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The *memefication* of journalism: Exploring political news content on TikTok

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Table of contents

INTRODUCTION	2
THEORY SECTION	5
POLITICAL NEWS ON SOCIAL MEDIA	5
USER-GENERATED NEWS CONTENT	7
POLITICAL NEWS CONTENT ON TIKTOK	12
METHODS	15
SAMPLING PROCEDURE	15
SAMPLE	16
VARIABLES	18
INTERCODER RELIABILITY TEST	20
RESULTS	23
NEWS PRESENTATION STYLE	23
MARKERS OF PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM	24
MEMETIC QUALITIES	25
DISCUSSION	27
LIMITATIONS	29
IMPLICATIONS	31
REFERENCES	35
APPENDIX (CODEBOOK)	52
ABSTRACT	59
ZUSAMMENFASSUNG	60

Introduction

With cultural and technological innovations happening more rapidly than ever, the media environment is constantly changing, in turn leading to a reshaping of news consumption (Hermida, 2014). This evolution, however, is accompanied by a decline in significance of traditional news media as an essential part of civic society (Aharoni et al., 2021; Bennett, 2007), as a result of an increase in news avoidance behaviors due to negativity bias (Boukes & Vliegenthart, 2017) and lack of trust in legacy media (Tsfati & Cappella, 2003). Further, due to the emergence of the internet, news production processes have undergone significant changes, enabling citizens without a professional journalistic background to take part in the production and dissemination of political news (Scott et al., 2015) and thus undermining the traditional role of professional journalists as gatekeepers (Blaagaard, 2013). As a result, political communication is increasingly characterized by a combination of public and personalized messages, spread on mass as well as social media and published by established just as non-established communicators (Esser & Pfetsch, 2020).

The emergence of the user as a new actor in the field of journalistic production has been studied extensively in the context of user-generated news content on legacy media's online sites (e.g., in the form of comments) or on specific websites (commonly known as citizen journalism). However, as stressed by Jönsson and Örnebring (2011), "direct user involvement in news production is minimal" on these traditional news websites due to the sites structures and professional codes. In contrast, as a result of differing underlying platform mechanisms, user-generated content on social media is bound to no such restrictions, leading to political news posted or commented by users taking different forms that seem especially interesting in view of the lack of professional regulations. Nevertheless, user-generated news content on social media has yet to gain its fair share of academic attention.

A possible reason for this subject remaining relatively understudied lies in the fact that the active contribution of users mostly stays limited to the dissemination or commentation of the news content on social media platforms such as *Twitter*, *Facebook*, or *Instagram*. However, social media also gives users the possibility to themselves produce news contents without having to adhere to any institutional framework. In this regard, the platform *TikTok* sets itself apart from other social media platforms, as users do not only share and comment on news content, but rather they *become* the content, themselves being active presenters of information on current events (Medina Serrano et al., 2020). This is due to the platform's structure encouraging users to engage with content rather than with other users. While TikTok offers personal profiles, direct messages and following friends, those features of personal connections are downplayed by the site structure (Zulli & Zulli, 2022). Rather, TikTok aims at users consuming videos through the *For-you-feed*, based on the platform's algorithmic recommendation system. Users' engagement with content can take various forms, such as the use of filters or sounds used in other videos or the insertion of fragments of videos into other videos, e.g., reaction videos (Gamir-Ríos & Sánchez-Castillo, 2022). These *memetic* features being, if not exclusive, inherent to TikTok make this platform an especially interesting case when it comes to user-generated news content on social media that extends beyond mere sharing and commenting.

For this reason, this study will explore the way in which political news content is generated on TikTok by users as compared to legacy media outlets. On the one hand, it might be assumed that users follow traditional journalistic principles when creating political news content on TikTok as observing these principles plays a major part in what is perceived as news opposed to other kinds of content. On the other hand, one also has to consider the potential adherence of legacy media sources to the platform's features in order to gain a farther reach, thus letting go of traditional journalistic values in favor of qualities more commonly associated

with user contents. However, etiquette for information production in user-generated content differ significantly from traditional legacy media (Robinson & DeShano, 2011), leading to these new forms of journalism being viewed as distinct from public journalism (Konieczna et al., 2018). To further explore the potential similarities and differences in political news content on social media produced by users versus legacy media, the following research questions will be addressed:

RQ1: To what extent do users and legacy media sources follow journalistic practices when generating news content on TikTok?

RQ2: How do users and legacy media sources make use of the platforms memetic features to generate news content?

This research can be seen as an attempt to gain a first insight into the question if and how memetic short video content could possibly counteract news avoidance and thus contribute to ensuring that media continue to hold their essential role in creating informed and engaged citizens in democratic society (Song et al., 2020). Yet, as news in the form of short videos made by users may not necessarily adhere to journalistic values, the lack of traditional media acting as gatekeepers might facilitate the spread of political mis- and disinformation (Harris Lipschultz, 2022). Consequently, an exploration of memetic news contents on TikTok represents a necessary first step into investigating the chances as well the threats they pose to democratic society.

Theory section

Political news on social media

The consumption of political news content on social media is deeply shaped by what Gil de Zúñiga and colleagues (2017) call the *News finds me perception* that occurs when “individuals hold the mistaken perception that they can be part of a well-informed citizenry, as important news will find them without their actively seeking it” (p. 118). As a result, those individuals are less likely to turn to traditional news media such as television or newspapers in order to inform themselves. The *News finds me perception* is, on the one hand, related to frequent social media news use (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2017), on the other hand, the impression of individuals that their peers are politically knowledgeable and interested and that they will thus receive the relevant news in this way also contributes to the faulty perception that news will find them (Song et al., 2020). The lack of active news seeking through traditional or digital legacy media leads to political news consumption primordially happening incidentally. In this context, Matthes and colleagues (2020) propose the *Political Incidental News Exposure Model* that understands incidental news exposure as a two-level process with passive scanning of incidentally encountered news content constituting the first level and the intentional processing of this content as relevant information representing the second level.

Another important aspect of political news on social media is the potential polarization through echo chambers and filter bubbles. Several factors might influence the formation of echo chambers and filter bubbles, amongst others the social media platform (Kitchens et al., 2020), the type of interaction (e.g., replies, mentions, comments, follows) (Esteve Del Valle & Borge Bravo, 2018; Tsai et al., 2020), the topic discussed (Barberá et al., 2015; Baumann et al., 2020; Morini et al., 2021) as well as certain user-traits (Dubois & Blank, 2018; Franken & Pilditch, 2021; Matz, 2021; Sindermann et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2020). While research on

echo chambers and filter bubbles is plentiful, it rests largely inconclusive or leads to conflicting findings (Terren & Borge, 2021), which might be in part due to the lack of a consistent definition of the phenomena applied across the various studies (Bruns, 2019; Kitchens et al., 2020).

In regard to the effects of political news consumption on social media, Reiter and Matthes (2021) find a positive effect on political interest. However, Cheng and colleagues (2023) also show that political news consumption on social media may lead to political anger, in the case of homophilic discussion and information networks, which is facilitated by echo chambers and filter bubbles. Further, in contrast to online news websites, social media use is not associated with political knowledge (Dimitrova et al., 2014; Reiter & Matthes, 2021; Shehata & Strömbäck, 2021). A possible vein for explanation lies in the fact that the aforementioned *News finds me perception* has a negative influence on political knowledge (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2017). Moreover, in a more differentiated perspective, while there is no association of social media use with knowledge about political *processes*, Park (2019) finds a positive impact on knowledge about political *issues*. Further, the impact of social media use on political knowledge seems dependent on the specific platform, with Twitter having a positive and Facebook a negative effect (Boukes, 2019; van Erkel & Van Aelst, 2021). In addition, when it comes to political participation, studies found a positive association with social media use (Dimitrova et al., 2014; Lee & Xenos, 2020), with the user's age (Ohme, 2019) and the perceived relevance (Matthes et al., 2020) having an impact on the strength of the effect.

