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THE SECRET OF BUILDING A SUCCESSFUL PERSONAL BRAND IN
THE SOCIAL MEDIA WITHOUT ADVERTISEMENT

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Budapest, 2022

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INTRODUCTION

Selection of the topic

First of all, I chose this topic because I have my own experience with building a personal brand on social media platforms. More than one year ago now, I decided to start a network marketing business, which required strong social media presence. That is why, I decided to acquire all the knowledge which is indispensable for building a successful personal brand on several social media platforms. Although I am still building my network marketing business as well, my work as a content creator gave me several opportunities. For instance, several enterprises have visited my accounts and wanted to collaborate with me. Moreover, I am part of a company which deals with teaching French language to students, as well as giving them exercises for free, in the form of Facebook posts. I work as an editor and teacher too in this start-up, called Parle Binette. With my social media presence, I was able to obtain several new students for the company and for my own lessons as well. It is important to add that I achieved these successes completely relying on content creation, without paying for advertisements. More precisely, I have now more than 24.000 followers on TikTok, and more than 2200 followers on Instagram. Of course, success is relative and has a different meaning for everybody, but I believe that one can build a personal brand just by creating meaningful content on social media. Thus, I would like to dig deeper in this topic in my thesis.

Furthermore, I would like to pay close attention to the platform of TikTok, since I believe it has a growing influence nowadays. According to research, TikTok was once assigned as the “dancing app”, but now, it is viewed as one of the most popular social media platforms. TikTok has risen by 87.1% concerning the number of its users only in the year of the pandemic, in 2020. Additionally, in 2021, the number of users increased by an extra 18.3% as well (Latour, 2021). Moreover, a lot of people might not know, but TikTok was launched in 2016, but started to grow extremely fast from 2018. It overtook Twitter, Tumblr and LinkedIn already by the end of 2019. This earned TikTok the fourth place concerning the number of users, with approximately one billion accounts, after the most widespread Facebook, YouTube and Instagram (Geysler, 2022). However, in my opinion, the number of users cannot always be a proper indicator when trying to analyse the growth of a platform. Since Facebook was introduced a lot earlier than TikTok, it is better to look at the downloads of new apps, like TikTok. Not surprisingly, TikTok was the most downloaded app in 2020 and 2021 and also reached the highest quarterly downloads outside of China in the first quarter of 2020, with 318 million downloads (Iqbal, 2022).

From these figures, we can clearly see that TikTok is a significant social media site. As I mentioned, personally I had also the biggest successes on TikTok of the most popular social media platforms. Thus, I would like to emphasize the importance and the opportunity that TikTok can give to the people who would like to build a personal brand.

Research questions

Since I have been building my social media accounts for more than a year now, I have been considering several questions regarding a successful personal brand. First of all, my most important question was which is the best or most important social media platform when building a personal brand or the brand of a business? Is it incontestably TikTok or are there situations where Instagram is more important? It can also be interesting to regard these two as complementary platforms. Can TikTok and Instagram complement each other despite of the fact that they are owned by two different, competitive firms? If not, then do people have to build different follower bases on the two platforms? Taking this further, is it possible that only one social media platform is enough to build a personal brand, only TikTok or only Instagram? On the other hand, can we completely neglect Facebook which has the most users in the world? Lastly, but most importantly, is it possible to build a successful personal or business brand with a relevant follower base fully relying on content creation, completely without advertising? If yes, is it worth it? Does it take much more time to achieve success just by meaningful content than by paying for advertisements?

To summarize, I would like to investigate and answer these questions in my thesis because I believe the findings revealed can contribute to establishing a successful personal brand online.

Research objectives, hypothesis

According to my assumption and experience, I will consider the following possible answers to my research questions. I believe that TikTok is the most important platform if one would like to build a personal brand, however, we cannot neglect Instagram either, because it is true that most of the sales are still made on Instagram.

It is my firm belief Instagram and TikTok can fully complement each other, and we can build the same kind of follower base on both of them. However, I am convinced that establishing a follower base is much easier on TikTok than on Instagram. Thus a 10.000 follower base means almost nothing on TikTok, while the same number is considered as a very strong presence on Instagram. What is more, TikTok can help to build an Instagram follower base as well, since it is possible to redirect the followers from TikTok to Instagram hence killing two birds with one stone. Although these two platforms are owned by different firms, we can still link them and promote our Instagram content on TikTok. Nonetheless, in my view it is important not to

encourage too many people from TikTok to go to Instagram, because the algorithm of the previous one may not favour it. Besides, we can create the same content on both platforms, but the audience will react differently to a Reels video on Instagram than to a video on TikTok. I believe that the topics discussed on these platforms should be identical. For instance, in my mind, it is not worth building up a TikTok account for language learning, and an Instagram account as a travel blog. Personally, I communicate on both platforms about the three main topics of my personal brand: language learning, travelling with scholarships and network marketing. Thus, the contents of these two platforms are in line with each other.

From my perspective, it is possible to build a personal brand just with one platform, preferably TikTok, but is it not worth limiting the opportunities only to one social media site. It appears to me that at least the two major platforms, TikTok and Instagram are needed to make the most out of a personal brand. Nonetheless, I believe that we cannot fully neglect Facebook either. Personally, I experienced that on Facebook I have much less commitment from my followers or friends. It was not among my plans to build up a Facebook page with followers, thus I do not have a lot of achievements on Facebook. However, it is undeniable that a lot of people benefit from creating private Facebook groups for holding online courses there, and they can earn money and commitment with it. Therefore, Facebook is still among the most important social media sites for developing a personal brand.

Finally, in my opinion it is possible to build up several social media sites just by creating meaningful content for the people. In my view, it is easier to establish this follower base on TikTok because the advertisements are not that prevalent on that platform. Concerning Instagram, advertising is much more popular and can be more efficient as well. Although I have never used any advertisement, it might be possible that I could have obtained more followers on Instagram in a shorter time if I had decided to pay for announcements. However, the same is not true for TikTok, where organized and meaningful content creation can generate followers faster than paying for advertisements. Thus, I would like to emphasize the possibility of creating one's platforms on a low budget, without advertising, just by acquiring the necessary knowledge about how the algorithms work, why people watch a video or read a post and why they start to follow someone. If a one studies this and puts it into practice, it is easy to reach the people who will love their contents. What is more, in today's society, advertising can be so overwhelming that people even try to avoid it on purpose. According to my assumptions, in this case, if a content creator uses too much advertising, it can be even harmful for her profile. It is especially true on TikTok, where people are not used to seeing advertisements everywhere. On the contrary, if a personal brand is only built on creating the relevant content for the target

group, it can be even more appealing for the people, because they can see and appreciate the hard work which the content creator put into building up her social sites. Hence, I believe that establishing a personal brand fully without advertisement is not just a budget friendly solution but can result in even higher commitment from the side of the followers.

To sum it all up, my hypothesis will be the following. TikTok is the most important social media platform when building up a personal brand, where it is possible to establish a relevant follower base just by meaningful content creation, completely without advertising. Instagram is complementary to TikTok, they can be used together to build a successful personal brand, but currently it is TikTok where most of the potential is hiding.

Research methodology

To prove my hypothesis, I will use several resources concerning the topic and I will conduct a primary research as well.

First and foremost, I will study various resources, mainly books and online sources. I consider online sources a very useful way of studying a topic that is so dynamic and fast changing, because hardcopy books cannot change so fast as the social media platforms are changing. There is a possibility that tomorrow, a new feature of TikTok is launched, and one can find several online articles about it, but not a whole book or paper. That is why, I believe that in this topic, online articles and sources are inevitably important in order to get the most accurate knowledge in this field. In addition to online sources, I will study different books as well, which contain the basics of social media. These books include for example *The Definitive Guide to TikTok Advertising* by Marshall, Perry, Yu, Dennis, published in 2022. What is more, one of the most exciting readings is by Dave Miller, *Social Media Marketing: 3 books in one*, which is showing the reader how to grow business on Instagram, YouTube and TikTok. Lastly, *Hacks for TikTok* by Kyle Branch will be also a significant part of my studies.

In the second stage, I will conduct my primary research in this field. I will look at the analytics for my own followers on TikTok and on Instagram as well, to find out their motives for hitting the following button on my account. I will support my research with several kinds of data concerning where they found my videos or posts and what made them to follow. I would like to highlight in my thesis the different answers on TikTok and on Instagram, because I believe that the similarities or differences are essential to know on these platforms.

What is more, it is crucial to study not only my own account but other successful content creators' accounts as well. I would like to ask them to share their analytics with me concerning their followers, to get an insight to their motives as well. Fortunately, both platforms are aware of the importance of analytics in a business' life, hence they provide various charts, numbers

and evaluations on improvements through several time periods. For instance, it might be interesting to see, which video or post is the most popular and how many followers this content attracted. It is also essential to see the time period, both in an expanded time such as months and in a shorter period like the different times of the day. These figures are all necessary in order to study the evolution of a social media account.

In conclusion, I would like to use different research methods to be able to acquire the deepest knowledge possible on this topic.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Evolution of social media platforms

In the first place, the development of social media itself was due to the human desire to connect and communicate with each other. After, it was nourished by the evolution of information technology. Through the social media platforms, the users can establish a virtual world of communication while also support information, different concepts, and knowledge on these networking channels. Moreover, the growth of social media is also in relation with creating and sustaining personal connections to a huge degree (A Miami University Blog, 2021).

Additionally, although social media was designed to connect people, friends, and family online, now it has changed its role slightly. It has become an essential part of our daily lives that it is difficult to envision a day without it. Moreover, nowadays people even try to escape from these virtual platforms through the so-called “social media detox” (Drishti Ias Blog, 2022). On the contrary, if social media can help people stay in touch, why would someone need a social media detox? In fact, Madruga (2022) emphasizes that at this moment, networking platforms transformed into unfriendly places with drama, death threats and most importantly, advertisements. Beyond doubt, there is no platform completely lacking advertisements or the pressure to purchase a product or a service (Madruga, 2022). From my perspective, these changes forced people to avoid advertisements more and more. One of the means to do this is the above-mentioned social media detox.

The other side of the coin is, however, that social media has become a career opportunity as well. On one side, a few years after social media platforms were created, businesses started to discover the beneficial effects of maintaining a meaningful social media presence that can support the development of their brands. Consequently, today, more than 90% of businesses take advantage of these platforms, principally for branding, lead generation, customer retention, research and e-commerce. Thus, enterprises offer several jobs that are connected to social media, such being a social media manager, community manager and social media strategist. These professions are different, however, there are some key tasks which are needed to be fulfilled in all of them, like creating content, scheduling posts, interacting with customers, developing strategies, and of course analyzing the performance of posts and campaigns (Allabarton, 2022). As a result, social media can be a career opportunity when thinking about working for firms and supporting their online platforms.

On the other hand, social media created the so-called influencers as well. They are commonly digital content creators with a relevant follower base. They provide high quality content that

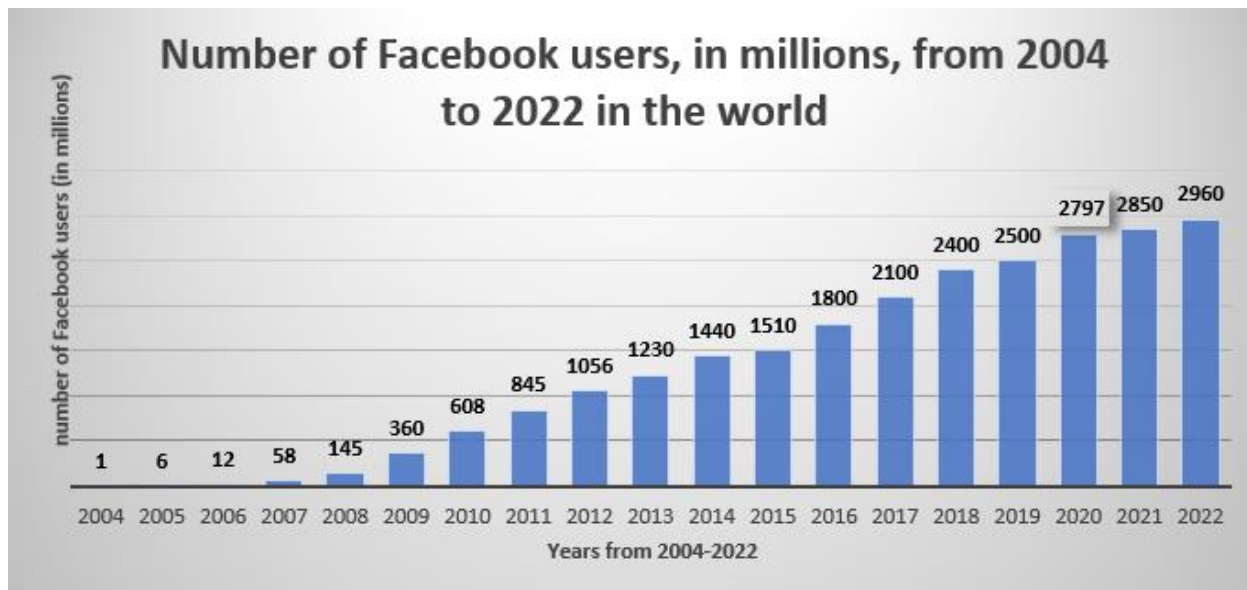
amuse, educate or motivate their audience which makes their followers become engaged with them. Influencers are creating, posting and communicating with their followers on a day-to-day basis (Nashville Film Institute, 2022). Nonetheless, how can this generate money? Social media influencers earn money with sponsorships like sponsored post and videos, affiliate marketing, brand partnerships, merchandising and direct donations, for instance in the form of subscriptions (Christison, 2022). Therefore, social media provides career opportunities today, in the forms of working for a company or maintaining your own social media presence as an influencer.

