

The Value of Visibility?

A case study of corporate visibility on TikTok and employee brand ambassadorship practises' facilitation of pressure in the workplace.

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“Today’s management thinking takes workers’ subjectivity into consideration only in order to codify it in line with the requirements of production. And once again this phase of transformation succeeds in concealing the fact that the individual and collective interests of workers and those of the company are not identical.”

Maurizio Lazzarato (1996)

Abstract

This thesis explores the conditions under which low-wage employees are expected to work as brand ambassadors for their organisations. The practice of brand ambassadorship is contextualised in our digital age, where social media have leveraged new opportunities for companies to conduct their marketing practices. It interrogates how corporate approaches to “authentic” marketing on such platforms affect employees. The findings indicate that unorganised approaches to building employee brand ambassadorships may affect work culture to an extent where it constitutes increased pressure on low-wage earners.

It further explores the practice of employee brand ambassadorship in the context of immaterial labour and suggests that certain approaches to employee brand ambassadorship are not only uncompensated but potentially “value-reducing” for employees. Feedback, such as through comment sections, is seen to potentially amplify the employees’ possible negative experiences of participation in promotional content. It is further argued that ambassadorship can reduce the felt value of a job through experiences of context collapse, where employees lose some control over their self-presentation and can experience reduced feelings of credibility in the eyes of others.

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Preface

Since I got my first job about 15 years ago at my local bakery I have worked in a variety of low-earning positions, all of which have centred around customer service. One thing I have noticed in practically all of these positions is how they are characterised by an expected involvement and engagement with the brand. As the beginning of my working life took place right as social media platforms became public property (at least for me, I joined Facebook in 2008), this expected engagement has gradually developed to entail some form of public engagement through social media.

I have, at times, experienced an expectancy to put my face at my employer's disposition in terms of being visible in content that contributes to the organisation's brand. Within the last five years, I have noted how these expectations have intensified, however never quite been comfortable enough to communicate the discomfort it sometimes brings me. My perceived experience of this expectancy having intensified is shared by everyone I have mentioned it to, and my frustration with it is mostly shared by my peers. Some of them explain that they are expected to share social media posts or constantly pose for social media content. Personally, I have given my employer my consent to use content where I am visible for promotional purposes, even though it run counter to my preference for such visibility.

My own experiences, as well as conversations with my friends, have raised questions about how relatively anonymous people experience the centrality accorded to online visibility in the workplace and how the visibility granted them through promotional content can affect them. These questions have been central to the formulation of the research question as it stands today.

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1. Introduction

“Step aside Kim Kardashian and Joe Wicks, retailers are turning shop floor managers into the new influencers, as their home-spun video clips are building a huge fanbase on social media (...) Brands may spend millions of pounds on mainstream advertising but these folksy, unvarnished social media clips and photos are building relationships with customers in a way glossy TV spots can’t.” (Butler 2021).

“‘People believe people like themselves’: meet the shop-floor TikTok stars” reads the headline of the article, published in The Guardian in November 2021 (Butler 2021). It depicts a current moment in time where regular employees are compared to Kim Kardashian, who currently counts 355 million followers on Instagram, in terms of their valuable influence as brand ambassadors. And while we are way past the days when social media platforms were thought of as spaces predominantly reserved for communications between private individuals (if those days ever existed, Mastercard started paying for exposure on Facebook in 2004) (Hall, 2023), it is challenging as never before to tell private individuals apart from brands.

Being present online has long been seen as essential to the majority of brands, organisations and companies, and it is normal for branders to create their own content through multimedia platforms. They do “no longer buy media to promote brands but rather ‘let the brand grow organically’ and think of themselves as not only ‘the curators but creators of content’ through multimedia platforms” (Banet-Weiser 2012, 100). Many businesses see social media technologies as an essential part of their businesses, and they are a prevalent tool for many companies (Loiacono and McCoy 2018, 967). As exemplified above, since social media facilitates an opportunity for what is often referred to as “organic growth”, it is increasingly normal for companies to establish and run their social media profiles on their own, utilising internal staff.

This thesis will show that companies who ask their employees to feature in promotional content on platforms that can generate immense (and unpredictable) visibility are essentially asking them to act as highly visible brand ambassadors. Moreover, since information and communication technologies have leveraged innovation in the workplace setting (Sakka and Ahammad 2020) and social media is free and easily available for most brands, it is bound to be taken advantage of by marketers in all industries. This means that the practice of utilising internal staff as brand ambassadors is increasingly affecting a workforce of low-wage earners, as will be exemplified through the research. Since this workforce is referred to as “building relationships with customers in a way glossy TV spots can’t” (Butler 2021), this research seeks to account for the force driving these employees. This is seen as especially prominent since they are compared to celebrities rumoured to charge 47.8 million dollars per year for the same labour (McCarthy, 2019).

This research will focus on digital promotional content intended for the consumer market and the utilisation of low-wage earners as actors in such content. It explores the practice of turning employees into brand ambassadors and interrogates how an unorganised approach to such a branding process can facilitate pressure in the workplace. As participation in social media content can grant individuals with unpredicted visibility, employee brand ambassadorship puts the individual in a position of potentially having their professional persona exposed, not only to the general public but also to other segments of their social circle. Therefore, it will further account for how this may affect the employees to an extent where their roles as ambassadors can be experienced to reduce the felt value of a job.

The significance of social networks is emphasised in the modern environment because of their proliferation, together with virtual communities, and their joint effect on organisational behaviour (Garrigos-Simon, Lapiedra Alcamí, and Barberá Ribera 2012, 1881). However, where attention is paid to how employee’s social media use affects organisational reputation and related governance practises (van den Berg and Verhoeven 2017; Macnamara and Zerfass 2012; Dreher 2014), few have yet explored the environment in which individual inclination to exposure on social media is an increasingly valued trait and how this affects the employee. This research will therefore account for how the

visibility generated by digital media is often connected to expectations of perceived authenticity (Banet-Weiser 2012; Macnamara and Zerfass 2012; Newlands and Fieseler 2020) and how companies' attempts to monetise on these technologies manifest through investments in employee ambassadorships (Macnamara and Zerfass 2012; Dreher 2014; van den Berg and Verhoeven 2017; Cervellon & Lirio 2017). Furthermore, it explores how employee ambassadorships may affect the employee with support in literature on individuals' self-presentation strategies (Cialdini and Goldstein 2004; Marwick and Boyd 2011; Hjetland et al. 2022) and experiences of context collapse when digital media restricts possibilities to keep audience segregated (Sánchez Abril, Levin, and Del Riego 2012; Davis and Jurgenson 2014; Ollier-Malaterre and Rothbard 2015; Batenburg and Bartels 2017).

It will further provide a recapitulation of some literature on norms (Hammer et al. 2004; Titlestad et al. 2019; van Kleef, Gelfand, and Jetten 2019), conformity (Cialdini and Goldstein 2004) and commitment (Meyer and Herscovitch 2001; Mercurio 2015; Meyer and Parfyonova 2010) in order to understand how and why low-wage earners participate in digital brand ambassadorship. Furthermore, when the bodies of low-wage earners are utilised to create a sense of corporate authenticity in attempts from companies to reap commercial rewards, it can be viewed as immaterial labour. This thesis will therefore raise questions about practises that commodify labour without compensation for the labourer and further suggest that brand ambassadorship can be experienced as "value-reducing" for employees.

My research aims to illuminate challenges that are likely to both remain and become increasingly prominent in years to come. Through identifying some potential implications of current approaches to online promotion it will highlight certain concerns to be considered for companies who wish to apply internal employees as highly visible ambassadors for their brand.

1.1 Research Question and Structure

The way companies or organisations handle their social media profiles begs some interesting questions: how do employees who appear in commercial content reflect on their

digital presence in a work context? What effects might participation have, and how does it influence company culture? As business culture favours social media's opportunities for promotion and the practice of utilising employees in such content for corporate profit appears normalised in our society, it is all the more relevant to pursue these questions. The research question is designed to shed light on matters that are seen as prominent in our digital society, with an aim to illuminate what possible challenges this constitutes for employees in low-earning positions.

As a result of their digital presence, a local grocery store in the eastern part of Norway has been chosen as a case study for this research project. The grocery store in question is part of a larger, well-established chain of grocery stores. The digital presence of the location in question is, however, not a part of a larger campaign or strategy carried out by the central organisation but is carried out on the particular store's own initiative. The store is located in a small town, counting less than 3000 inhabitants. Their TikTok profile counted just below 17 000 followers at the time of the selection in August 2022 and just above 20 000 followers as of the 1st of May 2023. Currently, a total of about 150 videos have been uploaded to their TikTok account, they have received well over 300 000 likes combined, and their most viewed video has over 2,2 million views. This makes the workplace of the grocery store an interesting case study in the context of its digital presence, and the opinions and experiences of its employees are valuable in the pursuit of answering the research questions. Relating to the specific example of my case study, these are as follows:

- I. Research question 1 (RQ1): In what ways can unorganised approaches to social media marketing (e.g., through spontaneous attempts to attain online visibility on social media platforms) affect work culture, and how may such a culture constitute increased pressure on low-wage earners?
- II. Research question 2 (RQ2): How can organisational striving for "authentic" marketing through employee social media ambassadorship be understood as potentially "value-reducing" for employees?

This thesis is structured by initially accounting for the methodology and describing the methodological choices, as well as the research ethics. It will thereafter introduce existing theory and previous research relevant to discuss the findings and answer the research question. Following this theoretical background, the analysis is presented, consisting of an initial and brief “textual” analysis of the content discussed throughout the six interviews that have been conducted. The main analysis is subsequently presented, pertaining to the interviews. Finally, it discusses the finding from the analysis, in the context of the presented theory, before providing the conclusion.

1.2 TikTok as context

TikTok is the international answer to the Chinese video-sharing app Douyin, which has been available in China since 2016. The social media company ByteDance launched TikTok internationally in 2017, and through their simultaneous acquisition of Musical.ly, an app popular among teenagers in the US and UK, they positioned TikTok as the next major social media app. In the years since TikTok entered the US social media market in 2018, the app has come to dominate it, mirroring its international successes (Boffone 2022, 2).

Trevor Boffone (2022, 4) explains that while TikTok is still defining itself in the US, it has at the same time fully penetrated US culture. He exemplifies this through how one for example, on a trip to the grocery chain Trader Joe’s will discover how they feature an “As Seen on TikTok” section promoting foods made popular by TikTok. Similarly, the Norwegian bookstore chain Ark features an online section labelled “booktok”, referring to content on TikTok that shows users’ recommendations of books. This underlines how the platform has gained a foothold in many Western societies, visible through how both private individuals and corporations make use of the platform.

The nature of how content is predominantly curated to the user on TikTok sets the platform apart from other social media. Social media platforms have traditions for curating content to users through emphasising content from creators the user follows. Crystal Abidin (2020) explain that fame of earlier social media like Instagram and YouTube used to be based on a coherent online identity or the making of an online brand the users would follow. Users

could subscribe to these influencers, continuously learning about their personal lives and be persuaded by the (sponsored) messages that they shared. She refers to this as “the era of persona-based or profile-anchored fame” and compares this with the current era of “post-based fame”, characterised by the nature of fame on a space like TikTok, where visibility tends to be based on the performance of users individual posts (79). The performance of an individual post on TikTok is influenced by whether or not it is catalogued by the “For You Page” (Abidin 2020, 79)¹. The For You feed is curated to each user’s specific interests, and the more a user uses TikTok, the better the For You feed becomes at curating videos that are tailored to the user in question (TikTok 2022). Jing Zeng, Chrystal Abidin, and Mike S. Schäfer (2021) suggest that the For You Page is “one of the most addictive scrolling experiences on the Internet.” (3163)

Moreover, where visual social media tend to focus on images over text, TikTok privileges sound over images. One feature of TikTok is a rotating button on the bottom of each post, which leads to a catalogue of content using the same audio clip on TikTok and an option to ‘use this sound’, encouraging users to create content with the same background audio template. This has been central to viral trends on TikTok, and is perhaps the most novel feature on the app. It can be understood as an ‘audio meme’ and is the driving template for content production on TikTok (Abidin 2020, 80)². In addition to reusing audio clips and music, users can also engage with each other’s content through features such as ‘duet’, where two videos can play at the same time in a split-screen format, or ‘stitch’, where users can incorporate someone else’s content as part of their video. Such features are often used to make commentary on — or reply to — the original videos (Abidin 2020, 80).

¹ I have previously referenced some of these observations made by Crystal Abidin in an exam in Screen Technologies (MEVIT 4701): “*The algorithmic logic of TikTok: Platformisation and its influence on cultural production in the music industry*”

² *ibid.*

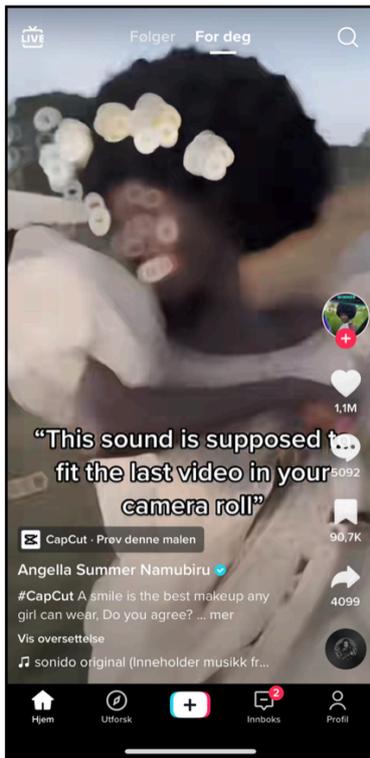


Figure 1: Illustration of what a video looks like on TikTok’s “For You” Page. @angellasummernamu

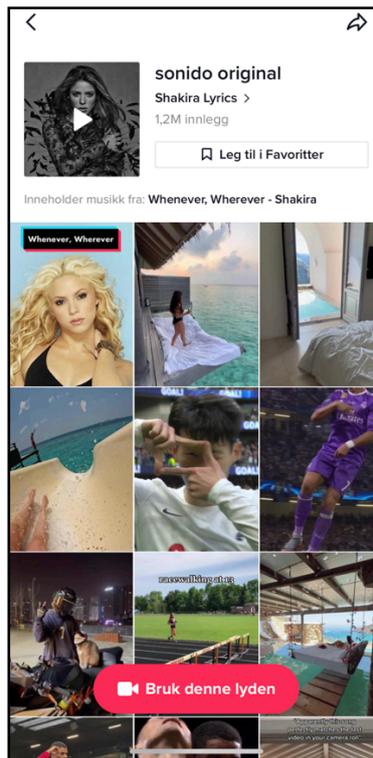


Figure 2: Illustration of what it looks like when pressing the rotating “sound-button”. @TikTok

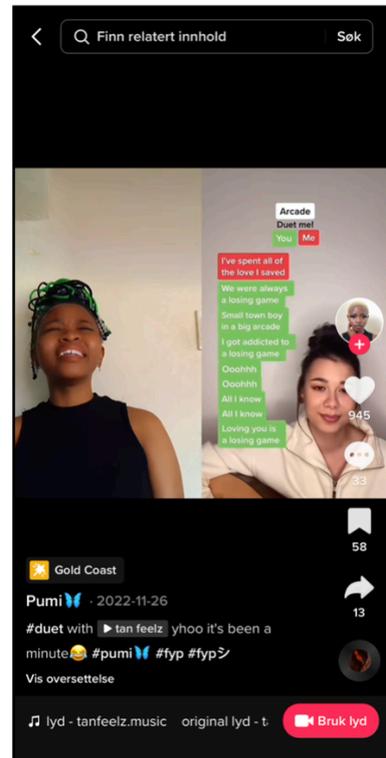


Figure 3: Illustration of what a “duet” looks like on TikTok. @greyy_a.quene

1.2.1 TikTok Controversies

TikTok has, on several occasions and for various reasons, sparked debate. For example, for content-related reasons, the platform has been banned in several countries, including India, Indonesia and Pakistan, and its Chinese ownership and popularity among underage users have made the platform subject to heightened criticism (Zeng and Kaye 2022, 79).

