

## Uloga Tik Tok društvene mreže u razvijanju odnosa s javnošću

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**Apstrakt:** Važnost uspostavljanja komunikacije s korisnicima i potrošačima, putem društvenih mreža, sve je više prepoznata i prisutna u savremenom poslovnom svetu. Odnosi s javnošću omogućuju izgradnju poverenja i sticanje lojalnosti među korisnicima, a delovanje ove poslovne funkcije sve se više dešava putem digitalnih, društvenih medija. Uspostavljanjem bliskog odnosa između potrošača i kompanije, razmena najvažnijih i novih informacija ostvaruje se na svim društvenim mrežama, ali na različite načine. Zbog svoje specifičnosti, Tik Tok kao društvena mreža postaje sve raširenija i dobija sve veći broj korisnika. U radu autori analiziraju važnost korištenja ove društvene mreže u savremenim odnosima s javnošću i promene koje Tik Tok društvena mreža donosi u procesu komuniciranja s javnošću.

**Keywords:** odnosi s javnošću, komunikacija, društvene mreže, tik tok

## The Role of Tik Tok Social Network in Developing Public Relations

**Abstract in English:** The importance of establishing communication with users and consumers, through social networks, is increasingly recognized and is present in the modern business world. Public relations enable building trust and gaining loyalty among users, and the activities of this business function are increasingly manifested through digital, social media channels. Establishing a close relationship between consumers and the company, the exchange of the most important and new information is achieved through all social media, but in different ways. Due to its specificity, Tik Tok as a social network is becoming more widespread and gaining an increasing number of users. In this paper, the authors analyze the importance of using this social network in modern public relations and the changes that Tik Tok social network brings in the process of communicating with the public.

**Keywords:** public relations, communication, social networks, Tik Tok.

### 1. Introduction

Globally, public relations revenue was over \$ 14 billion in 2016, and much of that money is just spent on social media communication (Chadwick, 2021). Public relations is very important for companies, especially in recent decades with the emergence and popularity of social media. This segment has especially advanced and become much more complex because it includes other organizational activities in the company. It is no longer enough for a company to have one-way communication with the public through the print media or television. Consumers demand communication in the form of dialogue, where the company will hear their remarks and suggestions, but also support social goals and stand by their consumers in times of social crisis or injustice.

The development of social media and their diversity, with the rapid flow of information, has enabled a conversation between the public and organizations at a very close level. The diversity of digital media has also led to a division of the population in relation to social media preferences, so that companies have a choice of which segment they want to be in contact with and in what way. In addition to the

rapid dissemination of information, the way in which that information is shared is also of great importance precisely because of population preference. Social media has changed a lot compared to a couple of years ago (Lawlor, 2019), so it is very important to adequately and at the right time choose a suitable social media and create a strategy for the company to be successful and reach the desired audience. According to Whiting and Williams (2013), social networks are used for various purposes, such as video sharing (YouTube), picture sharing (Instagram), microblogging (Twitter) and the like.

In the last few years, there has been a rapid growth in the number of users of the Tik Tok social network. Although it was initially famous as a social network used by teenagers, it quickly spread to the rest of the population due to the specifics of its use. Unlike other social media, social trends on the TikTok network are created and spread very quickly, regardless of the number of accounts that the user follows. By measuring user interaction with content, the algorithm decides how interesting and quality the content is and displays it to a larger or smaller number of users. The function enables companies to quickly achieve quality communication with a larger number of people. In this paper, the authors find connections between the essential activities within the framework of public relations and the observed new social networks. They review its value in building a brand and providing added value to customers in order to build trust among the target segment and improve competitiveness.

## 2. Public relations

The importance of public relations in the US, Australia, Brazil, Germany, Britain and other parts of the EU is reflected in investment in education programs and universities that deal with communication through the media (Botan, Taylor, 2004). This has led to the emergence of many scientific journals dealing with this form of communication. The first forms of this relatively young branch of science are most often attributed to Sallot et al. (1975), who were the first to try to lay the foundations of public relations. Subsequently, Ferguson (1984) identified three categories important for quality public relations: social ethics, social problems and their management, and public relations. Although seemingly separate categories, all three form a unified process by which companies communicate to the public.

The most important transition that has taken place in the theory of public relations is certainly the transition from a functional perspective to a cocreational one. According to Botan and Taylor (2004), the functional perspective is the observation of the public and communication towards it as a tool for achieving various organizational goals, therefore marketing and advertising arise from this perspective. However, as the theory of public relations developed as well as its application, the whole concept expanded beyond simply thinking about achieving organizational goals.

The cocreational perspective views the public as a partner in creating two-way communication about common goals. This way of observing the tools of public relations is much longer-term because it focuses on nurturing the relationship with the public and puts the importance of this relationship above the achievement of organizational goals. This perspective can also be seen in the authors Grunig and Huang (2000). The focus is on building trust, as the most important element of public relations. Such a relationship enables the contribution that public relations can have outside the company, so they can encourage social change, participate in solving social problems and initiate activities aimed at improving certain aspects of public life (Taylor, Vasquey, Doorley, 2003). With the use of social media as a tool for these processes, the work of companies has been made much easier.