Notwithstanding, social media had to take a long journey to improve to this level. When concerning social media platforms, the majority of people take into consideration Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and in recent times, TikTok. Yet, these platforms could not be so significant today, if the developers of the industry would have not placed the foundation of them a long time ago. Thus, the evolution of social media began with SixDegrees in 1997. It was founded by Andrew Weinreich and it is considered as the predecessor of Facebook (Drishti Ias Blog, 2022). People had to sign up or log in so that they can use the platform. Users could send messages and stay in contact without paying expensive phone bills. Moreover, it also transformed the methods of connecting since it made possible to make social acquaintance with somebody you have never met in person. That was speechless at that time. Furthermore, the evolution continued with LinkedIn, which is believed more as a professional platform than social media (Madruaga, 2022). It proposes users a platform where they can share their online curriculum vitae-s and connect with enterprises and people of the same mind. Today, it has over 740 million members and plenty of employers use it to recruit talents for their company, as well as people who are searching for employment. It was shortly followed by MySpace, founded similarly in 2003. It permitted users to personalize public profiles, implant videos and of course send messages (Drishti Ias Blog, 2022).

In the same way, Facebook was launched in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg. Since then, it has increased to the largest social media giant (Drishti Ias Blog, 2022). One might not think, but Facebook started from an idea to connect all Harvard students. Therefore, originally, only Harvard students were allowed to establish profiles on the platform. Later on, the site enlarged and made it possible to generate profiles for other students from different colleges as well. As a result of this, Facebook reached one million user profiles by September 2004. As we can see from the Figure 1, by 2005 it has already obtained 6 million users. In April 2006, Facebook could be used on mobiles, and it was made accessible for everyone above the age of 13 years in September. Thereby, with its worldwide accessibility, Facebook attained 58 million users in

2007. By the end of the same year, Facebook was popular not only among individuals but companies as well, having around 100,000 business pages. In the ages of 2008-2009 Facebook developed with several new features such as Chat, Pages, Facebook Ads and video support as well. Nonetheless, the most important improvement was the firstly outrageous Like button, announced in February 2009. With these enhancements, we can see the growth in the number of users as well: by 2009 it reached 360 million. During 2010-2012, the developments continued with tagging people in photos, liking comments and the home page was an improvement as well. After, it founded Facebook Places, Groups, Timeline and Video calling too. Consequently, by 2010, it had acquired 608 million users which made it the third-largest web company in November of the same year. Moreover, one of the most significant progresses was just coming after, in August 2011, Facebook started Messenger, the instant messaging app. After, a milestone came because Facebook bought Instagram for 1 billion US dollars and made another breakthrough regarding the number of users: it hit 1 billion profiles by the end of 2012. During the next couple of years, Facebook accessed new territories and bought WhatsApp, Oculus and Atlas. Thus, in 2015 it had more than 40 million small business pages. This led to a new feature as well, Facebook Marketplace. As in every business' life, it had to face several criticisms and hate as well, mostly in 2016. To reverse this tendency, it introduced the so-called Reactions which allow people to express their different feelings with several emojis and not only with the Like button. Although, through the years the number of users kept increasing, with around 2100 million in 2017, the abuse and provocation continued. In 2018, these problems peaked with the massive data breach involving a British consulting firm. After, it went on with accusations referring to privacy concerns. The year of 2019 ended with another considerable data breach. Obviously, this brought a portion of users to change to other apps, but this did not cause the decrease of users. Facebook kept rising its number of users to around 2960 million in 2022. These negative events probably caused the announcement of Zuckerberg in 2021 stating that Facebook is rebranding to Meta considering its new mission to create a metaverse. However, a lot of people identify it like a hopeless attempt to get rid of the bad reputation Facebook gained in the last years. Although Meta is still facing several technical, legal, ethical and social issues, most probably it will continue to grow higher despite of its debates. One of the reasons for this thriving future might be the fact that the founders of it know very well how to manage and succeed in a challenging environment. As I mentioned, it is only a matter of time before Facebook will reach 3000 million users worldwide (Jalan, 2022). It was worth seeing the evolution of Facebook, because it was the first giant social media platform, where the expansion of social media started.

Figure 1 Number of Facebook users, in millions, from 2004 to 2022 in the world



Source: Statista.com, Richter F. (2021)

Facebook was followed by another very significant platform, YouTube, which went live in 2005 and was founded by Steve Chen, Chad Hurley, and Jawed Karim. It was designed as an online video sharing platform, and it has been the unquestioned emperor of online videos until today. It is possessed by Google, and it is the second most visited website, after Google Search. It has more than 2.5 billion monthly users and they watch altogether more than one billion hours of videos every day! While it can be acknowledged as a social media platform because of the possibilities to like or share, it is rather considered as a video-sharing platform (Drishti Ias Blog, 2022).

Besides this, Reddit came to existence in 2005 as a website consisting of user-generated content such as photos, videos, links and text-based posts as well as discussions on certain topics. The name comes from the phrase “read it” because it can sound great to say, “I read it on Reddit” (Drishti Ias Blog, 2022). However, in Hungary, this platform is more about discussing certain topics, most of the time about influencers where the users are not afraid at all to criticize anybody. Shortly after Reddit came Twitter, in 2006. It was founded by Jack Dorsey, Evan Williams, and Biz Stone. It is a so-called microblogging site that enable people to post and discuss through messages, called “tweets”. It was originally created to become a tool for sending updates between friends but later it changed to “the SMS of the Internet” (Drishti Ias Blog, 2022). However, Twitter is not very popular in Hungary, only 4.7 percent of the population uses it in 2022 (Kemp, 2022). One of the most important reasons for this could be the restriction of characters in the tweets. As the Hungarian language naturally express thoughts

in longer phases, it could be harder for Hungarians to state their opinion with these limited number of characters.

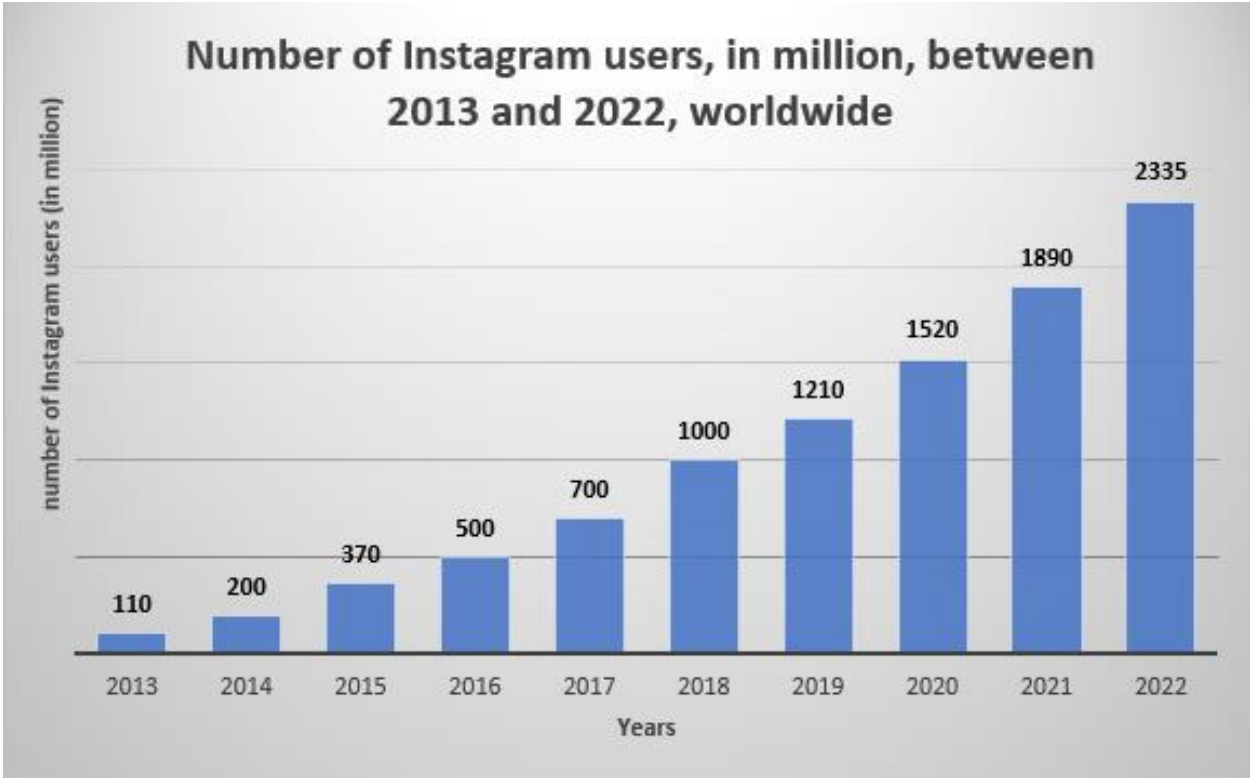
Following this, Instagram is the third most well-known social media site with 2.335 billion users worldwide. It was launched in 2010 by Kevin Systrom as a photo and video sharing social platform, initially only for iOS. In one day, it gained 25,000 users already. Since there was a rapid increase in Instagram's user base, more and more investors became curious about the company. By March 2012, the number of Instagram users had risen to 27 million. After, in April in the same year, it was issued for Android phones as well, which resulted in more than one million downloads in less than one day. Consequently, in the same month, Facebook made a proposal to buy Instagram for one billion US dollars in cash and stock. This offer was successful, shortly after Facebook achieved and purchased Instagram (Blystone, 2022). As we can see from Figure 2, the real growth started after. New elements were added to the app, however, it was successful originally as well. From the beginning, Instagram permitted users to upload photos and videos as well as to edit them with different filters, add location to them and the so popular hashtags. Thus, with the hashtags, the users can indicate what is the topic of the post or the video. Moreover, there is a feature to establish a public or a private profile, which allows people to decide who can see their uploaded content. One of the most important features is that people can search other users' photos and videos based on location or hashtags. Thus, it can be used for inspiration because we can find trending content, comment and communicate with other users on the platform. What is more, people can be followed, which makes it easier to find the users who are inspiring and interesting for you and concentrate on their content. Although the first form of Instagram only allowed to upload their content in a square aspect ratio, this has changed luckily. At that time, for the square ratio, the image had to be the same height and width which was not compatible with the iPhone 4 then. Eventually, in 2015, this feature was developed and now people can upload media up to 1080 pixels. As we can see from the Figure below, it had also a significant impact on the user base as well, since by 2016, Instagram already counted 500 million people. Moreover, since it was launched, it developed a messaging feature as well. Nonetheless, one of the most beloved features is the so-called Instagram Stories. This makes it possible to post content to a separate feed on the app which is only visible for 24 hours after posting. Besides, according to research, 500 million people use Instagram Stories every day in 2022 (Blystone, 2022). Instagram Stories was launched in August 2016 along with several other features. The reason why Instagram Stories became so popular might be that it enables people to express themselves in new ways, and connect more profoundly than before, since the posts in Stories disappear after 24 hours. This way, it is more

flexible and spontaneous. What is more, from 2016, people could save posts on Instagram. Therefore, one may conclude that the year 2016 brought a lot of new features which resulted in a user base increase of 200 million from 2016 to 2017. After, in February 2017, it introduced another popular feature, which is sharing 10 images and videos in one post. With this, users are able to share the best moments from a vacation, without the need to create 10 different posts. Similarly in 2017, a new characteristic to organize saved posts was created. Therefore, people can establish private collections from saved posts. At the end of 2017, Instagram established Stories Highlights which made it possible to make an archive of the best stories even after 24 hours. Thus, people could make a saved collection of moments on their feed which made their profiles more personal and expressive. In the same period, Instagram developed to follow hashtags as well, making it easier for people to discover photos and videos in the topics they like. Consequently, from 2017 to 2018 the user base expanded with 300 million people which means that Instagram grew more and more in these years. After that, the so-called IGTV videos were introduced, in 2018. IGTV videos are longer, vertical contents which are unique because the form of the videos is in full screen which adapts to the screen of the mobile phones. Another important feature of IGTVs is that the videos are starting automatically as soon as the user opens Instagram. Of course, sending and commenting on the videos are also possible. As it can be found on Instagram's official site, "IGTV began a new chapter of video on Instagram" (about.instagram, 2022).

Notwithstanding, the biggest and most recent innovation of Instagram was the introduction of Instagram Reels. These are the opposite of IGTVs to a certain extent, because Reel videos are short, entertaining contents. When it was introduced, in 2020, it was only possible to record and edit a 15-second-long video. Since then, as of July 2022, we can create content up to 90 seconds (Maiorca, 2022). It is possible to share reels with followers but with a public Instagram page it is achievable to reach to a wider audience through the feature "Explore". Establishing reels is a creative process, the user can edit the audio, AR effects, timer and countdown and the speed as well. The videos can be recorded all together or in separate clips too (about.instagram, 2020). The reels videos seemed to be successful on the platform, because as Figure 2 shows, there was a huge rise in the number of Instagram users between 2020 and 2022. From 1520 million users 2 years ago, by 2022, we can speak about 2335 million and it is still growing.

Consequently, it is undeniable that Instagram has become one of the most important social media platforms when speaking about establishing a personal brand.

