Activists and the Algorithm:

Visibility Tactics and Folk Theories of Dutch Activists on TikTok

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Abstract

Although designed for entertainment purposes, TikTok is increasingly used for activism. Yet, visibility of content on the platform is heavily curated by its recommendation algorithm. This can potentially affect the reappropriation of the platform for activist purposes, as it may undermine the activists' ability to reach out to fellow citizens and mobilize action. To increase visibility on digital platforms, users can develop certain tactics. These tactics are produced through the interactions that users have with the platform's algorithm. Prior research shows that users construct an algorithmic imaginary and come up with algorithmic folk theories, as information on how the algorithm works is proprietary. Furthermore, current research suggests that, because of each platform's specific functionalities, these theories differ across different platforms. This study focuses specifically on Dutch TikTok activists and sets out to explore how they use visibility tactics and conceptualize the algorithm. To do so, a combination of two exploratory interviews and a qualitative content analysis TikTok posts (N=50) was carried out. Results show that these activists use platform-specific tactics to gain visibility and use a set of more generalizable tactics to grab and retain the audience's attention. This study further reinforces the idea that different groups on a platform adopt a different repertoire of tactics to reach their desired visibility.

Keywords: Activism, Dutch, Algorithms, TikTok, Visibility Tactics

Introduction

With more than a billion active users on a monthly basis, TikTok is currently among the most popular social media platforms (Singh, 2024). The platform itself describes it as their mission to "inspire creativity and bring joy" (TikTok, 2024). Although the platform is most commonly used for such entertainment purposes, it is also growingly used for increasing political engagement via online activism ("Maken dansvideo's plaats voor", 2020). Like other large social media platforms, TikTok is not designed to push for and mobilize action, but instead to reproduce a capitalist model to maximize user engagement and sell user data for financial gain. The platform is designed to generate money, even if most users do not spend money on the platform itself. Among the specific characteristics that TikTok uses to maximize their user engagement are the short video format, which does not require too much patience and deep thinking from consumers, and a convenient user interface where users only have to slide their screens to get unlimited, new recommended content (Liang, 2021, pp. 3102-30103).

Several studies have addressed how users can reappropriate social media platforms for political engagement and activism (Jaramillo-Dent et al., 2022; Moran et al., 2022; Riedl et al., 2023), however little is known about how this specifically happens on TikTok. The case of TikTok is particularly interesting because the platform's specific user interface: each user automatically lands on the *For You Page* upon opening the app, where the user is presented with videos selected by TikTok's recommendation algorithm (Oluoch, 2023). Although users can follow specific creators on the platform, visibility on the platform thus heavily relies on the recommendation algorithm. This heavy curation of content may negatively affect the reappropriation of the platform for activist purposes, potentially undermining the ability of activists to reach out to fellow citizens and mobilize them towards social justice causes. These challenges associated with the platform's technical aspects raise the question of how creators of activistic content on TikTok then navigate through the platform.

Because how recommendation algorithms specifically work is proprietary information, creators on social media platforms come up with their own theories on how these algorithms work. A number of studies show that users theorize and employ specific tactics based on their conceptualizations of it to increase visibility (Jaramillo-Dent, 2022; Moran et al., 2022; Riedl et al., 2023). As activism increases on TikTok, it is important to consider these tactics and conceptualizations specifically in the context of digital activism. How are such tactics and conceptualizations helpful for activists? Having the goal of mobilizing action and producing social and political change, activists need to reach other people. This makes the concept of visibility especially important to this group of users. The way in which digital activists use

visibility tactics and how they conceptualize the recommendation algorithm is important, because contemporary digital activism can be reshaped according to the theories users have about TikTok's algorithm.

This study contributes to the existing body of research on visibility tactics and algorithmic theorization by researching how contemporary activism is impacted by the possibilities and limitations that social media platforms bring. To demarcate the research, this study will focus specifically on Dutch activists on TikTok. The aim of this study is to explore how activistic content and behavior of Dutch TikTok activists is influenced by the recommendation algorithm of the platform. To do so, two research questions will be answered; *RQ1: Which tactics do Dutch activists employ to gain visibility on TikTok?* and *RQ2: How do Dutch activists conceptualize TikTok's recommendation algorithm?* A combination of a qualitative content analysis (QCA) of TikTok videos by Dutch activists and interviews with Dutch TikTok activists is used to answer these research questions.

The paper is structured as follows: first the important theory relevant to the research topic is reviewed. From there, important concepts are determined that compose the theoretical framework. Then, a detailed description of the method is presented. The results are presented in the next section, which are further interpreted and connected to a broader context in the discussion. Finally, the conclusion is presented, in which the research questions are answered concisely.

Theory

Algorithmic Imaginaries and Folk Theories

In the current literature on user interactions with social media platforms' algorithms, two core concepts are evident: algorithmic imaginaries and algorithmic folk theories. Although both concepts result in similar observations and ideas, this section sets out to explain how both concepts have evolved from different theoretical traditions.

Algorithmic Imaginaries

Social media platforms use personalized recommendation algorithms to curate the social media posts that appear for specific users on the platform. The ways in which these algorithmic systems work are usually hidden for users. The algorithmic imaginary comes forth from a broader debate on the relationship between users and technology. The lack of available information on background processes in platform technologies plays a significant role in this debate. Specifically for algorithms, this means that without information on algorithmic processes, users produce their own ideas of how these processes work. Bucher

(2017) refers to these ideas as the algorithmic imaginary. These ideas in the algorithmic imaginary are productive; they shape the way people talk, think and feel about algorithms. Furthermore, they shape behaviour on the platforms: certain things are shared because they are believed to work better for the algorithm (Bucher, 2017, pp. 39-41). In a broader sense, imaginaries allow people to think about notions of control and their environments, specifically if the infrastructure of the environment is invisible or unintelligible for them (Kazansky & Milan, 2021, p. 366, Parks, 2015, p. 355). The algorithmic imaginary is thus produced because of an unequal distribution of power on the platform. The hidden nature of algorithms leads to a limited understanding of users about the processes that take place. This can give users a sense of helplessness, as they feel that they cannot influence what is showed to them through the algorithm. To create a bigger sense of agency, users produce algorithmic imaginaries. Algorithmic imaginaries are then used as a framing to understand how individuals and communities, in this case on social media platforms, can make sense of changes in their (technological) environments through mundane practices (Kazansky & Milan, 2021, p. 366). The ideas that arise through the algorithmic imaginary result in specific practices on platforms; Bucher points out that the beliefs that make up these algorithmic imaginaries influence people's understandings of what algorithms are, and as a result of this also affect how people use platforms (Bucher, 2017, p. 32).

Building on this concept of the algorithmic imaginary, Schellewald (2022) identifies the specific algorithmic imaginary of TikTok, as imagined by the 'ordinary users' of the platform. Schellewald introduces the idea of 'stories about algorithms' as part of the algorithmic imaginary of ordinary users. With these stories, ordinary users create continued awareness of algorithms, helping them manage how to pass through the algorithm without feeling helpless (Schellewald, 2022, pp. 4, 8). Although these 'stories about algorithms' are minimally productive in the sense that they do not straightforwardly mobilize the users to change their behaviour, they are productive because they help shape the way how users feel and think about algorithms. This way algorithmic awareness is created, which in turn can stimulate users to develop their own ideas on how the algorithm works.

