; a signature ASMR video emphasizes soothing visuals and soft noises or sound effects” (Ellefson 2021). On TikTok, many cosmetics companies use ASMR in the form of unboxing new products. An example is in FentyVideo14, where we see hands unboxing lipsticks, opening, and closing the lids, and tapping long nails on the lipstick. All the actions result in ASMR; the text to the video is even “Volume up. POV: You finally cop and unbox your face #FENTYICON shades” (FentyVideo14). Furthermore, they have tagged “asmr” and “oddlysatisfying” in the video. On Screenshot 4 you can see the comments on the video of people finding it satisfying, as well as Fenty Beauty’s comment themselves: “Who else loved a lil asmr unboxing moment?”. It is also worth noting that Fenty Skin has commented on the video, which is Rihanna’s skincare brand, meaning that both are gaining engagement from this post and benefiting each other.

The use of specific words in the video is also a way of reaching the target audience, both with the use of “POV” – which is a reference to many videos on TikTok – and with the use of ‘cop’, which is slang for “get hold of”. As mentioned earlier, this informal register, which is dominant in the entire page and all the videos, is a way of reaching the



Screenshot 4

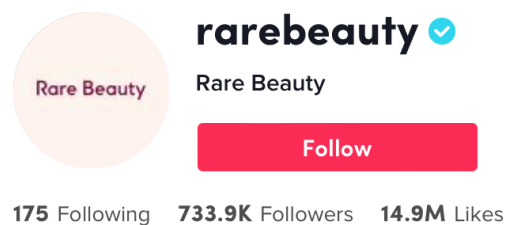
audience on a level that makes it easier for the target audience to relate to. The indirect marketing approaches are done with the use of tutorials, ‘beautyhacks’ posted by other users and shared by the company, and the use of popular sounds, where the company expects the users to understand the references enough to decode the meaning in a preferred reading. While Hall’s notion indicates that the users are aware of the conditions of production, this shows that while the users are aware of the use of sounds, they are not necessarily aware of the fact that it is a marketing attempt. Naturally, it is obvious that this is posted by Fenty Beauty, consequently making it difficult to disguise the fact that it is an ad. However, as the company has simply reposted videos and tutorials from other, random users on the app, the viewer might not immediately recognize it as an ad. While the use of a popular sound in a video shows an expectation to the viewers, about knowing the viral sound, it does not necessarily mean that the viewer is aware of the production in connection with the ad. The fact that Fenty Beauty reposts videos from other users on the platform is an example of how encoders can, simultaneously, be decoders. The user in the video might feel happy about Fenty Beauty sharing their video, which can encourage the user to post more videos with the same content. Moreover, the indirect promise of reposting user videos encourages other users to post videos with Fenty Beauty products, which is an easy way to gain more engagement for Fenty Beauty.

Additionally, the use of a TikTok House is a great way for the company to create engagement and more authenticity, as they are not the ones praising their own products. The reviews from the TikTok House encourage behavioral contagion as the “TikTok Made Me Buy It” is included in most video reviews on the app. Many users listen to a review and are immediately encouraged to go buy the product, and try it on for themselves, as mentioned earlier. This will be discussed in more detail later in the paper.

4.1.2. Rare Beauty

Rare Beauty is a makeup line founded in 2020 by American singer, actress, and producer

Selena Gomez. The line focuses on “breaking down unrealistic standards of perfection” (Rarebeauty.com, “About”), and to “help everyone celebrate their individuality by redefining what beautiful means” (Rarebeauty.com, “About”).



Screenshot 5

At the time of writing, their account has 733.9 thousand followers and 14.9 million likes (Screenshot 5). Like Fenty Beauty, Rare Beauty post videos regularly, while many of the videos include their celebrity founder – in this case, it is videos with Selena Gomez or references to her. The first example can be seen on RareVideo1, where Selena Gomez is introducing a new product. The account has hashtagged Selena’s name in the caption of the video, which might persuade people, who exclusively follow her instead of the company’s account, to watch the video and like or share it. On TikTok, you can add a hashtag to your favorite’s pages, which most likely makes the app’s algorithm add videos with the hashtag to followers’ ‘For You’ pages. Using the hashtag in their video, Rare Beauty ensures that followers of Selena Gomez and the hashtag with her name see the video and possibly like, comment, or share the video, which makes it more possible for the video to go viral and for the company to gain engagement and publicity. Additionally, Selena herself alludes to behavior contagion as she says that she “can’t wait for you guys to try it, and don’t forget to tag me in your new looks” (RareVideo1), which is an example of how the company tries to activate viral behavior – the more people like the video or tag the company, the bigger the chance is of going viral. Additionally, the indirect promise of watching and sharing the videos that people will be posting encourages people to do so, whilst giving the brand more publicity while simultaneously encouraging contagious behavior. This is a great example of how the company uses behavioral contagion to their benefit with the addition of their beloved celebrity founder, who is the face of the company.

Indirectly promising to watch the videos is Selena’s way of making sure that people will share the looks with her, while simultaneously keeping an eye out on her account to see which ones she shares. This itself ensures Selena more traffic on her page, while also ensuring that people follow her own page as well and will be exposed to the marketing, she uses there, which we analyze later in the paper. The promise is indirect because she does not directly say that she will look at the videos or that she will follow the tag. Selena merely reminds people not to forget to share their looks, but the followers are left with an indirect indication that she will be seeing their makeup looks and, thus, that she will be paying them attention. What emphasizes the indirectness is the fact that Selena Gomez has been off the internet for several years and has had her assistant post things on her social media pages on her behalf (Kirkpatrick 2022). While this is elaborated in the section about Selena Gomez later in the paper, it is relevant to note in this case, as Selena’s absence from social media has been common knowledge for many fans throughout the last few years. Therefore, the indirect

promise of watching the looks her fans share is strengthened when they realize that she might go on the internet to see their videos, subsequently encouraging them to post videos even more.

RareVideo2 is another example of the company using Selena Gomez to market their products. The video shows which makeup products Selena wore for the Screen Actors Guild Awards, also known as the SAG Awards. RareVideo2 was posted on March 1, 2022, which is two days after the award show (Sagawards.org). While it is not clear why the video was posted after two days, a possible explanation might be that Selena “created a tremendous buzz on the internet” (Raut 2022) after the show. Multiple articles covered the news about how she tripped in her high black heels on the red carpet and was escorted by security personnel shortly after (Raut 2022). The video and the picture in the article both went viral, as people – most especially her fans – were concerned about her being “left injured” (Raut 2022). However, she “did not fail to fulfill her responsibility” (Raut 2022) of presenting an award on stage, as she merely “dither her swanky high heels and walked barefoot on the stage” (Raut 2022), which created more ‘buzz’. Several popular news outlets such as Billboard.com, (Kaufman 2022) US Magazine (Macke 2022), and Teen Vogue (Nesvig 2022) covered this, which might have been the reason for her going viral for it.

Whether she did it on purpose to activate this viral behavior is difficult to confirm, though it is very likely. Rare Beauty certainly used it to their benefit, as every news outlet mentions her looks and what she was wearing, which made her appearance go viral with the news of her injury as well. The cosmetics company benefited from this, as Selena was wearing products from the makeup brand, which might go viral along with her appearance. Eight of their products are marketed in the video, whilst also showing a picture of Selena Gomez from the award show. This indicates an indirect way of saying that by using these products, one can borrow some of the elegance and glamor from the award show. Teen Vogue even described the incident as the shoe falling “extremely glamorously from her foot in a true *Cinderella* fashion, because, well, everything she does is iconic”. Rare Beauty alludes that the fans or followers can borrow some of this ‘iconic’ and ‘glamorous’ behavior by wearing the same makeup she does. Teen Vogue’s article, as well as US Magazine and many other magazines covering the viral news all mention her glamorous look and even the fact that she was “of course, using Rare Beauty” (Nesvig 2022). Thus, RareVideo2 is a great example of how the company uses virality to their benefit, as they were possibly inspired by the viral photos and videos of Selena from the award show, prompting them to post a video of

which products she wore. The users are behaviorally conditioned by Selena’s glamor, which seduces them to go buy the products.

A similar video is RareVideo3, which is the same concept of using a picture of the celebrity to sell their products. RareVideo3 shows the makeup products Selena wore at the Critics’ Choice Awards. Like RareVideo2, the products are shown as a screenshot from Rare Beauty’s web shop. Using screenshots that show both the price and the ‘add to basket’ button might make people more inclined to go to the website and shop the products. The brand makes the process easier for the consumer, as all the information, whether it is price or product, is provided. While it is an obvious direct attempt to sell the products, the company tries to disguise the directness with their attempt to make it seem like a favor they are doing their followers, who keep asking about Selena’s look in the comments section.

According to the theory section, Guarda et al claim that a characteristic of social media marketing is that it works as relationship marketing. By creating a point of contact and, thus, a bond with potential customers, the followers most likely take more incisive actions – such as buying the company’s products. A great example of this is seen in RareVideo4, which features a video with one of their popular products: the beauty blush. The video shows a gold blush with glued eyed eyes and thinking bubbles, as if it is a living being. It is about to go on a blind date with a red blush, but while they are together in the car on the way home, the gold blush wonders whether the red blush is thinking about someone else, which is all shown with text bubbles.

The first clip is in front of a Sephora store – a multinational retailer of beauty products and personal care including Rare Beauty products – where a text bubble says the following: “I just traveled 6,050 miles to Italy for my first blind date” (RareVideo4). The blush is then inside the Sephora store with the text bubble “Kinda nervous”, followed by it being set next to the other shades of blush in the store. In the following clip we see the blushes in what seems to be a car, where a text bubble appears in front of



Screenshot 6

the red blush with a different product: a glossy lip balm (Screenshot 6) While the red blush is thinking about the other product, the gold one is wondering if the red blush is thinking about “someone else”.

The sound chosen for the video is one that has been used more than 209,000 times at the time of writing and has gone viral due to “Couch Guy” (Rolling Stone 2021). Couch Guy is a reference to a TikTok video, where a girl, Lauren Zarras, visits her boyfriend, Robbie McCoy, at college, surprising him while he sat on a couch with three girls. Lauren posted the video on TikTok, which was meant to be a sweet, heartwarming video that turned into “... the internet’s hottest relationship scandal, with millions of TikTokers picking apart whether the 20-second clip was definite proof of Robbie (soon to be known as ‘Couch Guy’) was cheating” (Rolling Stone 2021). According to Alexander Kacala, “if you’ve logged in to TikTok recently and have been bombarded with content about ‘couch guy,’ you’re not alone. The hashtag #couchguy currently has more than 702,800,000 views and climbing” (2021). The virality is due “some eagle-eyed viewers” (Kacala 2021) concluding that the boyfriend was not excited to see her and potentially tried to hide that he was trading something – presumably a phone – with one of the girls he was sitting next to. As he takes a moment before standing up and hugging her, “the amateur sleuths of Tik Tok decided that the vibes were off” (Davies 2022).

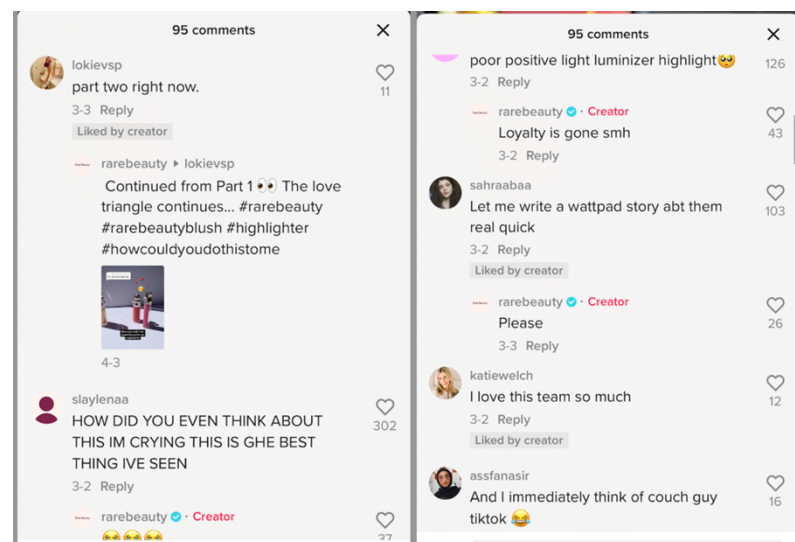
Each user had a theory about what Robbie handed one of the girls, or how he looked jumpy and that he is most definitely cheating on Lauren, which all created “a tangled web of conspiracy theories and seemingly turned the entirety of TikTok into a mix of amateur sleuths and relationship counselors” (Davies 2022). The many subtleties “including, but not limited to, the fact that it looks like the girl closest to McCoy had her hand on his back” (Davies 2022). The most interesting aspect of the virality of Couch Guy is that people on the internet seemed to all agree on the assumption that Robbie is cheating on Lauren: “While it’s rare for internet audiences to agree on anything, the comments section Zarras’ video seems to show they do agree on this video” (Davies 2022). This notion of agreement alone fits well with the theory section about contagious social behavior – for instance with the Stanley Milgram experiment. Several comments to the video enticed other comments which went on to make the video go viral. Additionally, it fits with the idea of mob mentality mentioned in the theory section as well, which is easily connected to contagion, as it is about how people are easily influenced by others.

Rare Beauty’s reference to Couch indicates that they expect people to know the reference by both using the same sound, as well as adding the element of infidelity. Reenacting things that are already popular on TikTok is a way of trying to borrow someone else’s point of contact. Couch Guy became “its own genre, with many of the videos under

#couchguy being parodies of the original in increasingly bizarre and hilarious situations” (Davies 2022). By creating something similar to Couch Guy, just like all the other parodies on TikTok, Rare Beauty’s video might also become popular and go viral, which is a contagious behavior. The ‘bizarre and hilarious’ element is added with the whole idea of making the blush and lip-gloss seem ‘alive’ and thinking about things – or ‘cheating’ on another blush. Rare Beauty posting a video with this sound is a way of engaging in a viral trend to both show up when users click on the sound, and to use humor to entertain their current followers. The humor is also a way of promoting the other product, the glossy lip balm, which is indicated to be desirable in the video. On Screenshot 6 above, the user comments clearly indicate that people are engaged in the story. The top comment to the video is a user demanding a ‘part two’, meaning that the user wants to know what happens in the saga of the beauty blushes.

The user’s engagement is a great indicator that there has been established a point of contact and a bond between Rare Beauty and the consumer. The rest of the comments show both that the users understand the reference to Couch Guy and encoded the video with the same meaning as was intended, which is also called a preferred reading. Additionally, the comments also show that the users are invested in the ‘story’ of the products in the video and want to know more. In an answer to the first comment demanding a ‘part two’ (Screenshot 7), Rare Beauty has posted a continuation of the story, which can be seen in RareVideo5.

Demanding a second part of a video is typical behavior on TikTok, where there is a time limit on videos. Often, content creators keep the users’ attention with the promise of making a part two of the video that people are interested in; examples could be a user telling a captivating story but needing more time to finish, thus, making a part two that the followers can await. It is



Screenshot 7

not likely that Rare Beauty originally planned to make a part two, but the fact that they did it shows their followers that they are prepared to give them the content they demand. In the

comments section to part two, seen on Screenshot 7, Rare Beauty continue interacting with the followers to mirror their excitement. A follower writes “Let me write a wappad story abt them real quick”, where Rare Beauty answers with a “Please”. Wappad is an online social reading platform where users can read and write original stories such as fanfiction. The platform has created social communities around stories and is one of the popular communities that Generation Z (the main audience on TikTok) seem to love, based on many other comments to videos such as this one. Rare Beauty’s answer is a way of mirroring both the excitement about the ‘love story’ in their videos and about Wappad itself, which makes Rare Beauty seem more likeable and relatable.

The sound used for the video is also a trendy one, which has been used over 44,1 thousand times at the time of writing. The sound is taken from a scene in the American reality television series “The Real Housewives of New York City” (2008), where Luann de Lesseps finds out that her fiancé, Tom D’Agostino cheated on her at one point in their relationship. Luann texts Tom via voice call, “meaning, she speaks into Siri and Siri types out a text” (McCarthy 2016). In her text to Tom, she says the following out loud: “How could you do this to me. Question mark” (McCarthy 2016), which is the sound in the TikTok video. Luann says, “question mark”, because you need to verbalize punctuation using voice texting.

Rare Beauty’s use of this popular sound is the same with the use of Couch Guy; they borrow someone else’s point of contact by referring to something they expect people to know about. Using sounds on TikTok and recreating them is an extremely popular use of the app and something that many users do. The fact that Rare Beauty does it, however, adds to the element of indirect marketing. When users watch RareVideo5, they are more inclined to think that this is merely a reenacting of the popular sound, which they most likely have seen several times already on their ‘For You’ pages, based on its virality. The ‘part two’ video is, thus, also a way of using a trendy sound to further enhance the bond with the users while using indirect marketing. The users who know the sound is from the reality show will also find the intertextual reference comical, as the blush in the video catches the other blush ‘cheating’ with a lip gloss, much like Luann caught Tom. The intertextual reference is yet another point of contact created with the user if the user decodes the given message correctly in a so-called preferred reading.

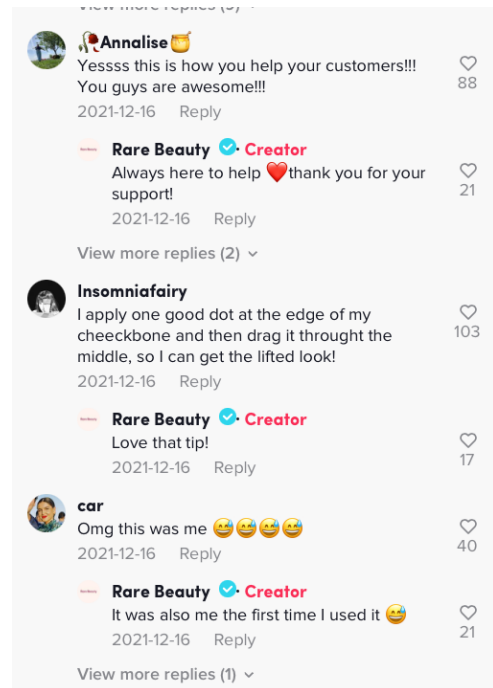
Based on the 95 comments and 7328 likes to the video, the company succeeded in creating engagement with the users and followers. However, the engagement in both likes and number of comments do not indicate a virality, which proves the statement in the theory

section about how you can never plan to go viral. Nevertheless, the company succeeded in creating engagements and points of contact through the reenactment of popular sounds, which might have persuaded enough consumers to buy more products – for instance the desired lip gloss, which was worth cheating on the gold blush for.

Point of Contact through Behavioral Contagion

Like Fenty Beauty and other cosmetics companies, Rare Beauty has had several products go viral on TikTok. One of the most popular ones is their Soft Pinch Liquid Blush (Schlisserman 2022), which is seen in RareVideo6. The video is a tutorial of how the blush is supposed to be used for the best result, which, based on the comments section, is something the consumers seem to love (Screenshot 8). The video shows that there is a better way to apply

the blush instead of the way that blush from other cosmetics companies is applied. Furthermore, the screenshot of the comments section shows how Rare Beauty engages with the TikTok users and how the users are liking their products. For instance, the company writes “Always here to help” to a user who states that “this is how you help customers”. By making tutorials of their products, consumers are more likely to follow and maybe even make their products go viral with their likes, comments, and reviews. The user’s comment is a confirmation of the point of contact that has been created. Moreover, we mention in the theory section that viral products can go in either a positive or negative light – in this case,



Screenshot 8

according to reviews and the comments on most videos, it can be concluded that “this is one of the viral beauty products that actually lives up to the hype” (Schlisserman 2022). The reviewer and Senior Beauty Editor, Erin Jahns, claims to have known that the blush was going to be “a star” (Schlisserman 2022) the second she tried it, which is proved by its “eventual virality on TikTok” (Schlisserman 2022).

Additionally, Rare Beauty wrote “It was also me the first time I used it” (Screenshot 8) to a user claiming that she used to apply the product in the wrong way as shown in the video. This makes the company seem more relatable, which strengthens the bond between the

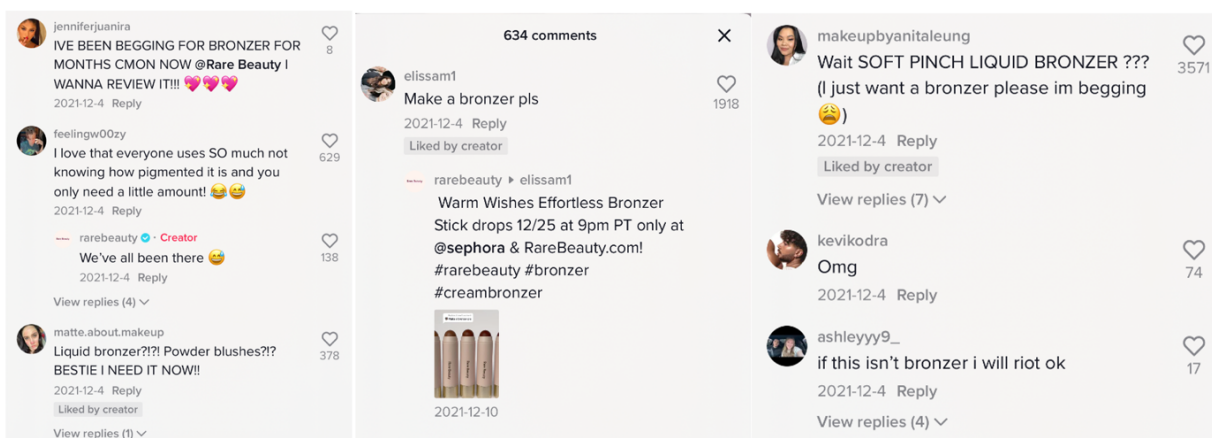
company and the consumers. By claiming to go through the same problem as the user, the company shows that they are on the same level as the user and that the user is not unintelligent by having this problem or by going through this experience. Seeming more relatable makes the company more inclined to make products that the users will want to use. It indirectly addresses their needs, as Deborah Lee would say, because they make it seem like they are on equal levels; a way of saying ‘we used to have this problem too, until we started using this product’, which is indirectly marketing the product. While the product has gone viral and is popular in the first place, this does not hurt its popularity and only makes it more desirable, as people are shown how to properly use it. Additionally, it is also a way for the company to tell the users that they are browsing through the comments section and addressing things that the users seem to suffer from relating to the products, making them more inclined to comment on their other videos.

RareVideo7 is similar to RareVideo6, where we see the viral product. This time, however, they are claiming to change their followers’ lives with a glowy blush hack”. Moreover, they write the following in the caption: “Share with your BFF who should try this hack!” (RareVideo7), which is another example of behavioral contagion; encouraging others to share the video. The encouragement is about this video specifically, as it is about sharing with people who should try the hack from the video – however, it could also be a reminder that the ‘share’ button exists, which might invite users to share other videos as well, creating more engagement. Incentivizing users to share a video is a common thing to do on the internet and has perhaps become common to such an extent that people seem to find it frustrating. Constantly being told to comment or share on a video can be tiresome for users, who will see the encouragement on multiple platforms and several times a day. Arguably, users have become ‘immune’ to listening when they are told to like or share a video. Being told what to do is something many people find irritating – perhaps especially Gen Z, who is the main audience on TikTok. When users, celebrities, or companies encourage followers to like or share, they are trying to capitalize on social contagious behavior that makes one like prompt more likes. However, as described in the theory section by David Scott, going viral is not something you can plan, which is why it might never work. In Rare Beauty’s case, they do not encourage the sharing or liking of all their videos – they leave that to the content and the use of trendy sounds. Moreover, they use a beauty hack to come off as helpful in an informal register, while merely encouraging them to “share with BFF” and not to share in general. This is a great way of indirectly making followers share a video without doing what

many other companies do when they try to make users ‘share’ or ‘like’ a certain video. By using an informal register and the use of “BFF”, Rare Beauty comes off as not irritating but merely trying to help others use a beauty product better and sharing a beauty trick that is worth knowing about.

The hashtag #viralblush is also in the caption to both RareVideo6 and RareVideo7, which is a way of portraying to everyone who sees the video that this product is good enough to have gone viral. Arguably, this is a way of indirectly marketing the product without actually writing “get this product” – instead, the assumption is that everyone already has the viral product, which is confirmed with the message of sharing the hack with your friends. Using Stuart Hall’s terms, the encoder of the video and message is the company, Rare Beauty, who has posted both RareVideo6 and 7. Their process of encoding is with the use of the hashtag #viralblush, which is used in a way that the encoder thinks the receivers will understand. The preferred reading of their encoding is that this product is good enough to go viral. Decoding a message is about understanding what you already know – and most users and followers of the brand are already aware of the virality surrounding the blush, thus, easily decoding the message relating to that. While the customers are not ignorant of the indirect marketing aspect, it does help with the encoding of the message.