Recently, in their open threat assessment, published in March 2023, the Norwegian intelligence service points to China as one of the main actors to threaten Norwegian security interests. They point to social media as a favourable arena for such actors to spread disinformation and fake news (Etterretningstjenesten 2023). The Norwegian National Security Authority (NSM) consequently assessed that TikTok should not be installed on public employee service units connected to the internal digital infrastructure or services of companies in the public sector (Regjeringen 2023). Moreover, public agencies and private

companies are now asking their employees to delete the app from their mobile phones as they fear that sensitive or classified information could fall into the wrong hands (Sandven et al. 2023).

Jing Zeng and D. Bondy Valdovinos Kaye (2022) further recapitulate how previous controversy surrounding the platform has surfaced as a result of leaked documents revealing that visibility was deliberately restricted for videos featuring individuals with traits of 'unattractiveness' and developmental disorders. The platform is also accused of suppressing content that mentioned 'Black' or 'Black Lives Matter' in profiles on the TikTok Creator Marketplace, and for preventing LGBTQ+ content from going viral (83).

Although these controversies will not directly be the subject of this thesis, they underline some serious uncertainties revolving around the platform at the current time and emphasise that use of the platform itself should be assessed and carefully considered by those who use it, be it private individuals or organisations.

2. Methodology

This chapter will present the methodological approaches aiding in answering the research question and account for why these are regarded as suitable for studying the phenomenon in question. It will further describe how the methodological approaches were carried out. It is underlined that the methods applied in this research project are not equally comprehensive, and some are therefore described with greater detail.

Firstly, it will briefly be accounted for how and why the literature introduced in Chapter 3 was selected. Thereafter, the approach that constitutes the main methodology, and which served to collect the data that is the basis for my conclusion, will be presented. This research applies an intensive approach in the form of a case study, which entails focusing on only one specific instance of the phenomenon to be studied (Swanborn 2010, n.p). The methods applied are qualitative and consist of a very brief “textual” analysis and individual respondent in-depth interviews with six employees at the grocery store that constitutes the case study. The analysis of the content uploaded to the case study’s TikTok profile forms a significantly smaller part of the analysis. This is for the sake of anonymising the case study. It is, however, considered sufficient as it mainly serves the purpose of informing the reader about what sort of content the analysis of the interviews is in reference to.

2.1 Literature review

Context is a central part of the interpretive process in qualitative research, and researchers must place their interpretations within the relevant historical, cultural, political and/or economic contexts (Brennen 2017, n.p). In the initial phase of this research project, before my research question was fully formulated, I read Sarah Banet-Weiser’s book *Authentic™: The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture*, and this can be regarded as the starting point for the literature review, one that guided further literary searches. Through her work I contextualised the utilisation of low-wager earners in commercial content within the practice of branding, which she argues to be profoundly cultural (Banet-Weiser 2012, 14). This contextualisation helped to further develop the research question. Consequently, literature on brand ambassadorship and the different meanings of — and approaches to —

employee brand ambassadorship was obtained through manual literary searches. Furthermore, a continuous review of the reference lists of each article found relevant for my purposes was conducted, a method often referred to as the ‘snowball effect’ (Greetham 2020, 58).

Because the interpretive process of qualitative research needs to draw on relevant contexts to help consider potential motives for people's actions (Brennen 2017, n.p), later literary searches set out to find literature that could increasingly unite the topics of social media participation and brand ambassadorship, to further contextualise the case study and inform the research about the mechanisms at play when employees act as brand ambassadors. In this, I was informed by the observations and circumstances paid attention to by other researchers. For example, as the literature on brand ambassadorship frequently mentions *commitment* in relation to brand-supporting behaviour (Schlager et al. 2011; Xiong, King, and Piehler 2013; Dreher 2014; Cervellon & Lirio 2017; Sakka and Ahammad 2020; Taku, Saini, and Abratt 2022), it was seen as necessary to include some literature on this. Theory on commitment further made it natural to include literature on norms and conformity as it was found applicable to add to —and nuance— the understanding of why employees participate in the kind of brand ambassadorship that is discussed within this paper. Furthermore, as the second research question addresses how employee social media ambassadorship can be understood as potentially “value-reducing” for employees, literature on context collapse and digital privacy was seen as fundamental to introduce in order to address factors that can illuminate how ambassadorship can be understood as such.

After collecting a body of literature that could illuminate some of the mechanisms at play when employees act as brand ambassadors, I returned to Banet-Weiser’s (2012) work on contemporary branding and authenticity to further examine my research from a political perspective. This led me to Maurizio Lazzarato’s (1996) concept of immaterial labour, which informed further literary searches that placed the concept in a digital context (Terranova 2004; Jin and Feenberg 2015; Kaymas and Yakin 2021).

The above accounts for the approaches to finding relevant literature and the rationale behind introducing the literature referenced within this paper. It helped to define the kind of ambassadorship discussed within this paper, to understand why it is considered desirable for organisations, why employees participate in it, and the implications of this participation.

2.2 Case study

Peter Swanborn (2010, n.p) explain that approaches or strategies applied to study social phenomena can roughly be divided into two general types: extensive approaches and intensive approaches. Where an extensive approach uses a large set of events, people, organisations or nation-states to ground a conclusion about the phenomenon, my research applies an intensive approach which entails focusing on only one specific instance of the phenomenon to be studied or only a handful of instances, in order to study a phenomenon in depth (Swanborn 2010, n.p). In an intensive approach, each instance is studied in its own specific context and in greater detail than in extensive research. Data can be collected using many sources of information, such as spokespeople, documents and behavioural observations. An intensive approach is generally called a ‘case study’ as each instance or example to be studied is usually called a case (Swanborn 2010, n.p).

One rationale for choosing this approach was its applicability in terms of scale and time. However, more importantly, it is seen as highly compatible with the wish to gain in-depth knowledge about how organisations approach social media marketing in spontaneous ways, how this affect work culture, and, consequently, the employees. Bonnie S. Brennen (2017) explains that qualitative researchers consider the diversity of meanings and values created in media and attempt to understand the many relationships between media and society (n.p). Accordingly, this research ultimately seeks to illuminate how social media can contribute to increased pressure on low-wage earners by interrogating how spontaneous approaches to social media marketing affect work culture. The chosen approach is highly suitable in that it allows for the collection of in-depth information about a specific case to inform us of some perspectives of this process.

Firstly, it allows for interviews with employees about their first-hand experiences of the phenomenon. Secondly, as promotional content vary greatly in character and quality, a case study allows for the interviews to be contextualised in relation to the specific type of content in question. My approach to illuminating the practice of utilising employees in online promotional content has accordingly, as I will return to elaborate on, been based on interviewing individuals who can share their own experiences. In addition, a brief “textual” analysis of the content they feature in has been conducted.

It is recognised that an extensive approach too could illuminate important and broader knowledge of the phenomenon, as one would collect information about a large number of instances of it and draw conclusions by interpreting correlations between the properties of the examples (Swanborn 2010, n.p). It was, however, too expansive for the scale of this research and was not seen as capable of producing a valuable dataset to draw conclusions from with the limited resources. Rather than collecting information from an array of different corporations or businesses, the data is derived from one business and six employees employed by the business in question.

2.2.1 Case study selection

In the initial phase of this research project, a key term was “cringe”. Cringe refers to an empathic feeling of sharing others’ embarrassment, in relation to their deviant behaviour, that at the same time often evokes a feeling of pleasure in the observer (Paulus et al. 2018, 52). It is often used about online content and frequently about the type of content previously described, seemingly spontaneous content uploaded by commercial actors. Because of this, the initial phase of this research project included a somewhat random monitoring of commercial content on TikTok. A “random” monitoring refers to a phase where a substantial amount of time was spent on TikTok to see what appeared organically (suggested by their algorithms) and where content that stood out in relation to my research was noted and considered in terms of suitability. A number of videos were also received from people who knew what the interest of the research was at the time. While the focus shifted to how employees experience the centrality accorded to visibility in work culture,

the case study was selected as a result of being received from a third party in the initial phase of the project.

However, the selection of the case, the company to be studied, was based on some updated criteria, considered central in order to illuminate the updated research questions:

- (1) The character of the content is commercial, communicated externally by a profit-driven business
- (2) The content features internal employees in social media content.
- (3) The average employee in the company is typically considered to be low-wage earners, or the business is typically associated with high turnover in employees.

The selected business, a local grocery store in Norway, fulfilled all the above criteria. It was further the relatively widespread visibility of their content in social media that made it stand out as particularly relevant for the purpose of this project. It was picked from a selection of other potential cases as a result of the initial monitoring of content. However, the chosen case study, which was, as mentioned, selected after being introduced to me by a peer, was seen as the most sustainable for my purposes.

As it is important for interviewers to understand the language, customs and culture of each person that they talk with, and it will help to ask informed and interesting questions and build rapport (Brennen, 2017, n.p) the business in question also stood out as particularly suitable, as I myself have worked in the same grocery store at a different location. The “hierarchy” and routines of the business are, therefore, somewhat known to me and possibly something I can better understand as a product of previously being part of it myself. Although this was never a crucial factor in the selection, it was considered valuable when the business otherwise also constituted a good case for my research purposes.

2.3 Interviews

As Brennen (2017) explains, qualitative research uses language to understand concepts based on people's experiences and attempts to create a sense of the larger realm of human relationships. The subject matter of qualitative research is not objective data to be quantified but meaningful relations to be interpreted (n.p). In order to illuminate variables in people's relationship to their surroundings, such as their work environment and their digital environments, conversations with people about their lived experiences is arguably essential (Brennen 2017, n.p). As a central aim of my research is to identify how participation in digital marketing content affects employees, it was seen as essential that some form of verbal communication with employees had to take place to sufficiently answer the research questions. As Brinkmann and Kvale (2018) state, "If you want to know how people understand their world and their lives, why not talk with them?" (n.p).

One form of research interview – the semi-structured life-world interview – is defined as an interview with the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena (Brinkmann and Kvale 2018, n.p). Semi-structured interviews are usually based on a pre-established set of questions that are asked to all respondents. However, there is a great flexibility with semi-structured interviews. Interviewers may vary the order of the questions and may also ask follow-up questions to delve more deeply into some of the topics or to clarify answers (Brennen 2017, n.p).

My interview design was semi-structured in nature, where a pre-established set of questions were asked to all respondents, but the greater focus was on following up on each respondent's answer to each of the questions. For example, when asking how the respondents experienced reading the comment section, the follow-up questions would explore the respondents' individual experiences. If they found certain challenges connected to the feedback, the interview tried to uncover what constituted the mentioned challenges. If the respondents' found it entertaining, I would similarly try to uncover what exactly made them experience it as entertaining and what constituted the experience of entertainment.

The conversation did, however, not develop fully organically, as it was important that the conversation remained within the theme and revolved around the employees' experiences of the exposure online.

I conducted the first three interviews face-to-face at the location of the store. This gave me the opportunity to gain an impression of the physical location, although this was not crucial for my analysis. The remaining three interviews were conducted over Zoom. One participant did not turn on the camera, and this can thus be regarded as a phone interview. I note that I did not ask this participant to turn on the camera for the sake of his comfort, and argue that my refrain from asking helped — rather than hampered— the interview, as research has confirmed that being concerned about personal appearance is among the reasons for individuals' reluctance to turn on their cameras during meetings (Castelli and Sarvary 2021, 3565). As Brinkmann and Kvale (2018) explain, the first minutes of an interview are decisive, and the interviewees will want to have a grasp of the interviewer before they allow themselves to talk freely and expose their experiences and feelings to a stranger (n.p). The rationale behind not pointing out that the participant did not have the camera on was accordingly not to disrupt the situation by appearing confrontational in a setting where it was obvious to both parties that he had made an active choice (not to put his camera on). As the conversation did not appear obstructed by the lack of the participant's visibility, the interview continued without mention of this. In general, the fact that three interviews were conducted digitally—in whatever way—is not regarded as impairing the conversations.

All the interviews were conducted in and transcribed to Norwegian. The statements referenced within this thesis have therefore been translated from Norwegian to English. For a few examples of how it was translated, see Appendix 1.

2.3.1 Interview selection

Brennen (2017, n.p) suggests that when, during the course of the interviews, information is repeated time and time again, and you are learning less and less from each new interview, it might be a good time to end the interview process. This influenced the process of selecting

participants in my case in the sense that it informed me when to stop conducting more interviews. Through initial contact with the employee responsible for the company's social media profile I was offered the opportunity to have an ongoing dialogue with him about who I wished to interview. Initially, I interviewed three employees. Two out of these were selected by virtue of their managing responsibilities. While one did not hold any managing responsibility, he is a prominent character in the operation of the profile and thus partially regarded as having a managing role for my purposes. The third participant was interviewed as a result of conversations with the employee responsible for the profile, where I had expressed interest in interviewing employees who had at one point participated in content.