Algorithmic Folk Theories

The concept of algorithmic folk theories stems from a different theoretical background than the algorithmic imaginary. Algorithmic folk theories are rooted in a broader tradition of folk theories in social psychology (Dogruel, 2021, pp. 287-288). Such theories are generated by people when they make assumptions about their environments, and subsequently create theories based on these assumptions. These theories are constantly tested and adjusted to help

people understand, predict and control their environments (Parke et al., 2017, p. 28). Although these folk theories produce similar ideas as algorithmic imaginaries, the concept does not necessarily stem from interactions of users with technology alone. Folk theories are a result of the interactions that people have with their environments in general, again as a way to increase their sense of agency. Algorithmic folk theories describe specific beliefs of users, based on their experiences with the algorithm and can thus vary across different digital platforms. Compared to the algorithmic imaginary, algorithmic folk theories are often more detailed and more specific to the platforms. However, both the algorithmic imaginary and algorithmic folk theories describe how users of a platform engage with, think about and understand recommendations algorithms. In both instances, users reflect on a power structure that exists between them and the platform's algorithm.

Studies on the user's perceptions of algorithms often find that users feel suppressed by the algorithm. For example, Riedl et al. (2023) find that both pro- and anti-abortion activists develop theories where it is assumed that the platform's governance is biased against their personal beliefs and ideological position (Riedl et al., 2023, pp. 11-12). Similarly, Jaramillo-Dent (2022) discusses how creators belonging to a minority group on TikTok perceive algorithmic injustice, as they perceive their content to be disproportionally affected by moderation (Jaramillo-Dent, 2022, p. 216). Due to such perceptions of algorithmic bias or algorithmic injustice, users are stimulated to produce strategies to increase (or decrease) their visibility on the platform. Examples are strategies used by transfeminine TikTok creators such as the use of hashtags, comments, 'duets'[1] or 'stitches'[2] to increase their visibility on the platform (DeVito, 2022, pp. 14-19). Similarly, stories about the algorithm as part of the algorithmic imaginary require users to become more active in their relationship with the algorithm: "They create awareness for invisible algorithms and reactivate people in their affective relation to them" (Schellewald, 2022, p. 8). These reflections on the power structure between the users and the algorithm can then increase the users' sense of agency on the platform.

Previous research on TikTok brings up several folk theories. In a study on folk theories and identity on TikTok, Karizat et al. (2021) propose 'the identity strainer theory', a folk theory where users believe the algorithm to be filtering out or suppressing certain social identities. Similar to the algorithmic imaginary, folk theories are productive. Based on these

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[1] The 'Duet' function lets the user show another user's video next to their own video (the screen is split into two).
[2] A 'Stitch' can be used to show an excerpt from anther user's video at the beginning of their own video.

beliefs users can alter their behaviour on the platform, resulting in 'algorithmic resistance' (Karizat et al., 2021, pp. 16-19) Some algorithmic folk theories give users an increased sense of agency, as it provides an opportunity to resist the algorithm. However, Eslami et al. (2016) found that most proposed algorithmic theories in their study placed the algorithm in a place of power over the user, leaving little to no room for the user to make any changes to what is recommended to them on the platform (Eslami et al., 2016, p. 2380). DeVito (2022) refers to algorithmic folk theories that do not guide the user to specific strategies, but instead help them explain why the platform behaves in a way that they perceive negatively, as 'demotivational folk theories' (DeVito, 2022, p. 19). This shows that being able to construct algorithmic folk theories does not always provide a sense of agency to the user of a platform. However, although not always successful in doing so, folk theories provide the user with tools to navigate a feeling of helplessness when interacting with platforms that use recommendation algorithms, as they provide users with an explanation as to why certain content gains visibility.

TikTok's functionalities and affordances

With 1.56 billion monthly active users worldwide, TikTok is considered as one of the most popular social media platforms present-day. Of all social media users worldwide, 30.95% use this particular platform. The majority of users are between the ages of 18 to 34, making up a relatively young user demographic (Singh, 2024). The platform, that originally started as the platform Musical.ly, is designed for making and sharing short videos, which can easily be uploaded and edited through the platform user interface. TikTok heavily relies on artificial intelligence (AI) to curate personalized content streams that are presented to their users, creating a personalized experience for each user (Herman, 2019). Although the platform describes it as their mission to inspire creativity and to bring joy, other types of videos are also shared (TikTok, 2024). For example, using the platform for activistic purposes becomes increasingly popular. To understand why activists use certain tactics to increase their visibility on the platform, it is important to understand TikTok's specific functionalities and platform affordances. On the platform, users can share and consume photo slideshows and videos from up to three minutes long. Upon opening the platform, the user automatically lands on the *For You Page*, where videos are recommended to the user by a recommendation algorithm. To go to the next video, the user only needs one swipe on their screen. Users have the possibility to follow other users and to go to their pages to see all their posted videos. Furthermore, users can like, comment, share, and save videos on the platform.

Platform Vernaculars

TikTok users can interact with the platform for different reasons. Among these reasons, prior literature mentions the use of the platform for the purpose of escapism (Omar & Dequan, 2020, p. 130; Schellewald, 2023, pp. 1572-1574). Schellewald (2023) notes the importance of the specific historical and social context of TikTok; the platform's popularity greatly increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. When forced to stay at home, TikTok became a distraction from everyday life, functioning as a 'feel good space' for its users. One of the properties of the platform that enables this, is its algorithm. The recommendation algorithm is very effective at observing and reinforcing the consumer preferences of users, creating a space that becomes hard to leave (Schellewald, 2023, pp. 1572-1574, 1580). It is, however, not just the recommendation algorithm that contributes to the efficiency of the platform in capturing engagement of its users. Within TikTok, specific subgenres or communities can resonate with central parts of users' identities, increasing the 'feel good quality' of the content and affording entertainment and relaxation on the platform (Schellewald, 2023, pp. 1575). The platform enables the creation of different vernaculars; subgenres with specific characteristics that shape their forms of communication (Gibbs et al., 2015, p. 5). Examples of these vernaculars on TikTok are 'GriefTok', containing content in which grief is expressed, or activism content for eliminating violence against women. Vernaculars can for example be maintained through the use of specific hashtags that can be added in the videos' caption, by using certain sounds in the videos, or with specific visual messages in the videos itself (Eriksson Krutrök, 2021, pp. 7-8; Ramati & Abeliovich, 2022, p. 12; Sued et al., 2022, pp. 64-66).

TikTok's Affordances

Among the reasons why different platform vernaculars can thrive on TikTok is the mimetic nature of content on the platform. As Ramati and Abeliovich (2022) note, TikTok stimulates creators to make mimetic videos by giving them specific tools to do so. The platform offers a 'use this sound' button, where users can detach the audio from a video to use it in their own video, a 'duet' and a 'stich' button, both enabling users to incorporate an existing video into their own video. This way, users of the platform can reuse, edit or remix existing sounds or videos (Ramati & Abeliovich, 2022, p. 3). This way, different communities can develop on the platform, each with their own specific styles of videos and sounds. These functionalities can, however, also be of use when developing specific tactics to increase visibility. Jaramillo-Dent (2022) describes how these functions are tactically used by immigrant influencers; for example, by using the duet function to increase the visibility of the original video or reusing a popular sound to increase their own visibility (Jaramillo-Dent, 2022, p. 214-215). Similarly,

DeVito (2022) finds that creators use comments, duets and stitches to increase their visibility on the platform (DeVito, 2022, p. 17). The specific affordances of TikTok thus shape the ways in which different groups of users use the platform. Considering that activists need to maximize their visibility to mobilize action and spread their messages, it is important to realize that TikTok's platform affordances shape the way in which they interact with the platform and that these affordances also shape the specific tactics and theories that these activists develop. Furthermore, activism on TikTok could be viewed as a specific platform vernacular, with its own style and practices. Platform affordances that can be used to increase visibility are therefore important to this group of users. In this study, special attention will be paid to the use of comments, 'duets' and 'stiches' as tactics to increase visibility.