The aspect of virality is used by Rare Beauty to their benefit. In RareVideo8, they use the fact that their blush went viral to market an upcoming product. In the video, they say “something is coming” right after writing “Remember when the Rare Beauty blush went viral?” (RareVideo8). The comments section to the video shows that many users wish for the upcoming product to be a bronzer (Screenshot 9). As an answer to the first comment which says, “make a bronzer pls”, Rare Beauty has posted another video presenting their new



Screenshot 9

product: a bronzer (see RareVideo9). When you reply to a comment with a video on TikTok, the comment is shown in the video, as you can see in RareVideo9. The video starts with a voice saying, “okay, bestie, we made a bronzer” (RareVideo9), which indicates that they listened to their followers and gave them what they are asking for in the comments section. Calling the user “bestie” is an informal way of calling a person’s best friend (“bestie”). This is a common term used on social media platforms among Gen Z, by whom, according to the theory section, TikTok is largely driven. Moreover, referencing a user as ‘bestie’ does not merely signal that Rare Beauty is aware of the target group, who use this term regularly; it also signals a relationship between the company and its consumers, which brings them closer together as a result of modern digital marketing, as Guarda et al state. The use of an informal register is also a way of reducing distance between the speaking and the audience which, again, further strengthens their bond and makes the company seem more relatable, as mentioned earlier. The informal register is often used in digital marketing in a way that is not seen in traditional marketing. Users on social media predominantly tend to use an informal register, which explains the reason why companies do as well in digital marketing strategies. When Rare Beauty uses terms such as ‘bestie’ or and “pls”, the company seems more authentic in its interactions with the users, making it as if the company and the consumers truly are ‘besties’. It creates a more intimate relationship and, subsequently, a more intimate video, which is one of the ways social media typically works. The same degree of intimacy is sought by all companies and celebrities when they use marketing tools on social media, as it makes the relationship with the users a more intimate one as well.

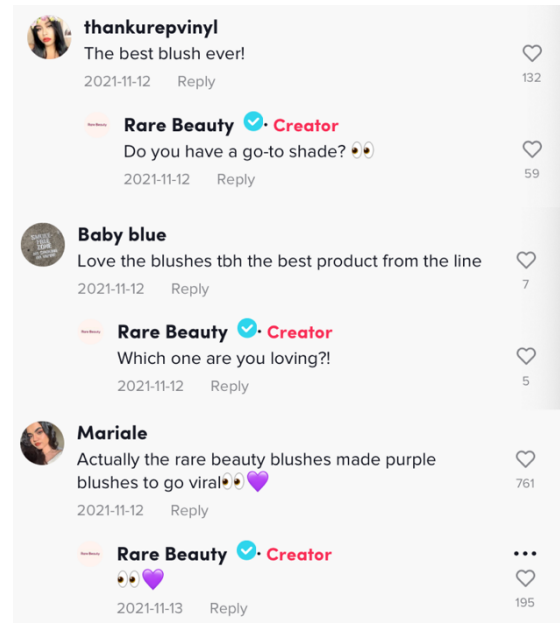
Another example where the company uses virality to their benefit is seen in RareVideo10: “We heard that purple blush is going viral on TikTok” (RareVideo10). The viral trend is about the use of purple blush in general, and not specifically a blush from Rare Beauty. The viral trend has, however, inspired the company to add purple to their current blushes, and they use the video to introduce two new products: another liquid blush in purple and a cream blush in purple. They have written both “#purpleblush” and “#viralblush” in the caption to attract other users, who follow the viral trend. The video is a way of capitalizing on an existing trend with the hope of showing up outside of conventional marketing circles. This would mean that the company and its products might be received differently and reach other audiences’, creating more engagement and possibly more sales. While some users are aware of the purple trend blush, not necessarily everyone is aware of the company and the fact that they have created products in the same shade that is trending. Thus, Rare Beauty tries to

capitalize on the fact that there is a trend about a blush, a kind of product that the company has gone viral for before, which they have now joined. What is also interesting is the fact that one of the viral purple blushes is Fenty Beauty’s purple cream blush, which was one of the “trendsetting purple blush[es]” (Reed 2022). While Fenty Beauty went viral with a product they already had, Rare Beauty is attempting to go viral for a product they specifically created as a result of this particular trend. What makes this interesting is that it speaks to how much a company is willing to go in order to go viral and join a contagious trend on the app.

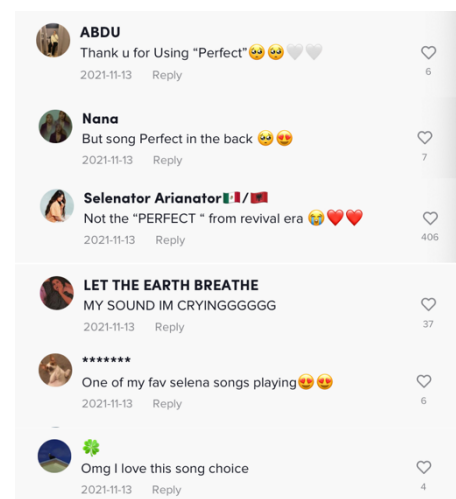
Based on the comments, the users appear to love the two new blushes in purple. Screenshot 10 shows one of the comments that even says “Actually the rare beauty blushes made purple blushes to go viral” as a way of praising the cosmetics brand. We also see the brand replying back to other users and interacting with them; for instance, by asking about the user’s ‘go-to-shade’ or asking another user about her favorite product

from their line. The interaction relates to the previously mentioned interaction with the ‘besties’ term, as it almost seems like a conversation between two good friends. A great way to increase the possibility of getting RareVideo10 to go viral, or at least create a large engagement, is that they have used a popular Selena Gomez song in the background called “Perfect”, which is from Gomez’s album called “Revival”. The comments on the video (Screenshot 11) all show that the users have noticed and appreciate the song choice, especially as the video currently has 142,8 thousand likes and 499 comments.

As Janell Azpeitia argues in the theory section, the point of marketing is to create a larger engagement as a way of reaching a new audience; Rare Beauty do this in all the mentioned videos, especially the ones where they reference Selena Gomez or one of her songs. However, while she is a popular celebrity, who can help give them a larger engagement, their good products – based



Screenshot 10



Screenshot 11

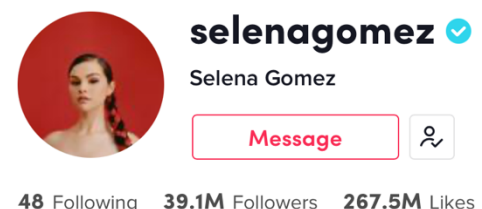
on reviews and positive virality – are also enough for users to keep following and engaging with the company. Their products are praised by the consumers, which is evident in both the positive virality and the comments sections to the videos. This additionally allows the company to use humor and funny references, such as the trendy Couch Guy or the love-triangle between the gold and red blush. The use of already-existing hashtags, events (SAG Awards) and viral sounds is a way of capitalizing on already-existing virality. Moreover, the reenacting of popular trends and videos is a great way of marketing their products without directly saying anything about them – for instance in the video referring to Couch Guy (RareVideo4) or with the video about the blush hack in RareVideo 6. In these instances, the company easily ‘borrows’ someone else’s point of contact in order to create one on their own with their consumers, who are expected to understand the references. Additionally, the company’s constant use of an informal register in all their videos and captions fits further into their way of trying to come off as more authentic, simultaneously strengthening the bond with the consumers with the relatable register.

4.2. Celebrities

In this paper, we have chosen to analyze videos posted by celebrities as well as companies, as the former have started using TikTok as a way to market themselves and create more publicity. We have chosen to analyze videos posted from the following celebrities: Selena Gomez, Will Smith, Hailey Bieber and Jason Derulo. The choice is made as a result of videos that have shown up on our own ‘For You’ pages as well as the fact that two of the celebrities – Will Smith and Jason Derulo – are two of the most followed celebrities on the app. Analyzing their videos, as well as the other celebrities’ videos makes for an interesting opportunity to look at differences and similarities between the celebrities themselves, as well as with the companies we have chosen to analyze. This makes for a more thorough conclusion to the issue in the paper about using TikTok for indirect marketing purposes.

4.2.1. Selena Gomez

Selena Gomez is an American singer, actress, and producer. She is a popular celebrity and “one of the most-followed people on the planet” (Kirkpatrick 2022). On TikTok, Selena has more than 39.1 million followers and 267.5 million likes (Screenshot 12). Her title as the most followed



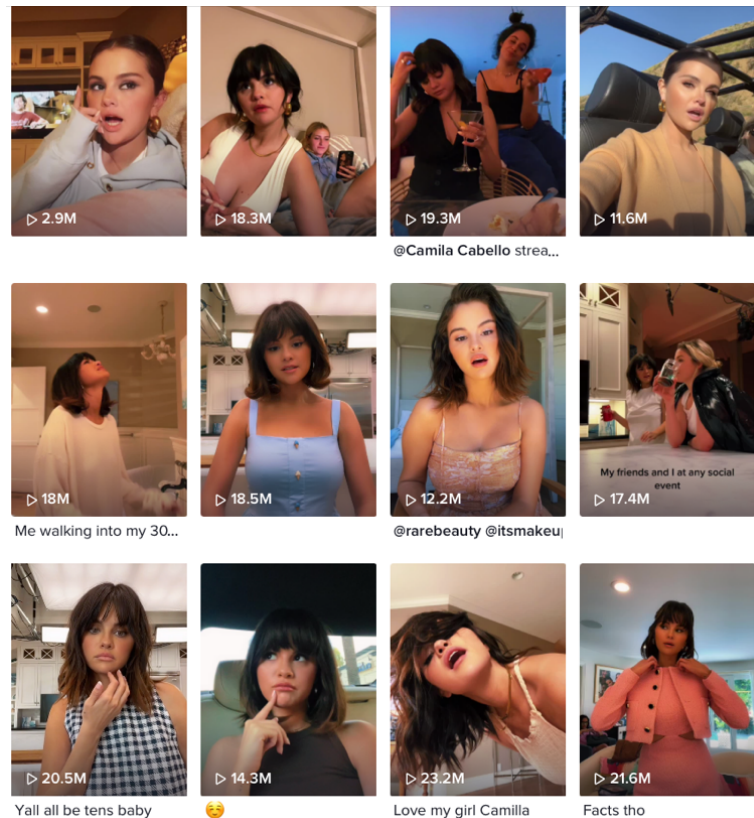
Screenshot 12

celebrity applies to Instagram, where she has 314 million followers (Screenshot 13). While this paper is about celebrities and companies using TikTok for marketing, her followers on Instagram are likely to want to follow her on other social media platforms, though this does not seem to be the case. A possible explanation could be that she used to not be as active as she is today – in fact, she has recently admitted to not having been on the internet in four and a half years (Kirkpatrick 2022). Instead, she would “send photos and text to her assistant to post to Instagram and Twitter on her behalf” (Kirkpatrick 2022). While this does not seem to have changed her popularity on Instagram, as she still has 316 million followers on the platform, it might explain why her number of followers are much less on TikTok. Of course, there is no way of knowing who is the one posting the posts and videos, but she has a significantly higher amount of likes than followers, which supports this theory, as users might like her videos when they show up on their ‘For You’ page, while they do not actually follow her account.



Screenshot 13

A quick look on her account, however, seems to indicate that she is working to rectify this social media absence and lack of followers. During the last few weeks, Selena Gomez has been unusually active on TikTok, posting a video almost every day. Screenshot 14 is an overview of her 12 most recently posted videos with the number of times they have been watched. On average, the 12 videos have been watched almost 16,5 million times each, which indicates a certain popularity.



Screenshot 14

While researching her page weeks ago, she had 37,3 million followers, meaning that she has

gained almost 2 million followers in a short period of time. This increase might indicate that her recent daily activity on the app seems to work. SelenaVideo1, 2, and 3 are all examples of the type of videos she has been posting lately. In all three videos, she is lip-syncing to a sound, which is a popular thing to do on TikTok. She uses a lot of comedic sounds, which seems to be her style in all videos: to use humor. This correlates to David Scott's notion about how humor is beneficially used in video driven marketing.

In SelenaVideo1 she lip-syncs to a sound that has been used more than 14,1 thousand times at the time of writing. The sound is humorous, as it is the voice of a girl claiming that she does not "struggle" with anxiety, as it "comes easily" to her. The video currently has 7872 comments and 1,9 million likes but has been watched 14,3 million times.

SelenaVideo2 is a video of Selena acting and lip-syncing a sound of a woman, who is complaining about her age and the appropriate dating pool. In the caption, Selena has written "Me walking into my 30s, I'm ok with it tho" (SelenaVideo2). The video currently has 3,1 million likes, 12,1 thousand comments and has been watched 18 million times. This implies that the video is significantly more popular than SelenaVideo1.

SelenaVideo3 is a video of Selena with her friend. The video shows Selena asking her friend – lip-syncing sound – whether or not she is having fun. Her friend lip-syncs a "no", while Selena lip-syncs a "yeah, me neither", and sips a can of Coca-Cola. This video has 2,6 million likes, 11,5 thousand likes and has been watched 17,4 million times.

All three mentioned videos are examples of the point of contact mentioned in the theory section. While Selena is not actively marketing any products, she is creating a larger engagement on her page, which gives her popularity. The point of contact with her followers is created with her relatable videos about being single, having anxiety, or being bored at a party. While she does not interact with the users in the comments section, alluding to all these things in her videos makes her more relatable to her followers, thus, strengthening the bond with them despite not actively interacting with them. David Scott adds that if companies treat buyers like human beings, it will gain them success – while Selena is a celebrity and not a company, the same thing applies to her, as she shares those humorous videos on her account and makes people relate to her. Her humorous videos exemplified in the three mentioned ones are examples of how Selena 'borrows' others' points of contact; by reenacting videos with viral sounds, she is expecting the users to understand the reference themselves when they decode her videos.

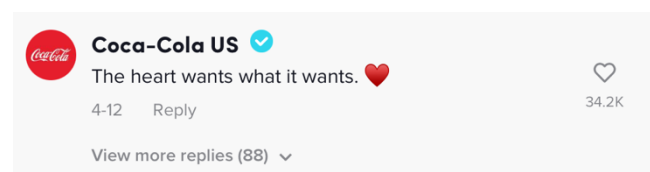
Stuart Hall would argue that the users are aware of the condition of production when it comes to encoding. While Selena's use of a viral sound expects the users to easily interpret the references, it does not necessarily make the attempt direct. The user is aware of the use of the viral, humor sounds, but it is exactly what TikTok is used for, which makes it less obvious that Selena is trying to create more engagement. The viewers are not naive, but scrolling through numerous videos posted by other users, with the same viral sounds, makes it less obvious for the user that Selena is using them for her benefit instead of for entertainment, as the other users. As mentioned in the theory section, Guarda et al argues that the content on the app is addictive and easy to watch for hours, making it less likely for each user to comprehend the marketing content as anything other than a "random video" (Gurage et al 37).

Reenacting viral sounds is one of the most popular uses of TikTok and thus, Selena is showing that she knows how to use the platform well for her own benefit – creating more engagement – as she is integrating with others' viral trends. Moreover, Selena's sudden activity seems to make people more excited to see her post, while giving her a lot of publicity, which she can later use to market both products or upcoming movies or TV series.

Gaining followers is also a great way for many celebrities to collaborate with big companies to both make money and to create better exposure. While it is not confirmed in the video or caption, it is highly likely that Selena collaborated with Coca-Cola for SelenaVideo3, where she sips one of their cans, especially considering the fact that they have a pre-existing relationship. In 2016, Selena posted a picture on Instagram of herself sipping on an old-fashioned bottle of Coca-Cola; the photo became the most-liked photo of all time (Bruner 2016). The Coca-Cola can in SelenaVideo3 might be a reference to their earlier collaboration, though it also fits well with the relatable element of sipping on a soda whilst spending time with your friend.

In the comments section, the TikTok account of Coca-Cola US has even commented, writing "The heart wants what it wants"

(Screenshot 15), referencing one of Selena's most popular songs with the same title. The comment currently has 34,2 thousand likes and 88 replies from people. One of the 88



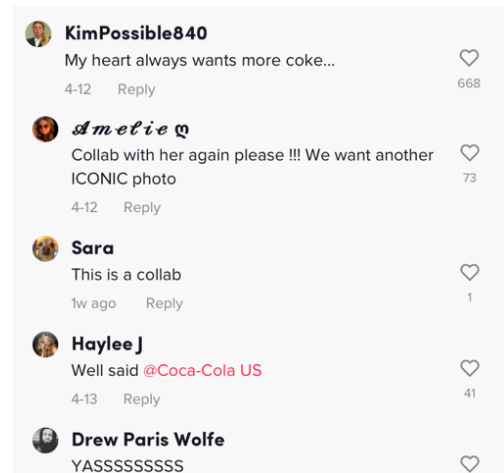
Screenshot 15

replies is from a user craving Coca-Cola – which possibly confirms a successful marketing

strategy – while others ask the drink manufacturer to collaborate with Selena again (Screenshot 16).

Selena’s possible collaboration with the brand fits with Azpeitia’s statement in the theory section about collaborations with influencers to reach the brand’s target audience.

While there is, arguably, no clear ‘target audience’ for a soda, Selena’s collaboration with them gives them access to her own target audience, who follows her and see her post videos with the soda can. Additionally, based on the likely assumption that the video is a collaboration with the brand, the marketing is an indirect one, as Selena never refers to the soda by name, tag, or even acknowledged it other than sipping from a can. Based on the comments section, with users commenting how they are craving the soda, it can be concluded that Selena succeeds in indirectly marketing the product to her fans.

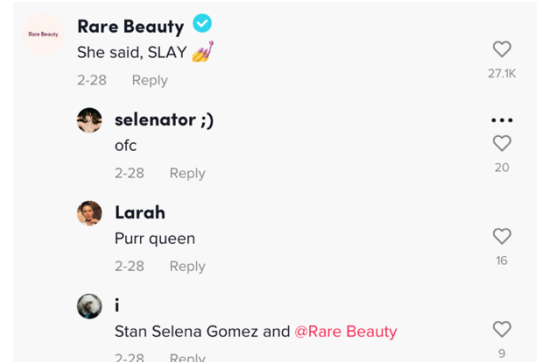


Screenshot 16

Moreover, the sound used in the video is one posted by HBO’s account, an American pay television network, who have posted a scene from their popular teen drama television series “Euphoria” (2019–). The teen drama has gone viral on TikTok several times before and is popular among the main audience on TikTok, where it has been “a major hot topic since its debut in 2019” (Sodimu 2022). Using a popular sound which is simultaneously a clip from a popular series, Selena Gomez manages to borrow HBO’s point of contact and create one on her own with her followers, who recognize the sound. Additionally, this connects with the encoding of her video; as encoding is about extracting a meaning of a message based on what you already know, the users who know about the series will immediately understand the reference to the series and maybe feel closer to Selena, who might enjoy the same television series as them. Not knowing about the TV series does not hurt the encoding, however, as it would merely result in a negotiated reading of the video, where there is a mixture of preferred and resistant readings. The users who are not aware of the series are still exposed to the marketing of Coca Cola.

Indirect and Direct Marketing

While Selena Gomez' recent humorous videos do not include direct promotions of anything, her TikTok account has been diligently used to promote both her makeup brand, Rare Beauty, her own music, and her new American mystery-comedy TV series. Her promotions are indirect, as she never refers to the products as being from her own brand, nor does she encourage people to buy them. Instead, Selena talks about her 'favorite' products, something friends do to each other. She engages with the audience in a way that indicates that she is their friend without

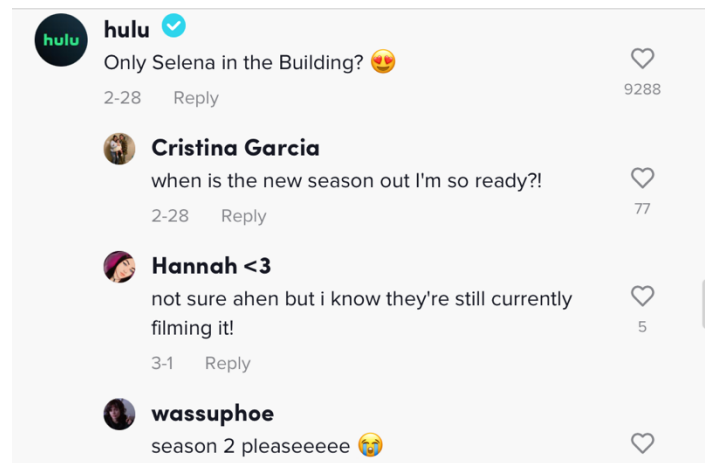


Screenshot 17

interacting with them in the comments section. The indirectness of her marketing is elaborated throughout the section below with the use of examples.

On SelenaVideo4 she indirectly promotes both her makeup brand, her TV series, and her music. The video is a 'before and after' video of Selena getting ready for an award show, where she has seemingly used products from Rare Beauty. Screenshot 17 above and Screenshot 18 show comments to the video by both Rare Beauty and Hulu, which is where

her TV series is streaming. The title of the series is "Only Murders in the Building" (2021–), which is referenced in Hulu's comment (Screenshot 18). This indirect way of marketing is also seen in SelenaVideo5, where she uses a popular sound to promote Rare Beauty's "Blot & Glow Touch-Up Kit". The sound has been used

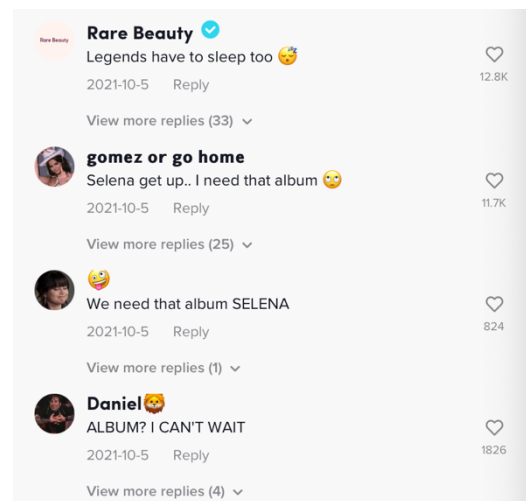


Screenshot 18

more than 113,4 thousand times, which is a great way for her to gain more viewers on the video, as it appears when people search for the video. Moreover, it creates yet another point of contact to use a popular and trendy voice on the app, as users most likely will understand the reference, because they have heard the sound before. In the caption, Selena writes "The Blow & Glow Touch-Up Kit is my fave @rarebeauty #rarebeauty" (SelenaVideo5). She does not directly ask the followers to go buy the product, but she does say that it is her 'fave' while

also tagging their account, which possibly makes people more inclined to go see what it is. Additionally, it plays into Deborah Lee's argument about knowing people's needs: Selena writes the following in the video: "Me to my Blot & Glow Touch-Up Kit before I go out", while lip-syncing the following: "you better work, bitch" (SelenaVideo5). This addresses the need people have to touch up their makeup before going out themselves. She inserts herself as the person who needs this, which also makes her more relatable to everyone who has needed to do the same thing. It also makes the marketing more indirect and seem more as a helpful tip given to her followers about a product that works for her and is 'her fave'. While the directness is obvious in her linking to the product, it is more disguised in her attempt to indicate that she is sharing her 'face' product as a favor to those who are curious.

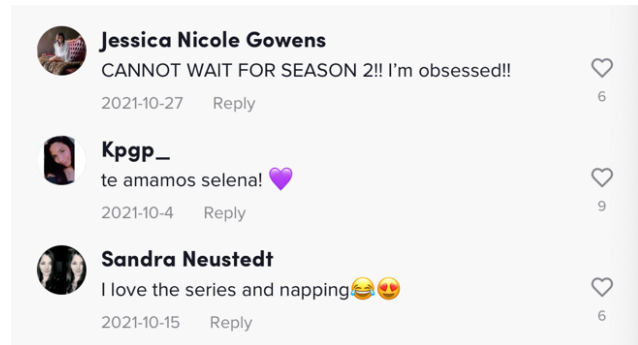
Another example is SelenaVideo6, where Selena posts a video of someone recording her while exhaustingly saying "I don't wanna make an album right now" (SelenaVideo6). She writes the following in the caption: "I just don't want to work today, but I promise I'm making my best album yet" (SelenaVideo6). This is most likely the first time she references the creation of new music after releasing an EP (extended play) in March 2021, a few months prior to the TikTok video. As Janell Azpeitia writes, the point of marketing is to spread word of mouth to others to create larger engagement, which is exactly what



Screenshot 19

happens after this video. In the comments section on Screenshot 19, it is clear that Selena's followers are excited to hear about upcoming music and have most likely spread that to other users on the app or in real life. The same instance is seen in SelenaVideo7, which is a compilation with pictures of Selena Gomez sleeping while on set for her TV series, "Only Murders in the Building" (2021–), which is mentioned earlier. Selena writes "Only Naps in the Building" and nothing else in the caption of the video (SelenaVideo7). While this is also consistent with Selena's use of humorous videos on her account, it is also an indirect promotional of the series. What makes it indirect is the fact that she never refers to the series itself; she merely uses a pun with the title of the series. This relates to Hall's encoding and decoding terms; much like the earlier-mentioned video (SelenaVideo3) with the use of a sound from "Euphoria" (2019–). Selena Gomez is merely encoding a video of her sleeping a

lot, where the interpretation is up to the followers and the knowledge they have. The followers who are aware of her TV series “Only Murders in the Building” (2021–) will have the frames of knowledge to know that Selena’s caption is a pun, while others will not know and merely interpret (decode) her caption as a humorous self-reflection of how much she sleeps. Using Hall’s terms helps confirm that the marketing of the TV series in SelenaVideo7 is an indirect marketing



Screenshot 20

attempt in which she succeeds, based on the comments. In the comments section, users are expressing excitement for the upcoming season for the show, despite Selena’s lack of directly mentioning the show (Screenshot 20), which suggest that their reading of her encoding is a dominant/preferred reading, where her intended message is understood. This conclusively confirms how the indirect way of marketing things on her account seems to be working on her followers. It also creates more spreading of the word of the show and gives the show more publicity, as people share the video of her sleeping on set. The users with the frames of knowledge about the TV series do the direct marketing for her in the comments section, where they essentially promote her show to other users and let them know about it, enticing more people to watch it without Selena herself lifting a finger.