Lastly, political news dissemination and consumption on social media is nowadays largely affected by the issue of *fake news*, which refers to deceptive, i.e., intentionally and verifiably false information circulated primarily through digital networks (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Cover et al., 2022). This phenomenon is also widely referred to as dis- or misinformation, whereby, according to Xu and colleagues (2023), disinformation involves the intent to mislead

readers and shape the perception of a topic, while misinformation refers to false information in general regardless of the motivation. The issue is especially prevalent when it comes to *political* news on social media, as politics was found to be the topic second most affected by fake news behind Covid-19 (Newman et al., 2021). Recent research on fake news has shown that greater cognitive reflection (Pennycook et al., 2020) as well as political sophistication (Vegetti & Mancosu, 2020) leads to better differentiation between true and false content. However, due to confirmation bias, users are more likely to believe and spread fake news articles that align with their opinions and ways of thinking (Kim et al., 2019), which also entails users perceiving partisan-consistent news as more plausible (Vegetti & Mancosu, 2020). Further, befriended or followed users are perceived as more credible sources than traditional news organizations (Tandoc, 2019), which – in combination with the fact that user-generated news content does not necessarily adhere to the same quality standards such as veracity or accountability (as will be discussed in the following chapter) – has led to fake news being especially frequent on social media (Kapantai et al., 2021).

User-generated news content

As Bednarek (2016) stresses, “the sharing of news through social media platforms is now a significant part of mainstream online media use and is an increasingly important consideration in journalism practice and production” (p. 227). However, not only professional journalists are concerned by this evolution, but also users, i.e., citizens, who are emerging as new actors in the news production process as a result of the enabling technological developments (Blaagaard, 2013; Scott et al., 2015). User-generated news content – also known as *user-created content*, *produsage* as well as *citizen-*, *participatory-*, *networked-*, *grassroots-* or *amateur-journalism* (Chung & Nah, 2020; Scott et al., 2015; Wall, 2015) – has existed for as long as professional digital journalism. While specific websites dedicated to user-generated

news content, i.e., citizen journalism, have been declining for over a decade now, after having reached a peak in popularity in the late 2000s to early 2010s (Lindner & Larson, 2017), contents produced by users are nowadays more and more integrated into online presence of mainstream news media (Hou et al., 2015; Thurman, 2008; Yildirim et al., 2013). Yet, most online news systems “do not involve citizens to the extent that the terms used to describe them imply” (Scott et al., 2015, p. 737), possibly due to journalists viewing user-generated news content only as complementary to professional journalism and therefore not deeming it useful to the public sphere or assigning any inherent value to it (Blaagaard, 2013; Konieczna et al., 2018).

Nevertheless, many mainstream media sources rely on user-generated content to provide firsthand accounts and local perspectives, with the aim of increasing the quality of the broadcast or article as well as enhancing the relationship with users in the community (Colistra et al., 2017). In regards to the business dimension of journalism, user-generated news content may be used as a means for reducing costs, drawing website traffic or reinforcing brand loyalty (Manosevitch & Tenenboim, 2017). On the other hand, the main reasons for citizens journalists or users to produce news content are the provision of the community with local news not covered by mainstream media, building a connection with the community, providing opportunities for dialogue as well as acting as a watchdog to the local government (Schaffer, 2007). Furthermore, while the consumption of user-generated news content is not associated with an increase of political knowledge in comparison with tradition media sources (Kaufhold et al., 2010), it does however have a positive impact on political involvement online as well as offline (Lee et al., 2022; Pain, 2018).

News presentation style

The main difference that sets user-generated news content apart from professional journalism lies in the fact that it is not produced by a traditional news organization (Rutigliano,

2008), but by users without professional journalistic training and without monetary compensation (Hess, 2010; Kaufhold et al., 2010). However, it is not always possible to draw a completely clear distinction between citizen- and professional journalism (Lindner et al., 2015), which might be partly due to the changing nature of legacy media contents. Specifically, a tendency to turn away from traditional markers of journalistic quality can be seen that has, according to Hasell and Weeks (2016), entailed an increase in episodic, narrative and entertainment-oriented content as well as shift towards emotionalization and dramatization. If emotions were traditionally regarded as private experiences that were deemed out-of-place in public debate, they have gained significant attention with the advent of digital journalism (Orgeret, 2020). However, a neutral and detached style of reporting has been regarded as the professional standard for the last century (Carpenter, 2008), and thus continues to prevail in most newsrooms (Peters, 2011). According to Pantti (2010), “the ideals of modern journalism are linked to the classical public sphere model in which journalism provides an instrument for objective, dispassionate investigation and a forum for rational discussion” (p. 169), through the compliance to different criteria, such as factuality, fairness, neutrality or detachment (Peters, 2011).

As a result, professional journalists are not likely to include their personal opinions in their news reporting (Carpenter, 2008; Rogstad, 2014). Citizen journalists, on the other hand, do not seek a neutral description of facts, but rather aspire meaningful interpretations of the news (Schaffer, 2007). Further, according to Kopp and Schönhagen (2008), citizen journalists publish their content in order to express feelings, ideas and opinions as well as to criticize societal injustices and wrongdoings, while traditional journalistic motives such as the neutral information about current events or the explanation of complex issues are not deemed important. This finding is partially supported by Holt and Karlsson (2015) who show that, even if user-generated news content follows an impersonal and unemotional style of reporting for

the most part, personal and emotional renderings of the news are still far more common when compared to professional media contents. This tendency for users to be more open to an emotional and affective reporting of political news can also be found in the case of the platform TikTok, which Medina Serrano and colleagues (2020) refer to as a “realization of politics as entertainment” (p. 264). Based on these findings, a first hypothesis regarding the adherence to journalistic principles is formulated as follows:

H1a: Political news content posted by users is more affective while content posted by legacy media sources is more informative.

Markers of professional journalism

Another factor to consider when it comes to journalistic practice on social media are news values. Remarkably, in view of their significance in traditional journalism, news values have been relatively rarely researched in the context of social media networks (Bednarek, 2016). However, the few existing studies concur largely, finding (to varying degrees) eliteness, superlativeness, unexpectedness, timeliness and continuity as well as negativity, conflict and controversy as the principal news values (Al-Rawi, 2021; Bednarek, 2016; García-Perdomo et al., 2018; Seyidov & Artan Özorán, 2020).

When it comes to the quality of online news content published by legacy media, the vast majority of journalists deem that the social media presence of legacy media impacts their informative quality (Sanchez Gonzales & Méndez Muros, 2015). These differences in quality are not only noticeable to professionals, but users also are able to differentiate good from bad journalistic quality, even more clearly when it comes to audio-visual content as compared to articles (Dohle, 2018). Yet, as Shin and Ognyanova (2022) show, news media quality is not associated with audience size on social media as “professional norms that are valued in the

field of journalism—such as accuracy, separation of opinion from news, and transparency—do not fruitfully translate into social media capital” (p. 592). This might stem from the fact that social media news content is associated to a drastically lesser degree than offline news contents with traditional quality criteria, such as objectivity, transparency, or background information (Neuberger, 2014), even though online news reporters themselves value traditional quality criteria more than web-specific quality criteria, such as ease of use, for example (Gladney et al., 2007).