The emergence and development of social media has had a profound effect on public relations. Social media platforms have enabled communication in different contexts. As many as 38% of CEOs in the U.S. said they use social media as their main tool for communicating with the public (USC Center for Public Relations, 2019). The influence of social networks is so strong that it has led to the development of social media related public relations (Wang, Cheng, Sun, 2021). Various authors deal with other aspects of social networks such as time spent in the use of social networks, user perception of social networks, as well as communication on social networks. Broom and Sha (2013) define public relations as a function of management that identifies, establishes and maintains beneficial relationships between companies and the public, while Huang, Wu and Huang (2017) define digital public relations as budding, diversification and advancement in relation to the public.

Diga and Kelleher (2009) note that public relations practitioners who use different social media in their work are much more aware of the expertise, structure and advantages that their company has over the

competition. According to the same authors, in addition to using social media for public relations, communication with the population through the same tools can also contribute to the improvement of strategies in other spheres of business, as well as other public concerns in education, culture, politics, health and marketing. If a company represents the same public goals as its consumers, it makes much stronger connections with its market segment and builds its brand using added value. This enables the company with competitive advantages that can lead to profit increasing (Krivokuća, 2020). In this way, the company invests in its long-term future, especially in times of crisis, and thus ensures the success of its business.

### **3. Social networks and brand building**

Digital technologies have a strong impact on businesses and can help a company use its full potential improve productivity and efficiency (Pavlović, Nestić, Bošković, 2021). Building a brand and providing added value to customers has become a key aspect of modern business. Through quality public relations, companies create a brand image and promote positive relationships between them and the public. Previously, this relationship was nurtured directly through products and services, but it is no longer enough to passively provide customers with certain information without feedbacks, but it is necessary to communicate things that are not product related and create a "product character" or connect the brand with values supported and nurtured by the company. The development of technology as well as e-commerce has led to a significant impact of social networks as well as the online presence of the brand on business. For every company, regardless of the activity it is engaged in, it has become very important to communicate with its customers through social networks. In addition to the possibility of online promotion and sale of products and services, social networks are also an excellent tool for developing good public relations, as well as for brand building and consumer loyalty.

Social networks enable the population to identify with the brand in a much closer way than conventional media advertisements, precisely because of two-way communication. This is made possible by social networks that provide a channel for creating and sharing content in a very easy way. Social networks have completely transformed the relationships between companies and the population by creating multi-way communication (Tsimonis, Dimitriadis, 2014). Information on social networks has become interactive, so users, in addition to consuming, have the opportunity to create and share content.

Rapid changes in the market lead to rapid changes in trends, so the popularity of certain social networks is changing on social networks. The most famous examples are certainly MySpace and Vine, social networks that have gone from a large number of users to a complete shutdown (McAlone, 2015). It is very difficult to predict these trends, and yet it is of great importance for the company to start building its brand on time on a network that gathers the target population. In addition, it is important to avoid wasting resources on the wrong social networks. That is why it is important to follow the trends, make a correct and timely decision on the choice of an adequate social network as a channel for communication, promotion and public relations. If the population perceives a certain brand positively, it will contribute to the brand image, increase customer loyalty and increase competence (Yunan, Yongshui, Jian, 2020).

Social networks cannot force users to communicate in a certain way, but the design of the application can in a specific way require or encourage certain social dynamics through the inclusion of certain digital features. For example, Twitter with its limit of 280 characters encourages short texts full of information, while Facebook's algorithm displays video content more than photos, encouraging users to share video content, and Instagram requires visual posts without the possibility of text-only content. The previously highlighted features in a certain way also create a population of users, so companies will, depending on their needs, use social networks in completely different ways.

Finally, online social networks primarily serve as a modern version of offline social networks, and allow people to gather around various social, cultural, political and other events, provide them with a platform for exchanging ideas, all without borders in geographical and linguistic terms (certain networks allow automatic translation into certain languages).

With the development of the Internet, as well as technology, from writing emails in the form of letters, networks now allow live streaming of various content. Following these trends, social networks have also changed. The trend can be noticed in the last few years, where short looping videos and live

streaming have emerged from content creation and sharing (Anderson, 2017). From retelling jokes and probably fictional anecdotes, social networks have progressed to creating video memes that have become part of mainstream culture. One of the networks that enable the creation of video memes and create mainstream culture is TikTok. This social network was created in 2017, and at the end of 2019 it already had 176 million downloads (Business of Apps, 2020).

#### **4. Tik Tok as a public relations tool**

In his work, Bresnick (2019) describes Tik Tok as a creative medium, not as a social network, because with the help of audiovisual effects, it enables users to easily create technically very interesting video content. Algorithms for displaying content very quickly "learn" from the user and a personalized "for you page" is quickly created, which at first glance seems chaotic. This element of uncertainty, which provides a large number of diverse videos in a short time, allows users to awaken the desire to see what's next and thus keep them for a long time. This feature of an online world is the cultural mind-set called metamodernism (Weil, 2019), or a set of nostalgic and cynical, knowing and naive, as well as directed and spontaneous videos. Such contrasts make the application intriguing and interesting, but they can also be confusing for people who are not used to the metamodern structure of new media.