After the initial three interviews, I discovered that their feeling about participation varied to an extent where it would be sufficient to only interview employees who had participated since the variables in their emotions towards the profile were sufficient to illuminate different perspectives on the practice (e.g. participants did express reluctance and engagement at the same time). While it was always planned to conduct more than the initial three interviews, the following selection became easier, as I chose to select further participants according to whether they had participated in content or not. I was subsequently led to interview an additional three employees, all of whom I had participated in content. After an additional three interviews, I identified a pattern sustainable to analyse and draw conclusions from. In total, I interviewed six employees.

2.3.2 Interview guide

As mentioned, before conducting the interviews, I made an interview guide (see Appendix 2). This served the dual purpose of keeping myself as an interviewer on topic and as a reminder of the core essence of what my research was supposed to uncover. Since my interview was semi-structured in nature, the guide included an outline of topics to be covered, with suggested questions (Brinkmann and Kvale 2018, n.p). The guide was divided into five main topics; (1) The company's ambitions, (2) Information provided by the management to the employees, (3) Individual commitment, (4) The individual's personal experience with social media generally, and (5) Feedback on the workplace's TikTok profile and experience around it. Some of these topics differentiated between

questions posed to employees in managing positions and employees. However, I do underline that, due to the relatively flat structure of the workplace and an unorganised nature of the operation of the account, some questions ended up relevant to ask participants regardless of their managing roles. In this sense, the semi-structured nature of the interviews was helpful.

The interview guide was designed according to the mentioned topics, and each topic had a brief introduction in the form of posing some general questions before introducing some straightforward examples of questions to be posed. Each section concluded with a sentence that stated the purpose of the questions to remind myself as an interviewer of the overall purpose of the questions and what they were designed to uncover. Some examples of the pre-determined, fully formulated questions all the participants were asked in relation to topic (4), The individual's personal experience with social media generally, are:

- Do you post things yourself on social media, or do you just follow others?
- Are your profile on any of the platforms you post to private?
- Are most of your friends active on any of the following platforms (Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, TikTok)

These examples illuminate how some questions were designed with the intent to contextualise the participants' reluctance or engagement with the company's social media profile to, for example, see whether there was a correlation between those who did not prefer to participate in promotional content and their private activity in social media (e.g. if an active private use reduced the proclivity to participate in promotional content).

2.4 Brief "Textual" Analysis

Firstly, it is underlined that I have not conducted a traditional textual analysis. The analysis of the content of my case study, conducted in chapter 4.1, rather presents as a brief presentation of the content discussed within the interviews. I will return to elaborate on the reasons for it being presented as it is when I address the research ethics.

As researchers study cultures and discover what they think are interesting aspects of a specific culture, texts can provide evidence about those practices (McKee 2003, n.p). In accordance with this, my research question was mainly developed out of observing the content uploaded to TikTok by my case study. Their approach to social media marketing was noted, and the general nature of the content was considered from the perspective of how it may be experienced to feature in. As I have accounted for, this is also why I chose to conduct interviews with the employees to obtain information about their perspectives.

However, since some initial interpretation of the content was made at a relatively early stage of my research, this first interpretation was partially prejudiced with regard to the research question at the time. This is also the reason for my choice to conduct the interviews before a more thorough analysis of the content. This is not to say that I did not have a sufficient overview of the content before conducting the interviews, but rather that I strived to separate myself from my preconceptions — as not to enhance them— before conversations with the employees. This was also useful in the sense that some of the participants gave reference to specific videos in the interviews and thus informed my decision on what content I could pay extra attention to when I later returned to my analysis of the TikTok content. As Alan McKee (2003) states, you can not do anything with a text until you establish its context. It can not even simply be described without implicitly putting it into a context (n.p). Therefore, leaving the analysis of the content was seen as beneficial in terms of having both described TikTok as a platform and conducted my literature review prior to analysing the content.

McKee (2003) points out that there is no single correct representation of any part of the world and, in the same way, no single correct interpretation of any text. It is therefore acknowledged that “the ways in which members of different cultures may make sense of a text will vary just as much as the ways in which they make sense of the world around them.” (n.p). Since my research question already implies a tension between two worlds — the private and the professional — it is already informative in itself with respect to suggesting that the quality of the content can be interpreted in different ways by different individuals (in my case, employees and employers within the same organisation). This

speaks to the fact that the kind of content I am analysing tends to be interpreted quite differently among relatively homogenous groups of people. However, there are always a limited number of reasonable interpretations available in a given culture at a given time, and evidence is necessary in order to support interpretations as reasonable (McKee 2003, n.p).

The analysis has benefitted from a reading of the comment section related to the content and used this to, at times, back up readings of the content. While technically part of the same content, the comment section is regarded as additional text in the sense that it provides evidence of others having made similar interpretations of the visual content, illuminating that I have not imposed a reading of the content where nobody else would see it (McKee 2003, n.p). Here I underline that the comment section was interpreted after my second reading of the visual content. The comment section has also helped to include interpretations of what the content could mean from multiple perspectives. In this sense, I have been looking for evidence of reasonable interpretations of the texts, which will be multiple but not completely open or arbitrary (McKee 2003, n.p).

Since a text should always be analysed in order to answer a specific question (McKee 2003, n.p), my analysis is conducted with the aim of understanding how the content in question can be seen as a practice of branding the employees and whether or not this is presented as “authentic” content, to the extent that authenticity is a measurable factor. Moreover, I acknowledge that my own theoretical perspectives have informed the types of questions I asked (Brennen, 2017, n.p). Since my theoretical perspective was from the point of view that wished to illuminate whether digital brand ambassadorship can constitute pressure for employees, I initially asked the question of whether the visual content could be experienced as undesirable to feature in. However, since textual analysis takes the approach of wanting to find out what interpretations are produced and which ones are most likely in a given cultural context (McKee 2003, n.p), I underline that it is not my personal interpretations that are highlighted in the analysis, but interpretations that are likely in the context that it is presented (e.g. TikTok is the platform, and this context is different from commercials on TV).

2.5 Research ethics

The first consideration that was made to establish good research ethics was to ensure that I started the project in accordance with existing rules and guidelines on the storage and handling of personal data. Before starting my data collection, I therefore obtained approval from Sikt - Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research (at the time of my application, named Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD)) (See Appendix 3). When my research study was reported, information about the intentions of the study as well as a description of how I intended to carry it out, was given. Furthermore, I described how I intended to protect the privacy of the participants, for example, that all personal information was to be anonymised and kept confidential for anyone other than the researcher and the supervisor of the project for the duration of the project.

Since it is crucial to make sure that the consent to being interviewed is informed and that each respondent should know exactly how his or her interview material is to be used (Brennen 2017, n.p), all the participants were also given written information about the research project before they signed a declaration of consent (see Appendix 4). Furthermore, all the participants were given a full list of their quotes and the contexts these were put in (for one example see Appendix 5), with the opportunity to raise objections before the thesis was submitted.

While I initially planned to give information about the approximate age of the participants, I refrained from doing so once I had analysed the data, as it was regarded as insignificant for my discussion and conclusion. No information is therefore given about any of the participants besides their gender — and in two instances, the nature of their positions (the managing positions). Furthermore, while I did obtain approval from Sikt not to anonymise the case study itself (anonymisation of it was not mentioned in my application), I have chosen not to give information about the company or its location in my thesis. The reason for this is mainly the identifying factor this constitutes for my participants. My case study is located in a small town in Norway and it only has one store belonging to the grocery store chain in question. It would consequently be easy to identify the participants in this thesis if

information about the company name or location of it. While this anonymisation came at the expense of a more thorough textual analysis, it is not considered to have impaired my arguments or my conclusion. A general description of the company and the content uploaded is seen as adequate in my context because the interviews conducted were sufficient to illuminate findings that would perhaps otherwise have been obtained through a more elaborate textual analysis. Therefore, I decided to leave the company unnamed to ensure the privacy of my participants in the best possible way.

No matter which presentation style a researcher chooses, ultimately, it is important to remember that the stories qualitative researchers tell are shaped by their writing styles, personal histories and the theoretical perspectives they use (Brennen 2017, n.p). I have had this in mind throughout the process and have strived not to let my preconceived ideas hamper the opportunity to illuminate the subject as objectively as possible. For example, as accounted for, since my initial interpretation of the content was partially prejudiced I conducted the interviews before a thorough analysis of the content. This was done in an attempt to separate myself from my preconceptions and rather let the interviewees inform me on how they themselves experienced participating in the content.

3. Theory and relevant prior research

In this chapter, I present theory and prior research relevant to the discussion that takes place in Chapter 5. It further provides definitions of terms and elaborates on what these are to be understood as within the context of this paper. This includes theory and research on brand ambassadorship, privacy and the experience of context collapse, organisational commitment and norm compliance and deviance. Furthermore, I introduce some literature that provides perspectives on what has been termed “immaterial labour” and how companies monetise on labour that is not compensated.

3.1 Branding the employee

In her introductory words to *AuthenticTM: The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture* Sarah Banet-Weiser (2012) assert that branding in our era has extended beyond a business model, that it is now both reliant on and reflective of our most basic social and cultural relations (4). The notion of the “brand ambassador” underlines a practice of commodifying things that are not typically thought of as products. As Lazzarato (1996) put it, capitalism seeks to involve even the worker’s personality and subjectivity within the production of value (135).

Mehita Iqani (2019) identify three main types of brand ambassadors: celebrities, employees and consumers themselves (231). For my purposes, the commodification of the employee is well reflected in how practitioners, research and literature frequently discuss the topic of branding employees to become brand ambassadors (Schlager et al. 2011; Macnamara and Zerfass 2012; Xiong, King, and Piehler 2013; Dreher 2014; Cervellon & Lirio 2017; Sakka and Ahammad 2020; Taku, Saini, and Abratt 2022) and it is this process that is relevant for my purposes. Since corporate branding involves creating a unique image for the brand in the minds of different kinds of stakeholders, it can pertain to internal branding, employer branding, and external branding (Cervellon & Lirio 2017, n.p). I underline that the focus of this research project is content uploaded to social media and thus to be understood as an external branding process.

3.1.1 Customer service representative vs. Brand ambassador

As Patricia Sánchez Abril, Avner Levin and Alissa Del Riego (2012) assert, “Conventional wisdom dictates that an employee is a representative of his or her organisation in all areas of life. This is especially true when an employee uses a company logo, wears a company uniform, or purports to speak for or about the company as an insider” (89). To get a clearer understanding of how important of a representative the employee is considered to be for companies it is useful to elaborate on the concept of employee branding, a process whereby employees internalise the company brand image and project that image to stakeholders such as customers (Cervellon & Lirio 2017, n.p). Employee branding differs from *employer* branding, which aims to enhance the organisation’s image in order to attract and retain talented employees (Cervellon & Lirio 2017, n.p). The outcome of a successful employee branding process may lead to an internalisation of company values to the extent that the employee becomes a brand ambassador. A brand ambassador can be defined as an official or authorised representative of a brand that is held out to the public primarily for promotional purposes, such as establishing or extending goodwill toward the brand (Iqani 2019, 231).

Research has found that brand awareness in employees results in supporting behaviour that influences brand loyalty by customers (Taku, Saini, and Abratt 2022, 166). When employees adopt brand values, they are considered to give the organisation they work for a sustainable competitive advantage, for example, through the likelihood of satisfied employees providing customers with better service (Schlager et al. 2011). As Lina Xiong, Ceridwyn King and Rico Piehler (2013) explain, within the hospitality industry, the employee’s performance during service encounters provides the immediate evidence of brand reality and it is considered to have a significant impact on how customers perceive and adjust their relationship toward the brand. Therefore, in order to establish a compelling customer-brand relationship, hospitality employees need to “become brand ambassadors by enacting certain behaviours that align with customers’ brand expectations during the employee-customer interaction” (349). As this illustrates, the call to have employees buy-in on an organisation’s brand and values exists independent of the ubiquitousness of screens and communication technology, as certain forms of ambassadorship relate to raising the

quality of physical employee-customer encounters. Similarly, an employee at a grocery store is usually expected to interact with customers in a friendly and helpful way that promotes the brand or store. The form of ambassadorship characterised by the expectancy of employees to be service minded is simply labelled as customer service for my purposes.

However, the evolution of new information and communication technologies has leveraged innovation in the workplace setting, and social media fosters innovation that offers new opportunities for innovative marketing (Sakka and Ahammad 2020, 354). This includes increased attention to how employee social media usage can be harnessed to build a stronger brand or better customer relationship (Dreher 2014; Cervellon & Lirio 2017; Sakka and Ahammad 2020). Social media specialists are cited to call for organisations to “proactively develop staff as ‘ambassadors’ and even ‘evangelists’ for their organisations.” (Macnamara and Zerfass 2012, 300) and employees are described to function as powerful brand ambassadors through social media, shaping reputation with everything they do and say online (Dreher 2014, 344). This extends the understanding of employee ambassadorship to include engagement with company culture in ways that do not immediately seem central to most job positions. As an individual’s social media profile can be described as part of their private sphere, one could also state that this digital ambassadorship increases the expectancy of employees to be ambassadors in private arenas. It is this form of “added” expectancy of employees that constitutes what is referred to as a brand ambassadorship for my purposes.

3.1.2 Ambassadorship through prevention vs. promotion

Employee social media ambassadorship can be characterised in two separate ways, either as expressed expectations of employees to not damage the brand through online speech or as employees actively promoting the brand online. In their study of managers’ attempts to govern employees’ social media behaviours, Annelieke C. van den Berg and Joost W.M. Verhoeven (2017) categorise managers’ focus as either preventive or promotive.

