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Managing customer comments – a study of webcare on TikTok

It has become standard practice for companies to interact with their customers and followers via video-based social media, in particular Instagram (e.g. Liebrecht et al. 2021), and to perform webcare, "online damage control" (van Noort et al. 2012). Recently, the video-based social medium TikTok has gained in popularity as a interaction platform, with a focus on spontaneous, fast-paced, often humorous, and occasionally controversial content.

This paper investigates how critical customer comments are managed on TikTok business accounts, based on a corpus of TikTok posts by internationally active companies. Of particular interest for the investigation are the general practices as influenced by the affordances of the medium, and the differences to
The study finds that companies use several strategies when addressing critical customer comments and complaints on Instagram. The degree of interaction ranges from very high to non-existent. Successful resolutions employ personal, brief multimodal messages that specifically and individually address issues, similar to findings by Zhang & Vásquez (2014) for Instagram. Visual and verbal humor is more pronounced in Webcare on TikTok. Instead of traditional complaint–resolution sequences, companies on TikTok pre-empt complaints by positioning marketing messages in a personal, ironic setting. Content creators are frequently employed to frame criticism humorously, As in previous studies of text-based customer communication, Conversational Human Voice (Decock et al. 2020, Liebrecht et al. 2021) is seen as best practice.

The study provides an overview of how customer comments on TikTok are successfully managed. In addition to describing best practices, there are also direct applied implications, as successful interaction is an effective tool for customer retention.

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