Digital activism

Activism can be understood as a form civic engagement where the acts of individuals are liked to political activities and are aimed to mobilize change in larger social structures (Pattie et al., 2003, pp. 445-446). In mobilizing action, activists draw on their local embeddedness in their communities and seek for both small and larger ways to transform power relations (Martin et al., 2007, p. 70). Digital activism specifically refers to the citizen-lead forms of collective actions that use digital tools or environments, such as social media platforms, to mobilize action (Balan & Dumitrica, 2022, p. 3). To understand why activists reach for social media platforms to spread their message, it is important to investigate the opportunities social media platforms have. First and foremost, the capacity and speed of building a network is drastically higher when using social media platforms in comparison to traditional offline networks of people. Social media platforms enable different forms of communication, such as one-to-many, many-to-many and one-to-one communication. Additionally, social media platforms are often free to use, which lowers the costs of participation. Finally, these platforms enable activists and movements to be self-mediated and can provide opportunities for citizens to construct collective identities on these platforms (Cammaerts, 2015, p. 5). These qualities of social media platforms thus make them attractive to use for activism purposes, as it provides an effective platform to reach large groups of like-minded people.

As most social media platforms use a recommendation algorithm to curate content to specific audiences, what does this then mean for social media activists? How can these activists make sure that they reach their intended target audiences? Some of the existing literature about how digital activists manage their visibility describes the use of certain tactics, although not specifically in the context of recommendation algorithms. For example, McCosker (2015) describes using the element of provocation to generate visibility, and Lee

(2018) describes tactics that generate visibility by assuming neutral positions, to avoid being repressed on the platform (Lee, 2018, p. 4101; McCosker, 2015, p. 10). The question arises, however, whether activists have also developed tactics in which the platforms algorithm is integrated to effectively reach their target audience. Specifically on this, Treré and Bonini (2024) describe that activists on the platform Twitter integrate algorithms in their repertoire to increase their visibility. To do so, activists use hashtags, avoid content moderation, and spread unrelated content to tarnish the intended motive of a hashtag (Treré & Bonini, 2024, pp. 310, 312-313). When developing such tactics, the ways in which their activism is shaped is thus mediated by the platform. This then has an impact on activism beyond the digital sphere, as the way digital activism is shaped also influences how offline activism is organized (Balan & Dumitrica, 2022, p. 158). The current study will contribute to this field of literature by examining how such tactics are used by a specific group of Dutch activists on the platform of TikTok. This will then also give insight in the potential differences in tactics and conceptualizations of the algorithm across different social media platforms.

Method

The goal of this research is to answer the two research questions:

RQ1: Which tactics do Dutch activists employ to gain visibility on TikTok?

RQ2: How do Dutch activists conceptualize TikTok's recommendation algorithm?

To do so, a qualitative approach was taken. Qualitative research takes the context of certain processes and behaviours into account and can therefore keep the integrity of the context as complete as possible (Geertz, 1973, p. 10). It is furthermore rich in contents, capturing not only what and why certain phenomena can be observed, but also how these phenomena come into existence in the first place (O'Dwyer & Bernauer, 2014, pp. 23-24). In the case of this research, by using this approach it can both be found how Dutch activists use certain tactics in gaining visibility on TikTok, and how these tactics are informed by certain conceptualizations. To answer the research questions, a combination of a qualitative content analysis (QCA) and interviews were done. The QCA was used specifically to convey which tactics and trends are visible in the produced content of the activists on the platform. The interviews were used both to explore which possible tactics activists may use, and to unveil the conceptualizations and thought processes that have informed their decisions. After gathering a number of important concepts from the interviews, the QCA was started. The choice for such qualitative methods permits the research to be flexible; it enables the data to guide the research during the research process (O'Dwyer & Bernauer, 2014, p. 24). Furthermore, the data collection process and the

data analysis overlapped each other, so adjustments could be made to the research design to collect as much valuable data as possible (Lareau, 2021, p. 220). This way collected data was for example used as a way to ask probing questions during subsequent interviews or to code important concepts during the QCA.

Sampling Strategy and Participant Recruitment

To find Dutch activists on TikTok, first a clear definition of what is considered an activist on the platform was developed. For this research, activists on TikTok are defined as creators who make content with the goal of mobilizing action, to trigger social or political change. This activistic content then has to be posted on the platform at a minimum once every two weeks. To find these activists, I made an account on TikTok that was only used for finding participants. I looked up hashtags associated with Dutch social justice movements (e.g. #klimaatmars, #vrouwenrechten). Some challenges were faced when looking up these hashtags, as predominantly content in English was showed. Therefore, I also looked up accounts of larger Dutch nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), that could be associated with social justice or human rights movements. Upon identifying some accounts that made content about these movements, I turned to their following lists. From there, I selected activists. I repeated this process multiple times per week. Upon following these activists, the 'For You Page' started recommending me other Dutch activists. I regularly scrolled through the platform's interface, following new activists when I encountered them, and subsequently going through the follower lists of these new activists to find other activists. Additionally, I asked people from my personal network to forward me the activistic accounts that they followed.

After locating the activists on the platform, I looked up their contact information. In some cases, they had linked an email address. In other cases, I used the direct message function of Instagram. I did not use the direct message function of TikTok, as this only works if both parties are following each other. All identified activists were recruited for the interviews of this study. However, the response rate was very low. In total, N=2 activists were interviewed. The accounts included in the interviews for this study, were excluded for the QCA to protect the privacy of these activists. For the QCA, the remaining videos were grouped into categories of activism. From there, the categories of environmental, human rights, and political activism[3] were selected for the QCA. Within these categories, the three or

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[3] For this study, political activists were defined as activists who primarily made content about politics, aimed to influence the audiences voting behaviour to trigger political change. Activists within this category often promoted specific political parties. Although some activist in this category were members of political parties, the

four largest accounts were selected, based on their follower count. The five most recent activistic videos of these accounts (e.g. content with the goal of mobilizing action, to trigger social or political change) were included in the analysis, bringing the total number of analysed posts to N=50. An overview of the entire process of sampling and participant recruitment is provided in Figure 1. An overview with anonymized information about the selected posts for the QCA is provided in Appendix B.