A prevention focus is characterised by a social media governance that is mostly restrictive, generally not allowing employees to converse about work or work-related activities on

social media at all (van den Berg and Verhoeven 2017, 160). Such a focus is typically enforced to minimise negative outcomes of employees' social media usage, for example through inappropriate statements that put the reputation of the organisation at risk (Sakka and Ahammad 2020, 357). Examples of employees being fired as a result of inappropriate statements on social media indicate that normative expectations exist in relation to employees' social media usage in their private lives (Sakka and Ahammad 2020, 357). Such expectations call for the employee to be an ambassador for the brand in the sense of acting as a respectable representative for the brand outside the work context. Within this type of ambassadorship, the focus does not lie on actively promoting brand values but rather on refraining from promoting negative attitudes (e.g. hate speech) and is in line with the notion that an employee is a representative of his or her organisation in all areas of life.

A promotion focus within social media governance generally views social media in terms of the opportunities they provide, and managers with this approach typically focus on how to facilitate employees' social media use in a way that promotes the brand in the best possible way (van den Berg and Verhoeven 2017, 160-161). In their examination of the tensions between the open, uncontrolled practices of social media and organisational strategy and management, Jim Macnamara and Ansgar Zerfass (2012) report that all social media specialists interviewed supported an open rather than a restrictive approach to employee use of social media. This was preferred due to the increased "authenticity" and "credibility" of spontaneous staff statements as opposed to communication distributed through centrally controlled organisational departments. Furthermore, a number of the participants went beyond permitting employees' social media use, calling for organisations to proactively develop staff as ambassadors (300).

Employees are explicitly endorsing an employer brand on social media when they comment positively on the brand to their contacts, recommend the brand, share links, pass on information, endorse the brand's values or refer to their brands indirectly on social media (Cervellon & Lirio 2017, n.p). In the current research, the notion of the brand ambassador further extends to include employees who are asked to put their bodies at the organisation's disposal by participating in promotional content distributed through the organisation's own

social media channels. This is understood as a branding behaviour with a promotion focus because it is an open endorsement of the organisation. Furthermore, while content is published on the company's account, it is underlined that the platform content is published on is to be understood as a private arena for anyone who is present (or with acquaintances that are present) on the platform in question.

3.1.3 Self-presentation and context collapse

People have a strong need to enhance their self-concepts by behaving consistently with their actions, statements, commitments, beliefs, and self-ascribed traits (Cialdini and Goldstein 2004, 602). As Sánchez Abril, Levin, and Del Riego (2012) summarise, individuals create and tailor their social identities for particular audiences, and each performance's audience must be segregated from the others for the performances to succeed. In this lies the fact that our credibility in one role can be reduced if the audience observes our behaviour in a conflicting role (63). Digital media is discussed in academic literature in relation to how they increasingly blur the line between the private and the public (Sánchez Abril, Levin, and Del Riego 2012) and how social media technologies collapse multiple audiences into single contexts (Marwick and boyd 2011; Davis and Jurgenson 2014; Ollier-Malaterre and Rothbard 2015; Batenburg and Bartels 2017), consequently complicating attempts to differ self-presentation strategies and creating tension as diverse groups of people are present on social network sites (Marwick and boyd 2011, 122).

As these technologies have the ability to disseminate information widely and in a way that gives a broad audience access to the individual (Ollier-Malaterre and Rothbard 2015, 27) they are viewed as both a threat to individual privacy but at the same as something that can be leveraged by the individual. Studies have, for example, implied that the best strategy to preserve respect and likability among colleagues is to integrate professional contacts on Facebook and post self-enhancing messages (Batenburg and Bartels 2017, 265). Here, I apply Jenny Davis & Nathan Jurgenson's (2014) differentiation between intentional and unintentional context collapse and call the former context collusions, in which users purposefully bring together various social situations. It is the unintentional context collapse, labelled context collisions, through which social situations unwittingly crash into each other

(483) that is interesting for my purposes. However, for the sake of simplicity, all references to *the unintentional* collapse of multiple audiences into single contexts is simply referred to as context collapse within this paper.

While organisations are advised to set expectation standards for employee social media use to alleviate some of the pressures on their workers to constantly be “connected” to social media technologies (Loiacono and McCoy 2018, 971), the emphasis put on building employee ambassadorships through social media appears to be of a particularly high priority for many. And while research does emphasise the individual right to have one’s private life remain private, as private information that was previously segregated now becomes easily accessible to perhaps unintended audiences (Sánchez Abril, Levin, and Del Riego 2012, 64), I wish to emphasise the individual’s right to have one’s professional life remain private. The openness of digital media has far-reaching effects on personal privacy, reputation, and self-expression (Sánchez Abril, Levin, and Del Riego 2012, 64). Because of this, the evolving practises of using employees in promotional content have made it prominent to pay attention to how organisations may influence an individual’s self-presentation. When an individual’s professional persona is becoming increasingly visible to contacts from outside work, one could make the argument that it poses a threat to that individual’s relationships outside of the workplace through the context collapse facilitated by digital media.

Sánchez Abril, Levin, and Del Riego (2012) describe the workplace as perhaps the quintessential social establishment where performers “cooperate to present to an audience a given definition of the situation” and explain that professionalism is the language of the traditional workplace performance (64). This is possibly not a persona one would present to friends, potential love interests or other peers usually encountered in more laid-back situations. A work-sphere that very much revolves around leveraging the possibilities for visibility, made possible by social media, thus emphasise how it is relevant to establish the individual right to have their professional lives remain private and explore how corporate visibility may affect reputational vulnerability to employees’ private persona. As online presence, for example through a personal social media profile, can be described as a

carefully controlled performance through which self-presentation is achieved under optimal conditions (Marwick and boyd 2011, 155), one needs to consider that employees lose some control over this presentation when participating in marketing content and thus that it might feel like a vulnerable position for many. Accordingly, research on ambassadorship from the perspective of employees indicates that it gives rise to identity tensions both during work and off work (Andersson 2019, 702).

Eleanor Loiacono and Scott McCoy (2018) apply the concept of stress within the realm of technology and account for how technostress has been defined as a modern disease of adaptation caused by an inability to cope with the new computer technologies in a healthy manner. They further explain that people who experience technostress may feel a loss of control (969-970). Within their research they focus on techno-invasion as the source of technostress. Techno-invasion refers to the invasive effect of a technology in terms of creating situations where users can potentially be reached at any time, feel the need to be constantly connected, and there is a blurring between work-related and personal contexts. This blurring can feel invasive and stressful to an individual who is used to keeping these realms separate (972) and the negative impact technology has on users' lives comes from the need users feel to continue to update and manage their online persona (976). We can thus, in accordance with this, establish that brand ambassadorship can emphasize a felt need to manage an online persona and potentially have a negative impact.

3.1.4 Compensation for brand-related labour

Research has depicted how managers are concerned with stimulating suitable employees to be active on social media (van den Berg and Verhoeven 2017, 159), and scholars within the field of communication emphasise the employees' potential as powerful brand ambassadors and external communicators (Dreher 2014, 344). This underlines how the employee is frequently described in ways that may be perceived as presenting the employee itself as a commodity. Since employee brand-building behaviours are rarely rewarded (Cervellon & Lirio 2017, n.p) but could both be seen as labour that does not naturally pertain to most job positions, and as a stressful component in the workplace, it is relevant to discuss the lack of compensation.

Firstly, as described, the nature of brand ambassadorships varies, and it is therefore important to briefly underline that the topic of added compensation is not equally relevant to all types of ambassadorship. Firstly, ambassadorship in the sense of carrying out quality customer encounters, referred to as customer service for my purposes, can be understood as a form of ambassadorship that employees already receive compensation for through their salary. The nature of being service minded and informative is a natural expectation of service personnel, often explicitly stated in the job descriptions of such positions. Therefore, an employee's ability to engage with the brand to the extent that one can meet expectations of "enacting certain behaviours that align with customers' brand expectations" (Xiong, King, and Piehler 2013, 349) is something they are arguably compensated for within their salary. However, In the context of social media ambassadorship, compensation for labour can be problematised to a greater extent, as employees are expected to engage with company culture on private arenas.

An ambassadorship characterised by managers' prevention focus, as accounted for, revolves around refraining from promoting negative attitudes. While the employee here is asked to keep their organisation in mind so as to refrain from damaging its reputation, it is not expected to actively communicate its values to strengthen its reputation. Within this (prevention-oriented) type of ambassadorship compensation for labour is therefore irrelevant to discuss for my purposes, as it does not present the employee with an added workload. A social media ambassadorship characterised by managers' promotion focus does, on the other hand, add to the employees workload through encouraging activity in social media or participation in digital content that promotes the brand. Within this digital form of "active" brand ambassadorship it seems relevant to address compensation, especially when considering how external ambassadors are typically compensated for similar labour.

As Iqani (2019, 231) explain, the most recognisable form of brand ambassadorship is perhaps when a famous person aligns him or herself with a particular brand "in exchange for financial reward, associating their face and reputation with the products.". Where

celebrity brand ambassadorship is a strategy that aims to align the values of the brand with those of the celebrity, employees are often viewed as the prototypical brand ambassadors who “are expected to help ‘maximise the assets of the company as a brand’” (Iqani 2019, 231). Employees are, however, not typically offered explicit compensation in relation to this labour.

From an organisational perspective, one might argue that this compensation is “built-in” to their salary, similarly to how a customer service representative is compensated for carrying out customer service. However, such an argument would overlook the fact that brand ambassadorship is not solely expected to be carried out by employees in high-earning positions, employees hired in communication positions or employees typically considered to be personally devoted to the organisation, such as employees with long-term plans to remain in the organisations. Brand ambassadorship is increasingly incorporated in positions associated with high turnover and carried out by employees considered to be low-wage earners, such as customer service representatives.

Throughout her book, Banet-Weiser (2012) discusses a number of entangled discourses and practices involved in the complex process of branding. This entails the making and selling of immaterial things, such as feelings, personalities and values, rather than actual goods (7). While her focus is mainly on the labour of consumers in brand culture, the notion of immaterial labour appears relevant to further discuss in relation to the mentioned practises of employee brand ambassadorship. Lazzarato (1996) defines the concept of immaterial labour as the labour that produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity. It involves a series of activities that are not normally recognised as “work”, but is rather the kinds of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural standards such as for example consumer norms and public opinion (132). This appears highly relevant for my purposes when considering the visibility social media ambassadorship grants the employee and the standard for how others are typically compensated for similar labour (e.g. actors or celebrities). We can therefore define employee brand ambassadorship as added labour that is not compensated, as it involves a “series of activities that are not normally recognised as ‘work’”, but involves fixing cultural standards such as for example consumer norms.

More specifically transferable to my research, Tiziana Terranova (2004) looks at the phenomenon of ‘free labour’ – the tendency of users to become actively involved in the production of content and software for the Internet, and focuses on the difficulties inherent in the relationship between such forms of volunteer and unpaid technocultural production and our understanding of contemporary capitalism. Within this thesis, the notion of immaterial labour or free labour, as it is conceptualised in the era of social media and highly visible brand ambassadorships, is interpreted quite broadly as both “labour that creates immaterial products” while at the same time being “unpaid labour that is voluntarily given.” (Jin and Feenberg 2015, 52). The aspect of voluntariness is underlined, as I will emphasise that it can be seen as both exploitation of employees and a voluntary action they carry out for personal opportunities. In any case, it is the tension between these that is important, as such labour could, either way, be described as capitalising on the worker’s personality or self-presentation. Accordingly, as Iqani (2019) underline, brand-related labour needs to be understood as simultaneously linked to self-expression and the operations of global capitalist power. For those who use digital media platforms to create content that might promote a corporate brand as well as their own personae, there exists a complex tension between self-empowering action and possible exploitation by economic power structures (233).

While the tension between self-expression and capitalist power has been addressed in relation to social media (Banet-Weiser 2012; Iqani 2019; Kaymas and Yakin 2021), it is becoming increasingly relevant to raise these questions in specific relation to the practice of how employees are used as actors in content uploaded to social media by their organisations. Especially when organisations utilise platforms that tend to invoke “post-based” virality rather than “persona-based” fame (Abidin 2020, 79), consequently allowing videos to accumulate hundreds of thousands of views in a short period of time, influencing the self-presentation of the subject figuring in the content. This means the employees, in such instances, trade off their self-presentation practises for the benefit of the brand. Dennis K. Mumby (2016) exemplify how any free, autonomous act of communication has the potential to become free labour that is brandable and transformable into economic value through the US phenomenon of “Alex from Target”, a teenage grocery bagger at a Target

store who became a social media meme with over 700,000 Twitter followers after a teenage female admirer posted a photo of him online. After an appearance on the Ellen DeGeneres Show, ‘Alex from Target’ got an agent and went ‘on tour’, no longer simply a teenage boy but a brand with economic value (886-887).

3.2 Organisational commitment and norms

A report examining the characteristics of people who work in low-paid jobs in Norway, and the special characteristics of these jobs, establish that young people who are just starting their working life dominate in the lowest salary levels. Furthermore, it found that the level of education is lower for people in jobs with lower wages. The jobs with lower wage levels are concentrated in a small number of industries, for example, trade in goods, accommodation and personal service provision (Grini and Johnsen 2021, 4). Starting in lower points of the salary distribution gives a greater probability of greater movement upward in the salary distribution (Grini and Johnsen 2021, 7), meaning that low-earning positions are associated with higher turnover.

While the wages differ within an industry or profession and far from everyone in a given profession falls below the threshold for being in the low-paid category (Grini and Johnsen 2021, 4), we can establish that within many of the industries where we find visibility in social media to be perceived as most favourable, for example, industries that revolve around trade in goods, we also find those with the lowest salary levels. Organisations that operate within these industries often also encourage social media ambassadorship, as will be exemplified within my case study. Since this ambassadorship, as accounted for, often lack economic compensation, they are arguably in need of a workforce bound to action through something else. Therefore, the focus on employees’ participation in social media content presupposes commitment beyond economic compensation.

3.2.1 Organisational Commitment

While it is well recognised that commitment is a multidimensional construct (Meyer and Herscovitch 2001), and researchers have developed important multidimensional models that conceptualise organisational commitment as nuanced (Mercurio 2015), John P. Meyer and Lynne Herscovitch (2001) argue that commitment should have a core essence

regardless of the context in which it is studied. Within this thesis, commitment is to be understood in accordance with their general model, based on the proposition that “commitment is a force that binds an individual to a course of action of relevance to one or more targets. As such, commitment is distinguishable from exchange-based forms of motivation (...) and can influence behaviour even in the absence of extrinsic motivation or positive attitudes.” (Meyer and Herscovitch 2001, 301).