Figure 2 Number of Instagram users, in million, between 2013 and 2022, worldwide

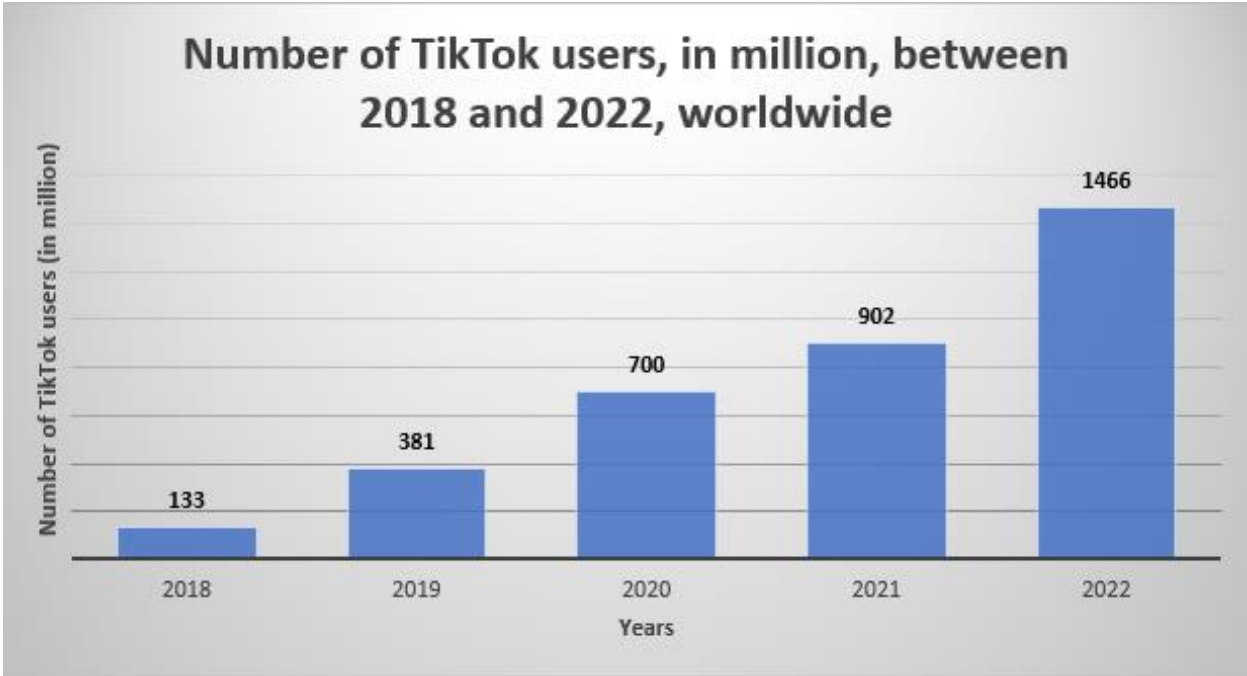


Source: Iqbal, 2022

Notwithstanding, it is undeniable that the Reels videos were introduced because of the rise of another very important, competitive platform, which is TikTok. This is the most recent but the most significant platform out of all I already mentioned. The success of TikTok is based on two platforms that were previously independent from each other but later they merged, which has given the place for TikTok to expand. They were Musical.ly and Douyin. Musical.ly was established by Luyu Yang and Alex Zhu in Shanghai, China in 2014. Although, it was originally introduced to the Chinese and American market, it was rather the USA where it became very popular. In May 2016, Musical.ly already had 70 million downloads. Following this, ByteDance, the Chinese firm, developed a new app, Douyin in 2016. Then, it enlarged the platform internationally in 2017 and along with this, the company rebranded to TikTok, while also keeping the Douyin name in China. In 2018, these apps united together since ByteDance bought Musical.ly and this resulted in an enormous increase for TikTok, in a relatively short time (Geysler, 2022). As you can see from Figure 3, the user numbers were growing much faster than in the case of Facebook or Instagram. Only from 2018 to 2019, there was a rise of 248 million people who were new users on the platform during these years. However, that was not only because of the merge, but ByteDance, the company who owns TikTok, has conducted an excellent marketing campaign. They advertised the platform virtually in all places where their target audience – the young people – could be found, inclusive of other social media sites as

well, such as Snapchat or YouTube. Nonetheless, this also led to the fact that TikTok has one of the narrowest demographics of any social sites, including above mentioned ones. This means, that people above 30 years without kids probably did not hear but very likely not registered to the platform. What is more, although Musical.ly was the predecessor of TikTok, it has less musical significance than Musical.ly since we can find a lot of funny, sometimes “cringe” videos on the platform. However, TikTok is not only about music and funny things, but it has also more and more educational contents as well, such as cooking videos. The diversity of the videos also shows that TikTok is expanding, it did not stop after the merge. It was the most downloaded free app in the Apple App Store in the US in September 2018 and in the Google Play in October (Geyser, 2022). As the chart below shows, the registered users were increasing significantly from 2019 to 2020, with 319 million new people. The biggest reason for this was unequivocally the pandemic. When the coronavirus started expanding in the world, a lot of governments asked the citizens to keep distance, isolate from each other and stay at home. Since the people were obligated into isolation, they began to look for methods to entertain themselves and also connect with others. Thus, many people became users of the platform during this period (Johnson, 2020). Of course, from 2020 to 2021, this growth was not that huge as before, but it was still a significant 202 million. However, another very important increase came in the years of 2021 to 2022 and it is still counting. In 2022, TikTok can already count 1466 million users and it is not the end of the year yet.

Figure 3 Number of TikTok users, in million, between 2018 and 2022, worldwide



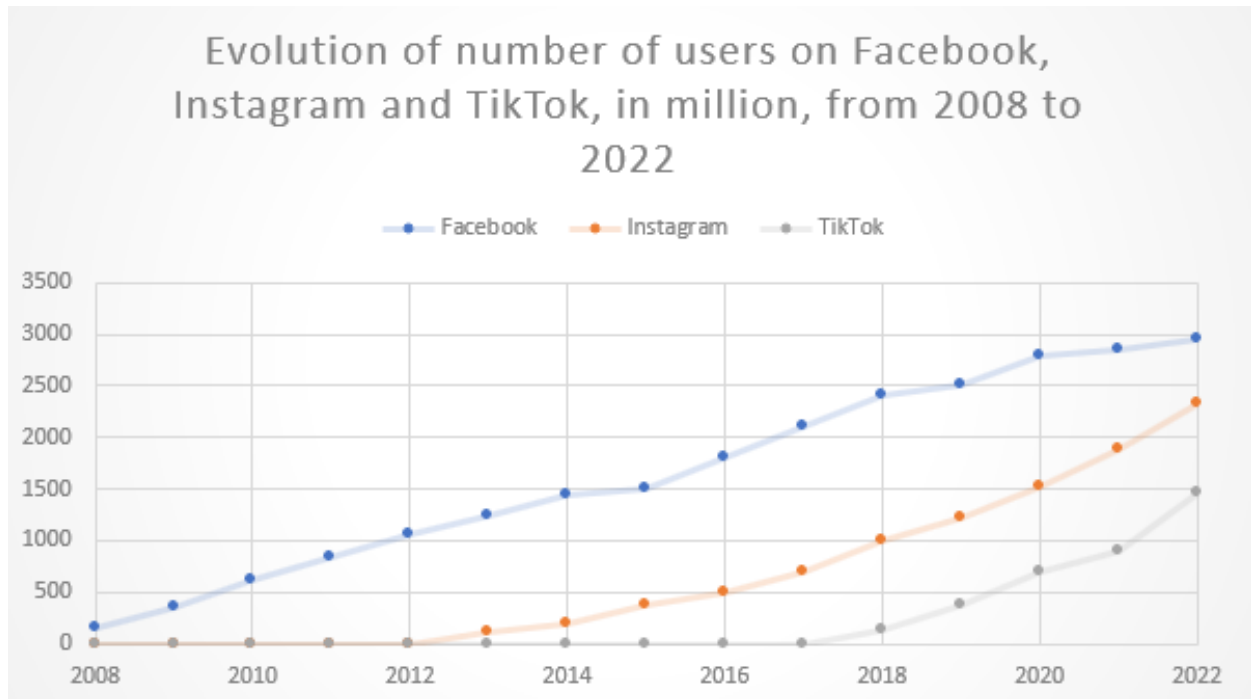
Source: Iqbal, 2022

Speed of social media platform changes

Consequently, from the evolution of social media platforms we can conclude that the speed of platform changes was faster and faster throughout the years. Naturally, it took more time for Facebook to reach one billion users and then grow to almost 3 billion. For Instagram and later TikTok, it was easier since there was a foundation already regarding the existence of social media platforms. As we can see from figure 4, the growth of these 3 most important social media sites were quicker and quicker. It took TikTok around 2 years from the merge, to reach 500 million people. To achieve the same amount of user base, Instagram had to develop through 6 years from 2010 to 2016. What is more, since Facebook was the first successful social platform, which has paved the way for others, for this site it took around 6-7 years to reach 500 million people. On the other hand, it is also worth analyzing, how long it took for the platforms to reach the momentous 1 billion user base. As the figure below shows, for Facebook it was 8 years, for Instagram it took also 8 years from the beginning, but it is worth mentioning that Instagram was made available for Android only in 2012. Finally, TikTok was the fastest growing platform of all three because it was less than 4 years from the merge in 2018 until it reached 1 billion users in the beginning of 2022.

It is unquestionable that the companies also noticed these rapid changes in the platforms, and they also started switching between them. Facebook was the most important social site for a long period when it came to advertising. There were Facebook Groups, Facebook Advertisements which are undeniably significant today as well. However, Instagram became popular too and today we can see that most of the firms advertise – mostly with influencers – on Instagram. This is the so-called influencer marketing which is used by numerous businesses. Nonetheless, it is important to take into account TikTok's fast emergence on the market. Although it is still Instagram where the majority of advertisements takes place but there is also a possibility of platform change from Instagram to TikTok for the businesses. We can see some commercial contents already on TikTok, but they are not that significant. The strategy for a lot of influencers is still relying on Instagram as the place for selling. However, they can raise the attention on TikTok, with an interesting video, and then redirect possible customers to Instagram which remained a more personal platform. Thus, TikTok can complement the selling, but it is not yet the place for companies to pay for influencer videos on TikTok. At least, not for all of the companies, some of them are already experiencing with it. However, whether there will be a platform change and if yes then when, is still remaining a question today. What is sure that more and more companies become aware of the importance of social media, and they keep monitoring the changes on the market.

Figure 4 Evolution of number of users on Facebook, Instagram and TikTok, in million, from 2008 to 2022, worldwide



Source: Iqbal, 2022 (self-edited)

Analysis of Instagram in details

As I mentioned, Instagram is the most significant platform for businesses who would like to advertise their products or services. Thus, it is also one of the most important platforms to start with if somebody would like to establish a personal brand in the social media. If somebody has built up a personal brand, it is possible that firms will propose offers to advertise their products through influencer marketing. In this case, companies link the influencer and their market offerings through Instagram. According to statistics, Instagram users are more engaged than the average user of other social media platforms. For instance, according to a survey, 72% of Instagram users answered that they have already made the choice to buy something after they saw it on Instagram, and the most common categories were mainly clothes, accessories, jewelry and hair related products. The researchers call it the “shopping mentality” which makes Instagram users the most important audience since they are open and decide rapidly (Miller, 2020).

One of the most important aspects to consider, when speaking about succeeding on a social media platform is the algorithm. The algorithm in case of Instagram is the series of rules and restrictions that rate the content on the site. The algorithm conclude which content can be showed more – the content that the algorithm ranks as better – and which content will be showed to less people. It is affecting the Instagram users’ feeds, the Explore Page as well as the Reels

feed and hashtag pages as well. During the process, the Instagram algorithm analyzes every section of a content that has been posted. It considers the so-called “metadata” such as the caption and alt text, hashtags as well as engagement data. Based on this information gathered, it assigns and distributes the content in a way that every user sees what they are most enthusiastic about. Basically, Instagram algorithm compares the posted content, such as posts, Reels and Stories with the available information about the registered users, content consumers, in order to deliver the most appropriate content for everybody (McLachlan, Mikolajczyk, 2022). The goal behind this algorithm is to make the best out of the user experience. As the CEO, Adam Mosseri mentioned in a blog post: “We want to make the most of your time, and we believe that using technology to personalize your experience is the best way to do that” (2021). The history behind creating an algorithm was started when more and more people registered to the platform. It was impossible for people to see every content posted by their friends, or the people they follow. Consequently, by 2016, people did not see approximately 70% of all their posts in Feed, in addition to 50% of the content from their close relations. As a result, Instagram established and announced a Feed that is based on what the user is most interested in. Moreover, now Instagram has three different algorithms for the different parts of the platform, such as the Feed, Explore and Reels. The reason for this that users have distinct habits on what they would like to see among the Stories and what they would like to discover on the Explore page. For instance, generally, the Stories are more personal while the Explore page is for discovery (Mosseri, 2021). Thereby, I will analyze all three algorithms and how they are exactly working. To start with, there is the first type of algorithm which ranks the Feed and the Stories section of the application. During the years, the developers noticed that in these two sections, people would like to see their closest relations, such as friends and family. The algorithm first takes into account all the information about the content shared by the people the user follows, such as who posted the content, what was posted and the user’s preferences as well. There are a thousand of information like this and the developers call them the “signals”. Signals can be also the timing of the post, whether it was posted on a phone or using web browser, as well as how often the user likes these posts. However, there are four most important signals, which has a huge significance on deciding about the rating. The first and most crucial is of course the information about the post. This includes the signs of how popular a post is, such as depending on the number of likes and interactions. Moreover, the timing, the length – in case of a video – and the location – if there is any attached to it – are also critical. Secondly, the algorithm considers the information about the person who posted the content. This way, the system tries to analyze how interesting is the person for the user, how often the user interacts with the

content creator. Thirdly, the user's own activity is also important. This means that the algorithm analyzes what the user likes, interacts with, watch and comment under. Finally, the history of the user's interaction is taken into account. For instance, how often the user liked and commented on a post of a particular content creator in the last few weeks. From these signals, the algorithm makes predictions. These are educated guesses at the probability of interaction with a post in different ways. For example, in the Feed, the five most significant interactions are: spending time on a post – reading the content, watching an interesting photo or video - as well as liking and commenting, resharing and tapping on the profile photo. The more likely the user interacts the more frequently he will see these kinds of posts. On the other hand, the algorithm takes other factors into account as well. It is important not to show too many contents from the same person. Similarly, the Stories that includes a reshared post from the Feed is valued less, since the developers think that the people would like to see original Stories (Mosseri, 2021).