Figure 1

A visual representation of the sampling process and participant recruitment

Sampling Strategy and Participant Recruitment Process

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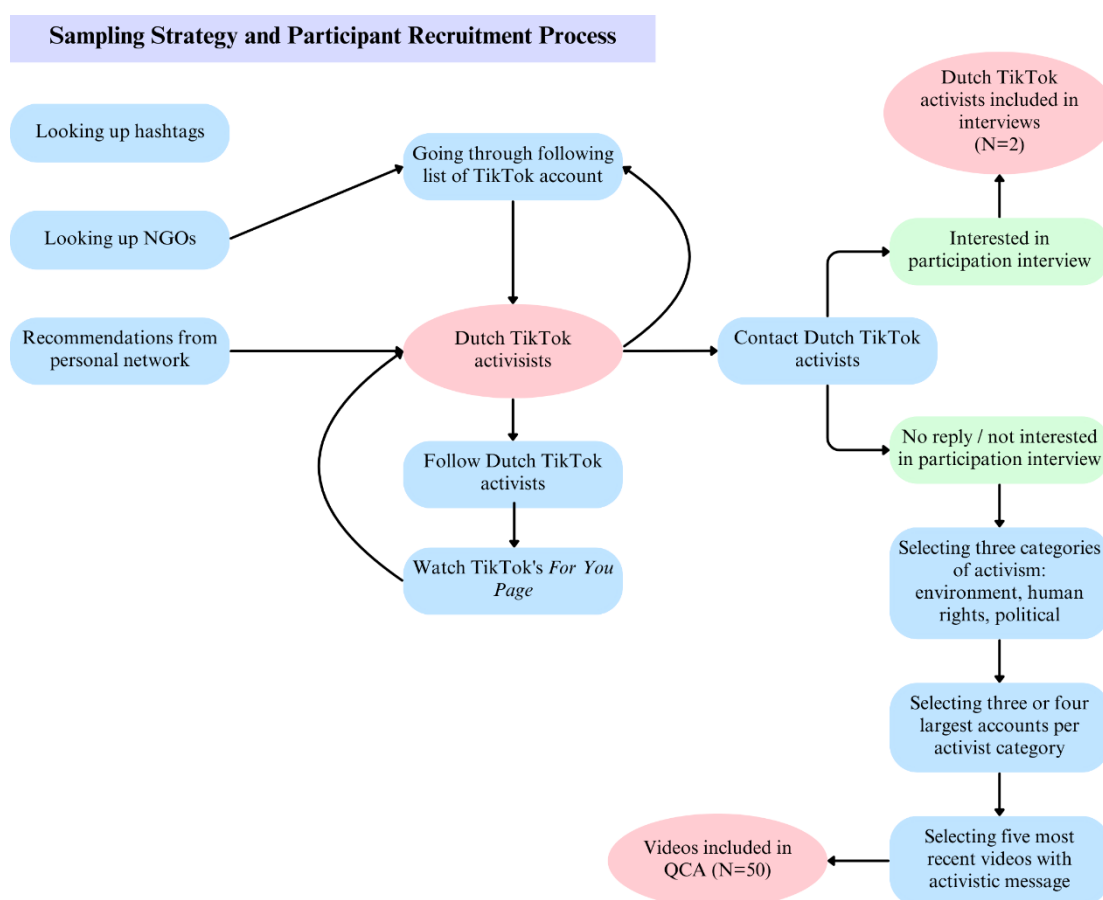
content was not made in the name of these political parties. Accounts owned by political parties were excluded from the analysis of this study.

Interviews

Interviews were used to explore the possible tactics of activists (RQ1), informing the codes used in the QCA, and to gather data on the way activists conceptualize TikTok's recommendation algorithm (RQ2). The interviews were in-depth and semi-structured. Participants were for example asked about their thoughts on how the algorithm works and their choices for specific tactics. Before starting the interviews and platform walkthrough, informed consent was obtained from the participants. The interviews lasted around 60 minutes. To ensure that all important topics were covered, a number of questions was identified beforehand in the interview guide (Appendix A). However, due to the exploratory nature of the research, asking follow-up questions was the most important part of the interview process. These follow-up questions allowed participants to provide more details about (unexpected) interesting topics. Specific topics or themes that were encountered in multiple interviews, were added to the interview schedule. This way, important themes were compared across the different participants. At the end of the interview, the participants were asked to give the researcher a walkthrough of the platform, in which they explained their process of posting content. This minimized the chance that information about the decision-making associated with posting on the platform was missed. During the interview and platform walkthrough, audio recordings were made that were transcribed verbatim and anonymized. The interview data was analysed using a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After finishing the coding process, several themes were established, informing the codes used in the QCA.

Qualitative Content Analysis of TikTok Posts

A QCA was conducted on 50 TikTok posts, made by Dutch TikTok activists. Here, the goal was to examine which visibility tactics or trends are visible in the content that activists post on TikTok (RQ1). Special attention was paid to content that mentions underlying algorithmic processes, mentions visibility or the use of certain strategies to increase visibility. In the analysis, a combination of deductive and inductive codes was used. Deductive codes were both informed by the data of the initial interviews and by concepts gathered from the literature. Examples of such deductive codes are the use of 'stiches', 'duets', re-use of sounds or the use of hashtags (DeVito, 2022, p. 17; Jaramillo-Dent, 2022, pp. 214-215). Additionally, notable observations from during the QCA formed the basis for inductive codes, for example using the video to reply to a specific comment. All videos were anonymized and no information that can lead back to the original creators is shared in this paper. An overview of the codes used in the analysis can be found in the codebook (Appendix C). Because of the

challenges in contacting the creators of the videos for consent, a similar approach to Jaramillo-Dent (2022) was taken. Contents included in the paper were translated from Dutch to English, and the videos are shared as illustrated renderings instead of screenshots. Furthermore, account names are not shared. This will ensure that the privacy of the TikTok activists is protected, and the data can be analysed and presented with minimal risk to the creators of the videos (Jaramillo-Dent, 2022, p. 223).

Results

The results are structured around two broader themes: grabbing and retaining attention of the audience, and visibility through specific platform affordances. Within each theme, the specific tactics used by TikTok activists are revealed and exemplified. The themes in this section come forth from the QCA on 50 TikTok posts made by Dutch activists. Interview data is used to give further context and explanation on the use of the specific tactics. Before describing the themes found in the analysis, it should be noted that not all videos have the same goal. Apart from the three distinguished categories of activism, each video serves its own purpose. Examples of the specific goals of videos are providing information, criticizing, and mobilizing the audience to join a protest.

Grabbing and Retaining Attention of the Audience

The participants in the interviews explained that in gaining visibility on TikTok, it is important to consider the audience's short attention span: "My idea is just, people's attention spans are wrecked. People have a short attention span so you, in an as short as possible time frame, you have to convey an as sensational as possible message" (Participant 1). To do so, specific tactics can be used to grab and retain the audience's attention. In this section, three different tactics are presented that were visible in the analysed TikTok posts: the use of popular topics, using a 'hook' and using a similar editing format.

Use of Popular Topics

Upon analysing the TikTok posts, it became apparent that certain topics are used more frequently than others. Specifically, the topic regarding the ongoing conflict between Israël and Palestine was frequently used (n=15). This is in line with what one of the interview participants explained: "For example, I know on TikTok you have Palestine content. Recently, this just has potential to reach a lot of people" (Participant 1). Although the content about this subject may be in line with the general goals of the activists, for example human rights, focusing on a specific popular topic, in this case Palestine, can be used as a tactic to reach more people on the platform. Several cases were encountered where the Israël-Palestine

conflict was used to draw attention to other issues. For example, one of the analysed videos reacts to the comments on another video. In this video, a LGBTQ+ flag is raised next to the Palestinian flag. They then use this occurrence as a way to draw attention to LGBTQ+ rights (Figure 2). In another video where this creator talks about LGBTQ+ rights, they end the video by saying that they should focus on Palestine, again shifting the topic of the video to the Israël-Palestine conflict. Another activist uses the Israël-Palestine conflict as an example of why they do not agree with strategic voting. The use of other subjects to do this was also observed. An example of this is an activist using the topic of pride week to raise awareness on the subject of accessibility. This activist started the video by talking about pride and LGBTQ+ rights, but then used the topic of pride week as an example of places that are inaccessible for disabled people. Interestingly, the analysis showed that such popular topics were only used if they were in line with the general activistic goal of the specific activist, for example, none of the environmental activists used the topic of Israël and Palestine in their videos.