While some citizen-journalists have partially adopted certain quality criteria followed in professional journalism, such as factual and balanced rendering of the news or relying on expert sources (Peters, 2011), most citizen-journalists have not been trained to adhere to those quality standards (Carpenter, 2008). This leads to professional journalists expressing concern about user-generated news content, in particular regarding issues of veracity and accountability (Chung et al., 2018), especially in view of the aforementioned issues of dis- and misinformation. Further, many citizen-journalists knowingly reject certain traditional journalistic quality criteria, such as the detached style of reporting or the lack of social engagement (Peters, 2011) and rather value criteria like connections, freshness, volume and transparency (Robinson & DeShano, 2011). Furthermore, user-generated content tends to stay in the realm of soft news, focus on individual rather than societal relevance and follow an episodic style of reporting (Holt & Karlsson, 2015). These findings lead to the second hypothesis regarding the first research question:

H1b: Political news content posted by users contains less markers of professional journalism than content posted by legacy media sources.

Political news content on TikTok

TikTok represents the international derivative of the Chinese social media platform Douyin, launched in 2016, and is operated by the parent company ByteDance. The platform emerged from the short video app Musical.ly that was purchased by ByteDance in 2017 and subsequently transformed into the app TikTok (Abidin, 2020; Gamir-Ríos & Sánchez-Castillo, 2022). Since, TikTok has become one of the fastest growing mobile applications (Chen et al., 2019), reaching a total number of one billion downloads in February 2019 (Miao et al., 2023) and almost continuously holding the top spot of downloaded apps up to present (Sensor Tower, 2022). Next to download numbers, TikTok's immense popularity also manifests itself through frequency of use. A third of users of TikTok's Chinese counterpart Douyin state using the platform more than three times a day (Lu et al., 2020). Fang and colleagues (2019) even argue that TikTok leads to an *anesthetic* effect, providing a continuous stream of content and maintaining users' curiosity needs, leading to a lasting immersion and thus, consuming a lot of users' time.

As Zulli and Zulli (2022) put it, "scholarship on TikTok is still in its infancy" (p. 1875). Thus far, research on the platform has been conducted investigating the spread of public health messages (Basch et al., 2022; Egtesadi & Florea, 2020; Kennedy, 2020), personality and psychology of users (Kumar & Prabha, 2019; Omar & Dequan, 2020), uses of humor (Y. Wang, 2020) as well as uses for student (Pavlik, 2020) and scientific public engagement (C. Hayes et al., 2020) among others. If research on TikTok can be considered sparse in general, the topic of political communication and news on the platform remains especially understudied (Del Rosso, 2021; Gamir-Ríos & Sánchez-Castillo, 2022). The lack of research on political content on TikTok might be simply due to the small quantity of news and political content on the platform in general (Lu et al., 2020; Shutsko, 2020). Another possible reason lies in the fact that, even though TikTok has grown more diverse since the rebranding from Musical.ly and

evolved into a sort of “video encyclopedia” (Zhang, 2021, p. 233), users’ main motivation to consume TikTok remains entertainment (Lu & Lu, 2019; Lu et al., 2020). Moreover, political communication remains rather rare on TikTok as the platform does not allow for paid political advertising (Papakyriakopoulos et al., 2022). Thus far, the subject of political news content on TikTok has been studied in the context of hashtag activism (Le Compte & Klug, 2021; Vizcaíno-Verdú & Aguaded, 2022; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2020), regarding climate change (Brown et al., 2022; Hautea et al., 2021), the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Abbas et al., 2022), political sarcasm in Indonesia (Abdullah et al., 2022) and partisan users’ videos in the US (Medina Serrano et al., 2020). The use of TikTok for political campaigning has been quite extensively studied in the national case of Spain (Cervi et al., 2021; Cervi & Marín-Lladó, 2021; Gamir-Ríos & Sánchez-Castillo, 2022; López Fernández, 2022), but remains unexplored in other contexts.

As argued by Zulli and Zulli (2022), due to the apps unique structure, TikTok content can be seen as *memetic text*. If the term *meme* was introduced as early as 1976 to describe units of cultural transmission or imitation (Dawkins, 1976), it is nowadays used mostly in terms of memes on social media. According to Shifman (2013), internet memes in general can be defined as “(a) a group of digital items sharing common characteristics of content, form, and/or stance, which (b) were created with awareness of each other, and (c) were circulated, imitated, and/or transformed via the Internet by many users” (pp. 7-8). For the special case of TikTok, Del Rosso (2021) defines a TikTok meme as “the use of popular audio or style” (p. 105), such as lip-syncing or dancing to popular songs, using filters and making video reactions or duets with other users. Even if scholars like Zeng and Abidin (2021) argue that internet memes can have “significant social, cultural, and political merit” (p. 2462), they still tend to be perceived as trivial or insignificant. If the utilization of memes slowly evolves from solely being present in younger publications such as *BuzzFeed* to also occasionally being employed by mainstream

outlets such as the *Daily Mail* (Hill & Bradshaw, 2019), legacy media still mainly rely on other forms of representation to convey news. Further, Peters and Allan (2022) point out the possible dangers of memes through what they call *memetic weaponization*, which they stress should be avoided by professional journalist in order not to perpetuate these forms of othering and discrimination. Based on these findings, the hypothesis regarding the second research question is stated as follows:

H2: Political news content posted by users contains more memetic qualities than content posted by legacy media sources.

Methods

Sampling procedure

The hypotheses were tested by conducting a quantitative content analysis of 200 TikTok's with 100 each being posted by users as well as legacy media sources. In order to facilitate the sampling procedure, videos with the hashtag *#ukraine* were searched to already ensure a relatively high share of political news content when selecting videos to be included in the sample. The topic of the Ukrainian war was chosen as to represent political news content because the subject is general enough that enough users would also post original content regarding this topic. Further, the topic presented itself as favorable for the analysis as it does not just constitute one single event in the past, but, at the time of the sampling, is still ongoing, thus ensuring a sample of relatively recent postings. Moreover, the Ukrainian war has gained comparatively high amount of attention in Western media, so a large enough sample of English-language content could be ensured.

The sample thus consisted of the 200 'top' TikTok videos containing the hashtag *#ukraine*. As the permanent storing of the videos proved to be difficult and time consuming due to the fact that download using API was not possible and therefore videos had to be downloaded one by one, videos were assessed for their fit in the sample before being downloaded. The 200 videos constituting the sample as well as 20 additional videos used in the pre-test were downloaded on May 14, 2023.

Yet, as the 'top' video feed provided by TikTok does not supply an infinite number of videos but cuts off at what was estimated to be about 300 videos, not enough videos posted by legacy media could be procured through the use of solely the hashtag *#ukraine*. For this reason, other hashtags were added in order to receive a new list of top videos as to ensure a large enough sample size. Ultimately, 15 videos could be obtained solely using the hashtag *#ukraine*,

36 more through adding the hashtag *#news* as well as 57 by adding the hashtag *#worldnews*. It also has to be mentioned that the ‘top’ videos provided by the platform do not necessarily have to be the most popular ones, as in terms of absolute interaction rates. It could also be noted that very recent, but comparatively unpopular videos were included in the list of top videos, which leads to the assumption that the TikTok algorithm does not only consider the most popular, but also the fastest growing videos at a certain time point for the top videos.

Further, as already mentioned, only English-language videos were included. Specifically, this comprises videos with no spoken or written word, videos in other languages that included a simultaneous translation into English as well as continuously English-language videos. Moreover, only videos that directly (through words) or indirectly (through imagery) referenced the war were included into the sample. For example, a video about the Eurovision song contest was included as it mentioned that Ukraine could not host due to the war, but another video covering the song contest was excluded as no statement referencing the war was made.