Pursuing this further, the second type of algorithm ranks the Explore page of Instagram. The aim of Explore is to help the users discover new things. In this way, it is so much different from the Feed and Stories section, since these last two contains the content of the people the user follows. On the Explore page, Instagram helps to find new photos and videos of the user's interest. In this case, the first action is also to define and rank the posts. To discover the content the user is interested in, algorithm considers what kind of photos and videos the user liked, saved and commented on previously. Then, the algorithm looks at other people who also liked or interacted with the same content creator. It takes into consideration that maybe the user will be interested in one of the same people as well. Moreover, from the type of the content the algorithm can also find out and show the user different photos on the Explore page (Mosseri, 2021). For instance, I often get travel related content as suggestions on my Explore page since I interact a lot with travel bloggers, and I really love seeing travel posts. After this, it is essential to decide about the order of these selected suggestions on the Explore page. For this, Instagram algorithm also has four most important signals. The most significant is the information about the post, as previously. This includes how rapidly people like, comment or save a post. However, these signals are much more important in the Explore page ranking then they were in the Feed and Stories ranking. Secondly, the history of interaction with the content creator matters a lot. It is more likely to see a post with someone the user has already interacted with. Thirdly, the algorithm takes into account the user's activity, as I mentioned, the kinds of post he liked, commented, saved or even shared and how often he interacts with posts from the Explore page. Finally, the fourth most important signal is the information about the person who

posted. Every content creator has analytics in Instagram where the algorithm follows how many times people have interacted with the content creator (Mosseri, 2021).

Last but not least, there is an algorithm for ranking Reel videos as well. Reel videos were introduced to entertain people. Similar to Explore, most of the people see the Reels from content creators that they do not follow. For the algorithm, it is a similar process, it goes through the content that the user might like and then make an order for them. Nonetheless, with Reel videos, the emphasis is much more on entertainment. Instagram tries to find out what kind of content is funny or entertaining for the users. In this case, the most important factor is the watch time of the video, meaning for how long the user has watched a particular Reels. We can find the four most important signals here as well, starting with the user's own activity. This algorithm considers the user's likes, comments and engagement the most important in case of suggestion Reel videos. These factors can assist the algorithm to find out what kind of content is entertaining for a particular user. Secondly, the system takes into account the user's history of interacting with the person who posted the Reel. It is similar to the Explore page in a way that users can see videos from people that they have never seen, but if they already interacted with someone in any way, it is more likely that the Reels page will show it. The third most important signal is the information about the reel itself. This information includes the content of the video, audio track, video understanding based on pixels and whole frames, and the popularity too. Finally, the algorithm considers the information about the person who posted the Reel. The system analyzes the popularity of the content creator (Mosseri, 2021). From these facts, one may conclude that in all kinds of contents – on the Feed, in Stories, on Explore page, among Reels – the interaction is the key to achieve success and to reach as many people as possible.

On the contrary, some people do not like how the algorithm works and blame it for getting less likes or comments, less interaction on their posts. This is called “shadowbanning” which means silencing a user. However, it is crucial to understand that it is not possible to consistently reach the same amount of people. Moreover, it is undeniable that the majority of the followers of a content creator will not see every post she shared because the users usually check only less than half of their Feed (Mosseri, 2021).

Based on this information, according to the researchers, there are 7 key advice that are useful in order to reach the desired audience on Instagram. First and foremost, it is inevitable to mention the community guidelines. Every content creator has to respect the community guidelines when uploading any kind of content. If the creator is sharing misinformation, upsetting or sensitive contents, she may find that the content is not so widely distributed or even restricted as well. Secondly, the specialists believe that in 2022 the most important is to upload

creative Reel videos. Indeed, Reel videos are one of the newest innovations on Instagram and they can attract a lot of attention and thus, followers as well. When posting a Reel, it is important not to recycle watermarked TikTok videos – but without the watermark, it is fine to post the same video to both platforms – as well as to shoot in vertical and use filters, camera effects and music. What is more, although it is possible to share a 90-second-long video, it is better if the creator keeps it short and entertaining, as this was the aim of introducing Reels. After, experts advise to schedule the posts in the right time for the maximum reach. Inside the analytics of Instagram, the creators can find the hours during which their follower base is most active. However, it is also important to reach new people and grow follower base. Thus, the creator has to find the time when her target audience is most active. For instance, in the case of mothers, it might be only in the late evening, while in the case of students, it can be in the afternoon. That is why it is crucial to define our target market before starting to create content for them. The fourth advice according to professionals is to encourage engagement as much as possible. It is achievable in different ways, for instance, through Instagram Stories with stickers, polls, emoji sliders, the creator can ask for the opinion and experience of her followers. It is not only possible with Stories, in the posts the creator can also write in the caption to comment, ask a question from the audience that they can explain in the comment section, as well as encouraging people to save the post for later. According to the specialists, the “good” amount of engagement on Instagram is between 1-5%. However, according to statistics, the average engagement rate for business account was 0.83% in 2021. Thus, if we want to improve the engagement, it is crucial to know our target audience, as well as to answer to direct messages from followers – as far as it is possible of course – and create several Stories where the people are encouraged to interact (McLachlan, Mikolajczyk, 2022).

Pursuing this further, the fifth advice from professionals is to use hashtags because this is what the algorithm can understand. It cannot define the content of a post if there are no hashtags attached to it. Thus, the algorithm can categorize the theme of the post and suggest it to the target audience of the creator. Another benefit of hashtags is that they are free, unlike to Instagram advertisements. However, it is important not to use every mainstream hashtag in the posts, like #instagood because it is too general. Instead, it is worth finding our niche market and discovering what types of hashtags they follow. After, it is equally important to post consistently. Consistency is the key in everything, and content creation is not an exception from this either. This is important if somebody would like to reach people, increase engagement, or grow follower base. In June 2021, during Instagram’s Creator Week, Adam Mosseri advised that 2 feed posts per week and 2 Stories per day is ideal for building a follower base. However,

we should not forget the Reel videos either since they have a huge importance in 2022! Finally, the last advice is to track and understand Instagram analytics. It is worth to look at them once a month because analytics can help the creator to understand which content is performing well – and possibly, why – as well as to see which posting time is preferable or which hashtags are the most successful. Thus, it is crucial to check analytics and find out when our target market is online, which hashtags are performing well, and which posts are generating the most engagement. Analytics are also important because these are the figures that may show to a social media professional if the Instagram algorithm has changed recently (McLachlan, Mikolajczyk, 2022). Since these figures are so important, I will analyze the analytics of my own Instagram account as well during my research.

To conclude, social media platforms and thus, Instagram as well are evolving from time to time. Consequently, the algorithm is also changing and may favor different contents next year than now. However, as McLachlan and Mikolajczyk states, “creating engaging Instagram content is always a winning strategy” (2022).

Analysis of TikTok in details

Although TikTok might look like a spontaneous platform, according to the professionals, the successful users consciously study trends, users, video techniques and innovations. If somebody is just starting to use TikTok, the first steps are already important. For instance, it is crucial to know your niche market before starting to create content on the platform. Generally, every social media marketing campaign starts with defining the target market and establishing a TikTok profile is not an exception either. According to researchers, the best TikTok users know their niche and they stay in that circle regarding the content. Secondly, it is really important at the beginning to find a strong and catchy username. Doubtless, your username on any social media site is your brand as well. That is notably true for TikTok. Another advice for the beginners is to post as often as possible. Since the biggest tool in the toolbox is your own content, you cannot make enough of it. Although there are some people who consider too much posting as becoming “hyperactive” on the platform, which can be a disadvantage according to them. In fact, the most successful content creators post between two and seven videos daily. However, that requires a huge commitment from the side of the content creator which is rare nowadays. That is why, professionals suggest making as many contents as you can, but if you are thinking about the balance between quality and quantity, you have to favor a little bit the quantity, principally during the early stages of content creation, when you do not have a significant follower base yet. In 2020, the professionals highly recommended following the latest trends. For example, different trends with dancing, sounds and music which you can

explore on the Discover Screen (Brach, 2020). However, since then, the contents on TikTok changed and now, besides the usual trend videos, we can find educative, interesting and more serious contents as well. That is why it is now questionable to what extent should a content creator follow trends. To understand the changes and how TikTok works in 2022, I will analyze the mysterious algorithm of this platform.

In the case of TikTok, we can determine the algorithm as a recommendation system that decides which contents will be showed on the For You page. It is interesting to mention that there are no two users that see exactly the same videos on their For You page. Moreover, the types of videos vary from time to time depending on the user's reaction and viewing preferences. TikTok itself defines the For You page algorithm in the following way: "a stream of videos curated to your interests, making it easy to find content and creators you love ... powered by a recommendation system that delivers content to each user that is likely to be of interest to that particular user" (Newberry, 2022).

It is difficult to define how the TikTok algorithm exactly works because social media platforms usually keep their algorithms as a secret since their recommendation system is their own unique technology. However, since more and more people have become skeptical about how the social sites are working internally, some platforms announced the essential workings of their networks. Favorably, due to this, now we know some of the key ranking signals for the TikTok algorithm, straight from TikTok. There are three most important signals, the first one is unquestionably the user interactions. It is similar to the Instagram algorithm in a way that it also considers the interaction as a very strong sign of interest. Consequently, the For You page suggestions are based on various aspects which I will emphasize one by one. The simplest sign of interest is if the user follows somebody or block somebody. Thus, as a content creator it is really important to get the people who are interested in your contents actually follow you. After, the algorithm takes into account the comments, likes and shares. These are very important signs, however, not equally important. It is much more powerful for the algorithm if somebody shares a video because it makes TikTok available for more people and it makes more people to spend more time in the application. Only after the shares, the algorithm will consider the comments and likes of a video. Additionally, a recently introduced feature of TikTok to be able to save a video to favorites. It is also a factor to indicate interest, thus, the more people save a video to their favorites, the more times the algorithm will show it on the For You page. However, sharing a video or saving it to favorites are not as powerful as the last aspect, which is the watch time of a video or video completion rate. Certainly, the purpose of TikTok is to make the users spend more and more time on the platform, even become addicted to it. Thus, if a video can catch and

keep the attention of a user for more and more seconds, sometimes even minutes, it is a winner situation for the company! That is why it will show it to more and more people, and this generates a huge reach to people which can also result in the growth of the follower base. Therefore, the biggest goal of a content creator is to make the people watch her video for the longest time possible, preferably until the end of the video or make the users watch the video several times again and again (Newberry, 2022).

Secondly, besides the user interaction, the video information is a useful indicator for the algorithm as well. The user interaction factors are effective to describe the ways the user interacts in the app, while the video information is advantageous to represent the type of content the user would like to see on the Discover tab. The video information includes captions, sounds, hashtags, effects and trending topics. Concerning the captions, it is important to write something that can also encourage people to watch longer the video, for example “wait for the end” or “the ending was unexpected” so that you can make people curious enough to watch the video. Regarding the sounds, there are some trending music from time to time. It is worth using these trending music – even if you are not actually doing the trend in the video – because the algorithm favors them more. With respect to hashtags, they make one of the most important parts of the content. With hashtags, the creator can show the TikTok algorithm what the video is about, what the story and the meaning is. Hashtags can help catching the attention and reaching the people that might be interested in the topic of the video. Thus, hashtags help to reach people and find the ones who wants to be your followers. Moreover, hashtags can be helpful to find your target market as well, since they will be interested in the topics that you post, it is possible that they will search for a hashtag and find your account this way. Hashtags are also a beneficial choice because they can help to both build and participate in a community. That is why, it is extremely important that they hashtags under the video are very accurate, they cannot be misleading because in this case the people will swipe away and will not watch the video. In addition, a successful content creator does not just only use niche hashtags but the popular hashtags as well. It is important to add hashtags which has less reach, because they are more specific and people from your niche are more likely to find them. Besides, make sure that you add the trendy hashtags as well, for the For You page (Newberry, 2022).

Finally, the last signal to rank the videos is based on the device and account settings, but these are far not that important as the two mentioned before. Since these settings are usually a one-time choice and not a continuous engagement, they have less influence on the video recommendations. These settings include for example the language of videos, the country settings because the user is more likely to see videos from the people in her own country. In

addition, the type of the mobile and the categories of interest selected are also decisive (Newberry, 2022). Regarding the language and country settings, it can be a disadvantage too in the case of targeting and reaching the audience, since for instance in Hungary, because of the geographical settings, it is much more likely to show the videos to Hungarian people than to internationals. That is why, the language of the videos is a significant question.

On the contrary, there are some kind of content that the TikTok algorithm does not show and recommend, such as duplicated content or a content that the user has already seen, or a video considered as spam, as well as videos that can be potentially upsetting. However, the TikTok algorithm is considered as fair because the recommendations in the For You page are not depending on the existing follower base or the history of the performance of the earlier videos. Thus, it is also possible for beginners to reach a huge amount of people if they are able to make a content that is engaging. Undoubtedly, the content creators with more followers will have more chance to reach high views because they have already existing follower base who actively looking for their content. However, if a beginner creates engaging content that communicate directly to her target market, she can also make it to the For You page and even reach more views than a content creator with already existing basics (Newberry, 2022).

Based on this information, professionals established nine useful advice to work and succeed with the TikTok algorithm. The first and most important step is to set the account as a TikTok Pro account. This is very important because with the Pro account, the user will be able to see the analytics, insights and metrics that can help her to improve the posted contents. Analytics have a huge significance as I already mentioned, so it is not worth to ignore them. Secondly, it is crucial to maximize the first moments of the video. TikTok is a fast-moving platform, meaning that people will switch between the videos in less than one second that is why it is essential to get their attention in the first three seconds of the video. If they watch it further, it is very likely that the video will go viral (Newberry, 2022). To illustrate, it is worth saying something interesting in the first some seconds, such as “the most horrifying experience in my life” or “how did I get two diplomas in three years”. It can be also effective to start with a sudden move, or to use physical things to illustrate your story of the video. All of these things give the so-called micro-shocks to the brain that keep up the attention and make the user watch the video further. If you combine all of the three, for example you suddenly jump to the video, saying “a method to learn the most foreign words faster” while you are showing a dictionary to illustrate can catch the attention in the beginning. Then, the same should be sustained through the whole video. It can be best achieved if there are short cuts in the video, making sure that a section without cut is no longer than 5 seconds. This way, these micro-shocks are continuously

stimulating the brain, producing dopamine which makes the user to watch the video longer, and makes the content creator reach a huge amount of people, including the target market.