Using a 'Hook'

To grab the audience's attention, one of the interview participants explains using a 'hook' at the beginning of the video. They describe what this hook looks like in their content: "In the first few seconds, there should be something weird, goofy, different, emotion-evoking… The first few seconds should evoke a strong emotion. That could be positive, that could be negative, that could be anything" (Participant 1). The use of this hook thus ensures that the audience watches the rest of the video: "You could have a fantastic video after that, but if nobody watches the first few seconds, the video is not distributed" (Participant 1). Both of the interview participants mention that the emotions that are evoked with the video do not always have to be positive. When telling about the reactions to a specific video, one interview participant explains: "That [video] got views, but predominantly got negative reactions, like 'go to work' and such, such kind of comments. And then, yes. Then you do go up in views" (Participant 2). This participant mentions discussing negativity as a strategy with their team: "We have actively said that, like we should do something that irritates people" (Participant 2).

In several (n=14) of the analysed videos, the use of a hook was observed. For example, one of the activists showed shocking videos of floods and wildfires at the beginning of the video (Figure 3). Another way in which activists seemingly attempt to catch the audience's attention is by starting the video with a strong and sometimes controversial statement, or with a very strong personal opinion. Other ways in which this hook was shaped were less emotion-evoking, but instead helped the viewer understand what was coming in the video, for example

by starting the video with a short summary on what the video is going to be about: "I read the coalition agreement, so you don't have to" (Politics_1.3).

Using a Similar Editing Format

What was striking, is that many of the videos used a very similar format and editing style. Often, the videos depicted a person presenting the video, who directly addressed the audience, for example by using the personal pronoun 'you'. In most videos this speaker talks directly to the camera, however there were also observations of the user looking into the camera without speaking, making use of a text overlay to convey the message of the video (Figure 4). Often, text overlay was used as subtitles, making the video accessible to watch without audio. In a substantial number of videos (n=29), the format in which the video was edited was very similar; most videos consist of a continuous clip of a person talking about a specific subject, or several short clips that are edited into one continuous piece of the person talking. To provide context, short videos and photos are edited over the video, or the video uses the 'greenscreen'[4] function to show these photos or videos in the background. Although the videos use a similar editing style, the length of the videos differs greatly; from 7 seconds to 2,5 minutes. On average, the videos were 48 seconds long.

Visibility through Specific Platform Affordances

In this section, the tactics that are shaped through the specific affordances of the platform TikTok are discussed. The specific tactics that are discussed in this theme, emerge from the specific functionalities that TikTok provides. Within this theme, making use of hashtags, reusing existing sounds or engaging with comments are discussed.

The Use of Hashtags

The majority (n=35) of the analysed videos made use of hashtags, placed in the caption of the video. Often, several different hashtags were used, providing keywords of the content of the videos. For example, a video promoting voting for the European parliament used, among others, the hashtags *#eu, #euverkiezingen* (translation: EU elections), *#useyourvote,* and *#politiek* (translation: politics). Similarly, in a video about the situation in Palestine, among others, the hashtags *#palestine, #freepalestine,* and *#alleyesonrafah* were used. This was seen in all videos that made use of hashtags in the caption. Upon asking one of the interview participants why they chose to use certain hashtags they explained that they used "popular search terms" (Participant 2). The use of one specific type of hashtag stood out from the analysis: *#fyp, #fy* or *#trending*. In this context, 'fyp' and 'fy' are respectively abbreviations

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[4] The 'greenscreen' function allows users to portray images or videos in the background of a video. The person in the video is portrayed in front of these images or videos, as if they are standing in front of a greenscreen.

for 'For You Page' and 'For You' – the interface through which the platform recommends videos to their users.

The Use of Sounds

With the option 'Use This Sound', TikTok users have the opportunity to reuse audio from other videos, including for example excerpts from songs, sometimes sped up or edited in a certain way. A number (n=13) of activist actively made use of these existing sounds, by reusing them in their own videos. Upon clicking on these sounds, the user can get information on who originally used the sound and in which and how many other videos the sound was used. The sounds used by the activists were often used many times before. For example, the sound used as background music in a video used as human rights activism was used in 407.900 other TikTok posts. Similarly, a video about LGBTQ+ rights used a sound that had been used in 327.000 other TikTok posts. The sounds that these activists use are often used as background music and were therefore not specific to the genre of activistic videos.

Interaction in the Comments Section

One of the interview participants stressed the importance of the comments section regarding the visibility of their posts. Although this participant only received limited comments on their videos, they said: "that was the intention, it did became building an active community, that was the idea […] It was the intention to get a certain interaction" (Participant 2). Although not all of the videos received comments, in about half (n=27) of the analysed videos, the activists interacted with the comments in some way. Most of these users interacted with the comments both by 'liking' certain comments and by replying to them. Some activists replied only to the positive comments, or to those they agreed with. Responding only to the positive comments was mentioned by one of the interview participants:

> "It was the intention that we replied as much as possible [to the comments]. To the positive ones anyway, the negative things, that was not… Unless it was really substantial, then you can say something about it. But if it was just something like 'go to work or' or something, we are not going to reply to that." (Participant 2).

In the analysed posts, some activists only responded to negative comments, or to the comments they disagreed with. However, the majority of the activist replied to both negative and positive comments. The audience often asked the activist questions in the comments. The activists then replied to these questions, giving further context on specific subjects. In some instances, activists would use the comment section to place comments themselves, to further elaborate on a topic or give further context. One of the interview participants specifically

mentions that they choose to reply with a video to a comment, whereas they normally do not reply to the comments at all:

> "It is actually quite rare that I would comment or reply something, because I have the idea that, it would cost too much energy, but words are way easier to misinterpret than a video. […] If there would be really strong comments or strong criticism, I would make a video to reply to that" (Participant 1).

That some activists chose to make a video reply to certain comments was observed on several instances (n=6) in the analysed videos.

Figure 2

Activist pointing to a LGBTQ+ flag raised next to a Palestinian flag, using the 'greenscreen' mode to showcase the image.
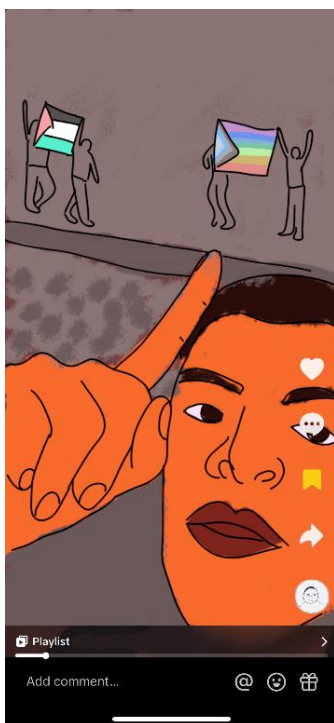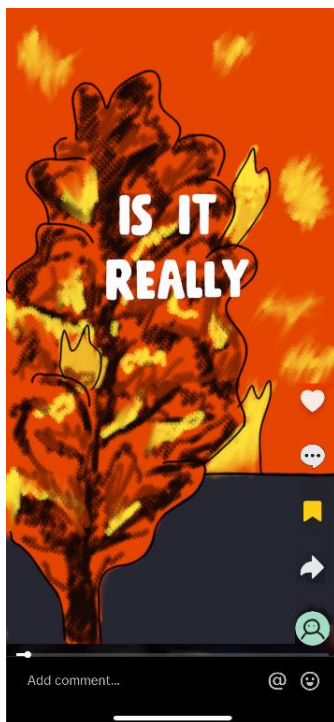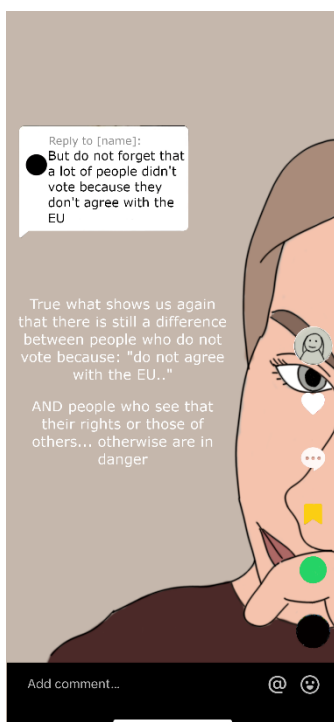
Figure 3

Shocking images used to catch attention of the audience; text overlay is used as subtitles.