Sample

The sample proved to be rather varied when it comes to the source accounts, further proving the platforms promotion of individual content items rather than whole accounts being popular. The 100 user videos were posted by a total of 71 users, with only 7 accounts showing up more than once in the sample (representing about a third of videos). The most popular account named *soldierukrainewin* made up for 19 percent of the sample. This account tends to post content that follows a very specific style, comprised of 8 to 16 seconds long clips showing Ukrainian soldiers during their everyday life at the front line, mostly underlaid with sentimental ballad-style music. In contrast, the sample of legacy media sources only comprised 29 different accounts, showing that the popularity of individual content items is linked more strongly to the

account for legacy media than it is for other users. The account that was the most present in the sample is *The Sun*, a British tabloid newspaper, accounting for 22 percent of the sample. The fact, that a major part of the sample is therefore made up of a tabloid source that does not necessarily adhere to the same quality standards as other news organizations, has to be kept in mind when evaluating the results.

Further, it has to be noted that the type of content posted by user versus legacy media sources was quite different. While half of the videos posted by users were solely comprised of music on the auditive level, this was only the case for 3 percent of the legacy media sample. Additionally, only 30 percent of user videos only contained spoken words as compared to 74 percent of legacy media videos. Further, 16 percent of user videos as well as 6 percent of legacy media videos contained both, music and voice, and 4 percent of user versus 15 percent of legacy media content contained other sounds (such as gunshots or missiles being fired). Finally, two videos in the legacy media sample were completely mute. Regarding the visual type of content, users and legacy media proved to be more similar, with both posting primarily video content with visible faces (66 percent of user and 83 percent of legacy media videos). Video content without faces made up for 29 percent of the contents posted by users as compared to 17 percent of the ones posted by legacy media organizations. Lastly, in the user sample four content items were only comprised of static photographs as well as one of animated imagery.

Moreover, even if the unequal sampling procedure using one versus multiple hashtags lead to more legacy media videos situated higher in the list of top videos being analyzed, the user videos achieved higher interaction rates than the legacy media content. Content posted by users achieved about 840 000 likes on average, by contrast, legacy media content only reached an average of about 170 000 likes per video. By contrast, the difference regarding comments was much less pronounced, with an average of around 11 000 comments per user video and 6 000 comments on legacy media videos.

Variables

To conduct the quantitative content analysis, a codebook was developed containing, firstly, the independent variable, thus the dichotomy of user versus legacy media sources, as well as identifiers such as a consecutive number, date of publishing as well as the account name. Further, the interaction rates (likes and comments) as well as the type of auditive and visual content were coded as to better understand the composition of the sample. Moreover, the length of each video was analyzed as a control variable, based on the assumption that potentially more emotions as well as journalistic markers could be present in longer videos. Yet, statistical analysis using a generalized linear model showed that even with video length as a control variable, the main results still hold true.

The news representation style of the content (H1a) was operationalized using two variables, tone and emotions, based on Cervi and colleagues (2021). For tone, the original three expressions of the variable – *informative*, *expressive*, and *appellative* – were complemented by a fourth, namely *humorous*. The coding of emotions was based on the facial action coding system proposed by Ekman and Friesen (1978) containing the six basic emotions *anger*, *fear*, *sadness*, *joy*, *disgust* and *surprise* as well the two options for a neutral expression and for the case that no face was visible in the video. In the final comparison between user and legacy media videos, the number of emotions was compared, with neutral being considered no emotion and videos without face being excluded from the statistical analysis.

The markers of professional journalism (H1b) were operationalized, firstly, as news values and, secondly, as journalistic quality criteria. The news values were coded based on the contemporary news values proposed by Harcup and O'Neill (2017) that represent an adaptation and addition to the ten original news values identified by Galtung and Ruge (1965). However, the codebook only comprised a reduced list of those news values as some were either never (*good news*) or always applicable (*relevance*, *magnitude*, *bad news*, and *conflict*) when it comes

to the topic of war. Further, *shareability* was excluded as to always being the case on the platform TikTok. Moreover, *follow-up* and *news organizations agenda* were also not included in the codebook due to those values referring to a news item in the context of prior coverage, whereas this study only looked into single news items. This left the news values *power elite*, *celebrity*, *entertainment*, *surprise*, *drama*, *exclusivity*, and *audio-visuals* to be included in the codebook. In regards to the journalistic quality criteria, the coding was based on the categorization presented by Bachmann and colleagues (2022). The variable comprised the expressions *relevance*, *contextualization*, and *diversity*. Moreover, the criterion *professionalism*, as proposed by Bachmann and colleagues (2022), was split into two separate criteria, *objectivity*, and *transparency*, as this seemed to better be applicable to the context of TikTok.

The memetic qualities of the content (H2) were assessed through two variables, firstly the auditive and secondly the visual features. Auditive features comprised music, non-musical sound, voice filters as well as read aloud filters, while visual features included text stickers, image stickers, green screen, duets, and surveys. For all these features it was coded whether or not they were present in the content item.

For the variables *emotions*, *news values* and *quality criteria*, it was deemed appropriate to code up to the first three expressions present in the content, as to not further complicate the coding process. Yet, as later found in the analysis, the vast majority contain even less than three of either expression, therefore the impact of this quantitative limitation can be assumed to be minor. Further, for all dependent variables a coding option for content that was not clearly assignable was established with these contents later being excluded from the main analysis.

Intercoder reliability test

Before the main analysis, a pre-test of the codebook was conducted, consisting of about 10 percent of the actual sample, as proposed by Lombard and colleagues (2002). For both, user and legacy media sources, ten videos were drawn randomly from the 110 downloaded videos and analyzed by two coders. The videos used in the pre-test were later excluded from the main sample.

In order to evaluate intercoder reliability, the Holsti coefficient (r_H) as well as Krippendorff's alpha (α) (A. F. Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007) were calculated. In regard to identification and content type, the variables proved to be almost unequivocal, however, concerning the dependent variables, the results were mixed, with some expressions performing very poorly regarding the alpha value. However, Krippendorff's alpha is known to be a very rigorous measurement, especially, when it comes to variables that are very rare, as it was the case in this reliability test, with most of the variables only being coded as present once or twice. Remedying that through drawing a sample in which all variables would be sufficiently represented, as proposed by Krippendorff (2004), was not possible as this would contradict the random drawing of the sample.

Additionally, as stressed by Raupp and Vogelgesang (2009), some variables inherently leave a bigger margin of discretion to the coders and should thus not be evaluated with conventional thresholds for reliability. Rather, the reliability scores should be compared to the ones achieved in previous studies. When testing intercoder reliability for news values, for example, Raupp and Vogelgesang (2009) also attained alpha results that would be deemed very poor regarding traditional thresholds. For these reasons, it was considered appropriate not to fundamentally change or exclude the variables due to the poor pre-test results, but rather to add more extensive explanations and clarifications to the codebook. The final codebook used in the main analysis can be found in the appendix, the results of the intercoder reliability test as well

as the means and standard deviations of the scale variables can be found in the table below (Table 1).