Despite using a lot of indirect elements to promote herself and her music, products and TV series, Selena Gomez also uses direct marketing on her TikTok account. An example is on SelenaVideo8, where she posts a video with clips of her show “Selena + Chef”. The point of the video is to promote the third season of the show, which she writes is “premiering tomorrow!!” in her caption (SelenaVideo8). Another example is SelenaVideo9, where she is promoting a new Rare Beauty product and writes the following in the caption: “NEW Rare Impact Lip Soufflé in Kindness, a nude pink. 100% of sales go to the Rare Impact Fund @rarebeauty” (SelenaVideo9). While she directly promotes the product in a nude pink shade called “Kindness” she, simultaneously, indirectly promotes her own music as well, as she uses her song “Kill ‘Em With Kindness” as the sound, but without referring to the fact that it is her own song of acknowledging it beyond that. This is possibly to emphasize the new product’s name, which might be named after the song. The indirect element is her lack of acknowledging the song itself other than using it as a sound; the curious followers are

welcome to click on the sound and discover the fact that the song is hers, but she never directly mentions it herself.

4.2.2. Will Smith

Will Smith is an American actor, rapper, and film producer. He is currently one of the top five most followed accounts on TikTok and



“regularly goes viral with his funny videos using some of the app’s most viral effects and sounds” (Thompson-Powell 2022). At the time of writing, Smith has 71.8 million followers and 486.5 million likes (Screenshot 21), which both speak to his popularity on the app.

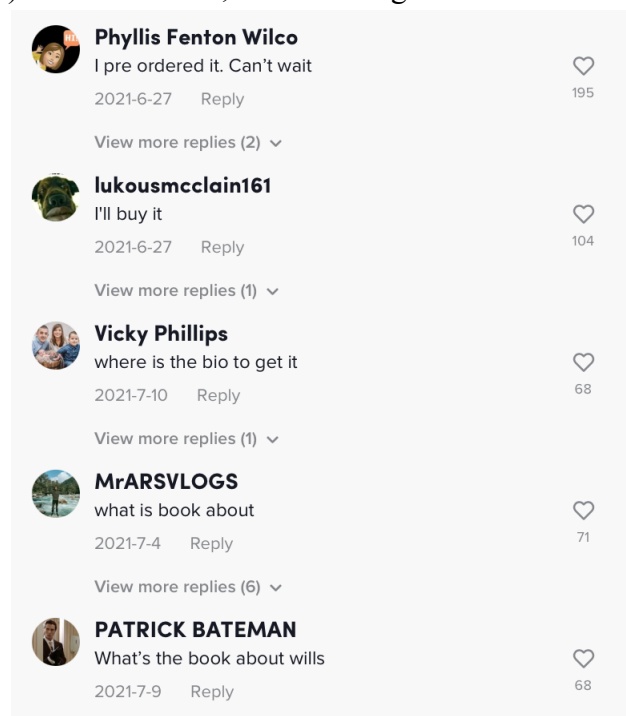
Will is one of the most well-known celebrities “who has embraced social media, including Tiktok and YouTube, in recent years as a way to promote his content and to promote himself” (Whitten 2022). In the article “Hollywood agencies are betting big on TikTok talent as they seek to woo Gen Z audiences”, it is claimed that Will has recognized that young audiences are “consuming media in a much different way [which is why] he had to shift and change the way that he was interacting with his audience” (Whitten 2022). The pivotal audience mentioned in the article ranges in age from six to around 25, also known as Gen Z, “and is one of the most sought after consumer bases for companies” (Whitten 2022). Not only is this generation coming of age as consumers, but they are also “driving major trends for older generations, [which] makes this younger set of trendsetters overly valuable” (Whitten 2022). This generation is discussed more thoroughly in the discussion section later in the paper.

During the pandemic, TikTok became more popular as “everyone was stuck at home [and] had nothing to do but watch content” (Whitten 2022). Will Smith’s account features many things from his life, as well as humorous videos with trendy sounds and special effects. By using TikTok, Will “reinvented his persona around his celebrity [and] found new audiences” (Whitten 2022). This statement is consistent with David Scott’s statement about the power of YouTube; especially as it relates to both YouTube and TikTok in Will Smith’s case. In this paper, however, we will only focus on his activity on TikTok, which is just a “brilliant asset” (Scott 100) as well.

Creative Content

Will Smith has a varied mix of content on his TikTok account. For instance, he posts videos of him reenacting comical, viral sounds; videos of him showing off his looks and outfits with special effects and filters; and videos of him where he addresses the users directly. On his page, he has the following three playlists: “King Richard”, “Best Shape of My Life” and “My Book”. Every user can click on one of the three playlists to go to the videos about those specific things. The first playlist is about Will’s newest film, an American biographical sports drama film where he plays the titular character; the second one is videos from the gym as well as other sports activities in order to get in shape; the third one is videos relating to his new book called *Will* (2021). These three categories indicate most of the content in Smith’s videos, though he does post other types of content.

WillVideo1 is an example of Will using direct marketing with a funny, popular filter in a video of him announcing his book. In the video he says (about the filter): “I know this is weird [...] but this is my book. It’s been a labor of love. I’ve been working on it for the past two years and it is finally ready” (WillVideo1). He has written, “I did a thing. Pre-order link in my bio!! #WillTheBook” (WillVideo1) in the caption. As explained earlier in the paper, one does not have to follow Will Smith to see his videos. Due to an algorithm, videos can show up on anyone’s ‘For You’ page, if the algorithm sees that the content fits with other things the user has been watching. When Will writes “link in my bio” in the caption of the video – which means the biography on the main page on his account – he tempts people to go to his account on TikTok, even the ones who do not follow him in the first place, which might make them watch his other



Screenshot 22

videos, as well as clicking on the link in his bio. The comments section to the video is filled with users expressing their excitement over the book announcement (Screenshot 22). With more than 4,7 million views and 381,6 thousand likes on the video, it is easy to conclude that

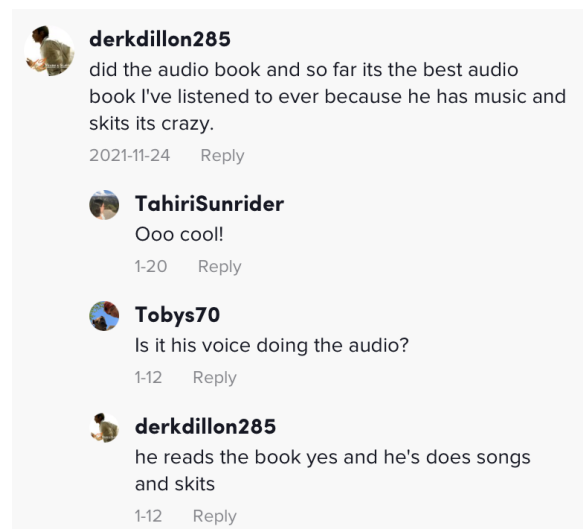
the direct marketing of his book worked – at least in the prospect of creating engagement and word of mouth, as Janell Azpeitia would say.

The filter Will uses in the video is a cartoon filter, which is a “weird mix of cool and kind of creepy. The filter has gone viral on TikTok and looks like a more advanced version of the Apple Memoji filter” (McGuinness 2021). The point of the filter is to make you look like “a Disney-esque cartoon, and it does a freakishly good job. Imagine if a top animator from Disney or Pixar were to take your likeness to use as the character of their new movie. That’s what the filter looks like” (McGuinness 2021). Will Smith using the video makes his eyes into “big cartoon ones that look like Anna or Elsa from *Frozen*” (McGuinness 2021), while also tracking his facial expressions and moves. The use of a funny cartoon filter might help slightly disguise the fact that the video is a direct marketing of his book, although the users should have no doubt about the marketing, as he refers to the website where it can be bought. Despite the direct marketing approach in the video, Will tries to make the video entertaining with the filter, so the users are not bored with the direct marketing attempt. Using a filter that makes him resemble Disney or Pixar characters helps users associate him with the same emotions they associate with the big companies, or cartoon characters, creating a certain familiarity in his video that makes the video comfortable to watch for his users. Additionally, Will’s book, which he is holding in the video, features a colorful cover portrait, which resembles the filter’s drawn features. This helps put more focus on the book itself and helps make people more curious to know more about the book. Furthermore, the filter was trending which means that using it makes the video more inclined to show up on people’s ‘For You’ pages. It also means that many people are familiar with it.

WillVideo2 is another example of Will’s direct marketing of his book, though this one differs slightly from the first video. WillVideo2 starts with a text that says: “Seeing my actual book for the first time”. Then, we see Will recording himself and saying, “this is a very, very special moment” (WillVideo2). He opens up a mailbag and says “wow, that feels nice!” (WillVideo2). He also says, “I’m officially an author” (WillVideo2), which is to emphasize his emotions and how proud he is of this accomplishment. Other than promoting the book by talking about how ‘nice it feels’ and more, Will creates a point of contact with his followers when he writes that this is him seeing the book for the first time in the introduction of the video; this way, he emphasizes the exclusivity of following him on the app, as he posts things of him doing things he has never done, or announcing things he has not announced on other platforms. Additionally, another point of contact can be associated with the emotion that Will

exhibits, which is meant to ideally rub off on the viewers with contagious behavior, and make them equally excited, thus making the video go viral and even sell more of his book. Emotion arguably triggers contagion, which might be something Will Smith benefits from here, as emotion is one of the things that can help make a video go viral. While it is not likely that this was a calculated move, Will creates a point of contact by telling and showing the viewers how proud he is of this accomplishment, as it puts his viewers into a situation where they feel happy for him as well. This prompts followers to share, like and comment on the video, which might make it – or his book itself – go viral.

Additionally, while Will uses a lot of special effects such as filters, loops, and effects such as green screens, this video does not include any of those things. It has none of the special effects that he is known for using in his videos and seems to be a video he recorded and posted immediately without editing it, which makes it seem more personal: as if this is something he just recorded and posted immediately, making the followers feel closer to him, as he is showing them something he is proud of, which he wants to share with them. It gives off a more authentic feeling and creates an intimate point of contact with his followers. While there is no way of knowing whether or not the video was planned, it comes off as intimate and spontaneous, which emphasizes what he is saying in the video: that he just found out about his 1 million copies sold and wanted to immediately thank his followers. The confirmation of a point of contact is seen on Screenshot 23, where a user states that it is the best audio book he has ever listened to. This comment has made other users reply to the comment and ask more about it, which has created a conversation among Will's users. These interactions correlate to



Screenshot 23

Azpeitia's statement about spreading the word of mouth: by having his followers comment on the videos and interact with each other, he is essentially having them market the book for him, as they are creating more publicity around the book. One comment from a user made other users curious, which then continues to grow to a large engagement surrounding Will's new book.

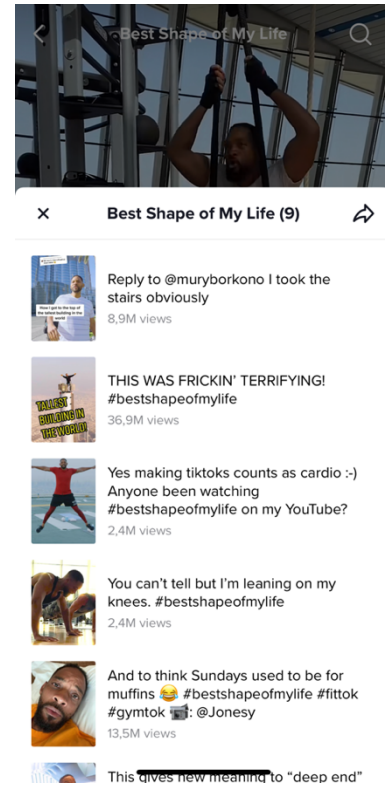
Another video with a personal feel to it is WillVideo3, where Will says, “I literally just found out that ‘Will’ is at one million – one million – copies sold!” (WillVideo3). In the video we see Will, in sweats, talking about how he just got back from the gym, which makes him relatable to his users. Recording himself coming back from the gym with sweat on his clothes is his way of portraying authenticity as in a video diary, while simultaneously and indirectly marketing his book. Even though the book has sold more than one million copies, he still markets the book to sell even more – however, the apparent point of the video is to thank his followers for buying the book. In the caption of the video, Will writes, “We sold a million books y’all! DAMN! One WILLion copies HA! Thanx everyone! #willthebook” (WillVideo3). Using ‘we’ is a way of putting himself next to his followers as equals, which might create a stronger bond. Inserting himself next to his followers is a way of creating a more intimate relationship with them. As a celebrity, it might be difficult to create a bond with your followers in a way where they are not looking up to the celebrity. Claiming that they are on equal levels by saying ‘we’, Will makes himself seem like a normal user on TikTok, someone who is grateful for their support in buying his book, while simultaneously making it seem like a team effort, which makes the users feel good about themselves. Additionally, it is also a way of praising the book for the ones who have not purchased it yet, making them want to buy it now after seeing its popularity. This plays well into contagion, which Will is hoping for here. Adding many filters and special effects, as well as a sound that has been used more than 1,6 million times, does not hurt in order to create engagement to the video, and has gained him more than 3,3 million views on the video.

WillVideo4 is an example of Will using humor and a viral, trendy sound. The sound has been used more than 5,9 million times at the time of writing, which speaks to how viral it was on the app. Other than the comical, viral sound, Will writes “Trying to remember how to use a gym after quarantine” (WillVideo4) in the introduction of the video, as well as “First and last time I was allowed at that gym” (WillVideo4) in the caption. By mentioning quarantine during the COVID-19 pandemic, Will makes himself more relatable to his followers; much like Selena Gomez with her videos, as mentioned earlier in the paper. Many people can most likely relate to the struggles of quarantine, and the adjustment of getting things back to normal after quarantining, which is what makes the video a great way to create a point of contact with his followers. While he does not directly market anything, he has still created a lot of engagement about himself and his image. The video currently has 10 million

likes and nearly 60 thousand comments as well as 74 million views, which confirms its success.

Another point of posting this video is to continue the narrative of trying to get back into shape after staying at home for months. Months prior to this video, Will Smith announced that he was in the worst shape of his life when he posted a shirtless photo of himself on Instagram, writing that this is the body that carried him through “an entire pandemic and countless days grazing thru the pantry” (Kubota 2021). The point of the photo was to further announce that he wants to get his health and wellness back on track, which he will document on social media – mostly on his YouTube channel. WillVideo5 is one of the videos in his playlist “Best Shape of My Life” (Screenshot 24).

One of the other videos from the playlist is WillVideo5, where he also uses a popular sound as well as writing “#bestshapeofmylife”, alluding to the transformation he is going through, as he is doing push-ups. The name of the playlist as well as the use of the hashtag is to market his transformation, which is shown in much more detail on his YouTube channel. As he does not directly write that people should go to his YouTube channel, it does insinuate that he will post it on other platforms if you follow him on there as well. This is especially argued based on the fact that Will Smith has been using YouTube successfully, where he “delivers unique behind-the-scenes tales in his videos. He also shares meaningful moments with his family and movies” (Arya 2021). While TikTok is a great platform to use for marketing, the maximum allowed duration of videos is three minutes, which makes it the wrong platform to share elaborated ‘tales’ or descriptive details about his body transformation. YouTube serves him as the better option to share those types of videos, where he can use TikTok to promote his content there instead. It also allows for another target audience; perhaps one who is more comfortable with YouTube instead of TikTok.



Screenshot 24

Behavioral Contagion

Other than the direct and indirect marketing of himself, Will Smith uses his TikTok account like many others: to join in on viral TikTok challenges.

Other than the virality of products, memes, sounds, or videos, behavioral contagion is especially connected to TikTok challenges. Combining a catchy hashtag with a video to showcase a specific action or dance, it is easy to challenge others to copy you to do the same – however, what makes it easy to challenge others on TikTok is the phenomenon known as contagion. In the theory section, Tony D. Sampson's claims that human emotion spreads universally like a virus across networks. A TikTok challenge depends on this human behavior to be socially influenced by others, both by creating a challenge or by merely joining one.

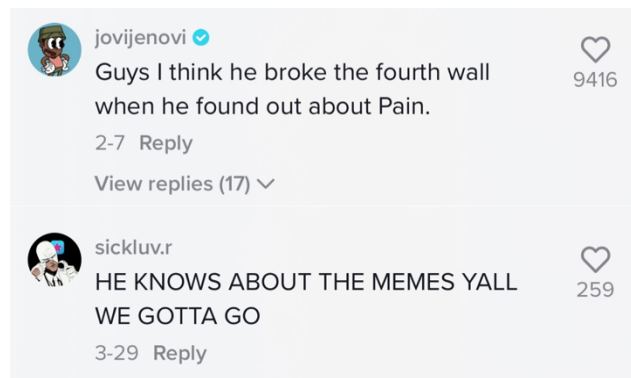
One of the recent viral challenges on TikTok is the “Not My Name” challenge that has “exploded over the last month” (Duncan-Smith 2022). The challenge is, when users use the song “That’s Not My Name” by The Ting Tings to show that they are tired or being called “something outside their moniker” (Duncan-Smith 2022).

WillVideo6 is Will's participation in the challenge, where we see Will standing outside and disappointedly shaking his head, followed by the start of the song and clips with various, viral memes of Will himself. The video has almost 8 million likes and more than 68 thousand comments, with many users finding the video funny. In the caption of the video, Will has written “My name’s not even Will! #ThatsNotMyName” (WillVideo6). The video is an example of something Will is known for: that he “doesn’t take himself that seriously” (Duncan-Smith 2022). While many other actors have joined the “Not My Name” challenge on TikTok, they used characters they have played on television and in movies over the span of their careers. Will, however, uses “the hilarious nicknames he has received on the reality show he not so WILL-ingly signed up for, ‘Social Media Memes’” (Duncan-Smith 2022). Thus, by joining in on the challenge and the behavioral contagion, Will has found a great way of creating a bond with his followers, as it shows them that he has seen the funny and popular memes and does not take it too seriously. Furthermore, while Rare Beauty and Selena Gomez also use humor, the tone of his videos are not the same type of humor. Selena's use of humor goes back to her effort into making herself more relatable – for instance with her video about how anxiety comes easily to her, reenacting a popular sound (SelenaVideo1). Many people can relate to that, especially on the internet, which is her way of addressing it with a humorous approach and creating a more intimate bond with her followers by revealing that she struggles with anxiety herself. Will Smith, on the other hand, uses it in a way that does

not make him relatable but in a way that shows that he does not take himself too seriously. Before showing the pictures of memes with himself such as “Poor Will”, “Crop Top Prince”, “Pain”, and “Thicc Willie”, Will is seen staring into the camera in order to signal the feeling of him staring at the viewer. Will shakes his head and signals disappointment, so the viewer is left with a feeling of having let Will down by calling him those names, which is also evident in the comments section.

On Screenshot 25, users have commented that Will breaks the fourth wall when he acknowledges the existence of the meme about “Pain”, which went viral on the internet for a while. The meme is a screenshot of Will Smith during a discussion on his wife’s Facebook talk show, “Red Table Talk”:

“The meme began after Will and Jada revealed in Red Table Talk that the couple were separated briefly when she began seeing 27-year-old singer August Alsina” (Vavra 2020). Will Smith admitted in the interview that he was not sure he would be



Screenshot 25

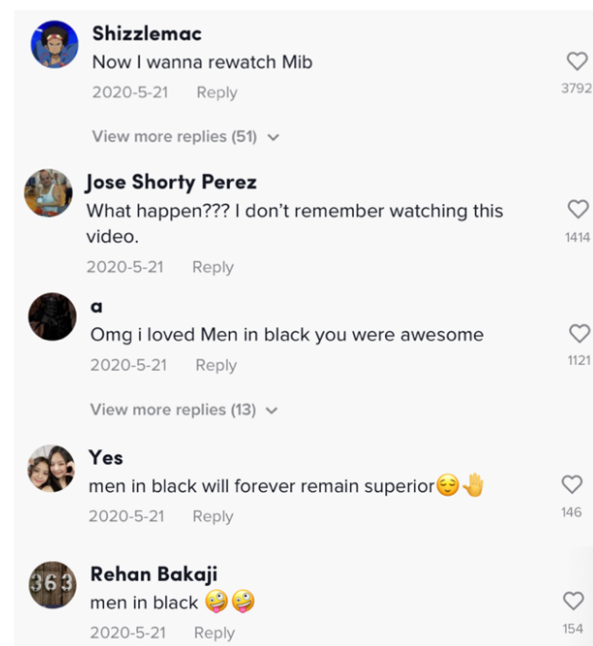
able to rebuild their relationship following their split in 2015, which is “when Jada has what she described as an ‘entanglement’ with Alsina” (Vavra 2020). After the conversation between Will and his wife about the rumors regarding their marriage and her relationship with Alsina, the video received many million views and went viral. The “Sad Will Smith / Pain” meme is of Will looking distraught, which was spread on the internet, trended on Twitter, and went viral. The point of the meme was to mock the situation regarding the ‘entanglement’, which became a known joke as well as express other feelings of detection. Will acknowledging the meme in his video on TikTok is in a way him breaking the fourth wall to show that he is aware that people make fun of him about something this personal – which is evident with the disappointed look. While the tone of the video is supposed to be a funny one, Will’s humor is not similar to Selena Gomez’s.

Additionally, Will Smith is commonly known for his sense of humor due to his famous role as Will, the street-smart teenager in the American television sitcom, *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* (1990-1996). As a sitcom, the series features various humorous lines said by Will, which are often related to the actor himself. His TikTok is, thus, majorly combined with a tone of his humor. WillVideo4 is a great example of this, as he tries to be funny about

how difficult it is to get back to normal training at the gym after being quarantined for a long while. Simultaneously, his humor is always used to promote something in a way, whether directly or indirectly. Where Selena Gomez’s videos about anxiety or the dating pool in your 30s are both used to do nothing but create engagement and publicity, Will’s use of humor is seen in promotional videos. In WillVideo1 he uses a funny filter to promote his book; in WillVideo4 he uses it to promote his body transformational journey, as he has posted it in his playlist “Best Shape of My Life”; in WillVideo6 he arguably uses it to indirectly promote the body transformation as well as all the films from the memes: for instance with the “Thicc Willie” meme, which is the picture he posted on Instagram when he announced that he was going to get into the best shape of his life; and the references to “Uncle Will” and “Crop Top Prince” are both references to the characters in his sitcom.

Another challenge he has joined is the “Wipe it Down” challenge, where Will shows how good he is with the edits and the use of special effects. While it could easily be an assistant or someone professional editing his videos, the followers are led to believe that the editor is Will himself, as he never directly

mentions someone else. In the video (WillVideo7), Will wipes a mirror clean, until another version of himself is revealed. The other version of himself is his role as Agent J in the American science fiction action film “Men in Black” (1997). In the caption to the video, Will writes, “I don’t remember making this...?” (WillVideo7), which is yet another reference to the science fiction film, where they use a so-called neuralyzer to wipe memories. Screenshot 26 shows some user comments which confirm that they have understood the reference to



Screenshot 26

“Men in Black” (1997), also called “MiB”. With his caption, Will is indirectly inviting people to comment exactly those things and encouraging this behavior, which is contagious as other people do the same. The video has 19,6 million likes and almost 100 thousand comments, where the 269,2 million views confirm the massive engagement the video created, something that might have created attention around the movie. In the comments section and

on Screenshot 26 it is clear that the users are loving the reference and want to rewatch the movies, which confirms how Will can use behavioral contagion in the form of a TikTok challenge to create attention around one of his old films. Additionally, the indirect marketing in this video is also a way of emphasizing his celebrity status, which especially came to happen because of “Men in Black” (1997).

4.2.3. Hailey Bieber

Many celebrities can be found on TikTok, whether it is to post silly and nonsensical videos just for fun, or to promote their brand or collaboration with other brands – or both. Like with the use of Instagram and other social media platforms, celebrities want to create an account, which can be an insight in their personal lives, and show more of their personality and humor, as well as create publicity and gain income. One of those celebrities taking advantage of what TikTok can offer is Hailey Bieber, a well-known model. She is also known for marrying the famous, Canadian singer, Justin Bieber.