Figure 4

Activist uses text overlay instead of speaking, video is a reaction to a comment on another video.

Discussion

The goal of this study was to examine which tactics are used by Dutch TikTok activists to increase the visibility of their content, and how they conceptualize TikTok's recommendation algorithm. Several tactics were found that are used by these activists. Of these tactics, some are specifically intended to grab and retain the audience's attention, for example by using a 'hook', using popular themes or topics, or by using a similar editing format. Some tactics, however, are shaped more by the functionalities of the platform itself and make use of TikTok's specific platform affordances. These tactics, for example, are the use of hashtags, the use of certain sounds, and interactions in the comment section. Important to note is that not all tactics were seen in all analysed videos; activists seemingly had their own preference of which tactics to use in their content.

The Activistic Message and Affective Reactions of the Audience

One of the most important aspects in gaining visibility as a Dutch activist on TikTok is that a video should grab someone's attention. As the interviews indicate, this can be done by evoking both positive and negative emotions of the audience. This tactic, which has been defined in the results of this study as using a hook to get people's attention, is focused on acquiring some kind of affective reaction from the audience. Smith et al. (2018) explain that what sets affective practices specifically apart, is that here, emotion is a specific and principal focus of the practice (Smith et al., 2018, p. 13). The use of affective reactions of the audience has been described in prior literature: for example, a recent study on Palestinian resistance activism on TikTok by Cervi and Divon (2023), finds affective strategies where playfulness is incorporated into the content of the videos. This playfulness then makes activism "relatable, tangible, and accessible to broader audiences" (Cervi & Divon, 2023, p. 10). This affects how activists talk about certain topics, as these have to be described in the video in a specific way to evoke such affective reactions. In the analysed videos by Dutch TikTok activists, the affective encounters do not necessarily make the video relatable, tangible or accessible at all. Instead, the focus here lies more on evoking emotion in general: videos are often set out to shock the viewer, or the videos start with a strong, controversial statements. It can be argued that doing this increases the visibility of videos, as these affective encounters give the audience something to talk about, both in the comments and in an offline setting.

As the results show, comments play an important role in managing visibility on the platform. By interacting with and replying to the comments on their videos, activists can promote their audience to leave comments, potentially increasing the visibility of the video. Although some activists only reply to positive comments, many activists choose to reply to

the negative comments as well. It can be argued that specifically replying to negative comments can create friction in the comment section, as this sparks further discussion. This then results in additional comments on the videos, increasing the visibility of the video. Again, affective encounters of the audience play a role in this, as these comments can evoke emotion from the audience, prompting them to reply. A similar observation is made by DeVito (2022), who describes that comments, both positive and negative, can increase engagement with the video, thus increasing the visibility of the content (DeVito, 2022, pp. 17-18). This shows that interacting with the comments in general can seen as a tactic to increase visibility on the platform.

It should be considered how acquiring an affective reaction from the audience impacts the primary goal of activists, which is to mobilize action and to bring about social and political change. The extent to which this then influences this primary goal of the activists, depends on whether concessions need to be made to show the subject in such a way that they evoke emotion from the audience. Framing topics in a specific, affective way could mean that activist take away the nuance in certain topics or choose to show the most shocking images that are associated with a certain subject. The analysis of this study showed that each specific video has a secondary goal that is used to reach the shared primary activistic goal. If the goal of a specific video is to mobilize people for a protest, framing a topic in this way impacts the goal of the specific video in a positive way, as the emotions evoke can mobilize people to take part in a protest. However, if the video sets out to inform the audience about a particular problem, taking away the nuance in the explanation could potentially negatively impact this particular message. Nevertheless, when looking at the overarching primary goal of activism, framing topics in such a way that they create affective encounters for the audience has a minimal effect on the overarching message.

The Activistic Message and the Mimetic Nature of TikTok

To become more visible, Dutch TikTok activists actively conform to the mimetic nature of TikTok, where content is often reused or made within similar formats. This is for example visible in the way in which most analysed videos are edited in a similar format. Another way in which Dutch TikTok activist mimic existing content is by reusing topics that are already popular on the platform. The interviewed activists voiced the belief that videos that use these topics are more likely to be watched by the audience. This is also reflected in the topics that were visible in the analysed posts; for example, many of the videos mentioned the ongoing situation regarding Israël and Palestine, a topic that is at the time of writing very prominent in

(social) media in general. Sometimes, a popular topic was used as a bridge to another, less popular topic.

Although the use of popular topics is something that is widely used, it can be questioned to what extend this is a specific tactic to gain visibility on the platform. Because of the ongoing public debates and the large amount of media coverage on issues such as the situation regarding Israël and Palestine, it is no surprise that activists that often talk about similar issues now also focus on those specific popular topics. However, one of the interviews did show that they were aware that using such popular topics could greatly increase their views and that some less popular topics were not covered because it is more challenging to make them appealing to the audience. Furthermore, prior research shows that reusing content in specific TikTok vernaculars is widely used to maintain visibility, much of the content on TikTok is mimetic in nature (Eriksson Krutrök, 2021, pp. 7-8; Ramati & Abeliovich, 2022, p. 12; Sued et al., 2022, pp. 64-66). From this point of view, popular topics can thus be viewed as a tactic to increase visibility on the platform, even if it is just the subject that is reused.

Another way in which Dutch activists on TikTok conform to this mimetic formatting of videos, is by reusing sound from other videos in their own videos. This can be regarded as a practice to increase the visibility of a video; when clicking on the sound icon in a video, a user can easily see all the other videos that have used the sound before. Even if the sound is just used as background music, this thus provides other ways for users to find the video than just relying on the algorithm of the For You Page to get the video recommended. The tactical use of sound in this specific way is different to the tactical use of sounds that has been described in prior research. There, the use of sound has been described as a way to link members of a specific community to each other, to reproduce social action, or to give voice to the original creator of the content (Jaramillo-Dent, 2022, pp. 223-224; Ramati & Abeliovich, 2022 pp. 6-7). In prior research, the sound is often part of the message of the video. Even though this is not the case in the observed videos in this study, sounds are nevertheless used in a tactical way, because the use of such sounds provides more ways for users to find the video.

Because videos made by Dutch activists conform to other videos with their mimetic format, the question arises of what then happens with the activistic message of the videos. Because sounds are mostly reused as background music, this question is especially relevant for the use of popular topics. For example, if mostly popular topics are used, does this then mean that these activists choose not to ask attention for issues that are not already popular? Although the results show that the videos often use topics that are already popular, it was also observed that this is only the case if these popular topics are relevant to the activistic goal of

the specific activists. Although the human rights activists and the political activists often spoke about Israël and Palestine, this was not the case for the environmental activists. Based on this, it could be speculated that it is important for activists to stay close to their specific activistic goal; the tactics used should not supersede the overarching message they want to bring out. However, this still means that if a topic cannot fit within the template of what is currently popular on the platform, activists may be less likely to incorporate these specific topics in their videos.