	<i>Variable</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Expressions</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>r_H</i>	<i>α</i>
Identification	Source	-	-	User	-	-	100%	1.000
				News medium	-	-		
	Consecutive numbering	-	-	Metric	-	-	100%	1.000
	Publication date	-	-	Year-Month-Day	-	-	100%	1.000
	Account name	-	-	-	-	-	100%	1.000
Interaction rates	Likes	501 830.98	1 401 746.26	Metric	-	-	100%	1.000
	Comments	8 686.20	14 389.30	Metric	-	-	100%	1.000
Type of content	Auditory	-	-	Music	-	-	95%	.9225
				Voice	-	-		
				Music and voice	-	-		
				Other	-	-		
				No sound	-	-		
				Not assignable	-	-		
	Visual	-	-	Video recording with face	-	-	90%	.8194
				Video recording without face	-	-		
				Static image	-	-		
				Animated video	-	-		
				Animated static image	-	-		
				Text only	-	-		
				Other	-	-		
				Not assignable	-	-		
Use of memetic features	Auditory	.3700	.53341	Music	.30	.457	95%	.8777
				Sound (non-musical)	.07	.256	95%	.6486
				Voice filter	.00	.000	-	-
				Read-aloud filter	.01	.071	100%	1.000
				None	.65	.477	90%	.7857
	Visual	.8500	.67808	Text sticker	.69	.462	75%	.3011
				Image sticker	.09	.280	95%	.0000
				Image filter	.02	.122	-	-
				Green screen	.04	.196	100%	1.000
				Video duets	.02	.122	100%	1.000
				Surveys	.00	.000	-	-
				None	.28	.453	80%	.3906
News presentation style	Tone	-	-	Informative	-	-	60%	.4574
				Expressive	-	-		
				Appellative	-	-		
				Humorous/sarcastic	-	-		
				Not assignable	-	-		
	Emotions	.3172	.48166	No face in video	.25	.437	100%	1.0000
				Anger	.02	.140	-	-
				Fear	.02	.122	-	-
				Sadness	.03	.171	100%	1.0000
				Joy	.15	.358	90%	.4583
				Disgust	.00	.000	-	-
				Surprise	.02	.122	95%	.0000
				Neutral	.50	.501	95%	.9003
				Not assignable	.02	.140	-	-

Markers of professional journalism	News values	.6700	.61071	No news values	.40	.492	75%	.4444
				Power elite	.37	.484	90%	.6953
				Celebrity	.02	.140	95%	.0000
				Entertainment	.11	.320	85%	-.0541
				Surprise	.02	.140	85%	.3314
				Drama	.08	.264	95%	.0000
				Exclusivity	.00	.000	-	-
				Audio-Visuals	.07	.256	90%	.7357
				Not assignable	.00	.000	-	-
	Journalistic quality	.4650	.81984	No quality criteria	.70	.457	70%	.3571
				Relevance	.04	.208	85%	.4935
				Contextualization	.07	.256	90%	.6176
				Objectivity	.08	.264	95%	.0000
				Transparency	.21	.412	75%	-.1143
				Diversity	.07	.247	-	-
				Not assignable	.00	.000	85%	-.0541

Table 1. Means, standard deviations and pre-test results.

Results

The statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS. Regarding emotions, news values, quality criteria and memetic features, in order to facilitate comparison via t-tests, new variables were computed that represented the number of present expressions of the variables rather than each expression being its own dichotomous variable (*present/not present*). Moreover, a chi squared test was employed concerning tone, as this represented the only nominal variable. Further, simple frequency analyses were conducted in order to better contextualize and possibly explain the results obtained.

News presentation style

A chi-square test of independence showed that there is a significant association between the type of source and the tone of the video ($\chi^2 (3, 156) = 33.104, p < .001$). Specifically, whereas both videos contained around an equal share of content expressing emotions or opinions, with 38 user and 35 legacy media videos, legacy media content was more frequently informative, with 38 percent as compared to 16 percent of user contents. Vice versa, humor or sarcasm accounted for a big part of user content (24 percent), while not being present at all in legacy media videos. Lastly, contents that called to action were rare in both samples, with three user and two legacy media videos exhibiting an appellative tone.

Regarding the number of emotions present in each video, an independent-samples t-test revealed that users ($M = .4219, SD = .49776$) show significantly more emotions than legacy media sources ($M = .2346, SD = .45474$) ($t(143) = 2.337, p = .021$). Approximately half (56 percent) of facial expressions in user videos were neutral, thus showing no emotions, as compared to about three quarters (76 percent) in legacy media videos. Surprisingly, in view of the topic being war, the emotion that was the most often present in both samples was joy, with

about 26 percent of people in user contents and 16 percent of people visible in legacy media videos. Other emotions were only marginally present in both samples, with anger making up for about 5 percent of user videos and around 1 percent for legacy media. Fear was shown also shown in approximately 5 percent of user contents, but not present at all in the legacy media sample, while sadness made up for about 3 percent of user and 5 percent of legacy media content. Surprise was shown in around 3 percent of videos posted by users compared to around 1 percent regarding legacy media. Disgust was not present in neither of the two samples. Finally, these results lead to the acceptance of *H1a: Political news content posted by users is more affective while content posted by legacy media sources is more informative.*

Markers of professional journalism

In order to see if there is a difference between user and legacy media videos on TikTok regarding news values, an independent-samples t-test was conducted ($t(198) = -4.619, p < .001$), showing that user videos ($M = .4800, SD = .62732$) feature significantly less news values than videos posted by legacy media sources ($M = .8600, SD = .53220$). While only 22 percent of legacy media content did not reflect any news values, this was the case for the majority (59 percent) of user videos. Further, the news value *power elite* proved to be predominant in the legacy media sample with 60 percent of videos reflecting this value, but only comprised a rather small share in the user sample (14 percent). On the other hand, the news value that was the most frequent among users (23 percent), *entertainment*, was not reflected in the legacy media contents at all. Moreover, the news value *drama* made up for a fair share of legacy media contents with 14 percent, yet, was only found once in the user sample. Striking *audio-visuals* could be detected as a news value in 9 percent of legacy media videos as compared to 5 percent of user videos. In addition, the news values *surprise* (3 percent of user and 1 percent of legacy

media videos) and *celebrity* (2 percent each) proved to be rare in both samples. Lastly, the news value of *exclusivity* was not present in either of the samples.

Further, the independent-samples t-test found a significant difference ($t(198) = -4.027$, $p < .001$) between users ($M = .2400$, $SD = .66848$) and legacy media ($M = .6900$, $SD = .89550$) in regards to the number of journalistic quality criteria. While the vast majority of user videos (86 percent) did not contain any journalistic quality features at all, this was only the case for about half of the legacy media TikToks (55 percent). The most frequent quality criteria in both samples proved to be *transparency*, with 35 percent of legacy media videos and 8 percent of user videos explicitly stating their sources. Moreover, the criterion *objectivity* was detected in 10 percent of legacy media contents compared to 5 percent of user contents, whereas *diversity* was present in 8 legacy media videos versus 5 user videos. Lastly, 7 percent of content items in each sample provided background information, thus reflecting the criterion *contextualization*. Based on these results, the hypothesis *H1b: Political news content posted by users contains less markers of professional journalism than content posted by legacy media sources* is accepted.

Memetic qualities

An independent-samples t-test was conducted in order to establish potential differences in memetic qualities of user versus legacy media content on TikTok. Regarding auditive memetic qualities ($t(198) = 8.708$, $p < .001$), a significantly higher number of features was present in user videos ($M = .6500$, $SD = .57516$) as compared to legacy media contents ($M = .0900$, $SD = .28762$). Specifically, with 53 percent of videos, user content contained a far higher amount of memetic music features, compared to only 6 percent of legacy media videos. Memetic non-musical sound was utilized considerably less in both samples with 11 percent of user and 3 percent of legacy media videos. The whole sample contained no voice filters at all

as well as only one utilization of the read aloud filter which was employed in a user video. Lastly, only 40 percent of the content items in the user sample did not use any auditive memetic features at all, in contrast to the vast majority of legacy media videos (91 percent).