Peaches Challenge

Hailey Bieber currently has 8,9 million followers, and 51,6 million likes on TikTok (Screenshot 27). Her account is mostly well-known for starting the TikTok



haileybieber ✓

Hailey Bieber

Message



96 Following

8.9M Followers

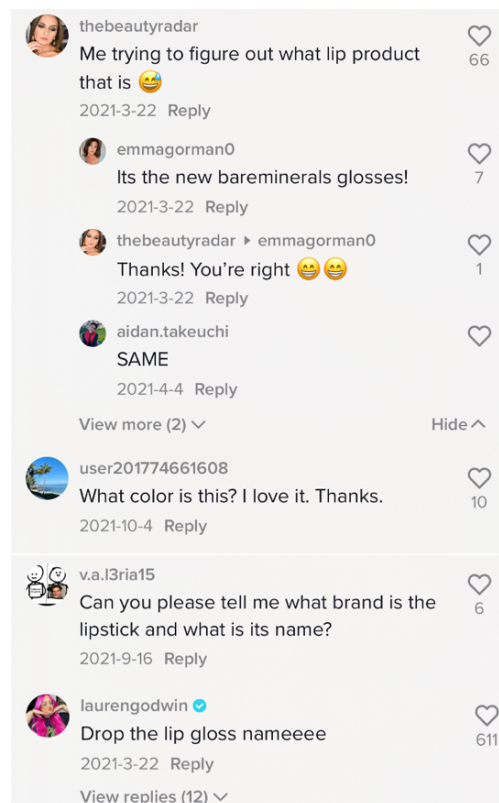
51.6M Likes

Screenshot 27

“Peaches challenge”, which can be seen in HaileyVideo1. In the video, she puts on a peachy colored lip gloss, while her husband's new song “Peaches” plays in the background. The video currently has 30,7 million viewers and 3 million likes and started a challenge among TikTok and its users. Not only did she make a video with Justin’s song playing as a sound, while she was applying make-up, but she also created another video days later for an Instagram, HaileyVideo2. In that video, someone is applying a Peaches inspired make-up look and had hashtagged #PeachesMakeupChallenge. The challenge was for people to post their own version of a makeup look, with the song playing in the background as a sound. Hailey had also posted HaileyVideo1 on Instagram; however, she used a different caption in the one on TikTok. On TikTok, she has only written a lip emoticon in the caption, whereas on Instagram, she wrote “Looks like a gloss, feels like a balm. Love the bareMinerals Gloss-balms #baremineralpartner”. This is a vast difference from the caption seen on TikTok. Not only are the followers privy to longer text with context, but they are also informed about her

partnership with the cosmetics brand bareMinerals. Hailey Bieber has had a partnership with the brand since 2019, when she signed on to be the face of the brand (Lawrenson 2019). Additionally, the “Peaches” song did not play in the background of the reposted video on Instagram. This could mean that she wanted the song to start trending on Tiktok, where the potential is bigger, and not Instagram, while simultaneously wanting to continue promoting the cosmetics company on Instagram, as she has done so for many instances.

It could be argued that the video on TikTok is an indirect marketing strategy. The viewers or followers on TikTok, who watch the video, can be curious about the lip-gloss she is using in the video, so they can either go on Instagram to find it or try to search the internet for it. As it is heavily advertised that she is the face of bareMinerals, it can be speculated from viewers that the lip-gloss is from their brand. This creates engagement for bareMinerals, as well as Hailey Bieber. This is similar to Selena Gomez’s use of a pun in SelenaVideo7, where Selena never explicitly says the name of the series and instead based her encoding on the decoders’ frame of knowledge to interpret for themselves. Hailey Bieber’s dedicated fans might already know about her partnership with bareMinerals and immediately decode the video into being a marketing attempt for the brand, while other viewers without that frame of knowledge will not immediately understand that which would result in an oppositional reading; instead, they are the ones wondering in the comments section which brand the



Screenshot 28

lip gloss is (Screenshot 28). Hailey leaves the promotion to her followers; the ones who know about her partnership are quick to answer the other users who are inquiring about the lip gloss, which is why the marketing attempt is indirect.

A reason why she might have different captions on the two platforms could be because she wants people to follow both accounts, so they are able to see something they do not see on the other platform. It could also be because of the different platforms which both have different uses, though it is counterintuitive, as the Peaches challenge was popular on TikTok and not Instagram. It does appear strange that she would make the hashtag on

Instagram and explicitly name the challenge, and not do the same on her TikTok, where the video was first posted. It could be an attempt to create more traffic on TikTok, as her husband Justin Bieber, was heavily promoting his song on his account on TikTok, where he posted videos of him dancing to the song. Hailey's video is an attempt to further the possibilities of the song going viral on TikTok, consequently making the song rise on the charts.

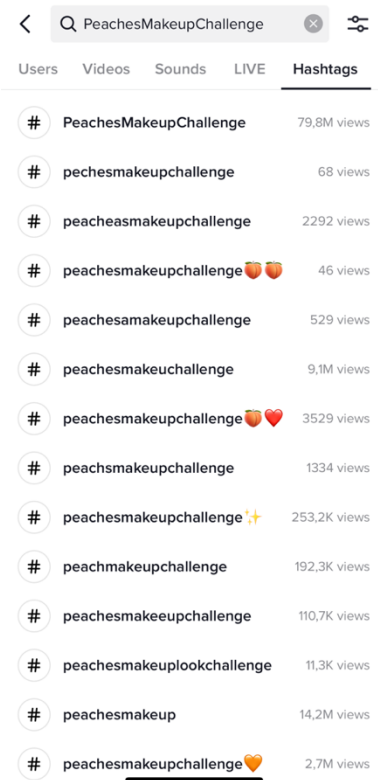
Hailey's videos on TikTok are a mix of various elements: she has videos with her friends and husband, some of herself with her dog, and some videos promoting her YouTube channel, where her viewers get a preview of her coming or current YouTube video. The content on TikTok is playful, relaxed, and not too serious, which is what the app is perfect for. Hailey takes advantage of popular sounds trendy at the point of her videos. She barely speaks in her TikTok videos and mostly uses sounds or music for her background, while she is showing herself in an outfit or with a makeup-look. The differences in her content on the different social media platforms are noticeable, which tempts people to follow her on every platform, as they might be able to get a new insight to the private life of her and her husband.

An important part about Hailey Bieber's account on TikTok is that she does not write in any of her captions that she is advertising a product or partnering with a makeup brand. While she uses Instagram to market her partnership with the makeup collection, bareMinerals, she merely uses TikTok to post videos alluding to these things but never confirming. A perfect example is how she created the #Peachesmakeupchallenge on Instagram but made it go viral on TikTok without even mentioning it on the app; instead, she posted (HaileyVideo1), where she applies peach-colored makeup from bareMinerals to her husband's song "Peaches" in the background. Not only is she marketing her husband's song, but she is also marketing the makeup brand she represents. Screenshot 28 above displays a few of the many users commenting on the video, wanting to know which makeup brand she is using in the video. Simultaneously, Hailey's husband's new song is playing in the background, as mentioned earlier. Most people watching this video would not immediately think that it is marketing anything, despite the fact that she is marketing two things: the song and the makeup brand, conclusively confirming what a great example of indirect marketing the video is. Moreover, it seems to work, as "after just a few days, Hailey's initial video has millions of views on TikTok and over one million likes on Instagram" (White 2021). This might have helped with the success of the song, which "... reached the number one spot on

Billboard’s Hot 100 List” (White 2021). Using indirect marketing this way has, thus, seemed to help both the Biebers.

Additionally, the caption of the HaileyVideo1 is merely a painted lip emoji, referring to the makeup challenge. The challenge is created by encouraging fans to “show off their own Peaches inspired makeup looks on social media, with a chance of Hailey reposting the videos” (White 2021). The promise of reposting the user’s videos and the challenge itself is a great example of behavioral contagion. She challenges her followers to do a makeup look and then to share it on social media, because she claims to want to see their looks; the promise of attention from a beloved celebrity such as herself might encourage more people to do the challenge and share the video, which other people will see and follow suit, creating behavioral contagion. Hailey kept her promise and did pay “close attention to the hashtags because she’s shared quite a few of her fans’ challenge videos on her Instagram” (White 2021). Conclusively, this portrays how Hailey uses a more indirect way of marketing on TikTok, while simultaneously using other more direct ways on other social media platforms such as Instagram. This correlates with the addictive nature of content on TikTok, mentioned in the theory section by Guarda et al, where it is very easy to watch random videos for hours. Hailey’s video is giving off the same type of ‘random video’ energy, as she is merely applying makeup, or listening to songs; people might not immediately realize that they are being exposed to an ad, they merely think it is a ‘random video’, which Hailey uses to her advantage.

As the focus in this paper is on TikTok, the app is used by Hailey in a way of merely posting a ‘random’ video of her applying makeup – however, if her followers on Instagram also follow her on TikTok, they would immediately get the reference, while other random TikTok users would merely be curious and ask which makeup brand it is, as shown in Screenshot 28 above. As scholars Guarda et al mention in our theory section, celebrities do not only post content on TikTok, but they also promote TikTok on their other social media platforms. This is the case with Hailey, as she is promoting her challenge on Instagram, but is originally using TikTok to make the video and publish it first there. If you search the



Screenshot 29

“PeachesMakeupChallenge” tag on TikTok, you are able to find many hashtags associated with the challenge. Screenshot 29 shows how many different hashtags there are. The first one has cultivated the most views with 79,8 million, while “Peachesmakeup” has 14,2 million views at the time of writing. The original hashtag created by Hailey is the “PeachesMakeupChallenge”, which is what she wrote on her Instagram page. Many on TikTok took to the challenge and created their own peaches inspired makeup looks and posted them, which confirms how the social behavior was contagious enough to market both the video, song, makeup brand as well as Hailey herself.

Staying on the theme of makeup, and her partnership with bareMinerals, Hailey has posted more videos on her TikTok promoting the brand and her collaboration with them. In the video HaileyVideo3, Hailey is promoting a new product for bareMinerals: a setting powder. The video showcases her applying the powder to her full face of makeup and one could presume that she also used other bareMinerals products for the rest of her face. The sound used for the video is not one that has been used many times, nor has it gone viral or is, by any means, popular. It is music from the band Tame Impala, which might also be a point of contact, as it was chosen by her and could be a song she plays often or one of her favorites. This could mean that her followers and viewers on TikTok, who pay attention to the music, could stand to think that it is a band which she likes. It showcases a more personal side to her, while she is promoting a product. This way of marketing might bring her closer to her followers, as she is possibly sharing her personal taste with them. She does not speak in the video and merely displays the product towards the camera while applying it. The short video managed to get 16,9 million views and 983,9 thousand likes at the time of writing. This is an example of direct marketing, as the caption of her video reads “my new bareminerals Original Mineral Veil Pressed Setting Powder. #bareMineralspartner”. She explicitly writes the name, so the viewers can copy the caption and search for it – without getting mistaken for another powder from the brand. Writing the name of the product in the caption is a way of accommodating the consumer’s needs, much like Deborah Lee claims marketing is all about. In the videos where she posts makeup products, consumers seem to fill the comments section with questions about which product and which shade, as shown in Screenshot 28 above. Posting the name of the product is a way of giving the consumers what they want without them having to ask, while simultaneously promoting the product itself. The fact that she mentions bareMinerals, and that she is a partner with them, emphasizes that the other videos,

mentioned in this section, are examples of indirect marketing, and thus leads followers with the feeling of knowing when they are being promoted to.

Mob Mentality

An interesting aspect about social media, which is mentioned in our theory section, concerns the consequences and the different reactions that could happen on social media platforms.

Janell Azpeitia discusses mob mentality and how it can have a negative effect on a company or a celebrity. Mob mentality can also be connected to contagion and virality. Hailey Bieber's video with her collaboration with bareMinerals, HaileyVideo3, people in the comments section are not too kind to the model. The criticism following the video is related to Hailey's

way of applying the product. It appears as if she is not applying any product on her brush or face, and people are noticing and writing it in the comments – and not in a pleasant way.

The links between virality and mob mentality are quite interesting. People have an easier time justifying their actions if they know more people are doing the same thing and are easily influenced by others into liking or disliking a product or

celebrity. This is the case with the video of Hailey Bieber and bareMinerals, where many are criticizing how she applies the product, and are either making fun of her, or being critical (Screenshot 30). It is something that comes with the territory of being on social media, whether you are a brand, company, or celebrity using TikTok as your marketing strategy tool.



Screenshot 30

With Hailey Bieber's case, she is commonly known to have been subjected to a lot of "online hate" (Desk 2021). On Instagram, "the trolling" (Desk 2021) got to the point where she decided to switch off the comments section, where only the ones Hailey follows can comment on her posts. At the time of writing, this feature is not available on TikTok. In an interview with "ELLE" Magazine, Hailey says the following:

"I remember someone telling me that (turning off the public comments) really lowers your engagement. And I was like, 'I could give a f*** about engagement! People are terrorizing me. Engagement, enschagement. I don't care!'" (Desk 2021).

The trolling and 'terrorizing' are exemplified in the comments section to HaileyVideo3, where the mob mentality is evident in the way that people are actively commenting horrible things. On Screenshot 30 many users are being mean about the fact that Hailey's husband, Justin Bieber, used to date the singer, Selena Gomez. Many of the comments are about Hailey being 'the second choice' or that no one knew who she was before her marriage to him – which, incidentally, is not true, as "she was famous well before Bieber and his slippers got down on one knee" (Lindsay 2018) and was considered to be a successful model prior to their relationship, modeling in major ads for Guess, Ralph Lauren, and Tommy Hilfiger. Many of the comments mock her by tagging Selena Gomez or writing about how Rare Beauty is a much better brand than what Hailey is promoting, as well as promoting Selena's works and music. The mob mentality is a massive factor that plays into the comments section of the video, as many comments appear to be about the same things, alluding to a certain contagion. A user sees one comment and adds another one that is similar, as the user feels there is a space to do so now that others have commented the same.

While Hailey's statement about being terrorized by people is from an interview in 2020, at the time of writing, she is still suffering from the same kind of trolling. As she cannot turn off certain comments on TikTok like on Instagram, almost every single video on the app contains several comments similar to the ones on Screenshot 30 above. On the 12th of April 2022, Hailey posted HaileyVideo4, where she writes, "this is for you guys in my comments every single time I post" in the caption of the video. The video shows Hailey recording herself while urging users to "leave [her] alone". She says the following: "I'm minding my business. I don't do anything, I don't say anything. Leave me alone, please, I'm begging you. Enough time has gone by where it's valid to leave me alone. I beg of you, truly. That's my only request. Leave me alone. Be miserable somewhere else, please."

(HaileyVideo4). While the video is clear to everyone who knows about the ‘online hate’ Hailey usually gets, the meaning is unclear to those who do not know, which relates to the process of decoding the video. In her encoding of the video, Hailey expects viewers to immediately interpret that what she is saying is about hate-comments. While ‘leave me alone’ is not difficult to understand for anyone watching, the fact that she says “enough time has gone by” signals that Hailey is referring to something specific. The followers who are invested in her or in Justin Bieber might interpret it into meaning one of two options. The first option is that she is referring to the fact that ‘enough time has gone by’ from his breakup with Selena Gomez in May 2018 to his marriage to Hailey in September 2018. According to the comments section on Screenshot 30 above, people are comparing Hailey to Selena and calling her ‘the second choice’ as Justin married Hailey merely four months after splitting with Selena.

The other option might be that Hailey has been married to Justin for almost four years now, which connects to the same issue about enough time having gone by where people should not be commenting on her relationship with him or calling it ‘fake’. What is especially interesting about Hailey’s video is that she acknowledges the hate-comments that she says appear ‘every single time’ she posts something. Janell Azpeitia suggests that a good relationship between consumer and supplier can be created with interactions and quick responses to comments on their page. While Hailey does not interact in the comments section, she interacts with her followers with this video by addressing their comments on her other videos. Azpeitia argues that this can give the opportunity to handle a backlash or mob mentality in a good manner, as a way of upholding the good relationship. This, however, does not seem to be the case, based on the many mean comments to the video itself.

Hailey never acknowledges the comments in the comments sections in any of her videos, but instead uses HaileyVideo4 as a way of interacting with the people commenting hateful messages. She is expressively talking about the issue, but in an indirect way, as she does not mention what the comments are about or if she is referring to specific ones. Hailey does not say ‘stop commenting hateful things’ or anything else that makes her seem petulant and privileged. Instead, her approach is indirect, while still being transparent about the problem of mob mentality and how everyone – or a majority of people – seems to be contagiously commenting the same mean things on her videos. The contagious aspect is also seen with the fact that it is not the same users commenting on the videos every time, but a mix of different users, who have been, arguably, affected by others commenting the same

things. Mob mentality makes them attack her in a way that they think is okay, because others are doing the same.

While Hailey Bieber is somewhat indirectly addressing the problem in her video, mob mentality makes users find a way to still address the problem they want without being given a platform to do so. A perfect example is Will Smith's TikTok page following the incident at the 94th Academy Awards on March 27, 2022, where "Will shocked the audience when he walked over and hit Rock during his monologue" (Grebenyuk 2022). What exactly happened was that Chris Rock, presenter at the show, went off script and made a joke about Jada Pinkett Smith which "didn't land well with the actress or her husband, Will Smith" (Grebenyuk 2022). Jada was seen rolling her eyes on screen before "Will walked up to the stage and slapped Rock" (Grebenyuk 2022). The segment appeared scripted at first, though it was revealed not to be after ABC muted the live segment. Rock looked shocked and said "'Will Smith just f—king smacked the s—t out of me' [in] unaired footage that later surfaced on Twitter" (Grebenyuk 2022). Will "... returned to his seat before saying 'keep my wife's name out your f—king mouth.'". In response, Rock attempted to laugh the situation off before promising not to mention Jada" (Grebenyuk 2022). Chris Rock's joke was in reference to Jada's shaved head, which she had previously opened up about is the result of her alopecia diagnosis, which is a medical condition known to cause hair loss (Grebenyuk 2022). Later that night, during the awards show, Will won Best Actor for his role in *King Richard* (2021) and during his acceptance speech, he started crying and apologizing to the academy and his fellow nominees" (Grebenyuk 2022).

Since the incident, Will has not posted a video on his TikTok account, though he was active before that. His last video is a video of him and Jada right before the award show. What is interesting in regard to mob mentality is that almost every video Will Smith has posted has several comments by users referencing the Oscars incident. Hailey Bieber ignored the comments until she could not handle it anymore, which made her post a video directly addressing the issue. Will Smith, on the other hand, has not provided the users with a place to comment on the incident. As he has not posted anything on his TikTok account, users on the app are affected by mob mentality to go to his previous videos and comment on the incident on those videos. On Instagram, the actor has posted a picture of a lengthy apology to both Chris Rock, the Academy, and the Williams Family, who *King Richard* (2021) is about. The post is restricted in a way that only Will Smith can see the total number of likes on the post,

and no one can comment on it. Instagram is the only social media platform, where he has commented on the issue, however, it still leaves the users without a place to comment on the issue themselves; mob mentality makes them feel entitled to do so, which is why they comment on his TikTok videos – and other Instagram posts – instead.

While Will Smith is not addressing the issue at all on TikTok, users still find a way to talk about it, which encourages even more people to do the same – and it can even spread to doing the same on other social media platforms. With mob mentality and contagious behavior, users find a way to spread negative comments whether the celebrity gives them the chance to or not, which is shown with Hailey Bieber and Will Smith. In Will’s case, Azpeitia’s argument about handling backlash or mob mentality through interactions is proven to be right, as he does not do so, which resulted in more backlash on his other videos.

4.2.4. Jason Derulo

Another celebrity that is strategically using TikTok to market himself is the American singer-songwriter and entertainer, Jason Derulo. He started his music career in 2009 and has since sold over 30 million singles. In quarantine during the COVID-19 pandemic, Jason made great use of his time and began to invest both time and creativity on his TikTok account as many others.



In an article with Insider, Jason explains how the app gave him the opportunity to thrive creatively and show more of his personality to his fans and followers. He says that “I’m able to show who I am, whereas [with] other apps, I didn’t thrive as much because I couldn’t show me” (Harris 2020). This is an interesting statement about TikTok and all the other apps. As an example, Instagram is known to be a place where people aim for perfection: the perfect picture edited with a filter and taken from the right angle. More people have spoken up about the problem of the “highly polished, aesthetically-pleasing world” (Hallett 2022) that Instagram serves. The main argument is that it can negatively affect the mental health of the target audiences, who instead wish for people to serve the “simple, back to basics” (Hallett 2022) reality on the app. When users keep seeing edited perfection on the app, they might feel less good about themselves for not being as perfect as others seem to be.

Jason's statement about not being able to 'show' who he is on other apps, the same way he is able to with TikTok, is an indication that this is what he is referring to. The simple, back to basics reality brings people more "authentic and more relatable role models" (Hallett 2022), something which Jason might aspire to become. The point of Instagram is to post a picture or a story, where one can use several filters and edits. While the use of filters and special effects is available on TikTok as well, the point of the app is not to be 'perfect', which Instagram is often connected to; instead, TikTok is meant to entertain users, which Jason wishes to do – while simultaneously gaining engagement and make money.

Jason Derulo currently has 52,4 million followers and 1,2 billion likes (Screenshot 31), earning him the title as "The King of TikTok" (Thompson-Powell 2022), where he is currently in the top 20 most followed as number 13 (Thompson-Powell 2022). Jason believes that the title as "King" does hold a certain amount of pressure, though he tries to "just be a leader and support the young creators, the early creators that don't have huge followings" (Harris 2020). A feature on TikTok which Jason uses a lot in his videos is called duets: a feature that allows creators or users to post their video side by side with a video from another creator or user. In JasonVideo1, Jason is dancing and duetting to a video created by a random user without many followers, singing to one of Jason's older songs. The caption of the video is "Should we drop this". When looking at the purpose of duetting from the perspective of celebrities such as Jason Derulo, it creates a fitting example of point of contact. Jason creates a relationship with his followers and fans by duetting with their videos; it creates a bond, where people feel encouraged to post videos and tag him in the hopes of him noticing and duetting with them. This also encourages more to follow him and create a similar bond with him, in order to try to be as active as possible with him.

In the interview with Insider, Jason states that he is paying attention to smaller creators on the app, and actively tries to help create a pathway for them with his fame and platform. This statement might encourage contagious behavior from "small content creators" on the app, who might be encouraged to post more videos in order to get his attention and make him duet their videos. In the interview, Jason also mentions how he comments on videos from creators who use his music as a sound (Harris 2020). Consequently, this creates a point of contact, as he is establishing a platform on his account that focuses on his relationship with other creators and his fans. By promising to comment on videos used with his music as sounds, Jason uses behavioral contagion to his benefit to market his music and possibly even make it go viral. The promise of a celebrity's attention might encourage

TikTok users to create videos, with his music used as the sound, in the hope of making him comment on it; it both gives them the desired attention from a beloved celebrity and gives each respectable user's account more attention – and possibly even more followers. All that behavior is created with Jason's statement about commenting on their videos, which is why it is considered behavioral contagion. It is also a great way of creating more attention on his music: when a user posts a video with Jason's music, the user's followers will hear the music and maybe like it enough to go listen to it. Simultaneously, when Jason comments or duets one of those videos, Jason's own followers will hear the music as well, as those users who are randomly shown the video on their 'For You' page due to the algorithm. Conclusively, this is an example of how Jason uses behavioral contagion in order to market himself, his music and his TikTok account.

Music for TikTok

Using TikTok serves as an effortless way of helping creators make their mark in the entertainment industry. Jason Derulo explains that the platform gives him the possibility to “reach out and do something without even noticing [its impact] [which is] pretty cool” (Harris 2020). Jason has had a successful music career, which has only blossomed with his use of TikTok. In an interview with GQ magazine, Jason discusses how he uses TikTok as a way to have his ear on the ground for new beats or samples that could inspire new music (Levesley 2020). However, it does not mean that he caters his music to fit with the trends of TikTok. Nevertheless, he was able to be inspired and create a hit from a sample seen on TikTok. He produced the song “Savaged Love (Laxed – Siren beat)”, which is from a beat he stumbled upon by scrolling through TikTok (Levesley 2020). The song became popular on TikTok and earned a spot on the Hot 100 top 10 list of songs in America. It became one of the biggest viral hits on TikTok and drew 750,000 TikTok videos a day (Donkor 2022) at its height.