Within the above it is acknowledge that commitment is not exclusively positive, but that it, for example, can lead individuals to behave in ways that might seem contrary to their own self-interest. They clarify by explaining that the target or targets to which the employee commits can be entities or behaviours, as we, for example, speak about both commitment to organisations (entity) or commitment to the implementations of policies (behaviour). Sometimes commitment can include both an entity and a course of action at the same time (Meyer and Herscovitch 2001, 309). The mindset accompanying commitment can take varying forms, including desire, perceived cost or obligation to continue a course of action. For example, the desire to continue a course of action can be a desire to exert effort to achieve organisational goals, and the perceived cost is what the employee imagines losing if failing to do so (Meyer and Herscovitch 2001, 308).

Since the focus of this research project is low-wage earners that are expected to expel commitment through social media ambassadorship, one could state that the desired commitment would manifest as an action taken by the employee (participation in content) that leads to the organisation's visibility in social media. The behavioural implications here are quite specific. However, as the employees are low-wage earners in positions that are often associated with high turnover, we need to consider the target of the commitment. As Meyer and Herscovitch (2001) explain, while it will be desirable for managers to make the organisations the target of members' commitment, there might be conditions under which this is neither desirable nor possible. For example, under conditions where permanent employment cannot be guaranteed, it might not be reasonable to expect a high level of employee commitment. It might also be difficult to get employees committed to work towards organisational goals for the sake of the organisation (322).

While a high level of employee commitment cannot be guaranteed in a low-wage workforce, Meyer and Herscovitch (2001) explain that it is possible to get employees to work towards some common goals if they can be shown to be relevant to an alternative target. For instance, employees who are highly committed to their own careers are more likely to work hard on projects that are seen as instrumental for the development of marketable skills (322). If the target of the commitment is to attain marketable skills, to elevate one's own employability, for example, one could argue that there are some basic behavioural implications often associated with this. For starters, many will make an effort to act in line with their current organisation's norms in order to generally appear as an attractive candidate for further recommendation to potential future employers. Moreover, in the current environment, many employees may perceive high inclination to participation in social media as a marketable trait in itself, and thus recognise it to increase their "value" in a job seekers market.

It is further relevant to account for how commitment has been theorised as partly developed by an individual's mindset of obligation to an organisation. This feeling of obligation may arise out of norms that are internalised by the individual and can be developed by a perceived expectation to reciprocate specific benefits to an organisation (Mercurio 2015, 395). As Robert B. Cialdini and Noah J. Goldstein (2004) state, a norm of reciprocation—the rule that obliges us to repay others for what we have received from them—is one of the strongest and most pervasive social forces in all human cultures (599). Therefore, it is not far-fetched to propose that, since low-earning positions are frequently filled by people with no previous employment (Grini and Johnsen 2021, 4), the employee might feel gratitude for the opportunity granted them by the employer and consequently internalise company norms due to a perceived expectation to reciprocate the opportunity given them. Moreover, since the level of education is lower for people in jobs with lower wages (Grini and Johnsen 2021, 4) an internalisation of company norms may be a reciprocation of employment in a society with a generally high level of education.

In accordance with this, John P. Meyer and Natalya M. Parfyonova (2010) recapitulate that normative commitment is the notion of commitment based on obligation and that moral involvement in an organisation has been described to develop through the internalisation of organisational goals, values, and norms. Within this, it is argued that moral involvement binds individuals to the organisation with a sense of duty and has a significant influence on individual behaviour (284). A “normative view” of organisational commitment defines commitment as “the totality of internalised normative pressures to act in a way that meets organisational goals and interests” and argues that “committed individuals may exhibit certain behaviours not because they have figured that doing so is to their personal benefit, but because they believe that it is the ‘right’ and moral thing to do” (Wiener 1982, 421). Regardless of its focus, normative commitment is characterised by a mindset of obligation (Meyer and Parfyonova 2010, 283).

3.2.2 The Nature of Norms

Norms can be defined as implicit or explicit rules or principles that are understood by members of a group and that guide behaviour without the force of laws (van Kleef, Gelfand, and Jetten 2019, 1). They are taken-for-granted beliefs about how people should think and behave (Hammer et al. 2004, 84). By creating a shared understanding of what is acceptable and what is not within a particular context, social norms inform behaviour and guide social interaction across all types of human collectives. They serve to discourage self-interested actions and to encourage behaviours that are beneficial for social collectives (van Kleef, Gelfand, and Jetten 2019, 1). Gerben A. van Kleef, Michele J. Gelfand, and Jolanda Jetten (2019, 2) summarise how research has documented that people follow norms to gain approval and that norm compliance is higher in contexts where reputational concerns and group identity are salient (van Kleef, Gelfand, and Jetten 2019, 2).

The workplace is arguably a context where group identity is salient and where reputational concerns may lead to norm compliance. More specifically, organisational norms are “collectively agreed-upon behaviours, attitudes, and beliefs that give employees a shared meaning or understanding of the workplace and their roles in it” (Hammer et al. 2004, 84). As previously accounted for, such norms are often emphasised in relation to employee ambassadorship, as “employee branding is the outcome of a process that starts with

employees internalising the brand, leading them to recommend the brand externally to customers as well as to potential employees.” (Sakka and Ahammad 2020, 359). Therefore, internalising the brand would, to a great extent, entail internalising the norms of the organisation.

As Tove Helland Hammer et al. (2004) elaborate, the norms in a workplace are not equivalents of job demands but cover a broader set of demands about a wider variety of behaviours than what employees will experience as they carry out their individual jobs (84). They explain that an organisational work performance norm “describes the nature of the exchange relationship between employer and employees in the form of prescriptions for, and expectations of, behaviours that relate to the employee’s contribution to overall organisational performance.” Examples of the latter can be expectations about employees’ contributions of effort and time. (84). As earlier stated, social media ambassadorship does not naturally exist as part of most job descriptions but is rather an *expectation*, directed at employees, to engage with company culture on private arenas.

In light of this, when emphasis is put on the importance of employee engagement with social media strategies, it could therefore be characterised as a norm that describes a behaviour an employee is expected to exhibit for the benefit of the organisation. However, when such expectations are inconsistent with personal preferences or conflict so that the fulfilment of one set of expectations prevents one from meeting other sets, the result is psychological tension, which can create stress (Hammer et al. 2004, 84). Accordingly, Loiacono and McCoy (2018) found a strong connection between social norms and an increase in users' technology invasion (976-977). Although their research does not focus on work environments specifically, the study provides insight into how the stress from feelings of invasiveness affects social media technologies user’s intentions to continue using a system and that part of that stress is related to pressure placed on them by their peers, in the case of work, their coworkers and managers (978).

Van Kleef, Gelfand, and Jetten (2019, 4) summarise that relatively little is known about how norms develop, are learned or change over time. Findings do suggest that norms emerge in groups through social interaction and are shaped collectively (Titlestad et al.

2019, 1). Communication is further a central factor in research pertaining to the emergence of norms as it is presumed to increase cooperation because it, among other things, provides the ability to create cooperative social norms, enhance trust in others and establish a social identity (Titlestad et al. 2019, 3). Especially face-to-face discussion has been shown to be effective in facilitating cooperation in situations in which members of a group are faced with a conflict between two choices: maximising personal interests or maximising collective interests (Chen 1996, 192). This indicates that, while it is hard to establish exactly how and when a norm develops, communication and social interaction is important for the purpose of letting norms be negotiated and shaped collectively. One could make the argument that this becomes increasingly important in an organisational setting, from the management perspective, as facilitating cooperation is often essential in a work-place setting.

It is important to underline that, in an organisational setting, individuals do not only abide by norms for the sake of looking favourable to the employer or organisation itself. As group identity is salient in the workplace, humans also strive to maintain good relationships with coworkers. As Cialdini and Goldstein (2004) explain, humans are fundamentally motivated to create and maintain meaningful social relationships with others. We use approval and liking cues to help build and maintain relationships with others and move closer to achieving our affiliation-oriented goals when we abide by norms of social exchange with others (598). Subjective norms refer to an individual's *perception* of what significant peers think the individual should do in a given situation and represent the influence others have on a person's decision to perform or not perform a behaviour (Loiacono and McCoy 2018, 971). Loiacono and McCoy (2018) explain that one can think of subjective norms as the pressure to comply with the wishes of those we deem important, similar to peer pressure (971). Changing one's behaviour to match the responses of others is also characterised as conformity, and normative conformity motivations are based on the goal of obtaining social approval from others (Cialdini and Goldstein 2004, 606).

Since research has found that people who deviate from group or societal norms often trigger negative emotions, gossip and various forms of (social) punishment, it is perhaps such consequences that can lead people to abide by social norms even when these run counter to their better judgment (van Kleef, Gelfand, and Jetten 2019, 1-2). It is however

important to underline that individuals need not suffer rejection nor ridicule from others firsthand in order to conform to norms. People also pursue goals related to social approval and self-esteem through acts such as mimicking — or matching their opinions to — their peers, meaning that even when not directly the target of others' disapproval, individuals may be driven to conform to restore their sense of belonging and their self-esteem (Cialdini and Goldstein 2004, 609-611).

In light of the above, it is important to consider both organisational norms and social norms when raising questions about employee social media participation, as a normative commitment to the workplace alone may not entirely account for an individual's proclivity to participate in such behaviour. Accordingly, Rickard Andersson (2019) provides an employee perspective on ambassadorship in the context of corporate communication, where ambassadorship is understood as a persona negotiated as employees construct their selves through relating to role expectations and interacting. His findings indicate that employees embrace this persona as they imagine that external stakeholders, colleagues and managers expect it of them (702).

4. Analysis

The analysis will open with a brief “textual” analysis of the content uploaded to TikTok by the case study. It mainly serves as a general description of the content in order to contextualise the statements from the interviews so as to describe the nature of the content statements are in reference to. After accounting for the nature of the content, the analysis that pertains to the interviews conducted will be provided.

A total of 6 interviews were conducted. Two of these interviews were interviews with what will be referred to as managing employees. This refers to employees with some form of responsibility for the other employees or responsibility for the operation of the account. One of the employees is the manager of the store, and the other is referred to as the “responsible employee” due to his role in the operation of the TikTok account. The remaining four employees did not hold any formal responsibilities at the time of the interviews. All the interviewees are referred to as R01-R06, their relevant positions can be seen in the table below. The continuous operation of the grocery store’s TikTok profile is frequently referred to as the “TikTok project” or “the project”.

Participant	Position
R01	Responsible employee
R02	Employee
R03	Manager of the store
R04	Employee
R05	Employee
R06	Employee

This chapter is structured according to four main headings, and the first one is my analysis of the content. The three remaining headings pertain to themes according to topics that proved prominent during the interviews, making the answers from the informants about each theme easy to compare. Where it is seen fit, the answers from the management are separated from the other employees in a way that makes the analysis clearer with respect to the differences between their roles and interests associated with them. The three themes

analysed from the interviews are (1) how the operation of the TikTok profile is organised and managed, (2) what level of pressure to participate in content exists in the organisation and (3) how the employees experience feedback on content and how feedback is handled by management.

4.1. Promotional, light-hearted content

As established, I have chosen a local grocery store in the eastern part of Norway as my case study. The grocery store in question is part of a larger well-established grocery chain. Firstly, a total of about 150 videos have been uploaded to the account as of May 2023, and these constitute the basis for the assessment of the content. They are not interpreted individually and in-depth but rather considered collectively with respect to examining tendencies of potential re-occurring thematics or focus in order to illuminate the typical characteristics of the content.

Almost every single video uploaded has people visible in it. Out of the 150 videos, there are only five videos where no people are featured in the video at all and only eight videos where no one in a uniform is visible. Concerning the frequency in which each employee participates, it varies a lot. However, one employee is far more often visible in content than the remaining employees. He is visible in about half of all the videos uploaded, and his voice is often heard in videos where he is not visible. This gives off the impression that he is very involved in producing content.

The content generally revolves around actions carried out by the people in the videos, either through employees addressing the camera, talking to each other or engaging in other activities (e.g. dancing) without talking. Almost everyone in the content appears to be employees rather than paid actors. This interpretation could be formed independently of them wearing uniforms (which display the company logo) due to their appearance on camera. For example, some employees appear to seek eye contact with someone behind the camera in the videos, perhaps the person filming. This gives the impression of them seeking affirmation or waiting for a cue to start speaking. There are also multiple videos where there is a delay from when the camera starts rolling to the employee starts speaking or the

employees misspeak. In a more “professional” production of content, such as one producing commercials for television, one would typically re-take such scenes or edit them out. Overall, it appears as if there is both a large variation in how comfortable the various employees are in front of the camera and that the content is made somewhat on impulse (due to what appears to be a lack of rehearsing). The impression of the people figuring in the content being actual employees is further amplified by the nature of the content itself, much of which appears as quite informal and spontaneous and, therefore, not content one would typically hire an actor to perform.

The TikTok account has few visible limitations to its profile. It is an open profile, and one would not need to follow it to view the content. It further has an open comment section on all its videos, meaning users can leave comments on the content. The comments left on a few videos also reflect my remarks above in that certain content seems to be perceived as unprofessional in the sense that it is pointed out that the employees are not actors. One comment states, “blink twice if you need help,” and another “presentation in secondary school be like”, implying that the people in the videos do not appear comfortable on camera. This is not to say that they appear stressed or insecure directly, but rather that the delivery of lines does not appear natural on screen.

In light of the above, we can assume that the people in the content will appear to be actual employees for many. This could entail that it appears more “authentic” or “real”. As Gemma Newlands and Christian Fieseler (2020) state, authentic “amateur” productions are often seen as more valuable in marketing in the sense that the less professional or calculated appearance does not have an immediate feel of being commercial (171). The fact that it comes across without an immediate feel of being commercial, I argue, is caused by the quality of the actors’ performance, despite the otherwise visible brand logo.