Concerning the number of visual memetic features present in the videos, the independent-samples t-test ($t(198) = 1.253$, $p = .212$) did not show a significant difference between users ($M = .9100$, $SD = .82993$) and legacy media sources ($M = .7900$, $SD = .47768$). In both samples, text stickers were by far the most utilized: About a third of user videos (63 percent) employed this visual memetic feature, compared to around three quarters (76 percent) of legacy media contents. In contrast, image stickers were more popular among users (16 percent) than among legacy media (1 percent). Similarly, green screen was used in six user videos compared to two legacy media videos. Moreover, image filters as well as duets were only employed in the user sample (3 percent each) and surveys were not present in the sample at all. Lastly, about a third (33 percent) of user contents and about a fourth (24 percent) of legacy media contents did not use any visual memetic features at all. Consequently, the last hypothesis *H2: Political news content posted by users contains more memetic qualities than content posted by legacy media sources* can only be partially supported as this is the case for auditive memetic features, but not for visual memetic qualities.

Discussion

Nowadays, as political news dissemination and consumption has largely moved into the digital realm, notably social media platforms, countless studies address this evolution, exploring for example the risks of filter bubbles or fake news. Moreover, while user-generated news content has been researched quite intensively regarding its implementation in legacy media's online content or concerning specific citizen journalism websites, it has rarely been studied in the context of social media. However, due to the lack of journalistic regulatory frameworks, it seems especially relevant to explore news content not only consumed and disseminated, but also produced by social media users. While users could in general act as producers of news items on all social media platforms, this phenomenon seems to be most prevalent on newer platforms such as TikTok, as the platforms structure encourages interaction with content rather than with users (Zulli & Zulli, 2022), thus inciting a (re-)production of news contents instead of just liking, sharing or commenting. For this reason, a study of political news contents on TikTok was eventuated with the aim of exploring potential differences between legacy medias and conventional users' news production habits on social media.

While many studies draw attention to the changing nature of journalism towards a more affective, emotional and engaged reporting over the last years and especially in the digital sphere (Beckett, 2015; Hasell & Weeks, 2016; Orgeret, 2020; Peters, 2011), the results of the effectuated content analysis show that traditional professional ideals of neutrality and rationalism in journalism still persevere when compared to news reporting by non-professional individuals. Hence, in line with findings by Carpenter (2008) and Rogstad (2014), journalistic sources tend towards an informative style of news reporting. On the other hand, non-professional sources seem to prefer an affective and humorous rendering of political news that

also includes showing more emotions, thus underpinning the findings by Kopp and Schönhagen (2008) and Holt and Karlsson (2015).

Furthermore, the present study revealed that legacy media content on TikTok comprises more news values than contents posted by users, with the most frequent news value by far being *power elite*, which in this sample predominantly meant referring to (former) heads of state, such as Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Vladimir Putin, Joe Biden or Donald Trump. This further confirms findings by Bednarek (2016), García-Perdomo and colleagues (2018) as well as Seyidov and Artan Özoran (2020) listing *eliteness* as one of the most important news values in the online presence of legacy media outlets. In addition, *entertainment* being found as the most prevalent news value in the user sample further confirms Medina Serrano and colleagues' (2020) notion of TikTok's rendering of politics as entertainment. Moreover, the present study also found that the videos posted by legacy media organizations exhibit more journalistic quality criteria than user videos. This shows that, even if many scholars argue that the transfer of journalistic production into the digital realm leads to a decline in quality standards (Neuberger, 2014; Sanchez Gonzales & Méndez Muros, 2015), there is still a net distinction between profession journalists and users who have not been trained to conform to these standards (Carpenter, 2008). However, in this regard it also has to be pointed out that, if users do not comply with professional journalistic quality criteria, they may adhere to other sorts of quality standards, such as connections with the community, social engagement, or providing opportunities for dialogue (Peters, 2011; Schaffer, 2007), therefore "creating their own professional etiquette" (Robinson & DeShano, 2011, p. 978).

Lastly, the quantitative content analysis also showed that, while users tend to employ more auditive memetic features in their political news TikTok's than legacy media sources, no difference could be found regarding visual memetic qualities. While the present study does not allow for a reliable evaluation of reasons for this finding due to the quantitative nature of the

analysis, some possible explanatory approaches can be derived from existing research. Firstly, while conventional memes on other social media platforms, so called “image macros” (Morger, 2020, p. 131) consisting of a static image accompanied by one or two pieces of texts, are mostly exclusively visual, TikTok memes, on the other hand, function primarily on the auditive level, for example through lip-syncing or dancing to popular songs (Del Rosso, 2021).

Another possible approach for reasoning lies in the fact that by far the most frequent visual feature found in the sample were text stickers. If these stickers were referred to in this thesis as a visual *memetic* quality due to them often serving as such through a reinterpretation of a set text with an original video, they, for the most part, did not serve a memetic purpose in the sense that the text would reproduce, imitate or transform other contents (Dawkins, 1976; Shifman, 2013). Instead, the vast majority of text stickers were used in a way similar to a title or header in print journalism or as a sort of subtitle to visualize the spoken words. Interestingly, this tendency to utilize the novel feature of the modern social media platform in the common ways of traditional print or TV journalism, was not only found in the legacy media sample, but also in the user sample. This could be seen as an indication for a mutual influence between the ‘new’, unconventional way of news production on social media and the ‘old’ journalistic conventions stemming from other platforms of news dissemination like TV or print media.

Limitations

While contributing to a deeper understanding of the similarities and differences of legacy media’s and users’ political news production on social media, this study has several limitations. The first limitation, inherent to all research on social media, lies in the fact that the algorithm employed by the TikTok platform is not transparent to the researcher. For this reason, even if a standardized approach to the two samples was employed at the best possible degree, it cannot be ruled out that certain factors, e.g., digital metadata or location, impacted the

selection of ‘top’ videos. In the same vein, the analysis showed that the list of ‘top’ videos is not only ranked by the popularity, but that other factors such as recency also play a part, however, it was not possible to assess in which way or to which degree this was the case. This fact is deemed especially problematic as the sampling procedure was further limited due to the insufficient number of legacy media videos and the subsequent addition of hashtags for this sample. Due to the lack of transparency regarding the TikTok algorithm, the extent of significance of this inequality in the sampling procedure can hardly be evaluated.

A further limitation in reliability is resulting from the nature of most of the studied variables that leave a certain scope for interpretation, even if extensive coding instructions were established after the reliability test in order to keep subjectivity as low as possible. However, in particular due to the fact that the main analysis was effectuated by a single coder, it is possible that a certain bias is present in the analysis. Yet, even though this may influence the descriptive results, it can be assumed that the statistical differences between the legacy media and user content would still hold true, as both samples would be biased to a relatively equal degree. Moreover, the codebook presents the limitation that certain variables lack discriminatory power due to the fact that they were derived from different sources. This concerns especially the variable *tone* in relation to certain expressions of the other variables (in particular the news value *entertainment* or the quality criteria *objectivity*). This also sometimes led to the variables appearing conflicting in certain cases in regard to the hypothesized outcomes. For example, the utilization of humor would lead to the classification as *humorous* tone, expected to be associated with user content, as well as the coding of the news value *entertainment*, with a higher number of news values hypothesized to be present in legacy media videos. Moreover, a more differentiated coding scheme would have been favorable concerning the variable *quality criteria*, as the absence of these standards was, in most cases, due to the brevity of the videos or the lack of spoken word. For this reason, the assessment of journalistic

quality in future studies should distinguish between the mere absence and the actual violation of the defined criteria.