This was the first song from Jason since his active use of TikTok. The app serves him as the perfect platform for dance choreography which was quickly created for the song. Thus, a certain dance to the song became a trend for users to recreate the dance and post it on TikTok with the song as a sound. The trendy dance was created by another ordinary user on the app, who created the dance before it went viral. Subsequently, Jason noticed the dance and began performing it himself on his account, making even more people notice it and the song. His performance of the song in a video, and the attention he gives it, encourages even

more people to create a video with the dance and song, subsequently encouraging viral behavior. It does not appear that the creator of the dance was credited on any of his videos, which could have served as an opportunity to bond with the follower – nevertheless, the bond is created with every other follower on his page who dances the same dance or comments on his videos. In video JasonVideo2, you will be able to see the viral dance. The sound has currently been used in 5,2 million videos, and Jason has performed both the song and dance on Good Morning America, an American morning television program, which gave the song even more attention.

Jason has also made videos with other creators, where they are seen dancing to his song, exemplified in JasonVideo3 and JasonVideo4. In JasonVideo4, he is seen duetting with a random and not well-known user on TikTok which is another great example of him simultaneously promoting his own song while creating a point of contact with his followers, whom he duets. The success of Jason's music has only grown from there: another two songs which are perfect examples of good marketing on TikTok, are his singles "Take You Dancing" and "Coño". The song Coño was produced shortly after "Savage Love", and it is also a collaboration which was inspired by TikTok. The song originates from 2017 and was created by musicians Puri, Jhormountain, and Adje. Around 3 years after its release, it resurfaced on TikTok, and a dance was created for the song. During its height, it surpassed around fourteen million videos. During the popularity of the song, Jason Derulo was quick to jump on the trend and create a remix with the song featuring himself. Much like with the previous song, Jason used his TikTok account, where he would, again, collaborate with known users of TikTok, who would do the viral dance with the song playing as a sound; an example of that is shown is JasonVideo5, where he uses the song throughout his account, as it can be found months after its release.

Jason Derulo makes a point of using his songs in his videos for any occasion. When it comes to the discussion of virality, he uses his platform correctly in regard to encouraging virality, whether it is using an already trending song and making it more viral with his presence or creating songs and marketing them on his TikTok account with a choreographed dance. An example of this can be seen with his other trending song "Take You Dancing", which was released shortly after his success with "Coño". Jason teased the release of the song on his TikTok. Not only was there a small snippet of the song, but Jason had also created a dance which would be performed during the chorus of the song. In the caption of JasonVideo6, Jason writes "comment [fire emoji] if you want me to drop this song right now

#takeyoudancing”. He encourages his followers to comment in order for him to give them what they desire: new music. This also encourages engagement from his followers, he is creating point of contact, as he will be seeing and possibly replying. In any case, he is interacting with them via the video, making it the point of contact. Additionally, having many people comment on his video is a great way to create word of mouth and more engagement, as Azpeitia states. Using behavioral contagion is, thus, a clever way for him to possibly make his video go viral due to a high number of comments, which subsequently might make his mentioned song go viral.

When it concerns his music, Jason uses a direct marketing approach, which he attempts to disguise. By having an ear to the ground on TikTok and being so observant of the behaviors and demographics, he gets to market his music to fit the idea of TikTok. Creating a dance to go with his song, plays well into the environment of TikTok, and helps with the thought of creating something that could go viral. It could be argued that despite David Scott’s belief that attempts to make a viral video often fail, Jason does have the means to understand his demographic, as well as the environment of TikTok, especially with a title such as “The King of TikTok”. He needs to keep living up to that title, which he was awarded due to his captivating content that fit perfectly with the purpose of the app. The image and persona of Jason Derulo has also created a big stir in the TikTok world. Big creators as well as celebrities want to collaborate with him to start their TikTok career. A great example of that is with actor and author Will Smith, who is mentioned earlier in our paper. The two famous celebrities collaborating is a way for them to borrow each other’s points of contact and gain more engagement – both on and off the app. Jason does not only market his music, but he also focuses on marketing himself as someone people should follow and spend their time on, if they seek entertainment, which the app is perfect for. His videos throughout his account are related to each other, as he uses humor to appeal to his demographic in all of them.

An example of this can be seen in JasonVideo7, which centers around a joke that has been made by many over different platforms. In both the caption and the video, Jason writes “when she tells you she’s hungry but can’t tell you what she wants”. He is seen standing in the kitchen with a frying pan containing two pieces of paper. Jason flips the paper pieces and plates them as if they are food. The pieces say the following: “Whatever” and “anything”. Next, he opens a pot and uses a saltshaker to ‘salt’ the pot, which contains a piece of paper

that says, “I don’t know”. The comments section of the video is filled with followers sympathizing with the joke and agreeing with him. Similar to Will Smith’s “Wipe it Down” challenge, Jason uses the caption to encourage certain behaviors in the comments section: users agreeing with the dilemma. Furthermore, Jason has created the video with the expectation that people have enough knowledge to understand the joke, which seems to be a universal problem based on the comments section. To use Stuart Hall’s terms here, he expects people to easily decode his video and interpret it the way he wanted to – which is not always the case, according to Hall. However, in Jason’s (and Will’s) case, it certainly worked in their favor based on the comments and engagements with the videos.

Jason has made a big name for himself on TikTok and has had much success. In the article from *Insider*, it is disclosed that he makes “far more” than 75,000 dollars per video (Harris 2020). His endeavors on TikTok are continuing to rise, and other creators and celebrities are looking at him as a fitting example of what can happen if you are marketing yourself correctly – based on the theory section. He has people talking about him, creating the element of word of mouth, which then results in more engagement and could lead to bigger chances of going viral. With the engagement from his side, he is also successful in creating a community with his fans with his points of contact. While also displaying a more open and creative side of himself, he comes off as genuine and authentic, which attracts more followers when it concerns TikTok. He edits his video in an entertaining way with loops and filters, attracting more users to his account, while also using and encouraging a lot of dances, which is what TikTok is mostly known for. His title as the King of TikTok is due to his ability to entertain his users while simultaneously marketing himself and his image, creating more success. This is done in an indirect way, where the promotion and marketing of his music is much more direct and unquestionable. Using a direct approach to market his videos works in his favor, when he creates dances to go along with them, because it encourages users on the app to create videos with the dance and get his attention as a beloved celebrity.

4.3. Purposefully Selected Companies

In this section, we analyze the purposefully selected companies, Duolingo and Ryanair. Both companies have been extremely prominent on the app with their content and have gone viral for several of their videos. Based on this, we have chosen to analyze three videos from Duolingo and four from Ryanair to exemplify the type of viral content that has been trending on TikTok. What has further compelled us to choose Duolingo to analyze is the fact that the

company does not sell a product, which easily disguised the marketing aspect in their entertaining and funny videos, as the typical user might merely watch and laugh without thinking about having been exposed to the marketing of the brand. Ryanair is chosen based on their virality, as well as their marketing of a product, juxtaposing Duolingo, which makes for a more interesting analysis.

4.3.1. Duolingo

Duolingo is a language learning app created in America. The app teaches its users everything from grammar,

pronunciation, and vocabulary. The users can be given tasks such as reading, translation, short stories, and tasks for speaking comprehension. It currently offers 41 different languages and over 500 million learners (Duolingo.com, “Approach”). On TikTok, they currently have 4,3 million followers and 80,3 million likes (Screenshot 32), which speaks to a huge engagement.

When browsing the company’s TikTok page and videos, we can quickly observe that they make much use of viral or trendy sounds circulating the platform. Many of the company’s videos feature popular and viral sounds. Duolingo has gone viral on TikTok many times and the account is seen as a popular and funny one with relatable, trendy, and silly videos. As mentioned in the theory section, digital media has advanced in the marketing world, as they are able to research a much larger audience of consumers. This is also shown in the videos that are produced on Duolingo's account, where many of their videos, if not all, generate around over a million views. This might be due to their use of memeable and funny videos, as they do not take themselves seriously and instead portray themselves in an entertaining manner to lure more followers and create more publicity for themselves. The company's logo is a green owl, by the name of Duo, which they have made into the mascot of the company used to add humor and entertainment to their videos. The choice of having a mascot is common among many other companies, such as Tony the Tiger by Kellogg’s Frosted Flakes or Michelin Man by Michelin. Duolingo’s mascot is who you see in all their videos on TikTok, which is also something many companies choose to do. Compared to most companies, however, Duo the Owl is known for its humorous statements and relatable situations.



duolingo ✓

Duolingo

Follow

110 Following 4.3M Followers 80.3M Likes

Screenshot 32

In our theory section, Deborah Lee argues that marketing is not about selling a product but defining how that product meets those needs of the consumers. This notion fits many of our examples of companies using TikTok as a marketing tool. However, Duolingo stands out in this crowd. They do not use many of their videos to promote their language-learning app, as there are relatively few videos regarding it. An example of a video, where they promote their concept is shown in DuolingoVideo1. In the video the caption is “when you use Google Translate instead of actually learning a language”, as well as “every time you open Google translate, I lose a feather”. Here, they are directly mentioning their competitors Google Translate and the services they provide. They are juxtaposing Google Translate with their own product, which “actually helps” with learning a new language. This is where they appeal to their consumers’ needs. As Lee states, it is about defining the consumers’ needs, and Duolingo is doing just that by defining how, instead of using Google Translate, Duolingo is much better at teaching languages and is the better service to provide for consumers’ needs. Duolingo does not have a product which they sell as their app is free to download, though users are able to buy add-ons if they choose to. Thus, it can be assumed that for them it is not about selling and more about creating word of mouth for exposure and virality. They still want downloads and for people to actively keep using the app, which is why they aim for engagement and virality to market themselves in order to gain publicity and more downloads. It can be said that Duolingo uses the notions of contagion theory, as they are marketing themselves with popular, entertaining, and viral videos, not by marketing their free product.

By posting the video DuolingoVideo2, the company shows two important things. The first thing is the use of a trendy sound, which has been used over 411,9 thousand times. This means that the video must have likely reached a lot of users on TikTok, which is evident in the current 3 million likes, and the 18 thousand comments. This seems to be their general marketing strategy throughout their account; the use of humor and entertainment videos in using trendy sounds.

The second important thing is that they create behavioral contagion. In the caption of the video, Duolingo writes, “can you guys just like this so I can go home early”, which is written in capital letters; a way of emphasizing how “important” it is to share the video. The encouragement of behavioral contagion is making users like the video, which might make the company go viral. Thus, the point of creating the behavioral contagion is to gain more publicity and fans. The humor in the video attracts followers, who not only like this video, but most likely browse the rest of their videos on their account, find them humorous, and like

them as well. Furthermore, it creates a point of contact between the followers and Duolingo, as people become invested in the owl and want to help it “go home” early. It also makes them easier to relate to, as many people are familiar with the desire of wanting to leave work early. Additionally, it connects to a certain element of explicit references to situations that many people are in or talk about on social media, which is a major part in Duolingo’s content: wanting to go home early, lusting for a popular singer and more examples. This is elaborated in more detail later in the paper.

The point of contact has become vital and essential for Duolingo's account. They have set a standard, which can be expected in all their videos, as it helps them draw more new fans, as well as keep those they already have. In all their videos, you can see how they interact with many users in the comments section. Duolingo often encourages fans to comment, as the company can connect and establish a point of contact with the fans. This results in many users wanting to comment on their videos, as they know the likelihood of getting a response back is big. This is another area where Duolingo differs from other TikTok companies. It correlates with Janell Azpeitia’s statement about how social media strengthens engagement. Which can be done through connecting with the audience with challenges, contests, promotions etc. Duolingo focuses on its engagement with its audience, which results in a good relationship between company and consumer. Instead of having the audience praising the company's products, however, they want praise for the humor in their videos, which means that they gain more engagement from followers. With their videos featuring popular and viral sounds, they are able to hit a younger demographic, often referred as Generation Z. As we mentioned in the theory section, the largest demographic found on TikTok are the users between 16- and 24-year-old, and that covers around 41 % of the users. In their comments section of their videos, it is not only individuals that comment, but also other brands and companies. This has the potential to lead to collaborations between the brands. Companies such as Ryanair, Nerf, Cut, and AGBO productions have commented on various Duolingo videos. Through their points of contact, and their mascot, they successfully create a personality that attracts consumers. Much like influencers and celebrities, the Duolingo owl has become recognizable and famous among both their target audience and other users on the app.

With their viral videos, they quickly gather a large following. Sampson mentions how “virality” and “meme” have become the marketing buzzwords of the network age, which fits

well with the concept and execution of Duolingo's marketing strategy. This is something that scholar David Meerman Scott agrees with. Azpeitia's claim of spreading word of mouth is also what Duolingo strives for with their videos, which result in other people talking about them and possibly driving them to action in downloading the Duolingo app.

Duolingo uses an indirect marketing approach, as the company is not trying to sell something to the consumers, but instead trying to create traffic on the account, as well as trying to seem less formal. The company does so by using viral sounds, creating a mascot with huge personality and charisma, as well as making the owl have a personality trait which their target audience can relate to. For instance, the mascot is known for taking a liking to the popular American singer, Dua Lipa, after people started mistaking the two for each other with the use of "Dua" and "Duo". There are multiple videos of Duolingo featuring the singer in some sort of way, whether it is a cut-out of her, pictures, or referring to her in general. The "owl" has even gone as far as traveling from Pittsburg, their headquarters, to New York in order to try and meet her, as shown in DuolingoVideo3. The singer has become quite famous over the years, and again this could lead to a potential collaboration that could draw more new followers to both parties. This marketing approach results in new followers, more exposure, and relatable videos, as users on the app like her, too, especially on the app.

In an interview with NBC, Duolingo's social media manager, Zaria Parvez, discusses how their intentions with the account was not to get users to sign up, but rather they just "wanted to be here and be present with people" (Wong 2021). She continues by explaining how such a mindset has given them the freedom to take risks, be bold, and relatable (Wong 2021). This again correlates with point of contact; they want and encourage as much contact with their target audience and future as well, while simultaneously treating their target audience as human beings, much like David Scott argues is the best way to market. Duolingo do not take themselves too seriously, as some brands and companies might do when they are trying to promote themselves, which is another reason why their target audience finds them relatable and continues watching them.



Screenshot 33

4.3.2. Ryanair

Ryanair is an Irish low-cost airline with a second base in Stansted, United Kingdom. It is one of the largest airline groups in Europe.

They have around 2400 daily flights carrying around 154 guests (Ryanair.com, About us). Ryanair has a 34-year safety record and considers itself one of Europe's cleanest airline groups (Ryanair.com, About us). The company currently has 1,6 million followers and 13,4 million likes (Screenshot 33), which indicates that they have content that many people seem to love. Much like other companies such as Duolingo, who have gained many followers and a lot of attention over the recent times, the airline is active on TikTok. Much like Duolingo, Ryanair takes the same approach with their content, posting entertaining and funny videos featuring trendy and popular sounds that are going viral.

In many ways, the airline's account is similar to Duolingo's, as Ryanair also has a mascot that is shown in many of their videos to be the face of the company. Their mascot takes the shape of an airplane with a human face filter on its nose. The account has a self-deprecating sense of humor, as they poke fun at themselves by bringing up several topics which the public have been critical of – for instance, the lack of legroom on their airplanes. In the video RyanVideo1, the caption on the screen reads “Pov: a customer is getting vexed about not having enough leg room”, to which Ryanair answers with “oh nooo. What did you expect? The flight literally costs you 9.99 euro”, and it features a popular sound at the time it was posted. Much like Rare Beauty, Selena Gomez and the other companies mentioned in this paper, when Ryanair chooses a popular sound in its video, the company tells us that it expects the viewer to immediately understand the reference and, thus, borrow the references' point of contact.

Additionally, the company has written in the caption “smh plz pipe down”. The use of language in the captions is heavily targeting Generation-Z, who commonly uses phrases like “smh” (shaking my head), “plz” (please) and “pipe down” (stop talking). Their account is also very active in their comments sections, interacting and responding to followers, where they continue writing in a language to fit their target audience on the app – a younger demographic. In another video, they make the same references towards one of the common complaints they receive from the public and make it into a funny video. In RyanVideo2, Ryanair comments on the additional charge for a suitcase by writing, “POV you just booked a 9.99 euro flight and ask me will I charge you extra for a suitcase”. The caption to the video is the following: “bestie how else will I make bank, i'm sorry”. Again, the language is informal and extremely similar to the one used by their target audience on TikTok. Similar to Rare Beauty's use of an informal register, Ryanair creates a more intimate relationship with its

followers, as the company appears more authentic in its language and more relatable to the audience. Additionally, in both the videos the company mentions the low-price for their flights, which is a way of emphasizing and marketing their prices. Furthermore, it relates to Deborah Lee's statement about meeting the consumers' needs; in the two videos their price is mentioned, as it will attract more customers to Ryanair, when the viewers are able to see what the airline can provide for a low-price. Ryanair is best known for their low-cost flights, and while they are poking fun at themselves with these two videos, they are still able to bring in customers at their low prices, especially because of the funny, entertaining, and self-deprecating personality projected on the account.

Marketing Strategy

In an article with Business Insider called "Meet the TikTok whisperers helping 10 top brands stand out on the app – from Netflix to Duolingo", the successful marketing strategies that several companies are conducting on TikTok are discussed, where Ryanair is mentioned. The social-media lead at Ryanair, Michael Corcoran, talks about the success of Ryanair's TikTok, claiming that "We've put Gen Z at the heart of the platform.... Somebody who lives and breathes the channel day and night. Somebody who actually understands the language and the references and the cultural trends that are happening within the world of TikTok" (Whateley & Mangalindan 2022). They can bring many views and followers to their account by knowing how their target audience talk, think, and move. They are able to replicate what is trending on TikTok, because they are so dedicated to being on the lookout for everything and anything happening on TikTok. This can help the airline catch certain trends before everyone does, helping them go viral, which would speak to their encoding strategy and approach, as they expect readers to easily interpret their intended meanings through the viral trends that help them make a so-called dominant reading.

Additionally, choosing someone who uses the same informal register as Gen Z, who 'live and breathe the channel day and night', the company ensures more authenticity in their marketing, similar to Rare Beauty and the other companies we mention, who use an informal register. Browsing through the company's videos, a typical user from Generation Z would feel closer to the company with the use of the same register and informal language. It also allows for their marketing to seem more indirect, as they are not formally addressing the users in a way that feels like traditional marketing. Digital marketing – especially on TikTok

– allows for this informal register in marketing approaches, which help disguise the fact that they post marketing videos.

Moreover, Ryanair also has the ability to start trends, challenges, or excite viewers on TikTok by having such an understanding of their demographic and how to appeal to them. Having in-house creators dedicate their time to the account shows how much they value the app and viewers (Whateley & Mangalindan 2022). The airline is seeing a big value in investing in a team just for TikTok, and many other brands or companies are following in their footsteps. The marketing strategy of Ryanair seen on TikTok fits well with “the four Ps of marketing” – product, price, promotion, and place, as Lee goes into depth about in our theory section. These four elements are evident in the two videos. The product, which they are advertising, is their low-cost flight ticket, and they are in both videos sharing the price of these tickets. The promotion of their products is taking place on TikTok, while using popular sounds that are sure to capture the attention of many viewers. The sound in RyanVideo1 has been used around 623 thousand times by others, and the sound in RyanVideo2 has been used by others around 225,2 thousand times. Thus, not only are they using popular sounds that were trending while they were using them, but they are also creating a point of contact with their demographic. It also alludes to their encoding process with the video, as they expect users to have a certain frame of knowledge to interpret their videos; by using popular and trendy sounds, the company expects the users to understand the references by borrowing another’s point of contact.

The last element of the “four Ps of marketing” is place, and in this instance, it takes place on TikTok, which is something all companies benefit from in this paper. Digital marketing benefits from the fact that people are most likely sitting in their own homes and enjoying videos online without thinking about the fact that it is marketing. A major point in this paper is that indirect marketing is found almost everywhere on TikTok, however, this is not to suggest that TikTok users are unintelligent and unable to distinguish between marketing and funny videos meant to make you laugh. The point of this statement is to suggest that almost nothing on the app is meant to merely entertain; the big influencers on TikTok, who are not already known for celebrity statuses, all gain something from the many videos, likes, comments and followers. The important part about the last “P” of the four Ps is that any video posted on the app is typically watched from your own bedroom or home. Every user is more comfortable while watching the videos in their own safe spaces, which

subsequently might make the users easier to approach with a marketing attempt in a funny video or with a memeable sound.

The idea of an airline company having an account on social media might have previously seemed far-fetched, though in contemporary society, where everything is on social media, and where people are checking their social media first thing in the morning, it has become a must for many in order to market their products or services. The perception of TikTok videos is that they are relaxed, accessible, and you get a sense of familiarity while on the platform. Ryanair might not be using every video of theirs to sell their service, but more about spending their time to create a familiar environment for their demographic – the Gen Z. They want to create an environment, where their viewers can have fun with Ryanair, and find videos similar to those on their ‘For You’ pages. Because of that, users might associate comedy and entertainment with Ryanair, subsequently making people want to travel with them. Ryanair, much like Duolingo, responds back to many of the comments written on their videos, which encourages many to write more comments. This further strengthens the bond between the company and the target audience.

One of their first published videos on their account, RyanVideo3, features a tour of the Ryanair headquarters, and insight that we, the public, have not been privy to on any social media accounts of theirs. This means that the company is opening up and offering users an exclusive view into the company, which can create a more trusting relationship between the two parties. In the current society, people are used to having access to everything they are curious and want to know as much as possible. Having a company as big as Ryanair show their headquarters and their office space can be seen as providing users access to that knowledge, as well as showing just how fun and entertaining the daily workday at their headquarters can be, and maybe entice people to apply for a job there.

Encouraging Behavioral Contagion

There are also examples of the airline encouraging behavioral contagion to create a bond with their viewers, which they do in various ways. In RyanVideo4, the text of the video is “Can I get every brand who has TikTok to comment on this for no reason” and features a sound which has combined every trendy sound up to that moment. Their comments section is flooded with comments from various brands and companies such as TikTok, Duolingo, Levis, Microsoft, Adidas, Xbox, and many more. A video such as this can be considered

quite creative and is sure to generate traffic on their account. Janell Azpeitia encourages creativity with marketing and explains that it is needed in an environment such as social media that is in constant change and is vital to stay relevant. She continues by explaining how original content can have a positive effect by going viral and gaining the company more followers, and subsequently more traffic. The fact that the video received around 49,4 thousand comments from brands, companies, and followers and viewers, it also has 11,2 million views which shows how successful this video was for them to post. It is almost impossible to find the comments from regular followers, instead of brands and companies as they are dominating the comments section. This could have the potential to lead to collaborations between various brands, if Ryanair chooses to do so, while simultaneously creating massive engagement and encouraging social behavior. The behavioral contagion comes into play as the airline is asking brands to comment on the video, and the brands or companies took advantage of this as well. They used the opportunity to be featured in some way or another in a potential viral video, which it ended up being. The effect of having a multitude of comments by verified accounts of well-known brands can make viewers want to participate in the viral trend and read the comments from companies such as Adidas or Xbox.

Going back to collaborations, Ryanair could potentially have reached out to some or all of these companies to have them comment on their video to give both parties publicity. It could have been a collaboration that benefits them all and helps many of the brands and companies create a point of contact with other followers from other accounts, as well as having them appear fun and part of the demographic that are mostly present on TikTok. The audience on TikTok is perceived to like those who poke fun at themselves and do not take themselves too seriously – much like Will Smith. Thus, the brands and companies participating in the comments section for this video are slowly also trying to achieve this reputation for themselves. Additionally, the companies that commented on the video prove the behavioral contagion, which is not limited to TikTok users. If Ryanair did not partner with the companies beforehand, the many companies were influenced by each other to comment on the video. When several companies comment on the video, other companies are persuaded to do the same and appear as ‘cool’ as the other companies, to get the same type of engagement.

Ryanair is succeeding in using self-deprecating humor while speaking the language of their demographic from Gen Z, which is why the company is successful on TikTok, and is pulling in traffic and engagement as well as word of mouth. Their efforts to create points of

contact with their responding and otherwise interacting with their followers in the comments section creates a good relationship. Their encouragement of contagious behavior such as making companies comment on their video is also a great way to achieve virality, which they succeed in doing.

5.0. Discussion Section

In this section, we discuss the result of the analysis section, where we compare and discuss interesting differences and similarities between the analyzed accounts. The aspect of indirect or direct marketing is especially researched with a discussion of the use of emotion, virality, and contagion. Secondly, we discuss the main audience on TikTok, Generation Z, and look into whether or not the analysis reflects a tendency to market directly to that audience. Lastly, we discuss the use of meta-references on TikTok and its societal impact, where we mention “TikTok Made Me Buy It”, mob mentality and popular culture disseminators.

5.1. Main Differences and Similarities

By analyzing videos posted by Fenty Beauty, Rare Beauty, Selena Gomez, Will Smith, Jason Derulo, Hailey Bieber, Duolingo and Ryanair, it is clear that they all creatively use TikTok in ways to benefit their marketing.

As mentioned in the theory section, a few of the most popular content categories on TikTok worldwide were entertainment, dances, fitness/sports, beauty/skincare, and life hacks. These categories are all included in this paper. Fenty Beauty, Rare Beauty, and Hailey Bieber mainly post content with beauty/skincare and hacks; Selena Gomez, Will Smith, Jason Derulo, Duolingo, and Ryanair mainly post videos with entertainment, where Jason Derulo also posts many dances, and Will Smith also posts fitness content.