When it comes to the themes of the content, it is hard to classify it in any particular way. However, the fact that the content is made for commercial purposes is a rather logical interpretation, as over 50 per cent of the content is explicitly promotional in the sense that it either presents offers or enhances certain products. One could argue that the remaining 50

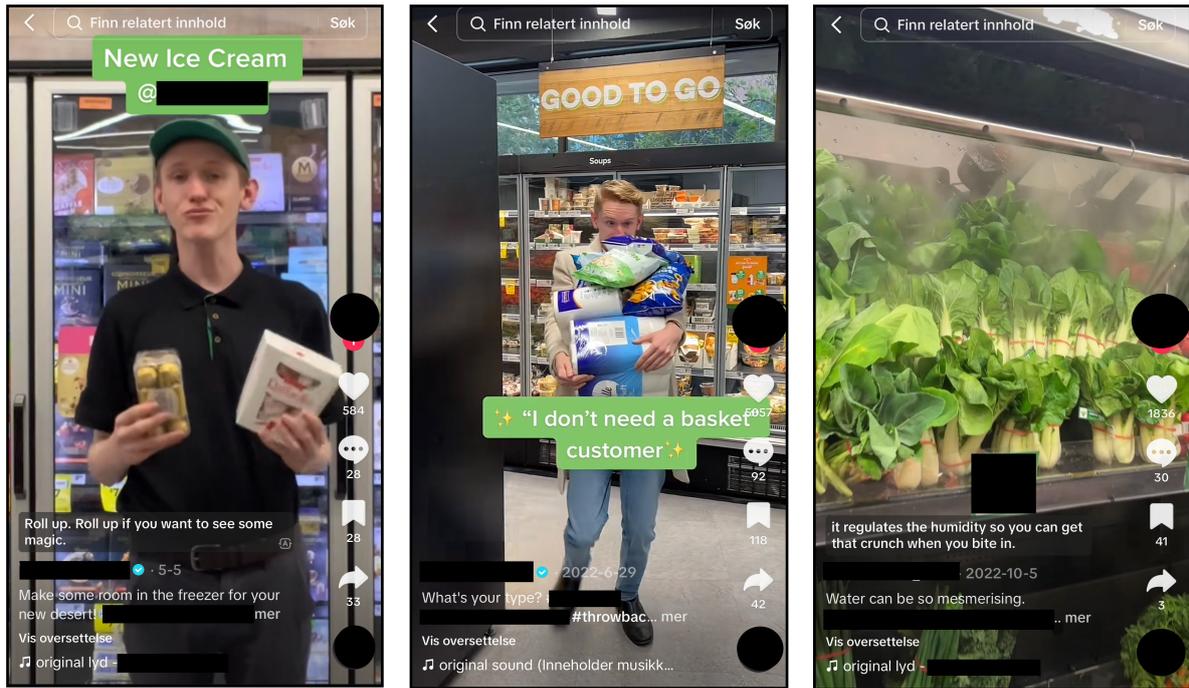


Figure 4, 5 and 6: Screenshots of content made by a store equivalent to my case study to illustrate what similar content looks like (and its variation). The brand is anonymised. It is a grocery store outside of Norway and it is only the visual quality of the content that is relevant in terms of similarity.

per cent of content presents as promotional as well, as —with the exception of a few videos — the company logo is visible on either signs or uniforms. While having a promotional undertone, a lot of the content does, at the same time, comes across as humorous or light-hearted. It is interpreted as this in part due to the appliance of tools that are common on TikTok, such as using already existing sounds or filters.

As previously mentioned, TikTok is a platform that privileges sound over image (Abidin 2020, 80). This is visible in the content uploaded by my case study, as a third of the videos uploaded to their profile are without original sound. Such videos are either what can be described as audio memes (where the employees lip sync over already existing audio) or simply videos that feature familiar music. Where the content consists of employees lip-syncing it is often humorous, for example, when presented as sketches where common customer service encounters are acted out. In instances where only music is playing, it can come across as more commercial. During Christmas, for example, the store uploaded content that showed seasonal products with familiar Christmas music playing. However, some videos that feature music also show employees dancing. Therefore, one could state

that the variation in the content, with respect to how commercial it presents itself, also varies within videos that are without original audio. Some present as very light-hearted and “fun”, whilst others enhance the products by filming them with familiar music playing.

However, the content that comes across as the most commercial is videos where the original sound is included, as this often involves the employees explicitly stating offers for the camera. A lot of the content also shows employees tasting new products or dressed up in merchandise from brands they lead, often in the context of them arranging a competition where customers can win merchandise and products. With respect to interrogating the comment section, a number of the comments also address the communicated message in such videos, illuminating that they show an interest in the offers or competitions rather than the visual content itself. In this sense, the content is interpreted to be taken seriously by many viewers.

Seen together, the content can be described as having a great variation because the employees seem to apply filters or audio to make videos with no specific purpose in some instances and then actively promote products or the brand in others. At the same time, it appears consistent in the sense that almost every single video is filmed in the store and in uniform. However, since promotional content is often a refined portrayal of a product or brand, the content in question sets itself apart from traditional marketing approaches to promotional content through its light-hearted informality and “amateurish” feel.

4.2. An unorganised approach to visibility in social media

One of the things that became apparent through the interviews was that the nature of the operation of the account is unorganised. This revealed itself in descriptions of how information about the account was acquired by — or communicated to — the employees. Depictions of the general communication between managing roles further demonstrate the unorganised nature.

4.2.1 Informal communication

In order to illuminate how formal the communication about the account was, all the employees were asked about how they first acquired knowledge about the account and how information about its operation was otherwise communicated from the management. One employee, employed at the time of the creation of the account, states in answer to how he was first informed about the TikTok profile:

There was already some talking about how we should perhaps start doing it, to be more visible, to younger people too. (...) I just heard that they, that R01, had made a video or something like that and thought that that was the reason (R06).

He describes that he understood the store's presence on TikTok as an attempt to reach a younger audience. Although this was never explicitly stated, he explains that there was some "talking about it" before he was made aware that his colleague had uploaded a video to TikTok. This illuminates how the project started without any formal information about a social media strategy or goal setting distributed to the employees.

This is further underlined by his follow up answer to questions of whether any staff meetings or any formal information about the TikTok project was given:

It was quite informal because we did not know how it would develop. It was not an idea of "Oh, we are going to put our full effort into this, and we are going to post every day" and all that. It was more like, "Ok. We can try this out and see how it goes", whether something more will come of it or not (R06).

This implies that the profile was created somewhat on impulse, initiated by a few employees.

A similar description is given by another employee, also employed at the time of the emergence of the account. R04 states that no staff meeting has been held to inform about the account and that, in the beginning, it was mostly a previous manager of the store and

R01 who was engaged in the profile. She also, similarly to R06, remember the creation of the profile as something rationalised through a wish to reach a younger audience:

I remember we started talking about having to create a TikTok account because we were quite active on Facebook. And we wanted to reach a younger audience as well and they are on TikTok (...), and R01 is a very fun guy, he gets people involved and stuff, so we figured he should be in charge of that (R04).

Statements from R06 and R04, who were both employed before the account was created, are consistent in the sense that they both explain that they have never received any formal information about the store's presence on TikTok.

When employees employed after the TikTok profile was established were asked about how they learned about it, one participant answered that she was informed through people who did not work there themselves:

I did not know that the store had a TikTok profile before I started working here. So it was actually my younger siblings, who are a few years younger than me, that told me, "you know that R01 is running that profile" and stuff. Because before I started, I knew that R01 had a profile, because my siblings were talking about it, "R01 is TikTok famous." (R05).

Here the employee explains how she knew that R01 had a private profile but that it was after she was hired that she understood that R01 had created a profile for the store as well. This implies that the TikTok profile was not mentioned during the hiring process. She explains that it was others that told her that he successfully had drawn visibility to the store:

He knew what he was doing and got that number [views] up quite fast, as I understood it through others (R05).

In relation to questions of whether any staff meetings about the account had been held or what they perceive the overall goal of the TikTok account to be, the answers given by all the employees reflect an unorganised nature of its operation:

(...)I think it sort of just is to reach an audience, so that people can see that there is a [name of grocery store chain] in [name of town].. and then it is fun to be recognised (...) I do not feel like it is something everyone who works here generally talks about, I feel like it is more of a thing among us younger employees (R02).

All the statements from the employees relating to how they learned about the account or how much formal information they have received about the operation of — or goal setting for it— indicates that it is run quite haphazardly.

4.2.2 Managing the profile

The mentioning of R01 as a central part of both the creation and running of the account is consistent in all the interviews and there seems to be a common conception of his character as fitting for the task of running the account. It further seems like R01s involvement in the account continues to be important for its operation, as he is the only one with the login information to the profile and thus the ability to either upload or delete content. The employee in question, R01, is not the manager of the store. This means that the manager herself does not have access to either upload or delete content if such a need presents itself when R01 is absent from work. The manager herself does, however, seem unaware of the fact that R01 is the only one with access:

(...) there are a few people that are known to take responsibility for it, so it is R01 and a few of the other girls who work here (R03).

Information given by the other employees and R01 explicitly states that this access is in fact only held by him.

The lack of knowledge on the manager's part may be due to the fact that she is relatively new in her position and that she was not employed at the location as the TikTok project started. However, it does underline the unorganised nature of the project and illuminate a lack of set guidelines and framework for the store's presence on TikTok. This impression is further amplified in R01's description of how the account was created:

It was originally the previous store manager who was interested in joining TikTok. And I had the app, and I am often on there scrolling, and it is fun to make videos. So then we agreed that we should create a profile for [name of grocery store] to create videos and inspire others and stuff like that. And I have seen that a lot of other [name of grocery chain] stores have started after us (R01).

In a follow-up question about the goal setting for the profile, whether he himself has a goal for it or if he discussed a goal setting with the former manager, the impression that the profile was created somewhat on impulse, initiated by a few employees, is reinforced.

It is to show people who we are. Maybe we will get more customers, show off offers for example. So it is a way to get people to understand who we are (R01).

He adds that the platform has become popular with a younger generation, insinuating that their presence on the platform could help reach a younger audience. His overall description of the goal setting is, however, short and lacks detailed descriptions or reflections about how the visibility he mentions, such as “showing people who we are”, could serve an overall goal. It appears as if the prevailing idea is that all visibility is good in some sense.

When R01 is asked if he has any ideas about why certain content has gained the visibility it has he further amplifies a lack of strategy for the platform:

No, I have no idea. It is something called “For You Page”, but not all videos get hype. But I feel like the videos we have made have gotten a lot of views. So I do not know if it is luck or if it is about the content we are making. No idea. But there are some videos where we receive almost no views, and then others where we receive ten, twenty, thirty, forty thousand (R01).

According to this, while visibility seems to be associated with success, a strategic approach to gaining visibility does not exist beyond the act of uploading content.

The manager of the store does neither mention any strategic approach but is a bit more elaborate in her description of why she believes visibility to be important:

We see that social platforms are an important part of reaching the customer and we have mostly been on Facebook (...) And then I can think, “what is the purpose of that, who are we going to reach there [on TikTok]?”. But then we are also talking about the long term, about the future customer and the young people too have a strong purchasing power, they actually spend a lot of money in the shop after school and training and so on. So it is a group that it is important to reach. And we see that it [content] spreads much faster among young people than the more adult group on Facebook (R03).

The manager seems to have reflected more on the store's presence on TikTok. However, this does not appear as something that has been discussed or established in a plenary session. The perception obtained from previous statements, from participants without managing responsibility, indicating that the profile is run quite haphazardly, is therefore maintained. It is also noted that this stands in contrast to how the strategy on Facebook is carried out, as this seems to be organised at a more central level:

TikTok is completely “on the side”. With Facebook, there is a set strategy on a central level, both in terms of access to tools and that the central organisation supplement us with content we can post in our own channels and so on. If we want to we can give them access to publish content on our behalf without this content being published on the page of all the stores (R03).

As accounted for, quite the contrary is the case with TikTok, where only one employee has access to the account.

No one particularly problematises the fact that it is only one employee who has access to the TikTok account, but when asked if others have access to the profile, one employee states that more employees should perhaps gain access:

(...) is only R01 who has access to TikTok. I should possibly be others too, because on Facebook we have multiple users with access, so on TikTok, we are sort of dependent on R01 if we want to upload something (R04).

This wish for others to have access to the account does not seem to be rooted in a wish for it to be more organised or better control over the content or quality of the content, but rather an opportunity for content to be created independent of R01s presence at work. This is also underlined by his own statements:

I am the only one with access to the user, but I am considering getting a few more people to join, then they could make some content on their own, because now we have to use my phone to make videos (R01).

4.2.3 General understanding of the TikTok Project

Although the employees do not express a clear conception of why the store is present on TikTok or share a common understanding of any particular strategies, their descriptions of the platform itself illuminate a sense of both what they expect it to offer in terms of opportunities and what they experience that it contributes to regardless of intention.

R01 express a belief that it has a positive influence on the work environment:

(...) it's a bit of fun with the informality of it, it is. It kind of makes you smile when you can make a video like that and, it's fun afterwards too (R01).

R05 also talks about the TikTok project in terms that indicate that she perceives it as being positive for the work environment:

(...) R01 and I work very well together and have a lot of fun. Sometimes we have had Saturdays when we close the store together, but hung around for a bit. It is a lot of fun, and it makes you get a good connection with your colleagues in a different way (R05).

She depicts how “hanging around” making TikTok videos makes her closer to her colleagues and adds that this contributes to making it easier to get to know them outside of work as well because you get to know what kind of people they are and what interests they have.

R04 talks about the informal nature of the platform and how this is something she considers valuable in terms of having fun with creating content. She explains that this was something she considered as one of the reasons when they first started using the platform:

(...)And then it was the fact that on TikTok, one could have a bit more fun with stuff, not being that serious. On Facebook, it is more serious, but on TikTok, there is a lot of fun stuff, like you can stuff a bunch of grapes in your face, like the one with cotton candy [referring to a specific video they made], it was a bit more like that, having fun with it (R04).

This indicates that TikTok as a platform is viewed, by this employee, as valuable because the external communication does not have to be too formal, but they can connect with their audiences or customer in a way that feels more playful. It is further noted that this is in line with the previously accounted for notions of “authenticity”.

In relation to social media in general, the manager notes the relevance of using their own employees in content, something the store does on Facebook as well as TikTok:

We want to use our people, because we see that, on Facebook as well, that it gets more shares and likes and all that, when we use our [employees] that they recognise (R03).

She elaborates with remarks indicating that a recognisable face is more important than high-quality content, in terms of getting attention.

(...)we have got a lot of local followers (...) but it is a bit more recognisable when we use our people [employees]. Even if I a lot of times think that content is not that exciting or nice or whatever, but it is the fact that they recognise us that is the most important part for the receiver (R03).