Lastly, the study also presents some limitation in regard to validity, due to the content constituting the legacy media sample. In the vast majority of cases, these videos did not seem to be produced specifically for the platform TikTok, but rather represented mere extracts from television news broadcasting. For this reason, the present research might be more seen as a comparison between television broadcasters' and social media users' political news production processes and less as a comparison between legacy media's and users' news content on social media. However, in order to explore the latter, one most possibly would have to forgo the drawing of a random sample and likely opt for a study of certain accounts rather than a certain topic.

Implications

In addition to most legacy media not producing specific content for TikTok, the findings that professional journalistic content is less affective and contains less auditive memetic features account for the fact that legacy publishing houses do not use the platforms mechanisms to their full potential. For example, as Berger (2011) as well as Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan (2013) show, affective and emotionally charged contents are shared more often on social media than neutral ones. A potential reason lies in the fact that professional journalists do not yet know how to utilize these mechanisms, possibly due to their novelty to the platform or age difference compared to younger users. On the other hand, it is also possible that journalists are indeed aware, but refrain from tapping into the platforms mechanisms as they seem opposed to traditional journalistic ideals. Though, as Carpenter (2008) points out, such principles also confine the journalistic practice, and what may be, in contrast, needed is a rethinking of quality standards in the digital realm. For example, Beckett (2015) argues that while journalists in

traditional newsrooms would aim to render inherently emotional events in an objective and formulaic way due to ideals of journalistic quality, modern forms of journalism tend to employ more affective narratives in order to elicit an emotional audience response that in turn leads to emotion driven sharing of the news content.

A rethinking of journalistic practice in the context of social media is especially relevant, as current phenomena like the *News finds me perception* (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2017; Song et al., 2020) and news avoidance (Aharoni et al., 2021; Boukes & Vliegenthart, 2017) lead to political news not being actively sought out any more, but only incidentally encountered on social media (Matthes et al., 2020). Yet, as several studies show (Dimitrova et al., 2014; Reiter & Matthes, 2021; Shehata & Strömbäck, 2021), these incidental encounters are not effective in providing the users with sufficient political knowledge. In not catering for the evolving frameworks, in regard to technological innovations as well as changing consumption habits through social media, current journalism fails its essential role in democracy which is to create informed citizens (Wall, 2015). As this study shows, simple reproductions of traditional journalistic contents on the novel platforms do not resonate with the younger audiences present on these platforms, as denote the lower interaction rates in comparison to user-created content. However, reaching these audiences is primordial in terms of informing not only current but also *emerging* citizens as to ensure the continuation of a functioning democratic society in the future. In order to do so, modern journalists will need to adapt or even turn away from traditional practices and ideals and instead produce social media content that caters to the platforms' features as well as the users' consumption habits.

On the other hand, user-generated news content seems to better account for these evolutions, thus addressing audiences that traditional journalism fails to reach. Thus, in the future the primordial role to create informed citizens in democratic society might not only rely on professional journalists anymore, but also on ordinary citizens creating and disseminating

news to their peers. As Konieczna and colleagues (2018) point out, user-generated news content “puts citizens in the position of being co-creators of the worlds they inhabit” (p. 5). While traditional journalistic routines negatively affect the diversity of content and information that is publicly available (Carpenter, 2008), citizen journalists offer a different perspective, thus featuring a greater diversity of topics and sources due to the lack of professional routines (Carpenter, 2010). Even if the present study did not find more diversity in users’ as compared to legacy media’s content (most probably as a result of diversity being evaluated *within* and not across the single news items), a heavy reliance on power elite sources could be found in the legacy media sample, which was not the case for the user sample. This leads to the assumption that the emergence of social media users as actors in news production entails a certain re-distribution of visibility in the sense of a shift away from the predominance of traditional figures of power to a more balanced state in which more people get to be represented in the news landscape. Moreover, this finding also shows that professionals and non-professionals in news production do not necessarily hold the same standards of what is deemed newsworthy, further putting into question the traditional role of journalists as gatekeepers who decide which news items merit being passed on to the general public. While some stress the importance of safeguarding the integrity of traditional routines effectuated by trained professionals, others emphasize the advantages of easing restrictions at the gates of publishing towards a more participatory news production process (Lewis et al., 2010).

As argued by Robinson and DeShano (2011), “‘knowledge’ does not have to be informed merely by institutionally approved facts, but can also derive from perspectives, opinions, rumor and other kinds of information products” (p. 975). In this sense, user-generated news content offers an important alternative to traditional news sources, that may enrich public discourse (Holt & Karlsson, 2015), encourage citizens participation in public debate (Manosevitch & Tenenboim, 2017) and boost political engagement (Lee et al., 2022; Pain,

2018). While this leads to researches such as Nah and colleagues (2015) highlighting “the importance of ordinary citizens as citizen journalists who contribute to news production and the conversation of democracy” (p. 411), one also has to keep in mind the concerns arising regarding standards of veracity and accountability (Carpenter, 2008; Chung et al., 2018), even more so as social media users are especially prone to disseminate mis- and disinformation (Kapantai et al., 2021), but, at the same time, also more credible to their peers than legacy media (Tandoc, 2019).

In conclusion, through an analysis of users’ and legacy media’s political news contents on TikTok, this study shows that traditional ideals and practices still prevail for professional journalists, whereas citizen users cater more heavily to the social media platforms features and mechanisms, therefore also reaching a larger audience. Future research should thus address the issue of how news production on social media could be practiced in the future in order to reach all citizens while still ensuring certain quality standards necessary to democratic society.

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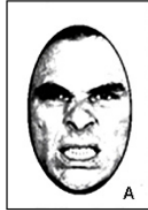
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Appendix (Codebook)

	<i>Variable</i>	<i>Expressions</i>	<i>Description</i>
IDENTIFICATION	Source	User	The videos are posted by users without affiliation to a news medium
		News medium	The videos are posted by news media, that are described as such by popular search engines (i.e., Google) and are verified by TikTok (i.e., check mark icon)
	Consecutive numbering	Metric	Consecutive number from 1 to 110 for user and media content each (excluding the 10 videos each used in the pre-test)
	Publication date	Year-Month-Day	As displayed by TikTok; note: The current year (2023) is not displayed, recent videos are only marked as ' <i>x days ago</i> ' (the videos were downloaded on the 14 th of May)
	Account name	-	The unique permanent account name in the upper line, printed in bold
INTERACTION RATES	Likes	Metric	Absolute number of likes
	Comments	Metric	Absolute number of comments
TYPE OF CONTENT	Auditory	Music	The content contains primarily music; other sounds are marginal
		Voice	The content contains primarily spoken words; other sounds are marginal
		Music and voice	The content contains music and spoken words
		Other	The content contains other sounds without music or spoken words
		No sound	The content has no sound
		Not assignable	A clear categorization is not possible
	Visual	Video recording with face	The content consists primarily of a video recording containing

			people of which the face is clearly visible;
		Video recording without face	The content consists primarily of a video recording without people/with people of which the face is not visible (e.g., in the distance, filmed from behind)
		Static image	The content consists primarily of one or more static images; even if the content contains some movement (e.g., through zoom into the image or through a slideshow of several images) it is still coded as static image
		Animated video	The content consists primarily of an animated, moving image
		Animated static image	The content consists primarily of an animated, static image; even if the content contains some movement (e.g., through zoom into the image or through a slideshow of several images) it is still coded as animated, static image
		Text only	The content only contains text and no image
		Other	The content contains other visual features
		Not assignable	A clear categorization is not possible
USE OF MEMETIC CONTENT	Auditory	Music	The content contains music that was originally produced by somebody else (i.e., the content is <i>not</i> marked as containing original sound by the same user; rather the song title is displayed)
		Sound (non-musical)	The content contains sounds (e.g. spoken words) that were originally produced by

