



REPORT 122/2020

Content Department

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# **Advertising in video content created by TikTokers**

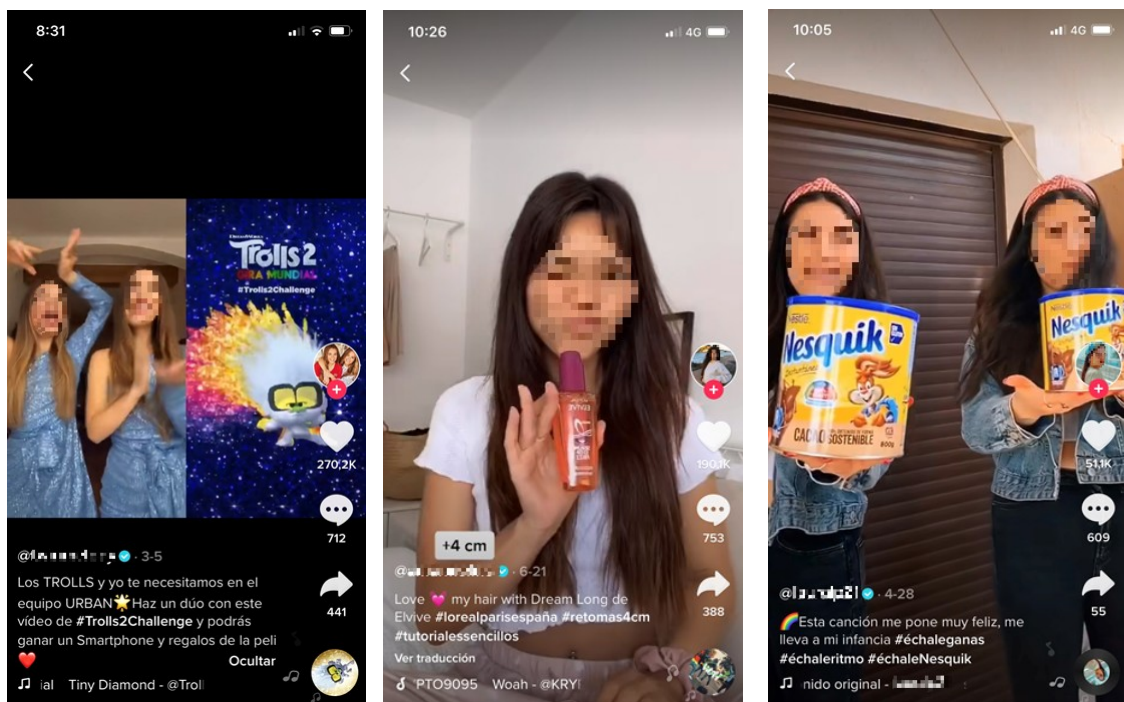
## Conclusions

The purpose of this report is to highlight the issue of advertising on TikTok videos and analyse the content and ways it is presented. TikTok is a social network where users create and share short videos, and is currently one of the most popular platforms among the youth demographic and one of the most downloaded apps in the world.<sup>1</sup>

We selected 8 profiles on the app featuring teenagers or young people in Spain who have some of the highest follower numbers. To narrow down the scope of the study, we examined videos uploaded between 1 March and 30 June 2020.

The report analyses commercial messages included in videos created by those 'TikTokers'.

**Image 1. Example of advertising content featuring TikTokers in the videos analysed**



The popularity of this social network is evidenced by the follower numbers (43 million among the 8 profiles analysed) and video views: the 16 in the sample amass over 30 million views.

<sup>1</sup> According to a report by Sensor Tower, which monitors consumer patterns on mobile devices, in the first quarter of 2020, TikTok broke the all-time record for application downloads. (<https://sensortower.com/blog/tiktok-downloads-2-billion>)

## Product types

Food and beverages are the most common, accounting for 25% of adverts. They are followed by goods related to fashion (18.8%) and beauty (18.8%), which include ads for hair products, sports shoes and clothing retailers, among others. The TikTokers also advertise their own merchandising (12.5%), including books and various goods aimed at children, as well as mobile applications and accessories (12.5%). Finally, the lowest percentage of adverts pertain to video game consoles and audiovisual fiction (an animated feature film), representing 6.3% each.

## Advert characteristics

In the advertising content analysed, inciting to buy is notably widespread (in 62.5% of cases), including by giving information on how to purchase, offering gifts or discounts, and explicit calls to action. This may either be verbalised by the TikToker (“Today I have a surprise for you that you're going to love! We're going to give away 25 of these packs to people who come on 25 June.”) or stated in the text (“There'll be a surprise on 25 June for the first 1,000 people to read my new book!!!”, and, “❤️Love this dress of @shein\_official Dress ID: 819920 The dress😊 15% discount on Shein with Coupon Code off % 15: Mtwinn015 #SHEIN”).

All examples include **endorsement** of the promoted product, service or brand, explicitly in half of all cases by verbalising its virtues or advantages. (“Today I went to Burger and saw their #greatdeal! [...] 2 menus for €7 😊🍷 Crazy, right??”). The other 50% include implicit endorsement of the product promoted by the TikToker expressing positive emotions or performing the typical choreographies.

The format to present the product or brand varies depending on the **type of interaction with the TikToker**. The most frequent - using the product (56.3%), is also the one with greatest interaction. This is followed by two formats with exactly the same frequency (18.8%): the TikToker showing the product and placement (usually wearing promoted clothing). The last category (6.3%) includes inserting advertising images in content created by the TikTokers.

## The Hashtag Challenge advertising format

Our study reveals that one quarter of the examples analysed are 'Hashtag Challenges', an advertising format that encourages users to create content on the platform linked to the promoted product or brand.

This format harnesses one of TikTok's most common entertainment content creation formulae: the 'challenge', which entails performing a given action and challenging others to replicate it.

A TikToker creates an initial video featuring the product, and presents it as a model to imitate:

“Try a Danet Shake and dedicate a top tune! Join the #DanetShakeChallenge and give your body a shake. I've done 6. How many can you do?”

In addition, in most of the examples analysed (75%), gifts are offered to incentivise users to replicate the content. This is the case in the promotion for an animated film, which encourages users to create new content including a video with images from the film:

“The TROLLS and I need you on the URBAN team★ Do a duet with this video from #Trolls2Challenge and you could win a Smartphone and movie goodies❤️”

The success of this type of advertising can be seen from the enormous amount of content created. For instance, a search for one of the hashtags (#Trolls2Challenge) shows a whole swathe of videos totalling 170 million views, most of which is content created by people who have taken up the challenge.

## Identification of advertising content

Almost all of the videos analysed (93.8%), which are found on the main platform interface with nothing to differentiate them from other content, have **no warning** to disclose advertising. The advertising we found that is placed by the platform, on the other hand, is disclosed.

In the videos analysed, the only advertising warning is “#ad” [in English] in the overlaid text. Given that this text is not necessarily comprehensible to a Catalan or Spanish speaking audience and is small print and alongside various other hashtags, it may be confusing for children and teenagers, and can easily go unnoticed.

Therefore, these ads, which draw on the youth audience's trust in TikTokers to lend credibility to a product, and which are presented in formats that simulate user-created content, are not easily identifiable as advertising, as required by the new European Media Services Directive.