As they are both cosmetics companies, Fenty Beauty and Rare Beauty have extremely similar ways of marketing their products and brand. Both have respectively been founded by the popular celebrities, Rihanna, and Selena Gomez and they, respectively, have an organic relationship with each other; Rihanna posts videos about Fenty Beauty and vice versa, and Selena posts videos about Rare Beauty and vice versa. For instance, the companies’ pages are filled with tutorials by the celebrities themselves, as well as other types of content relating to each celebrities’ music, which the celebrities benefit from as well. Using tutorials in general is a great way for cosmetics companies to market their products, and to show how they are

used. Additionally, both companies share user videos with ‘hacks’, which strengthen the bond with the followers – the user videos seem more authentic and genuine, as they are similar to every other random video with a user reviewing a beauty product, which shows up on the typical ‘For You’ page. By using the same language as the target audience, as well as the same emoticons, the cosmetics companies also strengthen the bond with their consumers, who will find the hacks useful or ‘life-changing’, as the companies claim themselves. The informal register and mirroring of the users’ language is an effective way to achieve relatableness and seem more authentic, while simultaneously creating a point of contact. Furthermore, it creates a more intimate relationship with the consumers, who might start considering the company in the same regard as a good friend, who also shares beauty hacks and uses the same informal language. It is up to the creativity in each video to obtain this intimacy; for instance, if the companies look in the comments section and see what the users are asking for, they can provide them with that and, thus, make the consumers feel heard or feel that their needs are met. As Janell Azpeitia states, a company can gather information about their target audience and use the information to create content that catches the audience’s attention. On TikTok, a company can easily go to the current trends and sounds and use those in favor to catch the audience’s attention, as it is the typical content the target audience wants to watch on the app. An example of this is Fenty Beauty, who created a TikTok bundle of products that went viral on TikTok; or Rare Beauty, who created a purple blush in the specific color that was trending on the app.

The use of indirect marketing is evident and clear with all the analyzed companies. Fenty Beauty and Rare Beauty use it in hacks, or when they use popular sounds and trends to create more engagement in the videos about their products, without directly mentioning that the product is good. For instance, with Rare Beauty’s video about the love triangle between the gold and red blush and the lip-gloss, where the lip-gloss is indicated to be something worth desiring; or with Fenty Beauty’s video about how a lipstick can completely transform a look, without mentioning that the lipstick in question is a Fenty Beauty product. The audience most likely understands that the lipstick is from Fenty Beauty, as the video is posted by the company itself; the point is, however, that the video might show up on any users’ ‘For You’ page, where the user does not necessarily see that the video is posted by the company as the first thing; instead, what might catch the attention is the use of the sound, Rihanna’s voice or even the color of the lipstick in the video. On an app where the videos blend in with each other, and the main activity is to scroll from one video to the next, the indirectness of not

mentioning the lipstick itself, and instead, using trends, or viral sounds, is what makes the marketing attempt less obvious. Of course, the users realize it is an ad for Fenty Beauty, if Fenty Beauty has posted the video – but the typical viewer on a ‘For You’ page might merely see the video and be persuaded by the lack of directness in the ad, as well as the use of a popular sound.

Selena Gomez uses indirect marketing when she adds humorous videos of her lip-syncing to a popular sound, as she gets more engagement with the use of viral sounds. Moreover, she is essentially able to ‘borrow’ the popularity of the viral sounds – her knowledge of the funny, viral sounds, and the idea of hitching onto an already-existing trend makes the users think that she is on the same level as them, as she appears to browse through TikTok’s popular sounds like any other user. Selena essentially lowers the hierarchy of her being a famous celebrity in order to create more intimacy with her followers. Putting herself next to her viewers makes her easier to relate to, and she seems more authentic and genuine, which creates a more intimate bond with her followers. The intimate bond is what makes them more engaged in her other videos and more inclined to comment, share or like them, which creates more engagement and the higher chance of virality. Will Smith uses indirect marketing to benefit from the same lowering hierarchy when he joins in on viral TikTok challenges while indirectly promoting his films such as in the Wipe it Down Challenge, where he uses his caption to indirectly encourage people to engage in the comments section with references to memory loss as well.

Jason Derulo is mainly direct in his marketing of his music, when he encourages behavioral contagion with the promise of releasing more music, though he does use indirect marketing when he duets or collaborates with other users on the app with one of his songs in the background, as he promotes the songs without saying the words but merely has it in his background. Hailey Bieber uses indirect marketing when she creates a makeup TikTok challenge without ever mentioning the brand of the makeup, while simultaneously using the sound of her husband’s song, which she also promotes. Both Duolingo and Ryanair use indirect marketing in their use of funny sounds and creative captions meant to entertain their followers without always directly mentioning their products.

Using popular and trendy sounds is a strategy all companies and celebrities use to strengthen the bond with their followers. It allows them to borrow someone else's point of contact, while also revealing their encoding process; they expect the viewers of the video to be familiar with the popular sound, and more easily able to decode the intended message of

the video. The borrowing of a point of contact is, essentially, what contagion and virality is about. Using a sound or a trend that has worked for someone else might work for the company or celebrity as well, which is how they ‘borrow’ the established contact from the other virality. The most important thing when borrowing someone else’s point of contact, is that it requires that the audience has a certain degree of knowledge, which relates to encoding and decoding. As the companies use trendy sounds that they expect the audience to know, it could easily result in a wrong encoding, an oppositional reading. The users who are not familiar with the trendy sounds might not understand the references and miss the intended message instead of decoding a preferred/dominant reading, which results in an oppositional reading. However, all the mentioned videos exemplified in the analysis section show that, while the companies and celebrities use popular sounds or viral trends, being familiar with them is not necessary to understand the marketing of the video. For instance, Rare Beauty’s love-triangle video about the lip-gloss and the blush is easily understood without the Couch Guy reference, while it does help create a point of contact and a space of familiarity to the audience. A common user on TikTok would, however, typically be familiar with the trending sounds and memes, making it less likely to result in an oppositional reading.

Collaborating with other users who are popular is also a way of borrowing the point of contact from someone else – for instance, Will Smith has collaborated with Jason Derulo in several videos posted on each of their accounts. Jason’s millions of followers might find the video entertaining and follow Will and vice versa, gaining them both more engagement on the app, which gives them more room to market their products or image; whether directly or indirectly.

As mentioned in the theory section, Janell Azpeitia argues that marketing on social media should be about interacting with consumers and giving them quick responses, such as replying to comments on their page. All the analyzed companies directly interact with their followers in the comments section, which shows that they are engaged and reachable. It also follows Guarda et al and their argument about getting closer to one’s target audience in a more personal, directed, and segmented way.

Replying to users in the comments section correlates with Janell Azpeitia’s other notion about creating a bond with your consumers in order to succeed in marketing. While the celebrities do not interact with the users in the comments section, they create a bond with their followers in different ways. A company can appoint a staff to maintain contact with

users on social media, to create more engagement and make it more likely that more users will comment, because they see that others' questions are answered. While celebrities can easily hire someone to do the same, it will make the contact seem less genuine. Famous singers or actors do not spend all their time on social media to answer people in the comments section, which is a likely reason as to why celebrities do not interact in the comments.

However, refusing to interact in the comments section does not mean that they cannot create an intimate contact through other means. For instance, Selena Gomez uses humor and posts videos about social anxiety and the difficulties of finding someone to date, making her relatable to her followers, which is a way of bonding with them. Simultaneously, it is a way of showing a vulnerable side of herself to talk about her personal issues, which creates a more authentic and genuine bond. Companies cannot talk about emotions or show vulnerability, as the company is not one person; celebrities, however, can express emotion through their videos in order to create a point of contact. As emotions are especially contagious, it makes sense for celebrities to use their own emotions to create a point of contact and more engagement with a possible virality.

Furthermore, celebrities can use meta-references in their videos, where they mention something to do with the comments to a previous video. This would also count as interacting with the followers. While users see that the celebrity is not answering the comments, it might encourage them to still keep commenting, as the celebrity indicates reading the comments by mentioning them. An interesting observation, however, is that none of the chosen celebrities in this paper use meta-references to reference their previous videos or content. Hailey Bieber is the exception with her video about wanting people to leave her alone, which clearly shows the audience that she reads the comments or that she is, at least, aware of them. While her intention is to make people stop, the contagious behavior with mob mentality might create the opposite effect: the people who are commenting hateful messages might be happy to learn that the comments have caused her to react to them, which can entice them into continuing to comment mean things.

Will Smith interacts with the users through the personal videos he occasionally posts, for instance thanking them for making his book sell 1 million copies. Similarly to Selena, Will also shows his vulnerable side to create a more intimate relationship with his followers, though in a completely different way: while Selena does so with the reenacting of funny and popular sounds, Will does so with a video he has seemingly recorded himself where he

directly addresses the viewers and talks about how proud he is of his book. Hailey Bieber interacts with the users by sharing makeup looks or her taste in music, while Jason Derulo does it in his use of duets with his fans who listen to his music. All the interactions help strengthen the bond with the users and eventual consumers and encourage them to continue commenting in the future.

5.1.1. The Use of Emotion

One of the most noticeable aspects in all the videos posted by the celebrities is the use of emotion. Tony D. Sampson claims human emotions are understood to spread universally like viruses. Additionally, in the theory section, David Scott states that video driven marketing uses emotions to tell stories in ways that other forms of marketing cannot. Telling an interesting story increases the likelihood of people sharing, which is where we see the aspect of virality, which Sampson talks about.

All the celebrities use emotions in their videos – whether intentionally or unintentionally. Will Smith has a long history of being related to comedy, for instance with his role in the sitcom *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* (1990-1996). It is, therefore, not surprising that comedy and excitement are in the palette of emotions that he benefits most from in his videos. With the marketing approaches of this book, Will mentions how much work he has put into writing it and how personal it is to him. This might persuade the viewers into taking incisive actions, as Scott claims, such as buying the book. Will's video of seeing the book for the first time (WillVideo2), or his video about how “we” made his book sell a million copies (WillVideo3) are great examples of his use of pathos, the appeal to emotion to persuade the audience into purposely evoking a certain emotion. A dedicated fan of Will might watch the video and perhaps feel proud of him; or a user who has already bought the book might feel happy and appreciated, and, thus, buy the next book or the next thing Will promotes, in order to feel the same way again.

Additionally, Will talks about how much work he has put into the book, which many people can relate to. Other than making himself relatable, he benefits from emotional contagion, as his pride and happiness affects the viewers who are exposed to the video. It is conceivable that most fans feel the same excitement that he portrays in the video. This is, for instance, not the case with Selena's videos about anxiety. While she tries to be vulnerable and talk about mental health, she does not want the contagion of that particular emotion to be expressed. Instead, she ‘tells the story’ (using a TikTok sound) with the element of humor,

which is what she wants users to feel. Hailey Bieber's honesty and vulnerability in her video about wanting people to leave her alone is a similar example to Will. While many users still comment hateful things on the video, many other comments indicate that some users are affected and try to defend her. Hailey shows a vulnerable side of herself in the video, where she is being honest about the fact that the comments are bothering her, which spreads a contagion of these emotions in the comments from people who are sympathetic with her. While this might not be a direct marketing approach, as she is not marketing anything in the video, Hailey still received a lot of publicity for the video. Several news outlets wrote about the video and mentioned that Hailey "begs social media trolls" to leave her alone (Bonner 2022). Subsequently, this most likely attracted many people to her TikTok page to watch the video, making it go viral, as well as creating attention around the other videos she has posted. It is a perfect example of Scott's notion about using emotion to tell stories, especially because many users are typically curious about celebrities' personal lives – and Hailey indirectly referring to her husband's ex-girlfriend by saying "enough time has gone by" is something that most likely attracts even more curious viewers and results in more engagement.

Interestingly, however, Hailey's vulnerability is not perceived in the same way as Selena Gomez's with her video about anxiety. The main audience on TikTok is, as mentioned earlier, Gen Z, which is a generation known for its focus on mental health problems such as anxiety. While this is elaborated later in the paper, it helps emphasize that Selena's vulnerability differs from Hailey's. Selena shows that she is struggling with anxiety, which she is known for having talked about earlier. Her break from social media was, for instance, one of the ways she dealt with her depression and anxiety, especially after suffering "an emotional breakdown in 2018" (Mazziotta 2022). In an interview with "People" magazine, Selena claims that she initially avoided talking about her mental struggles on social media, because she realized that she was in a situation where she was "extremely blessed" (Mazziotta 2022) compared to non-celebrities. However, she has now made "'changing the narrative of mental health' a major part of her career" (Mazziotta 2022) as she "regularly talks about it" (Mazziotta 2022). Her dedicated fans and followers would know this about her, but even the ones who are not aware of her habit of mentioning mental health struggles would perhaps find her relatable in a way that makes them bond with her more, as they are experiencing the same struggles. Comparing Selena to Hailey, the latter's act of vulnerability comes off as more privileged, as the users are not experiencing the same problem. While many users on TikTok might have experienced online bullying, Hailey's example is extreme

to such an extent that it is not relatable, while Selena's is more spot on in terms of her target audience and their common habit of addressing mental health issues, which is elaborated later in the discussion of Generation Z.

All the analyzed companies use humor as a way to communicate with their followers as well, which follows David Scott's argument about including humor-based approaches to garner views, or even go viral. The analyzed examples use it in a way to create the point of contact through popular trends and sounds, such as referencing Couch Guy (Rare Beauty) or talking about wanting to leave work early (Duolingo). Using humor is also the use of a human emotion, which is described as infectious (McFarland & Ployhart 1661). Using it in their videos, all companies and celebrities attract more viewers, likes, shares, and the likelihood of going viral. In the theory, we also mention Teresa Guarda et al, who talk about the short format of videos on TikTok, where neither the creation nor the viewing process takes much time or effort. In Will's case, it does not take much effort for him to record himself – or have his assistant record him – to promote his book. Similarly, it does not take much effort for the audience to watch the video, as it is relatively short due to the time limit on videos on the app. In the case of the companies, all their videos aim to entertain the typical user on TikTok, even if the viewer is not familiar with the popular sound. As mentioned earlier, while the exemplified videos have many references to viral trends or sounds, they are still understood (and decoded) in the intended way based on the engagement in the comments section and the number of likes.

Selena Gomez uses emotion in her humorous videos, where she still aims to make the videos personal as they reflect her actual views; for instance, the video about the difficulty of dating in your thirties, which she is herself. Instead of recording herself like Will Smith does, Selena uses the popular sounds as a way to communicate with her followers. While she is not the one actually speaking in her videos, her lip-syncing makes it seem like she is – and the fact that she lip-syncs to videos that reflect her real life makes the videos seem more personal, even though they differ from Will's videos, which seem to be personally recorded. Selena's use of humor is also consistent with Scott's statement about how a video is a great format to use humor, as it is a way of communicating to people while simultaneously disguising the marketing aspect, as the lack of formality makes it more entertaining on an app where scrolling to the next video is custom after finishing another video.

Lastly, Jason Derulo uses emotion in a way to connect with his followers as well. In the analysis section, we mention that Jason claims to be more authentic and more himself on TikTok than on other apps, as well as his efforts in trying to support small content creators on the app. Doing so makes him appeal to emotions as well, as the viewers believe him to be invested in his fans, with whom he duets and interacts through his videos. This might attract more followers, as well as more fans of his music, which he dances to, while encouraging contagious behavior. Despite his claim of trying to be authentic, based on the analysis in this paper, all his efforts are a result of his marketing of himself and his music as well as the fact that he makes money off his videos. Thus, Jason needs to use emotion to appeal in an interesting way, while also encouraging contagious behavior and aiming for more likes, shares, comments, and the likelihood of going viral. Lastly, this relates to all the celebrities and companies; despite their efforts to be personal and authentic, there will always be the element of creating more engagement and publicity as well as sales for their respectable products. TikTok is merely a great platform to disguise the fact that this is the main purpose of having created the accounts, as the app is a place for entertainment and fun.

5.1.2. Rare Beauty VS. Selena Gomez

An interesting aspect to discuss regarding the analysis section is the similarities – or lack thereof – in Rare Beauty’s and Selena Gomez’s marketing approaches. As mentioned in the analysis section, Selena Gomez has previously admitted to having her assistant run her social media accounts; and while she indicated that this was a while back, the viewers have no way of knowing who is the one currently managing her account on TikTok, even today.

Rare Beauty and Selena Gomez have similar approaches to their marketing in their videos but also many different ones. The use of popular sounds and memes is a common denominator, though it is so in all the videos mentioned by all companies and celebrities in this paper. In fact, it is one of the most popular uses of TikTok, which, therefore, does not make the similarity between Rare Beauty and Selena Gomez surprising. While Selena does post marketing of Rare Beauty products on her own account, they are similar to her other videos. An example is SelenaVideo5, which is analyzed in the analysis section. In the video, Selena reenacts a popular sound saying, “you better work, bitch”, while looking at her makeup kit. This is similar to her video about anxiety (SelenaVideo1) or her video about dating in your thirties (SelenaVideo2). Rare Beauty markets their products in more ways than one, including the similar use of a popular sound. Other than hacks and the sharing of user

videos, Rare Beauty also creates stories – such as RareVideo4, where they have recreated the popular Couch Guy Video in a way that markets their lip-gloss. Additionally, Rare Beauty uses informal registers throughout the entire page, which all companies and celebrities do in this paper. As the informal register is used in all videos and their captions, it is safe to conclude that all companies attempt to make their target audience and the typical TikTok user feel safe and comfortable, while watching their videos with the aspect of familiarity. Although there are similarities in Rare Beauty’s and Selena Gomez’s videos, their styles differ in a way that does not suggest the accounts are being run by the same person. The similarities are more overall counting to all the companies and not limited to Rare Beauty. Thus, while it would be a plausible theory, the marketing team behind the videos on the company’s page is not indicated to be the same one handling the marketing on Selena’s page – if it is, it is certainly not obvious in the analysis of the videos.

This is similar to the use of humor in the videos. Whilst Selena Gomez, Will Smith, Duolingo and Ryanair all use humor in their videos, they do not use it in the same way. Selena and Will reenact popular sounds and trends, which gives the videos a more personal vibe, as they are the ones in the video. Selena uses humor to reference anxiety or the difficulty of dating at her age, which is her way of expressing her real-life problems through the use of funny sounds. Will uses it in a way to express his self-criticalness with all the memes on the internet about him, like “Poor Will”. Duolingo and Ryanair have similar uses of humor in their videos, however, Duolingo is trying to be funny in a more relatable way – for instance with the crush on a popular singer or with the need to go home early from work. Ryanair uses it similarly to Will Smith in a way that suggests that they are aware of what people are writing about them on the internet – for instance the lack of legroom on their flights. All this goes to show that while many strategies are generally similar, they are used in different ways to indirectly – and sometimes directly – promote the company or celebrity. All efforts are, however, similar in their pursuit of engagement and virality, which helps conclude that there are certain markers that characterize a viral video on TikTok.

5.2. Virality and Contagion

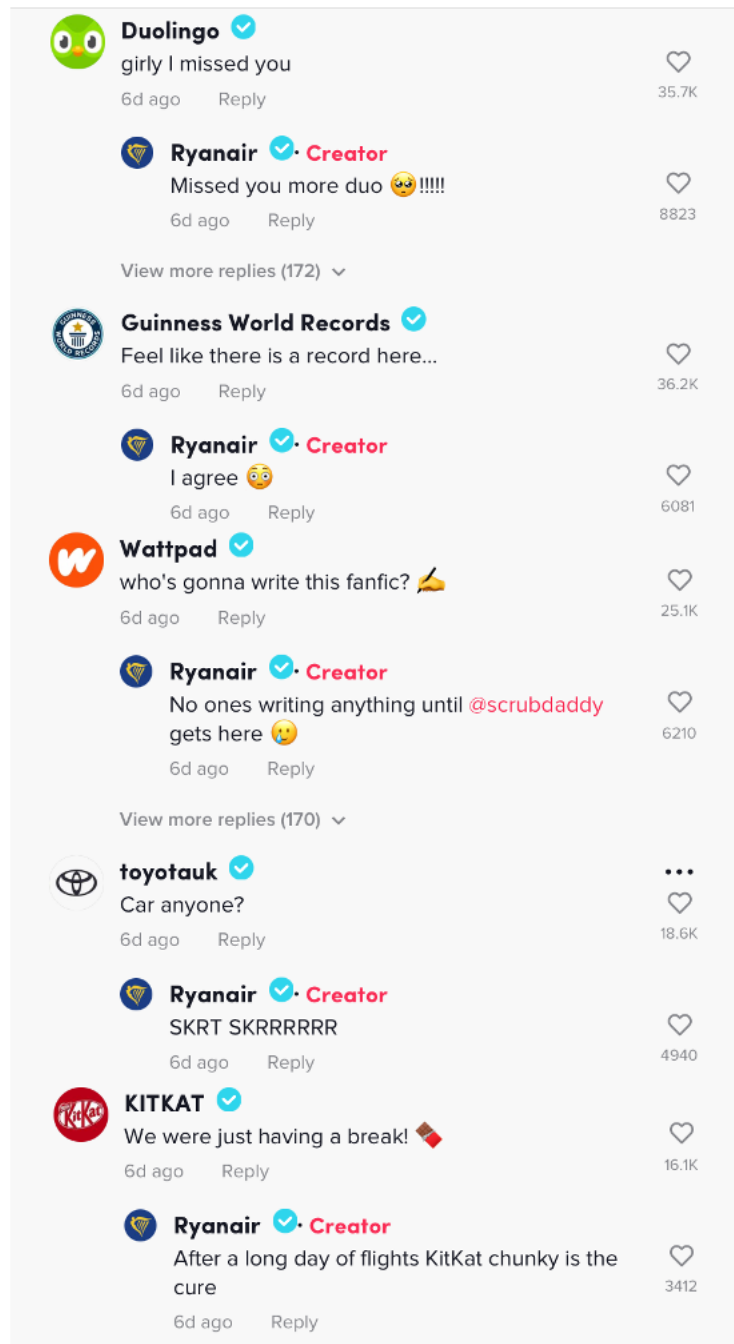
All companies and celebrities benefit from virality and behavioral contagion in their digital marketing strategies. While mob mentality and other aspects of virality are examples of negative attention, the companies, and celebrities, naturally, aim for the positive aspects such as large, positive engagement, as well as positive reviews about their products. The negative

aspects are aspects that all online users might have to deal with, and it is a risk that all companies take when they post a video. The cosmetics companies and the purposefully selected companies have all gone viral in a positive way for either their products or their use of humor in the videos – for instance Duo, the owl, lusting over Dua Lipa, the singer; and Ryanair posting a meme about the lack of legroom on their flights. The virality aspect plays into both the fact that they went viral but also behavioral contagion, as the users on the app made the respective companies go viral with liking, sharing, and commenting.

All the analyzed companies have used the consumer tendency for social contagious behavior. By enticing their followers to either share, like, comment, or duet their videos, all companies and celebrities benefit from, and encourage, contagious behavior in order to possibly go viral. Rare Beauty telling the users to share their looks, or Jason Derulo asking people to comment with a fire emoticon on his video if they want him to release a new song, are both examples of the encouragement and use of consumer behavior contagions, which they use to their benefit – both when it comes to direct and indirect marketing. The aspect of virality is consistent throughout all the companies' and celebrities' pages and approaches to marketing. The borrowing of points of contact with either the use of viral sounds or with a collaboration with popular TikTok users, goes along with the notion of virality, as that is seemingly what all companies and celebrities aspire for. A great example is not only Will Smith and Jason Derulo's collaboration, but also Ryanair's video, where they encourage all companies to comment on their video (RyanVideo4), increasing the likelihood of the video going viral.

Following the success and virality of the video, the company tried to recreate the same virality by posting a similar video. The video (RyanVideo5) says “pt. 2” and “crazy to think every brand on TikTok could comment on this for no reason”, while writing the following in the caption: “Been a while since our last Admin gathering!! [yawning emoticon] #ryanair #admins #brands #airline” (RyanVideo5). While David Scott claims that it is not possible to plan the virality of a video, this video is a good attempt, as it uses all the common characteristics of a viral video such as humor and referencing a popular trend. Furthermore, the desired result is many comments on the video, which is what the contagious behavior is pointing towards when they ask all brands on TikTok to comment on it. The risk with the recreational attempt is, however, that, generally, the internet quickly moves on. The success of one viral video is often not achievable with a second, similar video. Though it is easy to see the common characteristics of a viral video, and try to repeat them, virality is too

unpredictable to recreate. Using humor, encouraging contagious behavior, and expressing contagious emotion, the recreation is not difficult to attempt, though the success of it is difficult to obtain again. In this case, it is too early to determine the virality, as the video is 4 days old at the time of writing. However, it already has 390,8 thousand likes and 10,3 thousand comments, which is a large engagement this early on and signals a potential to go viral, which is how they have set it up. Similar to the previous video (RyanVideo3), the comments section to this video is filled with comments from companies who market themselves. Examples can be seen on Screenshot 34, where Duolingo, Guinness World Records, Wattpad, Toyotauk and Kit Kat have commented. Other companies such as McDonald's Canada, Burger King, NERF, Pepsi Romania as well as other airlines such as Virgina Atlantic have also commented on the video. All the comments usually refer to the company commenting – for instance Kit Kat commenting that they were just having a break, which is related



Screenshot 34

to the company slogan "Have a Break, Have a Kit Kat". It is highly likely that the airline has partnered with these companies, as Ryanair has replied to almost all the companies commenting (also seen on Screenshot 34).