What stands out from prior research on visibility practices and tactics on TikTok, is that some of the distinguished mimetic behaviour found in prior research were not found in the analysed content of Dutch TikTok activists. Although the use of 'duets', 'stitches', or specific TikTok challenges have been mentioned as a tactic in other studies, these were not observed in the videos made by Dutch TikTok activists (Cervi & Divon, 2023, pp. 7-10; DeVito, 2022, p. 17; Jaramillo-Dent, 2022, pp. 226-227; Jaramillo-Dent et al., 2022, p. 214; Ramati & Abeliovich, 2022, p. 7). This could be due to the specific habits and practices that are in place within the vernacular of Dutch activists on TikTok: these tactics could simply not be part of the repertoire of these users. However, it could also be speculated that these tactics are difficult to combine with the message of the activistic videos, and that duets and stitches are not deemed effective by Dutch TikTok activists in conveying an activistic message. Regarding specific TikTok challenges or trends, the lack of use of this specific tactic is possibly due to the moral mission of the activists; using certain trends may not be beneficial to the message of the videos which is prioritized in the activists' content.

User Agency and the Recommendation Algorithm

Another observed tactic used by Dutch activists, was the use of hashtags. The results show that these hashtags are often keywords, describing the subject of the video. These hashtags can be used to maximize the searchability of the video (Abidin, 2020, p. 78). However, another type of hashtags was also observed, *#fyp* and *#fy.* This type hashtags can be considered platform specific, as they refer directly to the For You Page of TikTok. Prior research on specific TikTok vernaculars show that this type of hashtags is widely used on the platform, as a strategy to get featured on the For You Page of other users (Eriksson Krutrök, 2021, p. 7; Vicari & Ditchfield, 2024, p.15). Users thus use these hashtags to increase their visibility on the platform, specifically by increasing the chance of getting the recommendation algorithm to promote the videos to users on the For You Page. The use of this type of hashtags shows that Dutch TikTok activists attempt to influence the outcome of the algorithm, even when they cannot be sure that this strategy actually works. Adding these hashtags to the

caption of a video can then give these activists an increased feeling of agency. Instead of surrendering to whatever the outcome of the algorithm is going to be, active attempts are made to influence this outcome. Because the hashtags are placed in the caption of the video, this visibility tactic does not interfere with the message of the video in any way.

A Shared Algorithmic Imaginary

The tactics that are described in this study point towards the existence of a collective belief on what works and what does not work to gain visibility on TikTok; a shared algorithmic imaginary. First of all, these tactics show that Dutch activists believe that you should do something to actively grab the audience's attention; getting and retaining attention is not something to take for granted. What is popular is then reused whenever it fits in the goal of the content, as is reflected through the use of popular topics and by playing on the affective encounters the audience have with the videos. Moreover, as the way in which videos are edited is very homogeneous, users seem to believe that a video has to look a certain way in order to work well on the platform. Ultimately, Dutch activists on TikTok seem to believe that the most important thing for a video to gain visibility is that it should not only be recommended to the audience in the first place, which can be done by using platform specific tactics, but that retaining the audience's attention is of equal importance.

Strengths and Limitations

A strength of this study lies in the combination of interview data with QCA data. Because the interview data was gathered in the first step of the data collection, the interview data was used to convey sensitizing concepts that formed the base of several codes that were used in the QCA. This made the QCA more effective, as it ensures that no important topics were missed by the researcher. Furthermore, although having only limited number of participants, the interview data gave some insights into why certain tactics were used and into the thought processes of the activists.

One of the limitations of this study is, however, the limited number of interview participants. Because of this, only limited data could be gathered on the perspectives of the activists themselves. Instead of gathering information about how activists conceptualize the recommendation algorithm of TikTok, these conceptualizations were instead speculated, using the QCA data as a proxy. It should however be noted that recruiting Dutch TikTok activists is a difficult and time-consuming process. For this study, many activists were recruited, but only four of them replied. Only two activists were actually interested in participating in the study. When recruiting activists in further research, researchers should consider additional ways to reach these activists in an offline setting, for example by contacting them at events like

protests. It is crucial to consider that recruitment of such a specific group of participants will take a considerable amount of time.

Finally, some remarks should be made about the recruitment strategy. Looking up hashtags in order to find Dutch activist proved to be rather difficult, as mostly American-based TikTok creators showed up through the search function. While it was effective to look up accounts of larger organisations and go through their follower lists to identify activists, and subsequently relying on the recommendation algorithm to recommend more posts by other activists, there may be limitations to this method of identifying activist on the platform. First of all, it is challenging to know if there are still other activists on the platform. Second of all, by relying on this method, only activists that effectively make use of visibility practices may have been shown to the recommendation algorithm. By using the personal network of the researcher to ask for recommendations, this limitation was partly addressed. However, it should be noted that the network of the researcher mostly consists of other university students, which potentially influenced which activists were recommended. Finally, it should be noted that going through following lists, strategically following certain accounts, and specifically looking for a certain type of content may not be natural way of using the platform. Using the platform such a way is not representative of regular users, potentially affecting which content was visible to the researcher and which content was not.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: Which tactics do Dutch activists employ to gain visibility on TikTok?

RQ2: How do Dutch activists conceptualize TikTok's recommendation algorithm?

To answer RQ1, several different tactics were employed by Dutch TikTok activists. These tactics can be divided into two different groups: tactics to grab and retain the attention of the audience, and tactics that specifically promote the visibility of videos through TikTok's platform affordances. To grab and retain the attention of the audience, activists used popular topics, a 'hook', and by using a homogeneous editing format. Specific platform affordances that were used to promote visibility of the videos were the use of hashtags, sounds, and by interacting with the comments. To answer RQ2, Dutch activists seemed to have conceptualized that the process of becoming visible through TikTok's recommendation algorithm is twofold. It is not only important to become visible in the first place, which can be done by using specific tactics using TikTok's affordances. It is also important to grab and retain the audience's attention, which can be achieved with a different set of tactics.

A recommendation for further research would be to enrich the tactics found in this study with more interview data by (Dutch) activists. Although challenging to collect, this interview data can be used to further elaborate on why certain tactics are used, and others not. This can then also provide insight in the perceived agency of activists on the platform; does using certain visibility tactics indeed provide users with an increased sense of agency regarding the outcome of the algorithm? Furthermore, more interview data can also provide details on how activists conceptualize TikTok's recommendation algorithm. Finally, interesting questions for further research would be: to what extent does the algorithm help or hinder activism, and what is gained and lost in citizen participation when adapting to the specific platform affordances of a digital platform?

To conclude, this study contributes to the existing body of literature on visibility tactics and algorithmic folk theories, by showing that in the specific context of Dutch activists, not every set of tactics is used by on the platforms. Although no new or remarkable visibility tactics were found to be used by Dutch TikTok activists, specifically active within the categories of environmental, human rights, and political activism, this study reinforces the idea that different platform vernaculars adopt a different repertoire of tactics to reach their desired visibility on the platform. This means that when researching visibility tactics in general, it is important to consider the context of the specific vernaculars in which these tactics are used. Ultimately, this study also shows is that this set of activists in the sample of this study are mindful when it comes to the tactics they use, to make sure that their tactics do not supersede their activistic goal.

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APPENDIX A: Interview Guide

Questions in the interview will be asked in Dutch. Additional questions will be asked based on the participants' answers.

Part 1: Main Interview (45 - 60 minutes)

Introduction (purpose of the research, my own background)

Icebreaker – who is your favourite creator in TikTok (I will go first).

Topic: General Use of TikTok for Activism Purposes

- Why did you start using TikTok for activism purposes?
- Do you think TikTok has specific advantages over other social media platforms?
- How would you describe the audience you want to reach?
- What do you think TikTok's goal is (from the perspective of the platform) and does this affect your use of the app?
- How would you describe the goal of your own content?
- Are you also active in an offline setting? Does your position as a TikTok activist influence what your offline activism activities look like?