This reflects a view that the use of social media offers an authenticity that is valued in corporate contexts.

4.2.4 Main take aways

The analysis of the TikTok project as unorganised can this far be explained through the nature of how it started, how the employee in charge of the profile came to be so and how it is continually run. It is further interpreted as unorganised as no one reports on receiving any formal information about the strategy for —or operation of— the TikTok account. The fact that it exists as an attempt to reach a younger audience appears as an assumption made by the employees, as a result of this loosely being discussed among them. The fact that the manager of the store also states that she believes others to have access to the account without this being the case further makes it appear unorganised.

All the statements from the participants generally indicate that the profile was started on impulse and that it is continually run quite haphazardly. It is also noted that the employees generally experience the informal nature of content created for the platform as something positive, both in terms of their own experience making content and in relation to how customers perceive them.

4.3 Pressure and conformity

An important aspect to illuminate for the purpose of answering the research questions was how the employees experienced being visible in content. Questions were designed to uncover the extent to which they were involved of their own volition or participated for other reasons. The analysis shows that where reluctance to participate exists, its nature varies between the employees. It further uncovered that pressure to participate manifested in various ways, was not always identified as pressure by the employees, and was not solely carried out by managing employees. Different levels of pressure and conformity revealed themselves through descriptions of situations where someone expressed reluctance or precaution related to their own participation.

4.3.1 Proclivity to participate

All the employees without managing responsibility were asked about whether or not they generally had or had ever had any reluctance to participate in content. All answered that they, at some point, had experienced some level of reluctance to participate. The nature of

this reluctance did vary and was expressed in various ways. When asked if she had ever said no to participating, one employee stated:

(...) there are many days when one does not quite “feel oneself”, like “today I do not want to participate” kind off. So when I have said no, it has usually been due to that (R02).

This answer reflects that this employee tends to be reluctant on days when she herself does not feel too comfortable with exposure. The term to “not feel oneself” is understood as not feeling confident or comfortable in a particular setting or on a particular day, related to appearance or mood. R02 do, however, not express any reluctance to participate apart from when she is in this state. One question all the participants were asked was about the first time they participated, to explore whether taking the leap of participating was related to any particular considerations. R02 describes her first participation as something related to no reluctancy at all:

I remember R01 asking, and I was like “yeah, I would like to do that”. So it was not like it was something I had to consider, it was more like “I’m in” (R02).

Another question that was designed to see how comfortable the employees were with featuring in content was whether or not they felt different about being alone in content as opposed to with someone else, as the idea of doing it with someone else may, for many, feel easier. R02 answered that it did not matter to her whether she had to participate in the content alone or with someone else, which indicates that she generally feels quite comfortable with participation. The three remaining participants without any managing responsibilities all answered the question relating to their first participation in ways that indicated a form of reluctance or consideration. Among these three employees, the general involvement or excitement for the TikTok profile seemed to vary.

One of the participants, that generally seemed very positive and engaged in the project, explained how the first participation was something less convenient than she has typically found later engagement or participation to be:

(...) that time it was more like.. it was not the creative, fun part, it was more like “we have got strawberries on discount, could you use this manuscript and say these things”, and then I was a bit like, I felt like I was sort of on display (R05).

The fact that her first participation was less comfortable than later participation may be due to it being her first time and thus inexperience.

Her answers do reflect that she might feel more comfortable featuring in content where she is more creatively involved. This is underlined by how she describes situations where she might not want to be alone in front of the camera:

If R01 has an idea that I feel is a bit like (...) “I think that is a bit embarrassing” or “I do not think that sounds very funny”, then I will say that I would rather film him (...) or that we do it together. But I feel like there is room to express those feelings (R05).

The reluctance she describes does not come across as reluctance towards the TikTok project in general. On the contrary, throughout the interview, she seems quite positive about many aspects of it. However, it does illuminate that she enjoys having a bigger part than just as an “actor”. She describes the creative aspect of the TikTok project as what makes her want to be involved:

(...) to do something different, something a bit fun, contribute to promotion of the store, I think that is fun (R05).

The two remaining employees expressed their reluctance to participate in different terms:

(...) I have never liked talking to a screen or making videos or talking in front of people, so for me it has been practise. I feel like I have become more confident. Now I no longer mind to participate in a TikTok video or talking in front of people (R04).

This employee was not instantly positive when asked to participate. However, her motivation to do so despite her reluctance seems to be a personal one as she explains that her reason for agreeing to participate in content was to challenge herself in order to become more confident in similar situations.

The last employee described his reluctancy, similarly to employee R04, to be rooted in his own feelings of modesty when being filmed:

(...) I am always a bit sceptical, (...) I am shy when it comes to talking in front of the camera and stuff like that (...) so of course if R01 ask me to say something on camera or something like that I usually say “no” and “would it be possible to have someone else do it” or if I could film him. Because for me, it is a bit uncomfortable as I am not as used to it as R01 seem to be (R06).

The explanation given for still participating in content for this employee seems to be rooted in a wish to please his colleague that is responsible for the account, rather than something he does for himself:

(...) I might have said “no”, but then he returns saying “now I have asked everyone, no one else wants to participate” and then he asks again.. so you could say I give in quite easily if I am asked more than once. That is why I say yes (R06).

This act of participating without any other reason but to please his colleagues or to “give in”, as he put it, illuminates a certain pressure to conform to a work culture where exposure on social media is incorporated.

This conformity is also expressed by another employee, one who generally explains that she finds participation to be fun, when asked if she has ever regretted participating after a video was uploaded:

No, but as a person I am a bit like, I am a very outgoing person and do not take my self too seriously (...) There are some videos where I might think, “wow, I look tired”, but personally I do not care too much about it, the video looks ok and I am the only one bothered by it, so (R05).

She does state that she never regretted participating and that she would probably ask for content to be taken down if it was something very particular about it. However, her statements do, to a certain extent, illuminate a wish to be a team player or pressure to conform. She might recognise that she is not looking her best in certain videos, but feels like this is not a valid reason to regret it, as she is “the only one bothered by it”.

4.3.2 Regretting participation

The management was asked about the degree to which participation was voluntary or how it was handled when someone expressed a wish not to participate or a regret of participation. In conversation with the manager, she states that no one has ever asked for content to be removed. When asked about how they would handle it if that were to happen, she says:

(...) then I think that that is important to listen to. We would do that. And then we do have a declaration of consent internally, regarding having your photo taken for internal or external use. So you sort of have to consciously approve (...) those who have said yes, we use [in content], those who do not want to do not have to (R03).

She is here referring to a declaration of consent that is signed as part of the employment contract and explains that this can be used as a guide for who is asked to participate and who is not.

These statements contradict information given by the employee who is in charge of the profile to a certain extent, as he gives the impression of asking people according to his knowledge from previous experiences. He also adds that one employee has expressed a wish to have content deleted after it was uploaded and that he did delete the content in question. It is once again noted that the manager's lack of knowledge about this could be due to her being employed after this incident.

However, the answer given by the employee in charge of the account does further illuminate a lack of unanimity on the management side in relation to how situations where

employees ask for content to be deleted should be handled. When asked whether or not he would try to convince an employee to leave a video on the page if the video in question has received a lot of likes or views, he phrases himself as follows:

Yes, I try to say “please, we have gotten a lot of views on it”. But it depends, if they say “no, delete it”, then I will do so. We had one that went quite viral, that we deleted (R01).

This gives the impression that this has happened a few times before, extending beyond the one example he gives.

Reports from other employees amplify this impression, as the example he gives is concerning an employee that also mentions a different episode where she wanted something deleted:

(...) It got a lot of views in a very short period of time. That was a bit awkward, but now I can just laugh at it (R02).

The video I question has 317 500 views at the current time (May 2023). She explains that she wanted it deleted due to a lot of what she calls “ironic” comments about how her colleague, who was also in the video, pronounced a word:

(...) A lot of people reacted to that, and they were like, “these girls should get an Oscar” and stuff like that. But I just think it is funny (R02).

While she describes that she no longer cares about these comments, she states that she originally wanted the content removed. It did however remain on the page. She explains that she thinks she mentioned that she wanted it removed but that it was declined because she was the one to initiate the video in the first place.

(...) because it was me and my colleague who asked R01 to film us, so it was a bit like, “but you guys asked to be filmed”, and we were like “yes, that’s true.” (R02).

This reluctance to remove the film does not seem ill-intended, nor does the employee who reported on it seem to be particularly affected by the fact that it was not removed. The two employees in question, R01 and R02, is further related, which perhaps explains the partially blunt response to her request and the jargon between them.

Another participant does give a third example in reply to whether or not anyone has ever asked for content to be deleted:

Yes (...) it was actually because it got certain comments (...) because they were a little insecure about themselves, and then finally she joined in on a TikTok, she wanted to, but then she did not want to, and then she wanted to and then joined in. And then it came a few bad comments and then she wanted it to be deleted. So we talked a little about it and showed her other films, that they also received comments and then, when we showed that to her she realised that, "okey, these are just people who comment to comment". And after that she has joined in on more TikTok's." (R04).

This explanation, of how her colleague needed a little convincing not to delete the TikTok, does not appear ill-intended or particularly aggressive, however, one could argue that some form of pressure exists in the described situation. As it is described that the video in question remained on the TikTok page, it is clear that it is not the example given by R01, and thus further indicates that examples of employees expressing regret for participation extend beyond the one example he gives.

His lack of mentioning this example may be due to his lack of knowledge of it. One could however question why he was not made aware of it in the light of him being the only one with access to delete content. However, as the responsible employee is not mentioned in this example, but the interviewee rather gives the impression of herself (along with others) being involved in convincing the employee to leave it on the page, it indicates that where pressure to participate exists it is not only executed by employees in managing roles.

4.3.3 Pressure

Pressure entails persuasion through rational argument or other external factors that lead to conformity among a group. As accounted for, we can think of subjective norms,

our *perception* of what peers think we should do in a given situation, as the pressure to comply with the wishes of those we deem important, similar to peer pressure (Loiacono and McCoy 2018, 971). As the example in the previous sections briefly accounted for, a pressure to participate or conform does not appear to only be executed by managing roles. Statements made by another employee further underlined this.

When asked if anyone had ever asked for content to be deleted, R05 explained that she herself had made a video with a colleague and that her colleague was a bit reluctant to post it as she did not think her makeup looked good in the video. While stating that they take such situations seriously, R05 managed to convince her colleague to upload the video:

(...) but she did not directly say “no” either. Then I was a bit like, “but honestly, no one is noticing this except yourself. Look at the entire video, not only that one clip [that she was unsure about] and then say what you think.” And then she said it was ok after all. So we have experienced that, but not that anyone has asked for content deleted, not that I know of (R05).

This example is quite similar to the one given by R04 and illuminates a pressure to conform that originates among and between the employees, independent of the management’s influence. As previously cited, R05 does, in response to whether she had ever wanted content to be deleted after it was published, describe herself as “a very outgoing person and do not take my self too seriously (...)” and precedes to explain that she might recognise that she does not look her best, but is not bothered by it. As argued, this indicates that, for this participant, the “greater good” of the workplace — that content is published — is more important than her feeling about that particular content.

The way she phrases herself is noted, as she talks about not taking herself too seriously. In the context of explaining why she has never asked for content to be deleted, it is presented as a trait that allows her not to be bothered by how she appears in the eyes of others, and thus indirectly a trait that allows her to fulfil the task of being a team player. In the example given above, it appears as if R05s attitude of not being bothered or affected by how she is viewed by others is forced on to her coworker. In the example about herself, R05 states that “I am the only one bothered by it”, and in the example about her coworker, she states, “no

one is noticing this except yourself". One could state that downplaying someone's (either your own or others) experience of being insecure neglects the relevance of their self-awareness or deem it as an unsociable trait. This could effectively work as an internal or external means to discourage self-interested actions and make individuals conform to what is considered valuable behaviours for the social collective, which, within the above example, mainly serves as beneficial for the company.

Another employee also talks about taking oneself too seriously when describing herself, in relation to how she did not originally want to participate but chose to challenge herself to do so despite it:

I don't really take myself too seriously, it is not like I have to watch back the film 100 times to accept it for publishing, I just find it [being in front of the camera] uncomfortable, but for me, it has given me practice in relaxing in that situation and to present a commodity I am confident in (R04).

Here, the employee uses the word as part of the reflection about herself. However, it is not directly a description of herself as finding it easy to participate in content. It is rather stating that despite the fact that she finds it a bit uncomfortable to participate, she is not a person that typically takes herself too seriously.

It is further interesting to note that she later refers to the younger generation as often taking themselves too seriously because they find certain comments to be uncomfortable:

I read those comments as if they have no meaning (...) but the younger people, they might take themselves a bit more seriously (R04).

There is a contradiction in this that may illuminate how certain emotions, such as self-awareness, are more carefully considered when detected in oneself than when communicated as an emotion felt by others. This might be why she refers to others as taking themselves too seriously when expressing discomfort with feedback, but explain her own discomfort with participation as something that stands in contrast to her personality.

This is perhaps because being self-aware is seen as a symptom of taking oneself too seriously in certain contexts, which again is an undesired trait in an environment where inclination to exposure on social media is preferable. While it was not particularly described as being a negative trait to take oneself too seriously, it was expressed as a positive one not to do so.

The statements about taking oneself too seriously indicate that someone is perceived as such simply as a result of not wanting to feature in commercial content online. In relation to pressure, this might illuminate that a reluctance to participate might offer consequences in terms of being labelled with a negative or undesired trait. Even if this labelling may not be explicitly named or spoken about in the workplace, it appears as if the employees do connect this trait to reluctance to participate. It may therefore work as a sort of tool for coercion. This means that the idea of being perceived as taking oneself too seriously in itself may influence employees to participate when they do not want to, even if they understand that they are free to choose.

None of the participants gave explicit examples of being pressured to participate themselves. Some did, as accounted for, depict situations where they participated due to what can be interpreted as pressure to a certain extent. However, one employee did use the word “push” in relation to R01s ability to persuade employees to participate:

(...)it is usually R01 who deals with it, he is good at pushing in the right way (...) and that is the importance of having a person who does it in an all right way. Because he can push like, “are you sure you do not.. maybe we could make it work if we make some changes or if you get to choose how you want to do it”. And then you can easily spot if someone are like “I do not want to participate, I do not want to show my face”, and that is completely OK, and then he does not need to ask again (R05).