The third advice is to write an engaging caption, which can be challenging with only 150 characters including hashtags, but an effective caption does not have to be necessarily long. An exceptional caption tells the users why they should watch the video, possibly until the end or multiple times in a row. The caption should be used to establish curiosity or ask a question that can be answered in the comment section, creating a conversation which is also advantageous for the video (Newberry, 2022).

The fourth tip is to create high-quality videos, which is not that difficult as it might seem. A simple phone can be appropriate for this, but it is worth to mention that TikTok favors more the iPhone devices. It is also useful to purchase a ring light for the good lighting during any time of the day, and a tripod as well. A microphone can be also useful, but it is not essential. It is also crucial to shoot the videos in a 9:16 vertical format, since this is the format TikTok prefers most. In addition, the fifth suggestion is to post at the right time of the day. It can be found also in the analytics when your followers are the most active on the platform. Since every target market is different, it can be different time frames for the different audiences. Another recommendation by the professionals has been already mentioned, which is the use of the proper hashtags. In addition, it can be emphasized that the trending hashtags can be important to find as well, and it is worth doing the trends which can be implemented to the personal brand of a particular content creator. However, it is equally important not to do every trend, since the building a personal brand is about the uniqueness, and the trends are usually mainstream contents. However, it is not the case with the trending music, since the last suggestion from the specialist is to use the trending sounds because the TikTok algorithm favors them more than regular music (Newberry, 2022).

In conclusion, from the analysis of TikTok algorithms we can see that there are various aspects which makes a video successful. In the next chapter, I will analyze my own social media accounts – Instagram and TikTok pages – to see and find out what is the secret of building up a successful personal brand just by creating engaging content that the algorithm likes, completely without paying for advertising.

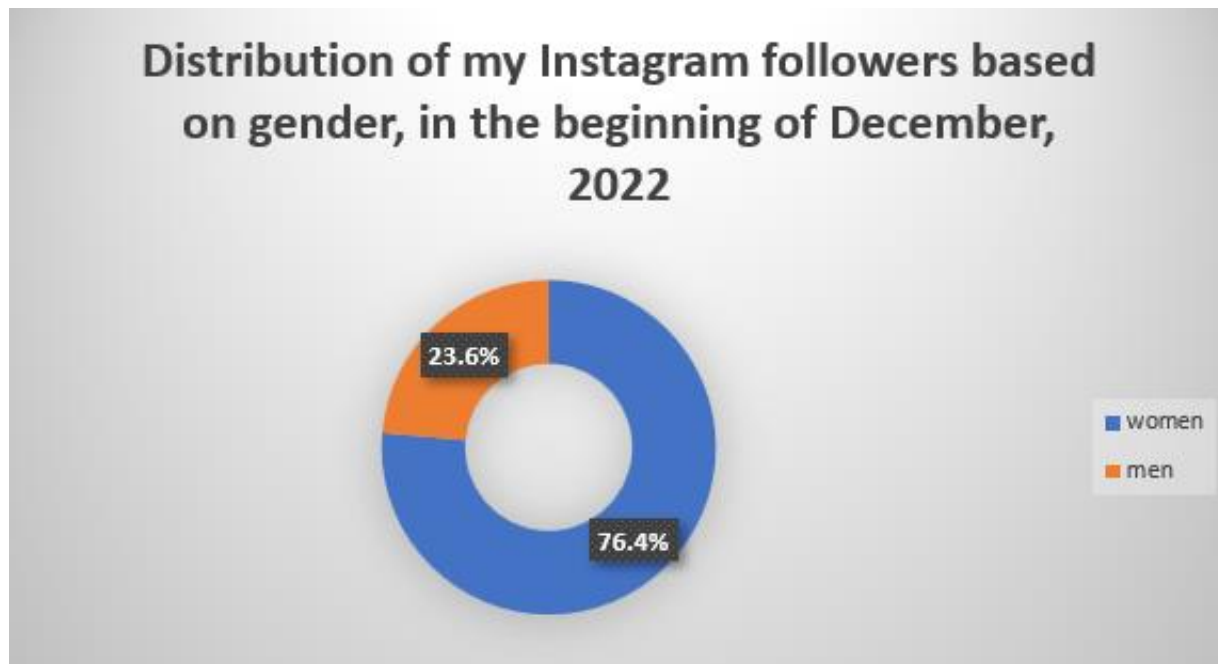
RESEARCH

Analysis of my own social media accounts

Firstly, I would like to start with the analysis of my Instagram account and then, I will describe my own TikTok account and eventually, I will compare them.

However, before entering to the analysis of the data I would like to describe my accounts and my target audience. On all of my social media platforms, I communicate and create content regarding three topics. These include networking marketing, language learning and travelling. Lately, language learning and travelling related contents were dominating on my accounts. On Instagram, I communicate more about travelling since it is an actual topic for me because I am constantly going on trips to different countries. On the other hand, on my TikTok account, the language learning tips, and useful videos are the ones that are dominating and that reached the most people. In addition, I believe that the travelling related posts and the language learning can complement each other since I always try to emphasize the importance of learning languages to be able to travel the world. Of course, it is possible without knowing a language but personally, my French and English knowledge have always helped me achieving my travel goals. That is why, my target audience include the students who are interested in learning French or English, and I am planning to make German learning videos as well. I would like to find the people who want to succeed on a language exam or just simply want to move to another country where one of these two languages is necessary, thus, the people who would like to learn languages. On the other hand, I am also seeking for the users who adore travelling just like me, and I want to provide travel tips for them, for instance, what to discover in the different countries that I have already visited. Lately, I started to introduce some gastronomic contents as well, during my journeys around the world. I really love showing the people the different cuisines and encouraging them to try the local dishes everywhere. Last but not least, regarding the network marketing contents, I search for the people who would like to generate an extra income through networking. Thus, I defined three several target audiences and I try to create content for all three kinds of people, so they can find engaging and valuable posts on my social accounts. To start with the analysis of my Instagram account, it is worth beginning with the composition of my follower base and after I can analyze how this follower base was built up. My username on Instagram is evelin.soos and currently, I have more than 2200 followers, around 2260 now, but it is always changing. From the chart below, you can see that the majority of my followers are women. This gender group was not set consciously as my target audience before I started creating content on the platform. However, it turned out that women are generally more interested in language learning and travel tips, as well as in the network marketing business.

Figure 5 Distribution of my Instagram followers based on gender, in the beginning of December 2022

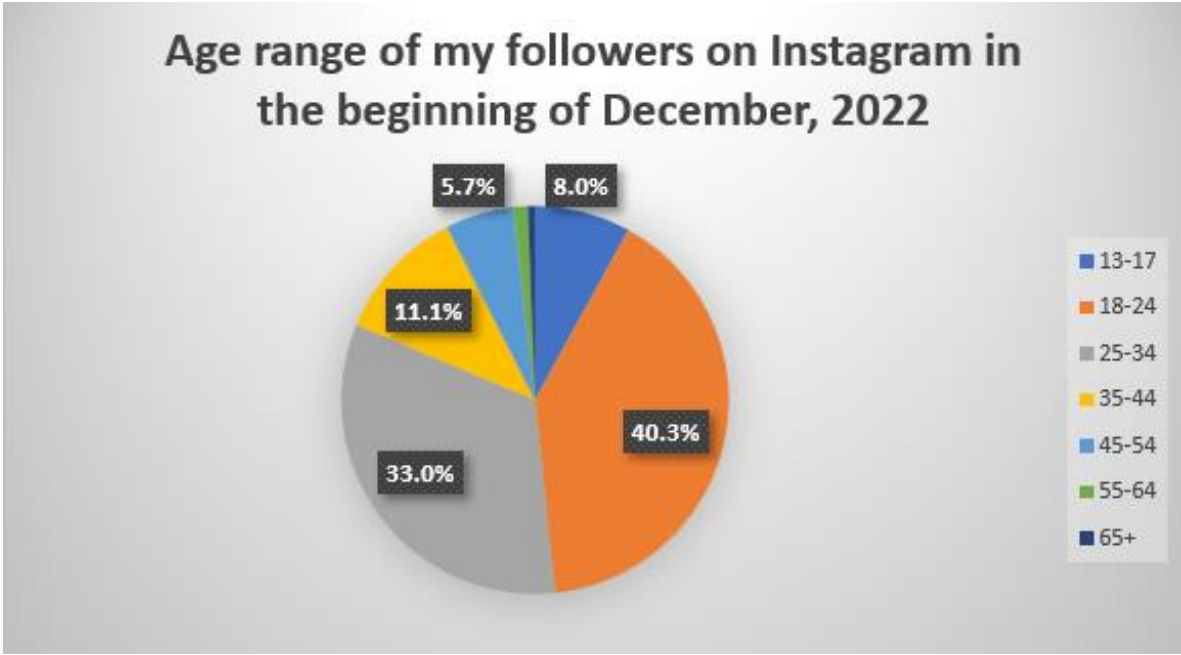


Source: Instagram,2022 (self-edited)

However, the age distribution might be more interesting than the gender range. In the case of the age, as the Figure 6 shows, more than 70% of my follower base is between 18 and 34 years old. 40.2% of my followers are between 18 and 24 years and 32.9% of the followers are from 25 to 34 years old. This range perfectly shows the ages of my target group, since the people who would like to learn languages are mostly students (around the age of 18-24) and the people who are interested in travelling the world are usually the older generation from 25 to 34 years. Thus, I am satisfied with both the gender and the age distribution on my Instagram account, it is in align with my purposes.

However, what is more important than the current composition of my follower base, is the growth of it which can be achieved with reaching high number of users and from them, there will be people who will start following my account. That is why, I would like to present the reached audience in the last 90 days on my account, meaning from 7 of September until 5 of December. During this period, I was not particularly active on my account due to several reasons. However, the accounts reached figure is still relatively high, I could reach 35.740 users in this period. Nonetheless, the real question behind this is that how it was possible, which contents were popular, what kind of contents are performing well. As a result, I will be able to analyze my performance and in the next 90 days I can concentrate on creating the contents that accomplish the best results, and thus, I can continue to grow my follower base.

Figure 6 Age range of my followers on Instagram in the beginning of December 2022

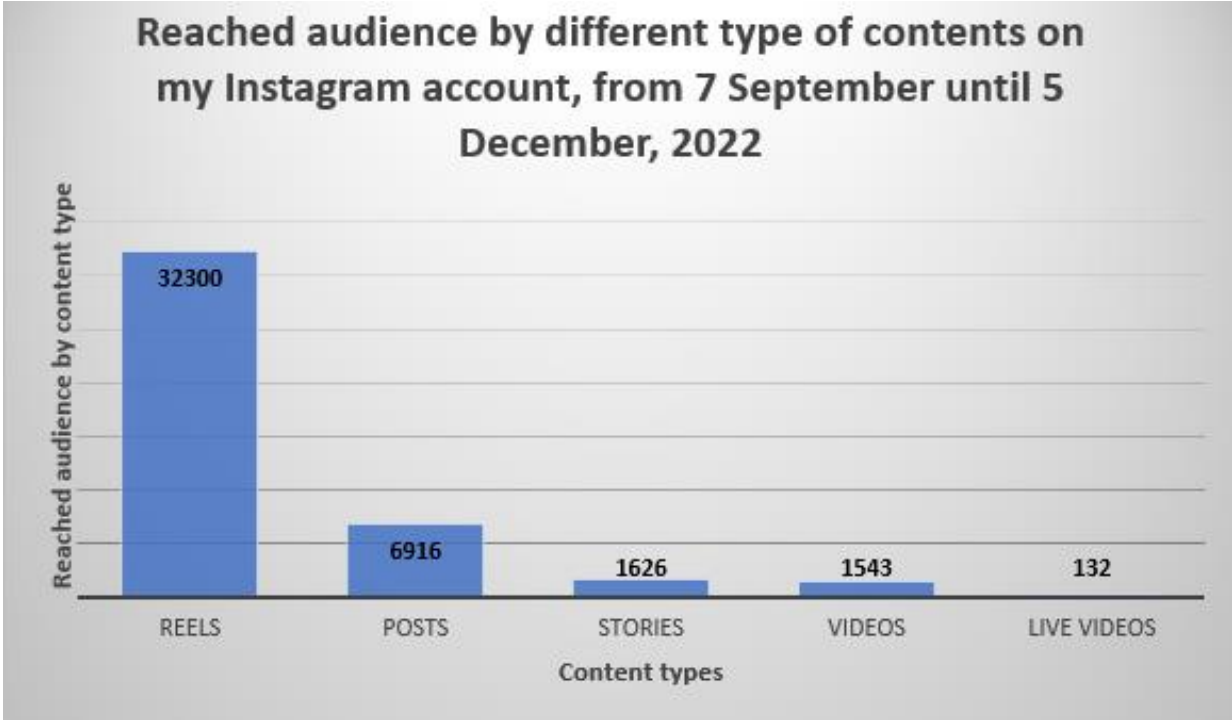


Source: Instagram, 2022 (self-edited)

On Figure 7, we can see the reached audience categorized by the different content types, meaning which kinds of content reached the most users and what this user number is. From this figure, we can see that 32.300 people was reached due to the Reel videos in this period. This means that around 90% of the reached accounts were accomplished thanks to the Reel videos. This is a huge amount which shows where the content creator should focus. From this, I can conclude that on Instagram, the most important content type is the Reels. I will analyze my most successful Reels as well, but it is important to mention the influence of posts. Generally, posts can be also a successful tool for reaching people, it is my account that shows the posts as less performing. Probably, I will need to analyze and investigate the content of my posts, why they are performing not so well. However, undoubtedly, the content that has the most influence is the Reels, on the whole Instagram. This is also linked to TikTok, but I will compare them only in the next chapter. It is worth mentioning the poor performance of live videos. Essentially, live videos can be a beneficial source of reaching people, however, for my account this number is very low since in this period I only had two live videos. Therefore, it is important to analyze the number of different content types because otherwise the data can be misleading. During this period, I only posted 17 posts and 8 Reels! The number of Stories were 172. It is interesting to see how only 8 Reel videos can generate a huge amount of reach, but this is the uniqueness of Reels. On the other hand, 17 posts are not enough compared to the ideal number of 2 feed posts per week, meaning minimum 26 posts in a 90-day-period time. Despite of the low number of posts, they were still able to generate a relatively high reached accounts, 6916 users. The ideal

number of stories are 2 per day according to Adam Mosseri, meaning 180 stories for 90 days. I almost reached this number however, the stories still generated a low number of reaches. According to one of my mentors in the content creation, one live video per week should be the ideal amount for lives, so it should be tested in the next 90 days and then I can compare whether the results will be better with more lives.