Topic: Making Sense of the Algorithm

- Are you aware of TikTok's recommendation algorithm? How?
- Can you explain to me how you think the algorithm works (what becomes popular, what not)?
- How did you learn about the algorithm?
- Do you converse with others (this could also be outside of the platform) about the algorithm? What do you talk about and why?
- Do you think your content is shaped by the algorithm (certain choices made because of it)
- Do you think you can influence the outcome of this algorithm (influence if something becomes popular etc – this already leans towards the strategies)?
- Can you think of any negative and positive effects of the algorithm?

Topic: Visibility and Tactics

- How do you make sure that your content is visible on TikTok? (hashtags, sounds, stitches etc.)
- Can you explain why visibility is important for your content? Are there also negative effects?
- If you use certain strategies, how did you learn about this?
- Do you feel some content is supressed? And how do you deal with that?
- If you did not have to use certain strategies, what would your content look like?
- Can you think of any negative or positive effects of these tactics and strategies?

Part 2: Platform Walkthrough (30 minutes)

In this part of the interview, the participant is asked to give a walkthrough of the platform. Additional questions will be asked based on what the participants show me.

- Can you show me how you would set up a TikTok post from beginning to end (a fictive post because of privacy reasons)?
- Can you show me how you engage with the platform when not posting?
- Can you show me how you engage with your audience on the platform?

Ending:

- Is there anything we did not discuss that you want to add?

Appendix B: QCA Sample Anonymized Information

Table 1

General information selected posts QCA Sample

Video ID	Account: number of followers	Video: length (seconds)	Video: number of likes	Video: number of comments	Video: goal
Environment_1.1	607	18	21	2	Mobilizing audience to join protest
Environment_1.2	607	31	34	2	Mobilizing audience to join protest
Environment_1.3	607	10	68	19	Mobilizing audience to join protest
Environment_1.4	607	18	19	0	Mobilizing audience to join protest
Environment_1.5	607	7	69	5	Addressing negative comment
Environment_2.1	263	73	9	0	Informing about specific problem
Environment_2.2	263	68	30	4	Informing about successful action
Environment_2.3	263	27	16	2	Mobilizing audience to join protest
Environment_2.4	263	140	8	2	Inform about a specific issue
Environment_2.5	263	24	41	5	Mobilizing audience to join protest
Environment_3.1	294	30	3	2	Informing about what happened on a protest
Environment_3.2	294	54	49	3	Mobilizing audience to join protest
Environment_3.3	294	63	47	1	Mobilizing audience to join protest
Environment_3.4	294	43	27	0	Informing about a specific issue
Environment_3.5	294	47	7	1	Informing about a specific issue

Video ID	Account: number of followers	Video: length (seconds)	Video: number of likes	Video: number of comments	Video: goal
Human Rights_1.1	158500	21	6464	325	Informing people about their rights
Human Rights_1.2	158500	65	109000	428	Informing about a specific issue, mobilizing to sign petition
Human Rights_1.3	158500	76	2914	68	Providing information
Human Rights_1.4	158500	14	31500	591	Informing about successful action
Human Rights_1.5	158500	54	1328	44	Providing information
Human Rights_2.1	273000	30	494	55	Criticizing, providing information
Human Rights_2.2	273000	54	224	17	Criticizing, informing about specific problem
Human Rights_2.3	273000	51	735	139	Criticizing a comment, providing information
Human Rights_2.4	273000	42	2661	93	Criticizing a comment, providing information
Human Rights_2.5	273000	51	1467	133	Informing about specific problem
Human Rights_3.1	17000	93	2330	81	Informing about specific problem
Human Rights_3.2	17000	42	278	7	Providing information
Human Rights_3.3	17000	56	6783	273	Informing about specific problem, debunking misinformation
Human Rights_3.4	17000	56	123	7	Informing about specific problem, debunking misinformation
Human Rights_3.5	17000	75	794	41	Debunking misinformation

Video ID	Account: number of followers	Video: length (seconds)	Video: number of likes	Video: number of comments	Video: goal
Human Rights_4.1	12000	91	335	49	Informing about specific problem
Human Rights_4.2	12000	70	121	8	Informing about specific problem
Human Rights_4.3	12000	64	222	9	Providing information
Human Rights_4.4	12000	7	316	37	Informing about specific problem
Human Rights_4.5	12000	32	403	55	Providing information
Politics_1.1	12900	39	481	29	Criticizing
Politics_1.2	12900	31	265	57	Providing information
Politics_1.3	12900	47	12500	971	Criticizing
Politics_1.4	12900	58	149	7	Criticizing
Politics_1.5	12900	35	107	6	Informing about specific problem
Politics_2.1	5528	22	413	86	Criticizing
Politics_2.2	5528	90	96	57	Criticizing, informing about a specific topic
Politics_2.3	5528	83	256	176	Provide information and share standpoint
Politics_2.4	5528	9	187	33	Share standpoint
Politics_2.5	5528	11	208	43	Criticizing, mobilizing audience to speak up on a certain topic
Politics_3.1	631	56	30	16	Informing about specific problem
Politics_3.2	631	18	4	7	Informing about specific problem
Politics_3.3	631	7	22	3	Mobilizing audience to vote
Politics_3.4	631	53	14	2	Providing information
Politics_3.5	631	145	36	9	Informing about specific problem

APPENDIX C: QCA Codebook

- Mix of deductive (informed by literature and interviews) and inductive codes
- Include: Videos made by Dutch activists (excluding the participants included in the interviews), a maximum of 5 videos per activist, using the most recent 5 videos that are considered "activistic" (definition: content with the goal of mobilizing action, to trigger social or political change)

General:

- Post ID
- Date Posted
- Video Length (in seconds)
- Metrics_Followers account
- Metrics_Likes
- Metrics_Views
- Metrics_Saves
- Metrics_Comments
- Metrics_Shares

Video:

- Summarize video: Indicate the topic
- Goal of video: Indicate the goal of the vide, e.g. informing, mobilizing action
- Subject of activism: Indicate the subject of the activism
- Text overlay: This is about the text edited on the video (not caption). Indicate key words provided by this text
- Stitch: Mark 1 if the video stitches another video
- Duet: Mark 1 if the video is a duet with another video
- Re-upload: Mark 1 if the video is a re-uploaded video
- Comment reply: Mark 1 if the video is made to reply to a comment
- Sound: Mark 1 if the video reuses the sound of another video (specify which sound, open coding)
- Music: Mark 1 if the video uses a popular song (specify which song, open coding)
- Hook: Indicate if the video shows something controversial/interesting in the first 5 seconds. Describe what is shown.

- Actors: Does the video show political figures or other well-known figures? (e.g. activists)
- Editing: Describe the editing style of the video

Narration:

- Algorithm: Mark 1 if the algorithm is mentioned, describe how (open coding)
- Interpolation: Describe how the audience is addressed
- Strategy: Mark 1 if the text of the video mentions a specific strategy for visibility, describe what (open coding)

Caption:

- Hashtags: Indicate any hashtags used in the caption
- Question: Mark 1 if the caption specifically asks the audience a question
- Mobilization: Mark 1 if the caption explicitly asks the audience to do something (petition, sharing, donating), describe what (open coding)
- Tags: Mark 1 if the caption tags other actors
- Emojis: Which emojis are used? Describe (open coding)

Comments:

- Comments: Mark 1 if the user interacts with comments (e.g. by liking the comments)
- Dialogue: Mark 1 if the user engages in a dialogue with other users in the comments