The encouragement of contagious behavior such as this is related to the company's attempt to go viral once again, which is similar to when Will keeps joining TikTok challenges

to go viral again or when Jason Derulo keeps choreographing certain dances to his songs to make the dance – and, subsequently, the song – go viral.

The behavioral contagion is especially what makes the role of social media relevant when it comes to society. Despite the fact that the companies we have chosen are relatively large, their use of social media such as TikTok makes them able to reach a different audience (Gen Z) and even more engagement, which can be done by going viral. As Vanja Nišić and Divna Plavšić mention, mass media is not only news, information, entertainment, or a powerful educational tool; mass media is every one of those things combined. Scrolling on TikTok gives you the ability to both hear the news when they are mentioned in a video and learn hacks and tutorials about random things, while simultaneously being entertained with other videos. The algorithm, however, also participates in this. The user and consumer are not in control of the ‘For You’ page in the same way as with earlier mass media, where the user chooses to watch the news instead of being exposed to it due to an algorithm on the app. This is one of the most important differences between traditional and digital marketing, as well as marketing on TikTok alone, where the algorithm simply takes control. Even if the algorithm is based on the users’ behavior on the app, it speaks to a lack of control when it comes to what each user is exposed to. The companies we mention all use the power of TikTok to their benefit, and, thus, benefit from using social media as an excellent tool for marketing. It allows them to reach their target audience – for instance when Rare Beauty created two new products in the color purple, because using a purple blush was going viral; or when Fenty Beauty created a TikTok House to have influencers on TikTok review their products and give them good reviews. This fits perfectly with David Scott’s statement about web marketing and how it is about delivering useful content at just the precise moment a buyer needs it, which is what both those cosmetics companies did.

Moreover, social media and its role in society also connects to the four Ps of marketing, more specifically the last P (place), which plays a big role in the marketing scheme and says a lot about both the perception and branding of the company. While you are watching a video posted by a company, you can be at home, in your own room and in your own safe space, on the bus, in the queue at the supermarket etc. This makes TikTok a perfect platform to be exposed to ads, as a user is merely relaxing or scrolling through videos, not directly realizing that the marketing is there – or most importantly, maybe not irritated as much by it as when it is direct and too obvious. Place can be the geographical place that the

user is in, but it can also mean the online place that is the TikTok platform. Both places are important. Watching a video on a phone requires the user to be able to listen to the sound of the video. If the user is watching videos while sitting on the bus or standing at the supermarket queue, he or she is most likely wearing headphones to not disturb those around. If the user is sitting in his or her room, the user is most likely relaxed and in the mood for entertainment or passing time. The requirements to use TikTok – such as wearing headphones or being in the mood – fosters a sense of belonging which is both related to the geographical place, as well as the place that is the online app itself. The sense of belonging is something that all companies benefit from in their indirect marketing approaches, as the user can easily forget the marketing attempts when browsing through TikTok in an abundance of entertaining videos.

The use of indirect marketing is dependent on the “place” in the four Ps of marketing; while people can be irritated by an ad on YouTube, an indirect ad in a humorous video might not seem like an ad at all, but merely a comical video meant to entertain the user. The purpose of indirect marketing is to circumvent this frustration with ads, thus, the purpose of using indirect marketing is to make the viewers not feel frustrated, as they are with conventional ads on YouTube. A great example is Selena Gomez’s sipping of Coca-Cola can in a video that is not at all focusing on the soda; or when Ryanair show their self-awareness of knowing that people are making fun of the lack of legroom on their planes in a funny video, while simultaneously – and very conveniently – mentioning the low prices they offer.

As mentioned by Azpeitia in the theory section, the meaning of using social media as a marketing tool is to have people talk and spread word of mouth, which is also done with the encouragement of contagious behavior. Using social media as a marketing tool is something all the companies and celebrities do, for instance by heavily using trendy sounds, as they are able to create word of mouth and have people discuss their videos while simultaneously borrowing other’s points of contact. For many users, it does seem comical and entertaining that companies such as Ryanair, Duolingo and Fenty Beauty use popular sounds to market their products. However, there are risks with using social media. Mob mentality and negative reactions, which spread due to contagion, are examples of why it can go wrong and simply backfire. Many companies use online and indirect marketing, but not all are as successful as the examples in this paper.

5.3. Gen Z on TikTok

Considering that Gen Z “constructs, narrates, and projects itself in real-life on TikTok” (Stahl & Literat 1), it is easy to assume that the app – which is “dominated by Gen Z” (Stahl & Literat 1) provides “a valuable window into youth experience and cultural production” (Stahl & Literat 1). In the article “#GenZ on Tiktok: the collective online self-Portrait of the social media generation” (2022) written by Caherine Cheng Stahl & Ioana Literat, the authors claim that that Gen Z collectively portrays itself on TikTok as “a generation of contrasts: powerful and self-assured, yet vulnerable and damaged” (Stahl & Literat 1). The claim is based on an analysis that helps conclude that the videos posted on the app by Gen Z users embrace “a playful self-reflexivity about time that embodies Gen Z’s self-awareness, sense of unity, and collective spirit” (Stahl & Literat 1).

Generation Z is described as “the largest, fastest-growing, most racially and ethnically diverse, most globally connected, and on track to be the best-educated generation” (Stahl & Literat 1). It is known to “care deeply and to mobilize itself for a variety of causes [...], making the label of ‘protest generation’ especially fitting” (Stahl & Literat 3). Additionally, mental health is an important enduring topic for Gen Zers “... and they are known to be generally comfortable talking openly about mental health” (Stahl & Literat 3). Having this in mind, Selena Gomez’s videos, particularly, seem to be aiming at this particular generation. Stahl and Literat claim that while previous Generation Y, also known as Millennials, experienced the explosion of the Internet, Gen Z “came of age in the image- and information-saturated twenty-first century” (Stahl & Literat 4). The prominence of Wi-Fi and digital media in their lives makes Gen Z less able to “distinguish between the digital and physical worlds [...] and, instead, has ‘seamlessly integrated technology into almost all areas of their lives, thereby being known as digital integrators’” (Stahl & Literat 4).

The generation uses the app in a way where contagion plays a massive role in terms of “setting trends, originating viral content, and shaping contemporary culture” (Stahl & Literat 5), especially considering that over 60 % of TikTok users are Gen Zers (Stahl & Literat 5). All the videos in the analysis are, thus, targeted at this generation, which is evident based on the result of the analysis such as the use of the informal register to appear more relatable. The informal register is acknowledged in the article as well, where Stahl and Literat write that Gen Z has their own multilayered communication mode, “including Gen Z lingo—e.g. no cap, bruh, blippi, but go off I guess, dead, YEET, simp, periodt, it’s the ... for me, sus, goat,

glowup—and sophisticated uses of memes and emojis [...], as well as its own humor [and] shared characteristics” (10). Almost all of this is exemplified in the videos and comments section from the analysis, especially with the sophisticated use of memes and emojis seen from both Rare Beauty, Fenty Beauty and Duolingo. Duolingo and Ryanair are the ones most active in their direct communication with users, where they exclusively communicate in the same ‘multilayered’ way. The shaping of contemporary culture is exemplified with the virality of the purple blush, which prompted a cosmetics company such as Rare Beauty to create a product in that exact shade in order to join in on the trend and possibly go viral. According to Stahl and Literat, studies have examined the generation’s significance in “shaping contemporary internet celebrity culture” (Stahl & Literat 5) – while in this case, it is also the shaping of companies and their products. With celebrities, it is also evident in the way Jason Derulo uses the app based on the videos from the analysis, where he is inspired by the trends created by the generation on the app. His music is created based on the content, which correlates with the studies about Gen Z shaping contemporary internet celebrity culture. Jason aims to please Gen Zers on the app with his new music inspired by content on the app. This correlates to Azpeitia’s notion about gathering information about your target audience to use in the creation of content that can catch the audience’s attention. The excitement about Selena Gomez’s sudden activeness is also an example of this, as the comments left by excited users might encourage her to keep posting things that she already knows the target audience is enjoying.

Furthermore, the use of contagion is evident on the app in the way that the generation behaves. According to Stahl and Literat, the young people from Generation Z often turn to the comments “for mutual support” (14), as they see their own generation as “the most united” one (10). The “strong sense of unity” (Stahl & Literat 13) correlates with the mobility aspect mentioned in the analysis section. Both are exemplified in the respective videos by Hailey Bieber and Will Smith, where the comments section seems to be in overall agreement. The sense of unity, which is evident in the generation, might be what encourages more users to ‘infect’ others into commenting on similar things in the comments sections.

Moreover, the so-called “Gen Z discourse is marked by a strong sense of generational identity” (Stahl & Literat 7), which all companies and celebrities attempt to mirror with their use of informal registers. Using “comedy, music, and dance—in line with the ethos of the platform— Gen Z creators craft playful ways to distinguish themselves from other generations” (Stahl & Literat 7). This statement is essential, as it confirms that there is both a

certain discourse and a way of behaving on the app, which makes Gen Z distinguishable from other generations on the app. However, as celebrities and companies mirror both the discourse (informal register) and behavior (using dances, music, and trendy sounds), the distinction might be less apparent today. While the behavior and identity arguably originated from Gen Z, making it generational, people who do not belong in this generation are still using the same markers, making it a contemporary cultural aspect instead. For instance, addressing emotion and mental health is something Selena Gomez does on her TikTok page, without belonging to that generation. Duolingo uses the yawning emoticon to reference a boredom with corporate America, or other types of awareness of trends such as Will Smith's participation in challenges are all examples. To use TikTok successfully, these types of markers and characteristics are seen in almost all videos. Celebrities and companies all imitate this generational identity, which makes it important to anyone, not just Gen Z. Thus, using Gen Z discourse or other markers that identify that generation has moved from being a generational identity into becoming a certain behavior in popular culture.

Based on the analysis, it is not far-fetched to claim that almost all companies and celebrities use TikTok in a way that demonstrates the same strategies as mentioned in the analysis – for instance the use of humor and the use of trendy sounds to market a specific product and borrow a point of contact from another user. The point of contact is indirectly referenced in the statement above with the mention of the ethos on the platform. Ethos is the character or emotions of a speaker, which are expressed to persuade an audience. Arguably, every video on TikTok is meant to persuade an audience, which is perhaps done with the use of ethos or the other forms of appeal. Based on the analysis, when a celebrity or company uses a trendy sound, it is to borrow another users' point of contact. This is easily connected with ethos, which is used to create a certain credibility and build authority, as it expresses that the encoder of a video is aware of this sound. When the viewers find the sound familiar, they will 'trust' the encoder more based on his knowledge of the trendy sound.

The same thing applies when the celebrities create videos with self-reflection, making themselves more relatable. According to Stahl and Literat, the generation has “a playful self-reflexivity [and a] self-awareness” (17), which correlates with both Will Smith's self-reflexivity in his videos as well as Selena Gomez's, when she complains about the lack of decent men in the dating pool when she is in her thirties. The playful reflection of themselves, their lives and their personalities are a great way to target an audience that is characterized to do the same. Selena Gomez, for instance, playfully addresses her anxiety in a way that Gen Z

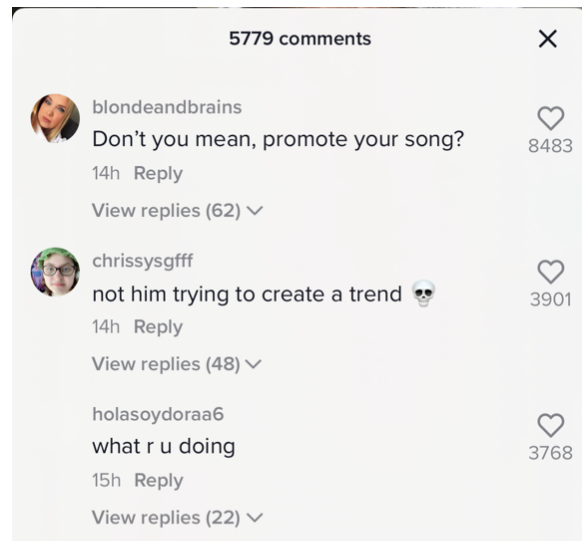
does on the app as well. Additionally, the generation is described as finding power in their collective voice in creatively expressing their generational ethos, as they are “repeatedly reaching for the collective ‘we’ rather than the singular ‘I’” (Stahl & Literat 7). While this statement also relates to contagious behavior and mob mentality, it also speaks to the generation’s somewhat criticalness when it comes to more direct approaches of marketing. An example is Justin Bieber’s video (JustinVideo1), where Justin Bieber says the following: “New trend alert: I want you guys to tell me something honest, put ‘Honest’ in the background of the video and let’s get real”. The point of the video is to promote his new song ‘Honest’, which he uses as an opportunity to create a ‘new trend’ – or at least attempt to. While the video is similar to the “Peaches Makeup Challenge” mentioned in the analysis, which Justin’s wife created as a way of promoting Justin’s song “Peaches”, this is a more direct approach to the promotion. In JustinVideo1, Justin directly orders users to “put ‘Honest’ in the background”, which will make the song go viral if many users obey. While a general encouragement of contagious behavior is typical in marketing on TikTok – based on the analysis section – this direct way of encouraging users to put his song in the background does not work out for Justin as he might have hoped.

The comments section to the video is filled with comments from users ridiculing him for his direct effort of promoting the song by trying to create a new trend on the app (Screenshot 35). Comments such as “not him trying to create a trend” followed with a skull emoticon. In the article “Are you using these emojis wrong?”, Amrita Prasad claims that there is a certain use of emoticons (emojis) on TikTok, which “make you look ‘cringeworthy’ and ‘cheugy’ to Gen Z [...] [and] they are also revealing your age!” (2021). ‘Cheugy’ is “not quite ‘basic,’ which can describe someone who is a conformist or perhaps generic in their tastes, and it’s not quite ‘uncool.’ It’s not embarrassing or even always negative. [It] can be used, broadly, to describe someone who is out of date or trying too hard” (Lorenz 2021). While the laugh-cry-face-emoticon has been the typical one used to convey laughter, according to Prasad, using it means “you’re definitely over 30 years old” (2021) and that it is the “most hated by Gen Z” (2021). Instead, “teens on TikTok are now using the skull emoji to convey laughter, as it best visually represents the slang phrase ‘I’m dead’” (Prasad 2021).

On Screenshot 35, the user writes a skull emoji as a way of laughing at Justin’s direct approach of promoting his song. In the analysis, we have exemplified that direct marketing approaches can work successfully based on engagement, number of comments and likes as well as virality; for instance, with Jason Derulo’s direct ways of promoting his music.

However, Justin Bieber’s attempt to indirectly market his song with the pretense of ‘creating a trend’ is what makes it a clear direct approach instead of an indirect one, which was his apparent intention.

Two important emotional markers that have become parts of popular culture behavior on TikTok are authenticity and honesty, which Justin tries to use to his benefit in this challenge. His attempt to create a trend is performative, however, he wants the ‘honesty’ to be applied in videos where his song ‘Honest’ is used. This



Screenshot 35

creates a certain exclusivity. Instead of imperatively encouraging honesty as an ethical thing, Justin performatively expects people to merely be ‘honest’ in videos relating to his song, making the trend more desirable as perhaps fun for users to participate in.

The comments section is another example of the way that Gen Z immediately finds a collective voice in creatively expressing a generational ethos. While the generational ethos on TikTok is trends and, arguably, behavioral contagion, Gen Zers do not seem to realize it in a way. Mirroring Justin’s attempt to create a ‘challenge’ or trend with Hailey’s “Peaches Challenge”, the Gen Z users were not as quick to comment on the attempt of creating a trend or challenge as they were with Justin. This suggests that the indirect marketing approach should be disguised well in order to not annoy the users, instead of being too direct like Justin’s attempt. Encouraging people to add his song in their background does not encourage many people to listen – in fact, only 138 users have dueted his sound, which, arguably, is not enough to create engagement or virality. Compared to Hailey’s challenge, there are more than 1,4 million videos with the ‘Peaches’ song in the background, as well as over 79,7 million views with the #PeachesMakeupChallenge hashtag.

While Justin Bieber attempted to create a trend like many others on the app, some celebrities use existing trends to promote themselves. One of many examples is Canadian singer, Michael Bublé, whose song, “Sway”, was going viral on TikTok. While he had nothing to do with the song trending, he was quick to join in on the trend to promote the song as his own. In MichaelVideo1, the singer writes “Obviously I had to jump on my own trend”

in the video and “... and the best part of this plan is that no one can stop me #Thisismysong”. The caption is a reference to another trending sound with “a giant flying bee” (Venn 2022), which is a scene from the American spy comedy film “Austin Powers in Goldmember” (2002). Currently, the trending sound has more than 244,6 thousand videos including Michael Bubl e’s mentioned video. Him hashtagging “This is my song” as well as writing “my own trend” is his way of emphasizing the promotion of his own music in a way to attract more fans. Additionally, it creates a point of contact as well as borrows the point of contact that comes with both the trending sounds in the video and the caption, which makes him seem relatable, as he listens to the trends on the app in the same way that other users have. Michael’s video has over 210,3 thousand likes and 2079 comments, which confirms a massive engagement. The comments section is filled with users commenting on his music and complimenting how good they think it is, which is, arguably, his intention with the video as well as wanting to go viral. His editing skills in the video such as the transformation from wearing a shirt to a suit with a flick of his hand is similar to Will Smith’s editing skills. Despite not knowing (or perhaps, believing) that Will is the one editing the videos, they still result in impressive videos that are worth following.

5.4. Societal Influence and Meta-references on TikTok

As we have established in the analysis section – with the help of the theory section – the point of most of the marketing videos on TikTok is to create a point of contact with followers and other users on the app. A point of contact can be easily created with the use of trends and popular sounds, as it creates a space of familiarity with the common TikTok user. However, another way of creating a point of contact is to create content signaling the cultural context of TikTok.

Briefly mentioned in the analysis of Duolingo, the company is an example of how to create videos as a way of explicitly referencing typical situations that people are often in. Lusting after a beautiful, popular singer or wanting to go home early from work are typical situations that most people can relate to. The use of meta-references, which is a type of self-reference, is a way of using the recipient's awareness or experience of a particular issue and benefit from it. Using the recipient’s awareness correlates with Stuart Hall’s notion of encoding and decoding, as the recipient needs to have a certain frame of knowledge in order to decode the message. It is also easily tied back to Gen Z, which is described as having a

playful self-reflexivity and self-awareness. The use of those meta-references is, thus, a great way to especially entertain a typical Gen Zer, who is the main audience on TikTok.

From the selected and analyzed companies and celebrities, Duolingo is the only one who predominantly uses meta-references in their content, which is not something that can easily be used in conventional marketing. As stated earlier, the language-learning website and app does not have a specific product to market, and merely posts content with the purpose of creating engagement for its app, which is downloaded for free. The company has conventional ads on the app and urges users to purchase ‘lives’ on the app, though many users can easily use the app without buying anything. Compared to the other companies mentioned in the paper, such as Rare Beauty and Ryanair, Duolingo has much more freedom to use these meta-references to create more engagement from its users, who find relatableness in the references, as the company does not market a specific product other than their app.

The impact of TikTok, which has “slowly become more and more integrated into society and peoples’ lives [and] become a full-time job for some teens and young adults” (Moncur-Bear 2021), is an indicator that meta-references are ‘easier’ to create on the app. The integration happens even more on the Gen Z aspect and perhaps less outside of it as it feeds into the Gen Z self-awareness marker. With the new use of emojis as well as the “TikTok Made Me Buy It” hashtag, TikTok’s impact on culture and society keeps growing, making the meta-references to TikTok trends easier to understand for every other user on the app. The trending sounds on TikTok as well as the use of emojis, as mentioned earlier, have created a new way of communicating on social media, which plays “an integral role in the community’s creativity, liveliness, and cultural impact” (Newsroom 2021). The number of users on the app keeps growing, as people are able to find videos from TikTok on other social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, which attract their interests and make them download the app itself. Thus, more people are exposed to the videos – both with the indirect/direct marketing approaches, as well as other things. The trends start on TikTok but “permeate everywhere” (Newsroom 2021), meaning that the app drives culture through these trends that resonate far beyond the app itself.

5.4.1. “TikTok Made Me Buy It”

The cultural impact that TikTok has is undoubtedly a result of contagious behavior, as the phenomenon relates to virality. As mentioned in the theory section, Paul Marsden states that contagious properties of consumer behavior can result in the spread of consumer fashion and

fads, which “TikTok Made Me Buy It” shows. Viral trends both in fashion and makeup are all a part of the way that TikTok is normally used today: “From clearing shelves thanks to #TikTokMadeMeBuyIt, to driving luxury fashion trends, to hearing your friends say, ‘I saw this thing on TikTok’ every day, 71% of users believe the biggest trends start on TikTok” (Newsroom 2021). This fact helps give further insight into why companies such as Rare Beauty, Ryanair, and Duolingo use the app to both build advocacy and drive purchases. The contagious behavior is seen in the hashtag “TikTok Made Me Buy It”, which is mentioned in the analysis section. By claiming that the app ‘makes’ someone buy anything, a user excuses the contagious behavior of buying something because others did as well, which is what companies benefit from on the app. Users are ‘infecting’ other users into buying things, which is a contagious behavior. The tag is also an example of how trends on TikTok drive culture that resonates far beyond the app and affects other aspects.

According to research on TikTok’s impact on culture custom, TikTok “inspired action off of the platform. 43 % of users try something or go somewhere new after seeing it at least once on the platform” (Newsroom 2021), which confirms that content on the app encourages behavior. Additionally, the research shows that when brands participate and embrace the language of TikTok, “the community embraces them. 61% of TikTokers like brands better when they create or participate in a trend on TikTok, and 21% of TikTokers feel more connected to brands when they comment on people's posts” (Newsroom 2021) which further confirms the result of the analysis section. Users particularly feel closer to the brand when it posts “human, unpolished content”, correlating with David Scott’s notion, where the characteristics are the same as videos that have a higher chance of going viral.

At the time of writing, the hashtag “TikTokMadeMeBuytIt” currently has 10,9 billion views. Using the hashtag in your video can be used as a signal that whatever product you are referring to in the video, it is worth buying – unless it is a negative review about a product, which TikTok ‘made’ the user buy. This is why you can also use the hashtag in a negative review, where you talk about why people should not buy whatever product is mentioned. The hashtag can also be used to infect the stream of users on the app without having anything to do with buying anything yourself. It can be both related to buying things or infecting others to buy things.

The massive number of views on the hashtag might be due to many curious users who go to the hashtag in order to see what is good enough to buy. Contagious behavior aside, this notion is interesting concerning consumerism and how consumers act on TikTok. The

hashtag is itself neutral, meaning that people who click on the hashtag are not searching for a specific product they need to research; instead, it is a hashtag people go to in order to entertain themselves and perhaps buy whatever might catch their interest. An interesting aspect of the hashtag is how it is often used to encourage the purchase of unnecessary things. TikTok mixes both the need to spare time with the scrolling of entertaining videos as well as online shopping, which is now available on one app. A common feature in many “TikTokMadeMeBuyIt” videos is purchases from Amazon with hashtags such as #AmazonFinds, which has over 20,3 billion views. The videos can mention everything from home decor to products for one's car, while the common denominator is that most products are often “a bunch of weird, non-essential and pretty hilarious stuff” (Venn 2020). The ‘non-essential’ element is explained with Paul Marsden’s statement about how the spread of fashion and fads is indicative of an influence epidemic rather than rational behavior, where people buy things, they actually need. Many videos include the mention of “gadgets you need” or “things you didn’t know you needed”, which all encourage contagious consumer behavior.

BookTok

The “TikTok Made Me Buy It” hashtag relates well with another known phenomenon on TikTok: BookTok. The phenomenon is another great example of contagious behavior on TikTok and is described as “a sanctuary for literature lovers of all kinds” (Lansom 2022). The #booktok tag currently has 51.2 billion views where users discuss their favorite or less favorite reads through “video reviews, recommendations and book nerd memes” (Lansom 2022). BookTok has become a common phrase in bookstores. The popular online bookstore “Barnes & Noble” uses it on their website, where they have gathered a collection of the most popular TikTok books. They write, “For those who can’t decide what to read next, #BookTok is the place to go. From ‘books that will make you sob’ to ‘book I couldn’t put down,’ you’ll find a variety of book lists and videos recommending different books to read” (Barnes and Noble).