Figure 7 Reached audience by different type of contents on my Instagram account, from 7 September until 5 December 2022



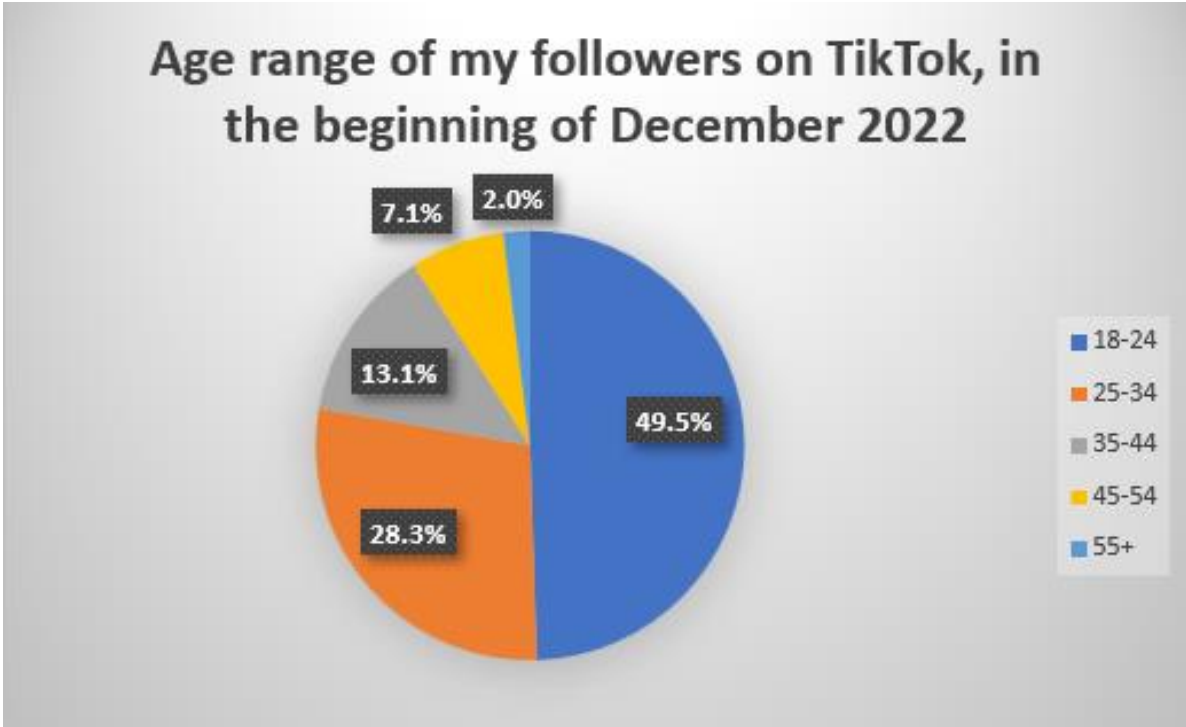
Source: Instagram, 2022 (self-edited)

Pursuing this further, I will analyze the best-performing Reel videos, as well as the best performing posts. Concerning the Reels, there are two outstanding videos from this period. Both of them are connected to language learning, more precisely to French language learning. The first one, which reached 18.100 people so far, is a motivational video from where I started learning the French language. It reached 16.605 people that are not my followers. Moreover, the number of savings is also important, which is 227 for this video, meaning that 227 people saved my content for later. It is worth looking at the used hashtags as well, since they are very specific, I did not include the mainstream hashtags. That is why, we can find hashtags under this video like #languagelearning or more specifically, #learnfrench and of course #learningmoitvation as well. However, what might be the secret of the success of this video is the plot of the whole content. I started with a close camera position to my French book, and I gradually went farer and farer while also recording a voice over the video. This way, people did not get bored while watching it and they kept watching which raised the probability of showing

it to more and more people, since the algorithm wants people to watch the videos for a long time. In the second video, I was speaking about a French book, and I started my video with a catchy phrase like “one book, if you want to learn French” which made people become interested about this book. I only revealed the name of the book at the end of the video. This one reached 14.800 people and 13.684 were non-followers. Regarding the best performing post during this period, it was the third part from my Thailand travel diary series. In this post I was writing about the Thai cuisine, and I wrote in the beginning of the post that I will include a recipe at the end of the caption. Thus, people read for more time, and they stayed at the post for longer time, which made the algorithm show it to more people. It reached altogether 2014 people and 1003 were non-followers out of this number. However, I believe it is crucial to analyze the best performing post of all times as well, which is a post about tips on how to learn the most vocabulary during foreign language learning. It reached 4399 people, with 3.334 non-followers out of them. It was saved by 248 people. The success of this post is connected to TikTok, so I will analyze it in the next chapter. Closely related to this, I have a very good performing live video as well which I saved so that people can watch it after the live ended as well. It was saved by 99 people, and it reached 3211 users, and out of them 2316 were non followers. This live was right after the previous post about effective learning of vocabulary, and during half an hour I gave various tips on how to succeed on a language exam. Thus, you can see that there is a conscious editing and sequencing in the contents. If I notice that my followers want to see contents regarding language learning, I give it to them.

Following this, I would like to analyze my own TikTok account as well. As I mentioned before during the review of the literature, it is worth looking at the analytics provided by TikTok, since they give us – content creators – a lot of useful knowledge on what kind of contents are performing well. On TikTok, I currently have more than 24.000 followers and more than 545,000 likes. Regarding the composition of my follower base, 25% of it are men, while 75% are women. This is very similar to Instagram, probably because of the same reason I mentioned before. Concerning the age distribution, we can see it on the Figure 8 below. The biggest part of the followers is between 18 and 24 years, it gives almost half of the whole follower base. I believe that the reason for it can be the fact that my feed is mainly focuses on language learning. Learning tips and language learning is generally for an older generation than the young teenagers on the platform. I try to encourage people to learn languages, especially French and I found that it is my generation who are motivated and goal-oriented enough to understand and watch these contents.

Figure 8 Age range of my followers on TikTok, in the beginning of December 2022



Source: TikTok, 2022 (self-edited)

Since the follower base was built up with the most successful videos, I will analyze them and the possible reasons for these achievements. My most successful video reached more than 1 million people, and my second-best performing video reached 603,000 people. From these two data we can already see that TikTok is a different platform from Instagram in a way that it is so much easier to generate views on TikTok than on Instagram. Both of these videos were about language learning, more precisely about learning the vocabulary of a foreign language as efficiently as possible. Both of my videos are starting with a catchy sentence: “How to learn as many foreign words as you can”. With this sentence I raised the attention and that is why people kept on watching. My most successful video which has 1 million views, has also 138.000 likes, 399 comments, 3327 shares and 36.000 savings. From these data, the number of shares and savings are the most important, since these two figures are preferable by the algorithm as well, meaning that if these numbers are high, the algorithm will show it more and more people on the For You page. Saving means that it is likely that the user will watch it again, which means that the person will spend more time on the application. Sharing means that the user sends it to somebody, and that person also watched the video and thus, spend time on the application. Both of these are contributing to TikTok as a company, consequently, it is a win-win situation for both the firm and the content creator. Fortunately, TikTok analytics shows the average watch time and the percentage of people who watched the video until the end among the analytics. For my most viewed video the average watch time is 17.9 seconds, meaning that on average,

users watched the video until 17.9 seconds. It is worth looking at what happened in the video at this time. In this case I was in the middle of explaining the idea of the video – the Leitner method for language learning. It is likely that the people who skipped the video at that time did not understand the technique, or they already knew it and that is why they switched the video. However, the other data that is significant for a content creator is the amount of people who actually watched until the end. In this case it is 22.21% of the whole 1 million viewers! This means around 222.100 people. This is a very important data since at the end of the video I shared with people that I made a template for this language learning technique which they can find on my Instagram account. Here comes the trick for linking the follower base growth: I raised the attention on TikTok, but the final “sale” happens on Instagram. This is the best strategy for a person who wants to build up a personal brand or any kind of company on the social media sites. According to my research, I gained about 2000 followers just because of this video on Instagram, which is a huge number on that platform since it is generally harder to build up a follower base on Instagram than on TikTok. Other techniques that I applied in my video which can be the reasons for the success include cutting multiple times during the video, so it was not boring for people, showing as many objects as I can to illustrate my point and I added subtitles to the video as well while I was speaking. Regarding the visualization with objects, I found it quite significant in this video, since I did not only raise the attention in the beginning and tried to keep it with the short cuts, but I also gave micro-shocks to the user’s brain in the form of showing different objects, for example, my template for the Leitner method, a dictionary, my pencil and my word cards. Moreover, analytics show that 88% of the people who watched the video found it on the For You page. This means that I did not need advertisements to get to the For You recommendation page, with only meaningful, engaging and useful content I could reach this 1 million people. Secondly, my second most viewed video has more or less the same data. It has 1080 shares and 11.000 savings. The average watch time is 14.9 seconds and 19.29% of people watched it until the end, which means that around 116.300 people. While in the first video I encouraged people to go to my Instagram page for the template, in this video at the end I told people to send it to a friend who also wants to learn more foreign words! With this “call-to-action” message at the end I made people share my video which is advantageous for the algorithm.

All in all, I believe that with engaging and useful content – such as giving language learning tips to the people – it is totally possible to build up a relevant follower base on both Instagram and TikTok as well. However, it is important that the follower base that has been built up is relevant. This means that the people who are following your account are your target audience

and interested in the product or service, or simply just the message that you are transferring. For instance, I had some videos on TikTok where I showed a hair conditioner that can make the hair lighter, blonder. These videos reached a huge amount of people and were beneficial in increasing my follower base and thus, becoming a bigger influencer. However, they are not the part of my relevant follower base because it is likely that they are interested in the beauty products, which is not my profile. Therefore, it is possible to post content that is not closely related to your profile and target market, however, it is worth keeping the balance and not posting too much from them. The same is true for the trend videos. It is favorable to make some trends which can be in connection with your goals, for example making a funny video about language learning in my case. However, it is worth considering not doing too much trend videos because as their names show, they are trends, they are not unique. The first criteria of building up a personal brand is uniqueness, the ability that you can provide something else than the majority. The trending videos are not appropriate tools for establishing a personal brand.

Comparing my Instagram and TikTok accounts

One of my research questions was whether Instagram and TikTok can complement each other despite of the fact that they are owned by different companies, meaning that they are in competition with each other. I would like to study my accounts and give you an insight what my research proved concerning my accounts and what I learned since I have been creating content on the platforms. The most relevant data to start with is the amount of the follower base. I created my Instagram earlier than my TikTok account, but it has been only since a year – when I started to build my personal brand on the social media – that I post content regularly and consciously on the platform. Similarly, I created my TikTok account approximately a year ago and since then, I create videos regularly. However, there is still a huge difference between the follower bases on the two accounts. While on Instagram, I have approximately 2200 followers, on TikTok I have 24.000. One might wonder how this huge difference is possible. Generally, it is much more difficult to build up a follower base on Instagram than on TikTok. Every content creator who is building up their TikTok account has more followers on TikTok than on Instagram. In the next chapter I will analyze the accounts of some successful content creators, but I would like to mention one of them already, as an example. Bence Halmi has one of the most followed TikTok accounts in Hungary, with around 423.800 followers. However, on Instagram the same person only has 34.300 followers. This figure also shows that TikTok is a very popular platform now, since a lot of people are using it, it has a huge potential in it, thus, it is much easier to obtain followers and build up a personal brand on TikTok. On the other hand, as I mentioned already, it is still Instagram where the actual “sales” are happening today.

We can think about encouraging people to write a message on Instagram if they would like to buy our product or service. What is more, Instagram is considered as a more personal platform, since there are no such numbers concerning the reached people and it is generally focused on the people that the user already follows, instead of constantly showing new contents like TikTok's For You page. Consequently, on Instagram, the people have more trust towards the content creators, and they buy anything offered or promoted more rapidly than in case of a TikTok collaboration. That is why, we can say that it is harder to obtain followers on Instagram, however, followers worth more there, since with 10.000 followers the user can simply be an influencer, while 10.000 followers are nice but not that significant on TikTok.

Secondly, it is worth comparing the most successful videos on TikTok with the most successful posts on Instagram, as well as with the most-performing Reel videos too. As I already mentioned, my most-watched video on TikTok deals with the Leitner method for language learning. When I published this video, I noticed that the people started following me on Instagram as well, in huge amounts. That is why I thought that a post is beneficial with the same content, so I created a picture holding a word card and, in the caption, I described how to learn with the Leitner method. I included in the post that the template can be found on the link in my Instagram bio. This post is my most successful content up until now as well. As of my observation, TikTok and Instagram could complement each other in this case, since the best performing video resulted in a follower base growth on Instagram, and it contributed to the most successful post on Instagram as well. Moreover, at that time when people started following my account on Instagram, I did a live video as well, on how to succeed on a language exam. I felt that it is very actual and a lot of people who follow me because of language learning will like this live video. My assumptions were correct since the live was saved by 99 people, and it reached 3211 users, and out of them 2316 were non followers, as I mentioned before. This was the link between the two platforms and a very interesting insight about how they can complement each other fully.