Tik Tok is an application that is primarily driven by an algorithm, unlike other social networks that are modeled by followers, so accounts without followers can quickly gain popularity if the content they create is interesting to the public (Anderson, 2020). Based on this way of functioning, TikTok motivates users to create content which the audience wants to interact with, and not to create a large number of followers. Because of this feature, some authors (Tolentino, 2019) describe Tik Tok as a social network that is not connected to one's social network. As the algorithm is the one that controls the display of video content, in addition to the option to choose the interests themselves, users are created a unique "for you page" based on the interaction with the content. In this way, users will be shown the videos in which they spend the most time using the application, or similar videos compared to those they shared, saved and/or marked as favorites. This is a very different principle compared to social networks such as Facebook, Instagram or Twitter where users are shown content in relation to which profiles or channels they follow. For these reasons, Tik Tok makes it interesting and unpredictable for users because there is a trend of viral videos that are becoming a kind of part of modern culture among the population.

It was these features that made Tik Tok a very popular application that quickly gained a large number of users, especially due to Covid-19 lockdowns. According to Palupa, Meifilina and Harumike (2020) TikTok is a very addictive network, which means that users stay using this network for a long time, which is a good channel to approach and communicate with them. The same source states that 85% of users are under 35, which is a population that spends a lot of time online and follows online trends in communication and the virality of metamodernism trends. Recognizing these trends, and implementing them, is a tool for companies, with the purpose of getting closer to the target audience. Companies must follow trends and participate in them, in order to get involved and achieve positive communication with the present customers. This form, the model of identification, creates an emotional connection that can have a very positive impact on the company's business in times of crisis and the diversity of the brand in relation to the competition.

Companies on Tik Tok can advertise independently through their own accounts or through other users, ie "influencers" who can share their experiences about certain products or services that the company offers. For the company itself, it is desirable to follow viral trends and use them in its communication to customers, without product placement, because it creates a positive connection between customers where they do not feel threatened that they have to consume the product, but nurture a brand relationship through others' values. This added value provides stronger connections than product satisfaction. Also, this way of communication provides the company and/or the brand with authenticity which also influences the building of recognition and improves competitiveness. As the company uses trends to identify different target groups, its positioning among the population will strengthen. This concept of "imitation" of trends represents a kind of phenomenon on the Internet that is practically an evolution in communication (Zulli, Zulli, 2020). Even before the appearance of social networks, this phenomenon was present, but modern technologies have made it possible to better monitor the spread of trends.

Currently, Tik Tok is one of the most influential social networks in the world (Iqbal, 2020), so it can be

assumed that this application will soon have a very strong effect on the population and digital communication. This opportunity motivates world-famous companies and artists to use this platform for promotion and public relations. The Washington Post and New York Times use Tik Tok to post short interesting videos and thus activate the audience to interact. These videos are not directly related to the news and events covered by the print and/or digital editions of these media, but are their take on current viral trends (Nover, 2019). The mentioned trends are also changing the way traditional media function, because the population requires different content. Zaffrano (2019) notes that there are over 170 media and news organizations that create content on TikTok, and that number is now certainly much higher. USA Today, TeenVogue, NBC News, ESPN and many others create content on this social network, according to the same author. From 2018. until now, social networks have completely changed the way the US population consumes news (Shearer, Grieco, 2020), so most Americans say they rely on social networks to get some news. People today have a lot more informations available about services, products and companies (Jagodič, Vukasović, 2019). With this in mind, companies that want to nurture quality public relations must keep in mind the impact of digital social media on the population. This is especially true for platforms with growing popularity, such as Tik Tok, which enables a very fast flow of information and their dissemination.

## 5. Conclusion

Consumers demand quality public relations that will "convince" them that a certain brand and company nurture similar values as they do. It is no longer enough for companies to offer a product or service of certain characteristics, but it is necessary to communicate publicly about social values that they support or condemn. In this way, brands and companies offer added value and become "more humane" so that it is easier to identify and communicate with the population. Achieving a high level of consumer confidence and loyalty for the company is of great importance in order to achieve success and competitiveness. Moreover, it can be decisive in times of crisis, world economic crisis and the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Social networks offer various tools for quality and fast communication with the public, and following the trends in the digital world enables the recognition of the company as modern and up-to-date. If companies want to stay up to date with social trends, they must communicate in two directions using those social networks that allow for the rapid exchange of information regardless of the source that shares that information. This is exactly what is possible through Tik Tok, which shows users content that provokes interaction.

Tik Tok has its controversies, but it does create new patterns in digital communication whose strong impact on marketing, e-commerce and public relations cannot be avoided. Tik Tok has a strong impact on the population that is loyal to this application, and this can be used as an advantage to develop quality relationships with consumers based on added value in creating content, as opposed to promotions and communication in marketing.

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