The tag arguably encourages contagious behavior in two ways. The first one is how many users, who see the tag on the app, immediately listen to the reviews and buy the books. Many users who love to read can use the tag to browse on the app for the next book recommendation. The use of the hashtag in a video suggests that the video is about a book worth mentioning – though it can also be in a video with a negative review of the book.

Either way, it is a way to catch all the attention of all the users who love to read, both in a way to find out what to read or what not to read. In WillVideo2, which is analyzed in the analysis section, Will Smith uses the tag in his video of seeing the book for the first time. In the caption, he writes the following: “Thank y’all for letting me share my life and stories with you. #WillTheBook is officially out! #booktok #tiktokmademebuyit” (WillVideo2). Using both “BookTok” and “TikTokMadeMeBuyIt” is his way of getting his videos on the result page of both hashtags. When a user clicks or searches for either hashtag, his video will show up as well and attract readers and users looking to buy random things. Additionally, seeing the tags on the video signals content that many users are familiar with on the app.

The second way that the tag arguably encourages contagious behavior is with the use of it outside of TikTok. As mentioned earlier, Barnes & Noble uses it on their website, however, they are not alone. The American multinational company, Amazon, uses it on their website as well to promote books. Next to the title of several books, they have written “Tik Tok Made Me Buy It”. As it references TikTok and the known hashtag, it might encourage people to buy it as well as borrow the point of contact that TikTok, the app, has with users. A typical user might see the book and immediately understand the reference to the hashtag and, subsequently, buy the book. While Amazon merely writes the tag and not directly links to TikTok or the hashtag, it, arguably, still counts as a way to encourage people to buy it; thus, contagious behavior. Additionally, relating to the sense of community that exists with Gen Z, the typical Gen Z user might browse on Amazon, see the “Tik Tok Made Me Buy It” caption on a book and be more persuaded into buying it based on that caption alone. Referencing the popular app and the popular hashtag might, thus, attract a specific type of consumer. The contagious behavior, which is a result of trends on the app, is also an example of how TikTok drives culture far beyond the app itself.

Publishers use BookTok to their benefit as well outside of TikTok, the app. According to the article “How book lovers on TikTok are changing the publishing industry” (2022), #BookTok had led to major sales in publishing last year (Jean 2020). Some publishers are collaborating with known creators on the app to boost titles. The level of engagement on the app is deeper than on other social media platforms, as creators can create video replies to comments, stick or duet content and other things that differ from other platforms, which has made BookTok such a success. The success has prompted publishers to print a special edition TikTok sticker onto popular BookTok books “as a new-age marketing tool for Gen Z and

young millennials to purchase books” (Mae 2022). Publishers using this type of sticker on editions of books is similar to when the companies and celebrities in this paper use popular sounds to create a point of contact. Once the book (or sound) goes viral, the publishers (or companies/celebrities) exploit this virality and put on a sticker (or recreate the popular sound and meme). What is important to note, however, is that there is a certain unpredictability with the tag. No one knows which book is suddenly going to go viral with the trend, and the virality or popularity of a book is never directed by one person. Similar to the way that you cannot purposefully create a viral video, you cannot make a book go viral. There are characteristics that one can try to add – for instance, writing a book with a popular trope that seems to be trending in the BookTok community might make it more likely that the book will gain attention. Typically, the author of a book has nothing to do with the popularity of it on the app, which is exemplified with the popularity of Colleen Hoover’s books – this is exemplified in the section below. However, authors can greatly benefit from the virality and join in on the virality to announce themselves as writers of the books, much like Michael Bublé joined in on the viral trend with his own song. This is an easy way to create even more engagement and perhaps shed light on their other works.

The app’s reign over the book industry has also affected booksellers: “Retailers both big and small are setting up sections of their store devoted to books seen on BookTok” (Jean 2020), as many customers go to the stores and ask about books, they have seen on TikTok. Similar to the “TikTokMadeMeBuyIt” hashtag, the BookTok tag encourages contagious consumer behavior, when the book review is a positive one. The tag can be used in bad reviews, much like the “TikTokMadeMeBuyIt”, meaning that the tag itself can be neutral without the content of the video. Based on the posted video, however, a consumer is either infected into buying or not buying the specific book. The typical tendency is, however, that the positive reviews highly infect the purchase of the book in question, which is evident with the use of “BookTok” stickers and the way that bookstores set up sections devoted to books from the tag.

5.4.2. Mob Mentality and Popular Culture Disseminators

With contagious behavior comes mob mentality as well, which is mentioned several times in this paper. However, while the mentions have been in connection to negative aspects – such as leaving mean comments on Hailey Bieber’s videos – mob mentality can also lead to positive things. A perfect example of this is the popularity of the American author of young

adult fiction and romance novels, Colleen Hoover. The best-selling author has quickly become “TikTok’s favorite writer” (Jeunesse 2022) due to the many positive video reviews on the app. Hoover has a full-length movie in the works as well as over two dozen books to her name (Jeunesse 2022). During an interview with “Glamour” magazine, the author claims that her TikTok success did not come from her, “it came from the readers who made videos about [her] books and shared them on the app. [...] The credit all goes to the lovely people of BookTok” (Jeunesse 2022). As the author herself claims, Colleen Hoover’s popularity is due to the many reviews posted on TikTok, which made several people curious to read her books. She is mostly known for her captivating storylines with psychological romance: “Colleen Hoover will (metaphorically) rip out your heart and stomp on it a thousand times. She’ll then hand it back to you and request a five-star rating. And you’ll give it to her. After all, it is her expertly crafted words that shattered your heart in the first place. She’s earned it” (Jeunesse 2022). Arguably, mob mentality is a part of what made the author popular on the app, as the reviews and the many tags with videos of BookTok referred to the author and her books.

According to Hui Zuo and Tongyue Wang, there is a certain TikTok user behavior on the app where its user groups are “not only producers of popular culture, but also disseminators and consumers” (1). This easily correlates with BookTok, as the users who influence other users to buy books are as easily persuaded by other users as well, which correlates to Sampson’s statement about the social tendency to herd or cascade. Zuo and Wang further state that users consciously or unconsciously become disseminators of popular culture, with two ways to disseminate. The first is that when users have a desire to share a video, they share it directly on the app through the “one-click forwarding function, which is the way users consciously disseminate” (2). The second way to disseminate popular culture on the app is through the unique traffic algorithm for video recommendation: “Traffic distribution is mainly about neighborhood and attention. Users have participated in the dissemination of popular culture when they Hit the like button or make comments on videos” (Zuo & Wang 2). This can also relate to the use of hashtags in order to signal something specific – as mentioned earlier, for instance when Will Smith uses the BookTok tag.

Zuo and Wang’s notion is easily connected to mob mentality and contagious behavior, as the dissemination of popular culture is a part of the contagious behavior on the app, just like BookTok. Additionally, Zuo and Wang write that the behavior of a single individual is “highly susceptible to the behavior of the surrounding crowd. In order to keep in line with the group, the individual will constantly adjust his behavior in the feedback of the

group, so as to follow and imitate the group behaviour” (3). Undoubtedly, this relates to contagion as well as the earlier-mentioned typical behavior of Gen Z users on the app who repeatedly reach for the collective ‘we’ rather than the singular ‘I’ to create “a sense of belonging to the trend” (Zuo & Wang 3).

Zuo and Wang write about “herd mentality” and how it is often transformed into “a collective unconsciousness, which affects people’s speech and behaviour” (4). Relating that to contagious behavior, it connects to group identity as well and with the social tendency to herd or cascade, as described by Sampson. Because of the typical Gen Z group identification, individual users “will be interested in the majority” (Zuo & Wang 4), which is why contagious behavior often occurs on the app, resulting in viral videos, trends, and sounds. Through participation in the activities on TikTok, users can “identify with the youth culture” (Zuo & Wang 5) on the app. The companies and celebrities mentioned in this paper all exemplify this as well, where their main purpose is not to merely identify with youth culture, but to insert themselves in the activities to gain engagement and ensure more sales. Relating this behavior to consumer behavior, users immerse their consumption experience on the app, which is used to “identify themselves, and [...] construct the identity of the popular consumer culture”. BookTok and TikTokMadeMeBuyIt are both great examples of this, as well as the use of other tags such as “viralblush” or “beautyhack”, as mentioned in the analysis section. By using the tags, the companies ensure that users identify themselves with the consumption experience, which the companies try to encode with their videos. Posting reviews of a certain lip-gloss or a book, the typical user participates in popular culture created on the social media app, which is both an expression of culture as well as “an important reflection of the current user’s sense of belonging, dilemma and emotional catharsis” (Zuo & Wang 5). Using the “TikTok Made Me Buy It” challenge only enhances the contagious behavior which is consistent on almost all content on the app.

6.0. Conclusion

Based on all of the above, it can be concluded that marketing via the video-focused social networking service, TikTok, is a new and popular way to digitally market products or brands. As times have changed, and everything has moved online, marketing has gotten digital as well. While traditional marketing approaches such as TV commercials or billboard signs are still used today, digital marketing is a way for companies to reach a different audience online.

It can be argued that people are more annoyed with the more direct and transparent marketing approaches, such as the ad that shows up in the middle of a YouTube video or the pop-up ads that show up while you are reading an article. According to author David Scott, messages in advertisements can no longer break through with “dumbed-down statements” (20) about their wonderful products. As the average person sees hundreds of commercial messages per day, people are starting to not trust them and turn them off, if we even notice them at all (Scott 20). This is what especially distinguishes traditional marketing from digital marketing on online platforms. One of the most popular online platforms is TikTok, which has gotten massive popularity during the last few years. The app hosts a variety of short-form user videos with content such as pranks, dances, stunts, and other types of entertainment.

Titled as the fastest growing social media app, with over 100 million users, TikTok is a perfect platform for companies and celebrities to use for their marketing efforts. Based on the analysis of marketing on TikTok, it can be concluded that the app is a great platform for companies and celebrities to use to catch consumers’ attention with the use of the typical markers that most TikTok videos seem to have – such as the use of viral sounds, challenges, or memes. The obviousness in direct marketing approaches might annoy the average person, while the indirectness of marketing via TikTok does the opposite. It allows for the company to interact with the consumers and see what they think about their products easily through comments sections or hashtag searches. According to Guarda et al, the content on the app has an addictive nature, as it is easy to watch random videos for hours, which makes it the perfect platform for companies and celebrities to add their seemingly random videos.

TikTok uses an algorithm, which is what makes it stand out from other apps. The algorithm shows users videos on a so-called ‘For You’ page, which is based on an analysis of the user's interests on the app such as the use of tags, likes, and comments. The typical user is between the age of 15-25 years old, particularly members of the so-called Generation Z, who are born between the late 1900s and the early 2010s. According to scholars, TikTok is dominated by Gen Z, who embrace a playful self-reflexivity as well as self-awareness, sense of unity, and collective spirit. The sense of unity and collective spirit is especially relevant in this paper, as we analyze contagious behavior.

With the interplay between different representational modes such as images, videos, and written/spoken words, TikTok is an example of multimodality. Therefore, we have conducted a multimodal analysis to analyze a total of 51 videos posted on TikTok and divided the analysis into the following sections: cosmetics companies including Fenty Beauty

and Rare Beauty; celebrities including Selena Gomez, Will Smith, Hailey Bieber, and Jason Derulo; purposefully selected companies including Duolingo and Ryanair. Based on a comparative analysis as well as Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model, it can be concluded that all companies and celebrities use collective behavior (including contagion theory and virality) to their benefit. Contagion theory is a theory of collective behavior, which explains how a crowd can cause hypnotic impact on individuals. The crowd in this paper refers to the audience, meaning the users on TikTok.

Tony D. Sampson's book, *Virality: Contagion Theory in the Age of Networks* (2012), defines virality as one of the marketing buzzwords of the network age. Mentioning an experiment by social psychologist Stanley Milgram, Sampson exemplifies a social tendency to herd or cascade, which is often seen on TikTok. The app makes it possible for users to make a video go viral with their likes, shares, and comments. In the analysis, we have exemplified how certain cosmetic products have gone viral in a positive way, as users post reviews. Nevertheless, virality and contagion can also lead to negative results and have negative impacts, as a product or brand can go viral due to its bad quality or a negative review. This connects with mob mentality, which is related to contagious behavior, as people are easily influenced by others into liking or disliking a product or celebrity. It is a risk all companies and celebrities take when they post a video online. Mob mentality can be the infection of both positive and negative behavior. Based on the analysis section, TikTok makes it easy for users to infect other users into commenting on hateful things. An example is American model, media personality, and socialite, Hailey Bieber, who posted a video in which she addressed the mean comments; the mean comments are an example of negative mob mentality. A positive example is seen in a video posted by the Irish low-cost airline, Ryanair, in which they encourage all brands to comment on the video for no reason. This is an example of a company encouraging contagious behavior in the hopes of going viral and creating engagement. It is also an example of an indirect marketing approach, as they do not directly mention a product or anything related to themselves, but merely ask brands to comment, consequently making them go viral if there is enough engagement.

In the analysis, it is concluded that the celebrities and companies have extremely similar marketing approaches. According to scholar Janell Azpeitia, marketing on social media is about engaging with the audience (the consumers), as well as spreading word of mouth to others and creating a larger engagement; in other words, it is about encouraging contagious behavior. The main objective is to create a so-called point of contact with

potential customers, which is something all companies and celebrities mentioned in this paper attempt to do. The cosmetics companies, Fenty Beauty and Rare Beauty, both use tutorials posted by other users on the app, which is a great way to market their products and still maintain credibility, as they are not the ones reviewing the product. Additionally, all the companies and celebrities use popular and viral sounds as backgrounds to their videos, which is common to do on the app. Using Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model, this shows that the so-called encoders of the videos expect their audience (decoders) to have a certain frame of knowledge to understand and interpret their videos correctly, which would result in a so-called dominant or preferred reading. Expecting your audience to understand a reference is a risky thing to do when you are encoding a video, because the audience might entirely misunderstand the message. Based on the analysis, however, the companies and celebrities attempt to use the sounds as a way to reach the audience that are watching viral content. Using viral sounds tells the audience that the company or celebrity is aware of the virality as well as thinking it is a funny sound, too, while simultaneously also bonding more with the audience. A point of contact is easily created with the use of popular/viral sounds, as the viewers feel more connected to the company/celebrity. Another example is the use of informal registers, which is consistent in all the analyzed examples as well. Using terms such as 'bestie', 'glowup', 'plz', 'smh', and 'POV' or using emoticons that mirror the users' sophisticated use of them in the comments section is also something that all companies and celebrities do. As it is concluded that Gen Z "dominate" the app (Stahl & Literat 1), mirroring Gen Zers use of language is a great way to create a point of contact, as well as bonding with them as potential customers.

According to scholars Catherine Cheng Stahl and Ioana Literat, Gen Z has their own multi-layered communication mode including a so-called Gen Z lingo, in which there is a sophisticated use of memes and emojis. An example is seen in Rare Beauty's video, where we see a gold blush product about to go on a blind date with a red blush. While on the 'date', the red blush is indicated to be thinking about a different product, a lip-gloss, which is shown with the use of a speech bubble. The point of the video is to show that the lip-gloss is a great product worth desiring, however, simultaneously, the company uses a popular sound, which has gone viral. The sound alludes to a video about a possible love triangle, which went viral on TikTok. Encoding and decoding is seen when the users in the comments section appear to immediately understand the reference and decode the video correctly with a preferred reading. While Stuart Hall's model works under the assumption that the audience is aware of

the conditions, the point in this paper is that the audience is not always aware of the marketing attempt. Having the frame of knowledge to understand certain references from popular culture or from viral trends on TikTok does not necessarily mean that the audience is aware that the video is a marketing attempt. Users who are not familiar with the sound beforehand can still interpret the video correctly, though the intimate bond is most likely not going to be as strong as with those who understand the reference. The point of the video is to market the lip gloss product without directly alluding to the fact, which is an example of the indirect marketing aspect in this paper. Using popular sounds and referring to viral videos is a way for companies to indirectly market their products, where the viewer's frame of knowledge on the app is a bonus.

While the viewers are not naive whatsoever and can easily see that the video is posted by a specific company, which is certainly looking to sell its products, the point of the videos is that they entertain most people, who already find the original viral videos humorous. While scrolling through a 'For You' page and watching endless videos, a user might watch one of the analyzed videos and not think much about the fact that this is a marketing attempt as much as it is entertaining. All the companies and celebrities use these types of references to either viral sounds or memes, as well as the use of an informal register, which helps disguise their marketing attempts to make them seem less direct.

TikTok is a networking service, where videos can spread to a worldwide audience in a short period of time. The spread of a video is referred to as virality, which is something all companies might strive for. While you can easily go viral in a negative way due to a negative review, the companies and celebrities use their indirect and direct marketing attempts to go viral and create more sales or more engagement. Jason Derulo uses direct marketing when he encourages contagious behavior, as he asks his followers to comment on his video with a fire emoticon if they want him to release a new song; Rare Beauty use it when they use Selena Gomez, their famous celebrity founder, in a video where she tells the users that she cannot wait to see their looks – and indirectly asking them to post videos in which they tag the company. The promise of attention from a beloved celebrity might cause enough reason for users to share, like or tag the company, which consequently might end up in a virality – or at least more engagement. A common feature used on TikTok is the so-called duet, which is a feature that allows users to post their video side by side with a video from another user. Jason Derulo uses this feature to bond with his followers, but also to encourage contagious

behavior; similar to Rare Beauty using Selena Gomez, the promise of being ‘dueted’ by a beloved celebrity might encourage users to post videos with Jason’s song in the background to catch his attention. Thus, encouraging contagious behavior is majorly done by all companies and celebrities to both create a point of contact, while simultaneously gaining more engagement, and increasing the possibility of (positively) going viral.

While the theory shows us that virality can never be planned, based on the analysis, it can be concluded that there are markers that are characterized in most viral videos. An awareness of viral trends, a use of humor and an elicitation of emotion seems to be common denominators in all viral videos, much like the reenactment of viral trends is, too. According to Tony D. Sampson, human emotions spread universally like viruses, which connects perfectly with the aspect of virality on TikTok. The companies and celebrities elicit humor in their videos both to bond with their audience, make themselves relatable, and attempt to go viral. David Scott argues that video driven marketing uses emotions to tell stories in ways that traditional marketing cannot. For instance, we see Selena Gomez post videos about her having anxiety, though she uses a humorous, viral sound to mirror Gen Z’s openness about mental health and, simultaneously, their tendency for a playful self-reflexivity (Stahl & Literal 1). We also see Will Smith use emotions in his videos about his newly published book, where he thanks the audience for making it sell one million copies. Using humor, showing vulnerability with personal topics such as mental health, or other elicitation of emotion is a great way to use video driven marketing to tell a story – and to use the story to indirectly market yourself and create more engagement around your brand.

Based on an analysis of the chosen videos, and a discussion of their use of emotions, encouragements of contagion, mob mentality, as well as the societal influence of TikTok, it can be concluded that the chosen companies and celebrities post videos with a disguised intention of marketing their products or brand. While some certainly post videos with direct marketing approaches, the major content of all videos and accounts that we have analyzed shows that the indirect approaches are used with the attempt to go viral and create engagement. TikTok makes it easy for a user to get lost in a sea of endless videos and maybe even forget the fact that the video is a disguised attempt to market a certain product.

The argument is not that the user is unintelligent or naive, but merely that TikTok is a perfect platform to make videos constantly go viral in a way that is not seen before, which is why the attempts to disguise marketing approaches are easier. While other social media

platforms provide users with the option to post a video, TikTok is mainly meant for only that, which makes it easier for companies such as Rare Beauty, Fenty Beauty, or even Duolingo to post videos with the use of humor or an informal register that mirrors Gen Z's. As Guarda et al mention, the short format on TikTok provides the perfect platform to go viral, where neither the video creation nor the viewing process takes much time or effort. Mob mentality, which relates to behavior contagion, connects well with Gen Z's sense of unity and collective spirit. The sense of unity and behavioral contagion has helped create the phenomenon called BookTok, which bookstores, publishers and authors have benefited greatly from. The indirect approaches to market with the reenacting of memes or with the use of popular sounds is a perfect example of how TikTok can be used for marketing in a digital age, where Gen Z is easier to reach as a target audience. The app and Gen Z's use of it helps drive culture through trends that resonate far beyond the app itself, affecting both culture and society.

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Appendix

This appendix includes weblinks to all the videos mentioned in this paper. In case they do not work, we have uploaded them all on the following Google Drive:

https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1I99k_hNylwHfr1B-ybvUUEOP2gYDclzs

Videos from Analysis Section:

Videos for Analysis of Fenty Beauty (cosmetics company)

FentyVideo1:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@fentybeauty/video/7072793819074383147>

FentyVideo2:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@fentybeauty/video/7065747733746945326>

FentyVideo3:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@fentybeauty/video/7070258537946975534>

FentyVideo4:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@fentybeauty/video/6814251798178663685>

FentyVideo5:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@fentybeauty/video/7045014876741389614>

FentyVideo6:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@fentybeauty/video/7055011249100164398>

FentyVideo7:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@fentybeauty/video/7049801551933738286>

FentyVideo8:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@fentybeauty/video/7072447906527087918>

FentyVideo9:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@fentybeauty/video/7060959735251569967>

FentyVideo10:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@fentybeauty/video/7061313390375111983>

FentyVideo11:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@fentybeauty/video/7061745318756355375>

FentyVideo12:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@fentybeauty/video/7062060501228047662>

FentyVideo13:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@fentybeauty/video/7063549251493858606>

FentyVideo14:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@fentybeauty/video/7063169328887237935>

Videos for Analysis of Rare Beauty (cosmetics company)

RareVideo1:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@rarebeauty/video/7081110408999980334>

RareVideo2:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@rarebeauty/video/7070239305444232490>

RareVideo3:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@rarebeauty/video/7075384045126978862>

RareVideo4:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@rarebeauty/video/7070579625927150894>

RareVideo5:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@rarebeauty/video/7082438045806415147>

RareVideo6:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@rarebeauty/video/7042063536536833326>

RareVideo7:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@rarebeauty/video/7049464965769563438>

RareVideo8:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@rarebeauty/video/7037622261326695685>

RareVideo9:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@rarebeauty/video/7040189643983179055>

RareVideo10:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@rarebeauty/video/7029804455352601861>

Videos for Analysis of Selena Gomez (celebrity)

SelenaVideo1:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@selenagomez/video/7085395568855633198>

SelenaVideo2:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@selenagomez/video/7086314593600998698>

SelenaVideo3:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@selenagomez/video/7085597742294158638>

SelenaVideo4:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@selenagomez/video/7069811560608206122>

SelenaVideo5:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@selenagomez/video/7033811271120244015>

SelenaVideo6:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@selenagomez/video/7015374174000532741>

SelenaVideo7:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@selenagomez/video/7007821040273427718>

SelenaVideo8:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@selenagomez/video/7023780610195868933>

SelenaVideo9:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@selenagomez/video/7015600088647060742>

Videos for Analysis of Will Smith (celebrity)

WillVideo1:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@willsmith/video/6975526564553428229>

WillVideo2:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@willsmith/video/7029003038669065519>

WillVideo3:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@willsmith/video/7060892659757583663>

WillVideo4:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@willsmith/video/6974469255681051910>

WillVideo5:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@willsmith/video/7023474706846190895>

WillVideo6:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@willsmith/video/7062035028708150574>

WillVideo7:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@willsmith/video/6829090092984929541>

Videos for Analysis of Hailey Bieber (celebrity)

HaileyVideo1:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@haileybieber/video/6942526558242442502>

HaileyVideo2:

- https://www.instagram.com/reel/CM44pDDBW87/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link

HaileyVideo3:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@haileybieber/video/6987874292138642693>

HaileyVideo4:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@haileybieber/video/7085769409586957614>

Videos for Analysis of Jason Derulo (celebrity)

JasonVideo1:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@jasonderulo/video/6873988677853400326>

JasonVideo2:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@jasonderulo/video/6852187605631601926>

JasonVideo3:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@jasonderulo/video/6846572427363749126>

JasonVideo4:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@jasonderulo/video/6876599034149129478>

JasonVideo5:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@jasonderulo/video/6846902529096191238>

JasonVideo6:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@jasonderulo/video/6852187605631601926>

JasonVideo7:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@jasonderulo/video/7069822058376613162>

Videos for Analysis of Duolingo (purposefully selected company)

DuoVideo1:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@duolingo/video/7030838886578359558>

DuoVideo2:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@duolingo/video/7051977130510404910>

DuoVideo3:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@duolingo/video/7070885597946055979>

Videos for Analysis of Ryanair (purposefully selected company)

RyanVideo1:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@ryanair/video/7014127618010270982>

RyanVideo2:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@ryanair/video/7052360939869457670>

RyanVideo3:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@ryanair/video/6895772495803092226>

RyanVideo4:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@ryanair/video/7018585179778272518>

Videos used in Discussion Section:

JustinVideo1:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@justinbieber/video/7093617595902905646>

MichaelVideo1:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@michaelbuble/video/7093635164324072709>

RyanVideo5:

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@ryanair/video/7091316662225472773>