However, it is worth contrasting the TikTok videos and Instagram Reels as well, since the Instagram Reels were introduced because of the rapid development of TikTok. Instagram Reels are basically the same as TikTok videos, inside Instagram. These are a maximum of 90 seconds long videos with similar possibilities like effects and sounds like the TikTok videos. The idea behind them is also the same: to entertain people and create rather short but funny videos. Nonetheless, Instagram Reels are generally performing much worse than the videos on TikTok. For instance, I have a well-performing video on TikTok, which was viewed by more than 460.000 people, where I show what can be purchased on a Thai traditional food market, with

all its strange things and surprising animals such as crocodile meat. Exactly the same video was posted on Instagram, without the TikTok watermark of course, and on Instagram it reached only 14.000 people. It is highly important to remove the TikTok watermark before uploading the video because we are speaking about two companies in competition with each other, meaning that if somebody leave the watermark, Instagram will not show it to as many people since it would promote TikTok, which is of course not possible. The same tendency can be seen on other successful content creators accounts as well. For instance, while Bence Halmi has a very good performing video about a hotel in Hungary with 784.900 views on TikTok, the same video on Instagram reached only 183.000 people for him. However, it is crucial to mention that these 183.000 views are a huge number concerning Instagram Reels, which is not so typical on this platform. On the contrary, since I post regularly some of my TikTok videos on Instagram as well, I have other contents to compare too. It is very interesting to see that I have one video where the Instagram Reels performed even better than the same video on TikTok! It is a motivational video for language learning, which reached only 8603 people on TikTok, while it was my best-performing Reel on Instagram, with reaching more than 18.100 people! Following this, another video is worth analyzing too, which is also about language learning, the one book that is needed if somebody would like to learn French. This video reached 26.500 people on TikTok and 14.800 people on Instagram. Consequently, we can see that there is not so much difference between the two performances. These two videos can give a thought-provoking idea whether for every kind of content the best option is TikTok or not. In my humble opinion, it is more difficult to educate people on TikTok than on Instagram. TikTok is generally an entertaining platform with trends, music and dancing. At least, that was the original idea before the platform started evolving. Since then, more and more people from the older generation are also registering on the platform, making it a more diverse place with more kinds of contents. However, I believe that the contents about learning, book tips or learning motivations can be more useful on Instagram. However, I am still advising to post the videos on both platforms, because we can succeed on two platforms at the same time with the same video.

All in all, I would like to conclude what can be the impact on the TikTok and Instagram accounts on each other. Linking TikTok to your Instagram account is necessary, because this way you can obtain followers on both platforms at the same time. The strategy can work in a way that the content creator publishes the videos on TikTok and from there, she attracts people to the Instagram account, where there is a more personal atmosphere. With this strategy it is possible to build up a personal brand that starts from TikTok but eventually flourish on Instagram. We can see that influencer marketing is still happening on Instagram, and companies will search

for possible collaborations on Instagram. However, it is important to mention that the strategy is not working in reverse. It does not work, and it does not make sense to redirect people to your TikTok account from your Instagram, since you generally have less followers on Instagram. To conclude, I would like to emphasize that Instagram and TikTok can complement each other and both of them are necessary to build up a relevant follower base and a meaningful personal brand.

Analysis of other successful content creators' accounts

Firstly, in this chapter I would like to analyze 3 successful content creators' accounts. Two of them have a follower base of similar size than mine and the last one will be Bence Halmi who I already mentioned as one of Hungary's most successful TikTok content creators. I chose the first two person as content creators with similar number of followers but in different fields of interest, meaning that they do not communicate about language learning or learning at all. Thus, I would like to show and analyze creators from different areas on the social media.

My first content creator to analyze is Zsuzsa Magyar, who has a name on TikTok as zsuzsa_magyar82 and she can be found with the same name on Instagram. Zsuzsa currently has 23.500 followers on TikTok, but this number is constantly growing, and more than 4600 followers on Instagram, which is growing together with TikTok. I will analyze her analytics that she shared with me, and I will investigate what can be the secret of her success on these platforms. However, first of all I would like to introduce Zsuzsa's strategy and target market. She is communicating mostly about parenting and raising children, since she is a mother of three children meaning that she has a huge experience in this field. She is giving tips and useful advice about childcare, such as how to use for example a nasal aspirator vacuum cleaner, or what kinds of hair styles she does for her daughter. From this, we can easily conclude that her target market is mostly women, especially mothers or women who would like to or will become mothers soon. She gives practical tips about cooking as well, since this is also connected to being a mother. Her aim with cooking tips is to show fast and easy recipes. We can also find some useful content for the everyday life on her platforms, such as using the best teeth whitening. All in all, her profile can be described as the life of an everyday mother who has a huge experience in parenting.

Regarding the composition of her follower base, it shows that the target market was reached, since on TikTok, 82% of her followers are women, while this percentage on Instagram is 92.9%. Concerning the age distribution, it can be discovered that the target market is an older generation than in my case for instance. Since Zsuzsa targets mothers, they are generally older than my target audience of students. On Figures 9 and 10 we can see both distributions on

TikTok and Instagram as well. On TikTok, 70% of her followers are between 18 and 34 years old, which is similar to my follower base but with more people in the 25-34 age group. However, for her, the 35-44 age group is also significant with its 18%.

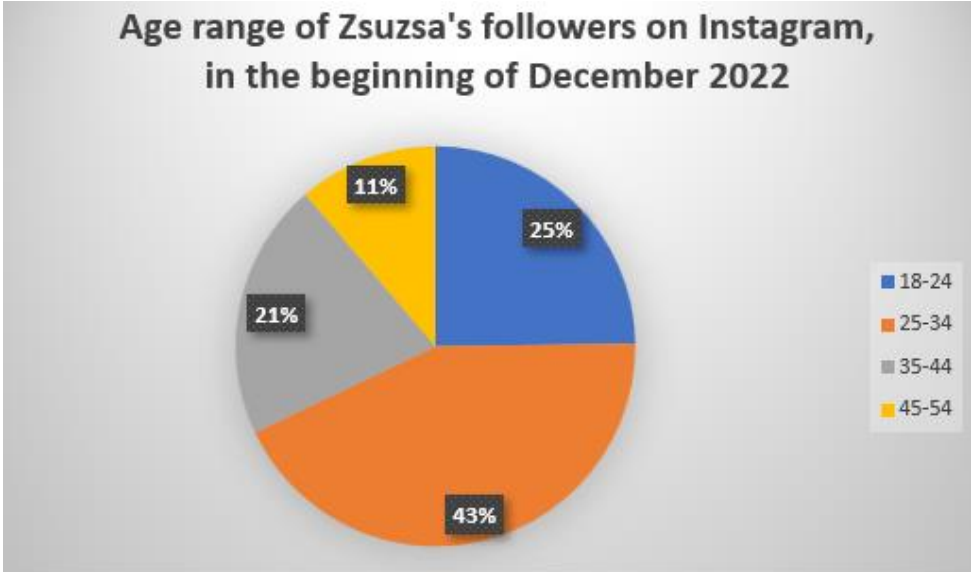
Figure 9 Age range of Zsuzsa's followers on TikTok, in the beginning of December 2022



Source: TikTok, 2022 (self-edited)

Concerning the age distribution of Instagram followers, it is even more interesting because here we can see a clear majority of the 25-34 age group with 43%. However, the younger generation with 18-24 years are also significant with their 25% while the 35-44 generation is present in 21% of the follower base. I believe that this data clearly shows the different target group as well as the gender distribution.

Figure 10 Age range of Zsuzsa's followers on Instagram, in the beginning of December 2022



Source: Instagram, 2022 (self-edited)

Secondly, I would like to analyze the most successful videos of Zsuzsa on TikTok, and I will make an analysis of her Instagram account as well. Regarding her most successful video on TikTok, it is about a product for teeth whitening which reached 961.000 people. I included every piece of important information in Table 1 and I will analyze the results based on this table. Regarding the most successful video, it can be concluded that the number of savings was the highest, and probably this is the reason why the algorithm showed it to many people. After, concerning a “how-to-use” video which is very practical and can help a lot concerning Zsuzsa’s target audience, the average watch time is significant. Although the full video was viewed only by 2.11% but it is likely that it is due to the fact that the video is 3 minutes long! These long videos usually do not get that much attention and do not reach that many people. Thus, it can be seen that the algorithm liked this video because people watched it for a very long time, 48.5 seconds.

Table 1 Information about Zsuzsa’s most successful videos on TikTok, at the beginning of December 2022

Content of the video	Number of people who were reached	Number of shares	Number of savings	Average watch time	Percentage of people who watched the full video
Teeth whitening	961.000	2003	28.000	22.1 seconds	13.66%
How to use a nasal aspirator vacuum cleaner	170.000	713	1809	48.5 seconds	2.11%
Her daughter hair style	167.000	25	1122	25.8 seconds	19.19%
How to pack books for children for school	275.000	175	1956	31.3 seconds	39.1%

Source: TikTok, 2022 (self-edited)

The third video that I would like to analyze is about Zsuzsa's daughter's hair style. There is a really interesting fact about this video, namely that it is part of a series! This is actually the second part of her series out of 9 episodes already! This is really important because if someone can make a series of videos on TikTok that are connected to each other and reach a huge number of people, this can lead to a huge follower base growth! It is because if the people see any episodes of the series, they will wait for the next one and that is why it is more likely that they will start following the content creator. That was the case with Zsuzsa as well, she started making videos of how she does the hair of her daughter every morning, to different and pretty hair styles. This can be a useful advice for other mothers and that is why they started following Zsuzsa. Moreover, we can also see that the number of people who watched the full video is also high, it is 19.19% while the average watch time is 25.8 seconds which is also significantly high. These two data show the best why the algorithm thought that it might be an interesting video enough to show it to other users as well, on the For You page. Another data which cannot be seen in the table is from where the huge number of reached people came from. For this video it is in 96% the For You page. This data also shows that the majority of people who viewed the video was coming from the For You page, meaning that it is TikTok's algorithm that the content creators need to impress, if that happens, it will be a win-win situation even without advertisements.

Last but not least, the fourth video to analyze on Zsuzsa's platform is also a "how-to" useful video, this time it is about packing the books for children who are going to school. In this case we can see the highest average watch time with 31.3 seconds as well as the highest percentage of viewers who watched the full video with 39.1%. These two data are generally considered very high in this case, which supports the idea of following the algorithm. For this video, the people saw the video in 98% on the For You page. All in all, I can conclude that Zsuzsa is building up her own personal brand on TikTok only through meaningful content creation, without advertising. From the data above, I believe that it is perfectly possible to rely only on the TikTok's algorithm when establishing a social network and Zsuzsa is an excellent example for it.

Concerning her Instagram account, she reached 11.433 people in the last 90 days meaning from 7 September until 5 December. From this 11.433 people 7847 were non-followers, which means that more than 68% of the users reached were the ones who do not or did not follow Zsuzsa. I believe that this is a significant amount since the goal is to reach as many people as possible and through it, increase the follower base. It is interesting to see that while on my account the Reel videos reached a lot of people, in case of Zsuzsa, it is mostly the posts, because they

reached 12.500 users in this period. The second-best performing contents were the Reels for her as well, with 3424 people reached. The Stories reached 1872 people while the videos influenced 1378 people, ending the data with the live videos for only 161 people reached. It is also important to mention that Zsuzsa made only 3 live videos in this period which can be the reason for the low number of people. Moreover, she posted only 3 Reels videos as well, so I believe that if she would have been posted more Reels, she could have gained more people reached. However, I can see from the data that her Instagram posts are also very popular, probably because she posts regularly on almost a daily basis but in every two days for sure. Thus, her most successful post from this period reached 2338 people and out of them, 1078 were not her followers. I can also see the analytics showing that 1549 people saw this post on their Feed while 1116 people found it from the hashtags. This also shows the importance of hashtags on Instagram. What is more, this post was saved by 47 people which means that the algorithm liked showing it to more and more people since it favors if a user saves something on the platform.

In conclusion, I can confirm that Zsuzsa is building her own personal brand on the social media channels completely without advertising, simply relying on the algorithm. From the analysis above, I noticed that she consciously pays attention to make the best contents for the algorithm and thus, it will help showing it to more people. I believe this is an available option for everyone who would like to establish a social account but do not want to spend on advertisements.

Secondly, I would like to analyze another very successful content creator, who is Dorottya Kern-Ganter. Her username on both TikTok and Instagram is kernganterdorka. She started her Instagram and TikTok accounts together, so it is really interesting to analyze the evaluation of both platforms together. On TikTok, she currently has 20.600 followers while on Instagram, this number is 933. She is considered as a micro-influencer as Zsuzsa or me, but I believe that is why it is interesting to evaluate her results. Dorka's aim with her accounts is to promote her own enterprise which is dealing with cosmetic services, such as waxing, building artificial eyelashes or tinting eyebrows. Besides, she constantly shares posts about cooking, as this is one of her hobbies and passions besides cosmetic services. Consequently, her target market is women who are interested in her cosmetic services, meaning rather the younger generation between 20 and 35 years. In addition, with her cooking content she can also target women but men as well. In conclusion, Dorka is building up her personal brand based on her own expertise in cosmetic services.

Regarding the composition of Dorka's follower base, it can be seen both on Instagram and TikTok as well that she reached her target market. On TikTok, 87% of her followers are women,

while on Instagram, this figure is 84.7%. From these two distributions we can see that her target market was reached, but it is also interesting to look at the age distribution of her followers. On TikTok, 47% of her followers are between 18-24 years old which clearly shows that the younger generation is more interested in the beauty area and cosmetic services. In addition, 33% of her follower base is between 25 and 34 years old while 13% is between 35 and 44 years old. There is a negligible amount of 5% of people between 45 and 54 years and 2% of 55 or more years old. On Instagram, these figures changed a little bit since on this platform, the majority, meaning 40.6% are between 25 and 34 years. After comes the 18 and 24 age group with 28%. Additionally, the next age group is between 35-44 years which has a quite significant 19.6% of the total follower base. From these data we can conclude that Dorka’s followers are a little bit older on Instagram than on TikTok, but this can be considered as normal since there are more younger people registered on TikTok.