			somebody else (i.e., the content is <i>not</i> marked as containing original sound by the <i>same</i> user; rather the title of the original audio file is displayed or it is the original sound of content by <i>another</i> user)
		Voice filter	A filter is used to distort the voice
		Read-aloud filter	The text sticker is automatically read out loud
		None	The content is marked as containing original sound by the <i>same</i> user
	Visual	Text sticker	A text sticker is used; note: the text stickers can be distinguished from other text inherent to the content by the use of the font <i>Proxima Nova - Semibold</i>
		Image sticker	An image sticker is used; note: image stickers can be distinguished from green screen by being static, while the background is in motion
		Image filter	The content contains a visual filter distorting the image or adding to it (e.g., augmented reality)
		Green screen	Green screen is used; note: green screen can be distinguished from image stickers by the front image layer (most often people) being in motion
		Video duets	The content is made up of video duets where the screen is split in two, with both videos playing at the same time (e.g., reaction videos)
		Surveys	The content contains a sticker that allows for surveys amongst users
		None	The content contains no visual memetic content

CONTENT CHARACTERISTICS	Tone	Informative	Stating facts, objective presentation of information; note: neutral audio-visual representation
		Expressive	Expressing feelings and or opinions; note: emotionalizing audio-visual representation (e.g., through the use of sad music)
		Appellative	Direct or indirect call to action; note: not only addressed at the viewer but also at other actors
		Humorous/sarcastic	Use of humor, sarcasm, or satire; possibly through the humorously contrasting combination of image and text/image and sound
		Not assignable	A clear categorization is not possible
	Emotions <i>(Select maximum the first three)</i>	No face in video	The content does not contain a face/the face is not clearly visible
		Anger	 Note: Flared nostrils, anger wrinkles over the nose, frowned eyebrows
		Fear	 Note: Raised eyebrows, wide-open eyes, downturned mouth
		Sadness	 Note: Frowned eyebrows, downturned mouth

		Joy		Note: Smiling with an <i>open</i> mouth
		Disgust		Note: Frowned eyebrows, wrinkled nose, pursed lips
		Surprise		Note: Lifted eyebrows, wide-open eyes, <i>open</i> mouth
		Neutral		The facial expression is neutral
		Not assignable		The person is expressing emotion, but a clear categorization is not possible
	News values (<i>Select maximum the first three</i>)	No news values		The content does not contain any of the news values listed below
		Power elite		Stories concerning powerful individuals, organizations, institutions or corporations. Note: e.g., politicians, CEOs, etc.
		Celebrity		Stories concerning people who are already famous. Note: e.g., musicians, actors, etc.
		Entertainment		Soft stories concerning sex, showbusiness, sport, lighter human interest, animals, or offering opportunities for humorous treatment. Note: e.g., sarcasm
		Surprise		Stories that have an element of surprise, contrast and/or the unusual about them. Note: It has to be the surprising

			factor that makes the story newsworthy, just one surprising or odd statement does not suffice
		Drama	Stories concerning an unfolding drama such as escapes, accidents, searches, sieges, rescues, battles, or court cases. Note: The context of war itself is not deemed dramatic, only if specific dramatic events (e.g., exchanges of fire, people fleeing areas, etc.) are shown
		Exclusivity	Stories generated by, or available first to, the news organization as a result of interviews, letters, investigations, surveys, polls, and so on. Note: It has to be explicitly stated through text or spoken word that the information is exclusive
		Audio-Visuals	Stories that have arresting photographs, video, audio and/or which can be illustrated with infographics. Note: Posts which are deemed captivating because of the auditory of visual content and that lack other information/story
		Not assignable	A clear categorization is not possible
	Journalistic quality <i>(Select maximum the first three)</i>	No quality criteria	The post does not contain any of the quality criteria listed below.
		Relevance	The post reports about relevant societal processes rather than about individuals. and concentrates on important occurrences rather than featuring miscellaneous. Note: Individual stories are not

			deemed relevant, even if they might be exemplary for the situation at large. Relevant processes/events include e.g., political decision being announced, military operations etc.
		Contextualization	The post contextualizes socially relevant topics and presents substantial background information about current topics. Note: The background information has to be presented through spoken or written words.
		Objectivity	The post clearly distinguishes between news and opinions and focuses on arguments over emotions in their coverage. Note: Only applicable for posts containing spoken or written words as the distinguishment between information and opinions/emotions has to be stated through verbal markers by the reporter/user
		Transparency	The post presents the news source transparently. Note: The source has to be stated explicitly through spoken or written word
		Diversity	The post covers various perspectives and conveys diverse viewpoints and opinions. Note: At least to different people expressing varying opinions have to be included either directly or indirectly, i.e., through citations
		Not assignable	A clear categorization is not possible

Abstract

As not only the consumption and dissemination, but also the production of political news is increasingly happening on social media, users have emerged as active producers of news content alongside legacy media. By effectuating a quantitative content analysis of 200 TikTok videos featuring the hashtag *#ukraine*, the present study explores political news content posted by users compared to legacy media. The results indicate that legacy media content follows a more informative style of news presentation while user content is more affective and contains more emotions. Moreover, news items posted by legacy media featured more news values and more journalistic quality criteria than user-generated news content. Lastly, while legacy media content contained significantly less auditive memetic qualities in comparison to user videos, no difference could be found regarding visual memetic features. The findings shed a light on how traditional practices and ideals still prevail on social media for professional journalists whereas users tend to cater more heavily to the mechanisms and memetic features of the platform.

Keywords: *political news, social media, user-generated content, journalistic practices, memetic content*

Zusammenfassung

Da nicht nur der Konsum und die Verbreitung, sondern auch die Produktion von politischen Nachrichten immer mehr auf sozialen Medien stattfindet, haben sich neben etablierten Medien auch Nutzer zu aktiven Produzenten von Nachrichteninhalten entwickelt. Durch eine quantitative Inhaltsanalyse von 200 TikTok-Videos mit dem Hashtag *#ukraine* erforscht die vorliegende Studie politische Nachrichteninhalte, die von Nutzern gepostet wurden, im Vergleich mit solchen, die von etablierten Nachrichtenmedien veröffentlicht wurden. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass Inhalte etablierter Medien einen informativen Stil der Nachrichtenpräsentation aufweisen, während Nutzerinhalte eher affektiv sind und mehr Emotionen beinhaltet. Außerdem enthalten Videos etablierter Medien mehr Nachrichtenwerte und journalistische Qualitätskriterien als Nachrichteninhalte, die von Nutzern veröffentlicht wurden. Während Inhalte etablierter Medien im Vergleich zu Nutzervideos signifikant weniger auditive *memetische* Merkmale aufweisen, gibt es keinen Unterschied in Bezug auf visuelle *memetische* Merkmale. Diese Erkenntnisse machen deutlich, dass bei professionellen Journalisten auf sozialen Medien traditionelle Praktiken immer noch vorherrschen. Im Gegensatz dazu passen sich Nutzer stärker an die Mechanismen und die *memetischen* Eigenschaften der Plattform an.

Schlüsselwörter: politische Nachrichten, soziale Medien, Nutzer-generierte Inhalte, journalistische Praktiken, memetische Inhalte