Concerning Dorka’s most successful videos on TikTok, I would like to analyze three of them.

Table 2 Information about Dorka’s most successful videos on TikTok, at the beginning of December 2022

Content of the video	Number of people who were reached	Number of shares	Number of savings	Average watch time	Percentage of people who watched the full video
How the intimate waxing works	650.000	527	3742	49.4 seconds	14.57%
Video response to a question regarding cosmetics	609.000	555	3064	66.6 seconds	13.39%
Video response to a question 2.	118.000	6	212	10.8 seconds	37.86%

Source: TikTok, 2022 (self-edited)

Dorka’s most watched video is about a topic that a lot of people do not like speaking about, they find it embarrassing and sharing a content regarding intimate waxing is also regarded as

controversial. However, since it is among Dorka's services in her enterprise, she wanted to give an insight on how she does this service, which are the steps, what are the things that the customers should expect if they choose this service. I believe that besides the numbers that I will analyze soon, the success of this video can be due to the fact that not a lot of people talk about this topic. Since it is considered as embarrassing, it can be seen as a secret but on the other hand, it is a service just like the others, such as tinting eyebrows. This is a stereotype that Dorka wanted to resolve by making this video. From the Table 2 we can see that the average watch time is very high, meaning that people watched the video on average for 49.4 seconds. This is a huge number compared to the fact that people can skip the video in the first three seconds. Moreover, the number of people who watched the full video is 14.57% which is significant because the full video is almost three minutes! The second most-viewed video is a response video to a question by a follower who was curious about some details of this intimate waxing. This video reached an even higher average watch time with 66.6 seconds and 13.39% of users watched it until the end. This content is also three minutes long that is why these numbers are excellent to amaze the algorithm. Consequently, both regarding this content and the previous one, 96% of the viewers found these videos on the For You page according to the TikTok analytics. This means that the algorithm showed it to many people and recommended these contents because people watched it for a long time, thus, they spent more time on the application, creating a win-win situation. Lastly, the third most-performing video is another answer video for a follower's question. This time, I believe that the majority watched this video because literally nobody speaks about this issue. The follower wanted to know whether it is possible to go on an intimate waxing while she is having her period, but she uses tampons of course. Dorka explained what the process is in this case and with this video she reached 118.000 people. The average watch time here is only 10.8 seconds, but it is important to mention that the full video is 16.32 seconds. That is why it is possible that the percentage of people who watched the full video is higher, 37.86%. According to TikTok analytics, only with this 16-second-long video, Dorka gained 105 followers.

-In conclusion, I believe that Dorka is using the TikTok algorithm to grow her follower base and to promote her services. This way, she could advertise her cosmetic services completely free, just by creating meaningful content on TikTok.

In addition, I would like to analyze her Instagram account as well because this is another platform where she establishes her personal brand. Although she does not have a lot of followers on Instagram yet, she managed to reach a lot of people in the last 90 days, more precisely, 20.750 users. The majority of people were reached through Reels, which means 18.600 users.

It is really interesting to analyze because Dorka only uploaded three Reel videos during this time, which is not a significant number at all. On the other hand, she managed to succeed and reach a lot of people only with these three videos. After, her posts were also performing well since she reached 3848 people with her regular posts, approximately five times a week. Finally, her Stories reached 779 users. Concerning her posts, Dorka’s most popular post in this 90-day-period reached 669 people, which is not a huge number. However, since she shares posts regularly, these numbers add up and it is possible to reach more people. This also shows the importance of quantity on this platform. Finally, I would like to emphasize that in the analytics there is a figure for the geographical distribution of followers as well. In Dorka’s case, this distribution is very important since her service is located in Budapest. Luckily, 39.6% of her followers are located in Budapest in the case of Instagram and there is a similar amount on TikTok as well.

In conclusion, in my humble opinion Dorka is using the social media as a free marketing tool for her enterprise and she manages to amaze the algorithms on both platforms which creates the opportunity for her to grow her following base and promote her company.

Finally, for the third content creator I would like to analyze the analytics of one of Hungary’s most successful TikTok content creators, Bence Halmi.

Table 3 Information about Bence’s most successful videos on TikTok, at the beginning of December 2022

Content of the video	Number of people who were reached	Number of shares	Number of savings	Average watch time	Percentage of people who watched the full video
Hotel Ózon Luxury Villa description	766.000	3757	8829	15 seconds	29.45%
Story video with his wife	603.000	274	1929	11.4 seconds	50.85%
Story video of first tattoo	607.000	67	2069	14.8 seconds	48.56%
Surprise gift for his wife	312.000	66	1373	29.6 seconds	40.71%

Source: TikTok, 2022 (self-edited)

As I mentioned, Bence has huge follower bases on both platforms, that is why it is worth to see his analytics. From Table 3 we can see some of his videos which achieved to reach a significant number of people. One of his most recent videos was about a description of a luxurious villa in Hungary, namely Hotel Ózon. It was a collaboration with the hotel and Bence had to make this video to promote the place. From the Table we can see that this video reached 766.000 people and the most important data is that 29.45% of the users watched the full video until the end. Bence applied various tricks in this video, starting from the importance of the first three seconds, when he said a catchy sentence like “luxury villas in the Mátra? This is available for you too!”. With this sentence he could raise the attention of people because who would say no to an offer like this? After, Bence showed the villa with various cuttings in the video, not letting people to become bored while watching. Since the most important information was at the end of the video – why it is available, what should be done to be able to try it – a lot of people kept on watching until the end. This was the same situation with the fourth video when he showed a surprise gift for his wife. His wife had to guess in the video which is the place where Bence will travel with her. Naturally, people are curious, and they wanted to know their next travel destination and that is why 40.71% people watched the full video.

The other two videos that I got the exact analytics about are two story videos, one is regarding Bence’s first tattoo and the other one is also with his wife. For the video about the tattoo, Bence started with sentence like “The first tattoo in my life just got done!” and he only showed the actual tattoo at the end of the video making sure that the people who are curious about it, will watch until the end, making it more attractive for the algorithm to show it to more users on the For You page. This strategy seemed to be successful since 607.000 people saw the video and 48.56% of them watched until the end which is a significant number. Finally, regarding the story video with her wife, it is simply a 11-second-long video with a trending music which could be built in to Bence’s profile and thus, he used it to make this trending video with his wife. According to his analytics, only by this 11-second-long video, he managed to gain 879 new followers! Moreover, what can be the time of editing a video like this, maybe 5 minutes? I believe it is amazing how the conscious content creation can work, if somebody knows how to use to algorithm for his own interests.

Concerning his Instagram account, he constantly posts his TikTok videos without watermarks in the form of Reel videos and this resulted in a huge follower base growth for him. However, we can see on the figures of his reached audience that it is still much less than in the case of TikTok. For instance, with the same video about the luxurious villas in the Mátra, he reached only 158.000 people on Instagram. However, it is considered as a huge number on Instagram.

From this 158.000 people, 143.601 were non-followers, meaning that Bence could reach new people as well, besides his own follower base. What is more, this video was saved by 542 people on Instagram which also favor the algorithm's work. All in all, Bence is an excellent example for the meaningful content creation, since he was among the first ones who had huge successes on TikTok. As for now, he has a whole online course on how to use TikTok consciously, how to amaze the algorithm and how to build a personal brand on the platform. I also participated in this online course which has helped me a lot to be able to achieve my purposes on social media.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, I believe that both the secondary literature and my own research supported my hypothesis, and I could answer all of my research questions. Based on my inquiries, I found out that today the most significant platform is TikTok, on this social site it is possible to gain the most followers in the shortest time. A lot of content creators noticed it as well, that is why the platform has evolved from being simply a “dancing app” to a potential platform for new influencers and meaningful contents. However, although TikTok is the most important social media site nowadays to build up a follower base, we cannot neglect Instagram either. According to my research, Instagram is a more personal platform where people can trust in the influencers better than on TikTok. That is why, most of the sales and collaborations are still taking place on Instagram, which makes this platform equally significant besides TikTok. On TikTok, one can build up a huge follower base and on Instagram, the content creator can sell her products or services, or she can collaborate with firms.

Pursuing this further, another research question was whether it is more difficult to build up a follower base on Instagram than on TikTok. All of my research, including my account and other successful content creators’ accounts showed that it is harder to build up a relevant follower base on Instagram. For instance, one of Hungary’s most successful content creators, Bence Halmi, who participated in my research, has around 423.800 followers on TikTok, while the same person only has 34.300 followers on Instagram. This distribution of followers was true for all analytics of other content creators as well, including my accounts. Nonetheless, it crucial to mention that although it is more challenging to build up a follower base on Instagram, but Instagram followers are also valued more than TikTok followers! Meaning that it is enough for Bence to have only around 30.000 followers on Instagram to be a significant influencer, while on the other hand, the same amount of follower base on TikTok would count but it would not mean that the user is a huge influencer.

Furthermore, I compared the Instagram Reel videos and TikTok videos as well since they have a very similar structure and idea behind. In fact, the secondary literature also proved that the Instagram Reels were introduced because of the emergence of TikTok. Generally, concerning their performances, Instagram Reels generate a smaller number of viewers. It was proved by different results of my research as well, for instance, on my own account I have a video which reached 14.000 people on Instagram and 460.000 viewers on TikTok. However, I noted during my analysis that there are some content types which can reach closely the same numbers on Instagram as well, or even better results than TikTok. In my case, this type of contents included the videos about language learning and learning motivation. In my humble opinion, even though

TikTok evolved a lot during the years, it is still more difficult to reach the audience with educational videos than with funny videos. This is however easier on Instagram since the people are more open for learning and education on this platform.

In addition to evaluating the Reels and TikTok videos, I conducted a research whether Instagram and TikTok can complement each other even though they are owned by different companies. I found out that they cannot simply complement each other but it is highly recommended to link together the two accounts and build them together. Every content creator who I could analyze insisted on building these two accounts together and taking advantage of the possibility to redirect people from TikTok to Instagram. Since it is easier to raise the attention on TikTok with a catchy video it is worth starting on this platform and redirecting people to Instagram at the end of the TikTok video. This way only those will go to Instagram who watched the full video and are interested about a more personal side of the content creator. With this method I was able to gain around 2000 followers on Instagram only with my most successful video on TikTok, which reached over 1 million users. What is more, as I mentioned most of the collaborations and actual sales are still happening on Instagram, so it is worth focusing on the Instagram follower base as well. Since it is easier to redirect people from TikTok to Instagram than trying to grow the follower base only organically on Instagram I would advise every content creator to link the two accounts and encourage people to follow them on both platforms. However, if a content creator does this, it is essential to mention that the topics discussed on the two platforms should be identical. For instance, if a user posts videos about language learning on TikTok, it is beneficial to posts contents that are similar on the Instagram account as well. This way, the people will get the content that they are interested in, and they do not get confused about several topics.

Finally, the most important research question was whether it is possible to build up successfully a personal brand only by meaningful content creation, without paying for advertising. According to my research, it is completely possible, moreover, it is more beneficial to accomplish it without advertising. All of the content creators that I analyzed – including one of Hungary's most successful TikTok creator – have built up their platforms only by creating content that is favorable for the algorithm. Since the algorithm notices if a content creator publishes something that is popular among the people, it is possible that the system will show it to more and more people, on the For You page in case of TikTok, and on the Discover page in case of Instagram. However, it is the content creator's task to publish contents that are advantageous for the algorithm. According to my research, the most important signal for this is the watch time of the videos or posts, on both platforms. Since both TikTok and Instagram have

the same goal, to make people spend more time on the platforms, it is logical that the algorithms favor the contents which can catch and keep the attention of the users. That is why, during my analysis I discovered that the first three seconds are crucial in case of a TikTok video, since this is the part when the viewer decides whether he will watch it further or not. After, since TikTok is considered as a fast platform where people tend to switch between the videos in less than seconds, it is crucial to keep the attention with providing the so-called “micro-shocks” to the users’ brains. This can be achieved through several ways, such as making the viewers curious about the ending of the video, using objects to visualize the message of the video, and using various cuttings inside one video. These are some of the elements that are used by the content creators I analyzed and based on the data, they could use it to amaze the algorithm and thus, reach a lot of people on TikTok. These elements are similar in the case of Instagram with the Reel videos which are the most important type of contents on this platform now. As I already mentioned, there is a huge potential in Reels and it is advised to upload the TikTok videos as Reels on Instagram, after making sure that the watermark is removed from the video.

Finally, it is important to mention whether it is a better option to rely only on content creation and not to pay for any advertising. According to my findings, it can be even timesaving if a content creator knows how to create content that is favorable by the algorithm. Among my research findings I included a particular video from Bence Halmi, one of Hungary’s most successful content creators. One of Bence’s videos were only around 11 seconds and it was so popular that only with this video, he gained 879 new followers according to TikTok analytics. I believe that it is not only budget friendly to skip paying for advertising, but it can result in a more relevant follower base as well. Since the algorithm will show the content to those who are interested in it and it will reach people organically without ads, it will generate followers who are truly interested in the topic that the content creator is speaking about. For instance, according to my findings, I could gain more than 24.000 followers on TikTok only with creating meaningful content for them. From their feedback I can see that my videos were really helpful for them, and I am glad that I could help them without paying for advertisements to reach my target audience.

In conclusion, I believe that content creation is more and more popular among people nowadays. However, it is essential to know how a beginner can build up a personal brand on the social media platforms. That is why, I wanted to investigate the opportunities without advertising. In my opinion, I could give an insight to the most important elements of establishing a personal brand in the online world.

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