In this depiction of how R01 pushes people in “the right way”, there lies an assumption that it is always obvious when someone really does not want to participate. Moreover, it places a responsibility on the employees to be very clear or firm when expressing that they do not want to participate. R06’s depictions of how he “gives in” do, however, illuminate that the

former is not always the case. Especially when considering his remarks about how he thinks TikTok influence the work environment:

Speaking for myself, if it.. if TikTok was a big thing [...] that we had to do it everyday, I would have thought that “this is draining, I don’t want to take part in it”, but of course it is not every day, and R01 knows that I do not really want to take part in those videos and stuff like that, so it does not affect my work environment like that. (R06).

He proceeds to explain that he perceives TikTok to be most relevant for those who want to engage in a focus to promote the store through the creation of content and that it, at the current time, does not influence his perception of the work environment to a noticeable extent. The pressure he feels to participate is, however, still detectable in his previous remarks and emphasised through his comments of how a potentially higher frequency of the production of TikTok content would be “draining”. This might be due to his experience of saying no to participation not always being sufficient to avoid participation.

In addition to this, one employee explicitly mentioned “force” in response to a question about how she felt that the TikTok profile influenced the work environment:

I think it is positive. Most of those who participate think it is a lot of fun. We did have a bit of a bad period earlier, where we had someone who would force people to participate, and that generated some bad vibes. But once we figured that out, (...) that it has to be voluntarily, then we had fun with it (R04).

She elaborates by stating that she was the one to express that the participation had to be voluntary as she walked past a situation where she perceived that another colleague was being forced to participate in content when she obviously expressed that she did not want to. She adds that the video that was taken off the employee in question was never uploaded as a result.

Another participant also expressed uncertainty about whether other employees’ participation is always voluntary when describing external feedback to content. She talks

about remarks made by friends from outside work, relating to a video where an old colleague participates:

I have privately had some of my friends make remarks about one particular video, where an old colleague of mine (...) I do not know whether she wanted to be in the TikTok or not, but she stutters a lot in the video and is very insecure it seems. (...) she probably just got a manuscript, “do this, say that” (R05).

While R05, otherwise during the interview, stated that participation is fully voluntary, she here expresses uncertainty connected to the voluntaries of her colleague’s participation. The fact that she includes these remarks in her reflection indicates that she acknowledges that involuntary participation may take place.

4.3.4 Main take aways

Two out of four employees that did participate in content described themselves as people who would not typically do so. Their reasons to participate despite of this varied from each other, but were rooted in a wish to evolve on a personal level or a wish to conform. The other two participants express more comfort in their own participation, but do depict that there are days or situations where they feel more reluctant.

Statements from both the employee responsible for the profile and the employees themselves reflect a certain level of pressure to participate. It is noted that no one explicitly mentions that they themselves have been pressured to participate, but the participants do describe situations where they did participate without predominantly wanting to or situations where they themselves persuaded others to accept content for publishing. One employee mentions an observed situation where someone was pressured.

It is underlined that the pressure reflected in the answers is not solely executed by employees in managing roles but is also described as a pressure performed by other employees or an internalised form of pressure that arise from a wish to conform to their colleagues’ expectations. It is further noted that there is a contradiction in some of the

descriptions where some employees seem to be able to detect pressure when carried out by others but not when they participate in it.

The overall analysis of the interviews with respect to willingness and conformity indicates that the participants in the content uploaded by the store are not exclusively employees that express excitement and engagement with the profile but also employees that are less invested and/or comfortable with participation.

4.4 External Feedback

The participants were asked about direct feedback from friends or customers as well as feedback through the comment section, in order to map what feedback they made note of and how it potentially influenced them. Questions to the management were designed to understand how the comment section is managed, how well it is monitored and how potential negative feedback is handled.

4.4.1 Direct feedback

Direct feedback refers to feedback that is received privately. It is not feedback left in a public or open comment section, but feedback that can only be accessed by the receiver(s). This may entail digital feedback, but in the form of a direct message to either one person or to multiple people in a private conversation such as a group chat. Direct feedback also means feedback received in a face-to-face encounter or conversation.

When it comes to direct feedback, there is only one participant that mentions uncomfortable feedback, previously cited in the context of uncertainty regarding her colleague's participation. This feedback did not regard herself, but another employee and the participant explained that the feedback consisted of making fun of content where the employee in question appeared "uncomfortable" or "awkward". The participant in question had a negative experience of this feedback although, as it did not regard herself, she expressed this offence on behalf of her colleague:

(...) some have just been like, "wow, it did not seem like she wanted to [be in the TikTok]", but others have actually said things like (...) a bit rude comments, in my opinion. So of

course one can experience things like that. I personally do not think it is nice [to receive such feedback] and just respond (...) “well, she only got a script, it is not that easy and I am not sure if you had done it so much better.” (R05).

This expresses a desire to defend her colleague in the situations. This desire can be understood as a general sympathy for her peer but might also be read as sympathy for being in a situation she is familiar with or has found herself in, and thus as a desire to defend herself and her own participation. The participant might identify such feedback as something that could also be said about her, as her participation in similar content also makes her the subject of potential criticism or humorous comments. Either way, the feedback the participant explained that she received implies that the visibility on TikTok does generate some form of humour at the expense of those who participate in the videos and that this humour is not always well received by those connected to the TikTok profile.

R05 is the only participant that describes having received direct negative feedback about other employees. Another employee does mention receiving direct feedback from his friends as well and that this, for example, occurs when content from the store has appeared on the For You Page of his friends.

(...) because then it has appeared on their [for you] page and they can see that “ah, that is [name of grocery store]” and then of course they say to me: “Yes, I have seen your video, it is really awkward.” (R06).

The participant does not seem negatively affected by this, nor is it described as being something they talk a lot about.

(...) when I meet them it is like, “I saw that video you guys made a while ago”, and stuff like that. And then we just talk a little bit about that (...). I do not get upset and they do not say anything mean about it. They just say that it is incredibly awkward that “you guys dare to do that” (R06).

The feedback does not appear as directly negative. It rather appears as humorous, however, at the expense of him and his colleagues who participate in the videos. It is underlined that this feedback is given to the participant from his friends and thus that both the nature of the

feedback — and how it is received by the participant — is likely influenced by this relationship.

4.4.2 The nature of negative comments

When it came to the employees' experience with feedback in the comment section, where feedback is given publicly, for anyone to see, most of the descriptions given of negative comments did not regard the people featured in the videos. However, there are a few mentions of comments that are of a somewhat personal nature, as explained by R04 when mentioning comments directed at herself:

I was wearing a robe, and then we got comments like “eww, I don’t want it when you have been wearing it”, you know, stuff like that (...). I do not care about such comments, I just think to myself, “I don’t care, then you won’t get the robe or that produce..” or whatever (R04).

While she expresses not to personally care about these comments, she explains that some of her colleagues have wanted content deleted due to similar comments:

(...) but they younger people, they are a bit, they might take themselves a bit more seriously. And there is a pressure on young people, so they do not like it when comments like that occur (R04).

Regardless of whether or not this is generational, as assumed here, R02 did, as previously mentioned, state that it was ironic comments directed at her colleague's pronunciation of a word that made her briefly regret participation in one video. Such comments can be labelled as having a characteristic of bullying to them, as they are directed at the participants in the video regardless of their role as employees. In addition to the comments regarding herself, R04 also mentions a comment that she asked the R01 to delete from the comment section, regarding a colleague:

(...) it was a bit regarding the body. That comment was a bit like, because he was wearing a jacket or something, stating, “you look even fatter here than you are in real life” (...) and I thought that that is not a nice comment to leave in the comment section (R04).

In this example, R04 takes charge to have something deleted on behalf of another colleague. This indicates that, while she personally does not take offence to comments directed at her, she acknowledges that certain comments may be hurtful to others. It is also noted that this comment targets appearance more so than the one she received about herself.

Most of the examples given of negative comments were, however, either described as trolling or negativity directed at the store/brand itself, actions carried out by participants in the context of their employment or remarks about the advertisement in the video:

I do not read the comment section a lot, but for example, when I participated in my first video, I had to talk about strawberries, as we had them on sale, and that time someone wrote very weird stuff like, “when I went to [name of grocery store] I got mouldy strawberries, and they smelled like..” I don’t know what it said, but that it tasted weird or something. (...) I do not really care about what people say in the comment section. For the most part, people are nice and funny (R05).

While this comment is not directed at her, it is still brought up by her in answer to whether she reads the comment section or not and as an example of a comment that she seems to have noted as negative to a certain extent. The comment she is referring to reads like this in full:

The strawberries you have got, are overripe and taste mouldy, would have checked them a little better before you advertise :D :D” (TikTok user).

To an outsider, this comment does not appear as particularly negative but rather as feedback. And while it is noted that feedback online, or written feedback in general, is not always read like it is directly put, this comment does not appear as anything distinctly negative.

The fact that the participant brings it up might be due to the fact that it is left on a video that she herself features in and that it is one out of in total two comments that were left in the comment section of that video. The fact that it is brought up could thus be due to the

participant's own participation in the content and may illuminate that she has made a note of it because she tends to read the comment section below videos where she appears in content more thoroughly.

Another employee made a note that supports this understanding, stating that she looks through the comments but that she herself is more aware of the comment section in relation to content where she herself features and makes the assumption that this goes for other employees as well.

(...) we have a tendency to check out the comment section. One does pay a little extra attention to videos of oneself, like, are any of the comments about me (...) but I feel like most people think about that, if there is a video of oneself, like "did anyone leave any nasty comments on this" or "are there any positive comments" (R02).

While these are her own personal experience and her own assumptions about others, it is reasonable to assume that most people would pay more attention to content where they do themselves feature, exactly for the reasons that this participant point out: "did anyone write anything about me?".

Participants were also asked if any discussion about whether or not the comment sections should be closed or moderated had found place between them:

(...) It was a bit like that in the beginning, because I think we were not used to bad comments. So back then it was a bit like, "but can't we just close the entire comment section?". I said so myself, because I thought we received a lot of comments that did not really mean anything (...) so, in the beginning we talked about it, but we never did. At least not that I know of (R04).

Here she explains that it is comments that "did not really mean anything" that spurred discussions about closing the comment section, reinforcing the impression given by R05, that it is primarily comments directed at the company or trolling that are noted as negative in relation to the comment section.

Participant R04 further explains that the bar is quite low before they receive certain comments:

There is not much we can do before we get [comments] like “Yuck” (...) and “how can you do that, you are a grocery store”, right, so we do kind of have to think twice, so the customers don’t think we are unhygienic or.. stuff like that (R04).

When asked what kind of content these comments appear on, she elaborates by explaining that the comments she is referring to target the content or what is carried out in it rather than the people in the video:

(...) For example, we pretended that the conveyor belt, where the groceries slide, was a treadmill mill, and that one of us had a workout during working hours. And its stuff like that, if we joke around with the groceries, like juggle with them...”ah, you are destroying the groceries”, it is stuff like that (R04).

The examples she gives once again appear more like critique than plain mean or negative comments, underlining that the employees do not exclusively make note of comments that are directed at the people featured in the videos.

The fact that they mention such comments could illuminate a strong loyalty to the store and that this loyalty makes these sorts of comments come to mind when asked about the “state” of the comment section. It could also indicate that criticism directed at the store is experienced as criticism of themselves, or something they represent, because they work as ambassadors for the company in the context of the videos.

However, it is noted that the example she gives is an example given by other employees as well, including the employee in charge of the TikTok profile, who explains that this video got a lot of attention due to the feedback it received. This particular video does therefore appear as if it has been the subject of previous discussion internally, which may also explain why it is used as an example by multiple employees. The participant that occurred in the video also states that the comments made him briefly reconsider participation:

(...) people went crazy in the comment section and stuff. And I just thought, “oh, man, maybe I should not have walked on it [the conveyor belt]”. And then I asked if we should delete it, and then we talked about it between us [R06 and R01] and then.. yes, we could have deleted it, but we thought, “no, lets not do it” (...) But right then and there, when I saw the comments I was like “ahh” [expresses discomfort], but I just left it, and it is still there I believe (R06).

Although the comments the videos received can be categorised as critical of his actions in the context of his employment and thus directed more at the brand than the person, it illustrates that critical comments have an effect on the participants in the videos, even when they are directed at the brand. In this example, it made the participant reconsider participation. This illustrates that employees both make a note of and are affected by critical comments directed at the brand or their actions in the context of their ambassadorship.

4.4.3 Management’s lack of overview

Both the manager and the employee responsible for the profile were asked about the comment section and to what extent they carried out moderation practices. In a reply to a question regarding whether or not he was ever asked to delete certain comments or to make it unavailable for users to leave comments, the employee responsible for the profile replies that they have considered shutting off the possibility for users to leave comments:

We have considered it on a few occasions, because there are some mean comments, but we do not really care about it (R01).

When asked about the character of the comments he is referring to, he explains that it has not been, to his knowledge, anything regarding the people in the videos but rather about the general content. In his description of the character of the comments, he uses the word “negativity” and “disagreement”. In answer to questions about what users expressed disagreement about in the comment section, he explained:

(...)for example about the advertisement and that the prices are too high and that Kiwi [another grocery store] is cheaper. There is a lot of that (R01).

Two things are noted in relation to his responses here. Firstly, that he initially describes these comments as “mean” comments. While it is acknowledged that the characteristic of what constitutes a “mean” comment is subjective, it is an interesting choice of words. Since he proceeds to elaborate that the comments he is referring to are directed at the chain of the grocery store and their prices, one could argue that they could be labelled as critical comments rather than mean comments. He also uses the word “disagreement”, which is not typically the same as mean. The fact that he labels these as mean comments might speak to a level of taking offence on behalf of the brand he is representing, although he does state that he really does not care about it. The fact that comments that express disagreement have been the subject of discussion in relation to closing the comment section is also noted.

Secondly, he explains that they have not received any negative comments that are directed at the people who feature in the videos to his knowledge. This is, first of all, in contradiction to the previously mentioned statements from another employee, who explained that she have made R01 aware of a negative comment regarding a colleague. This inconsistency in their explanations may be due to forgetfulness on either part. However, it is interesting to note the phrasing in his answer; that they have not received any negative comments directed at the people in the videos “to his knowledge”. This might be something he adds to his answer as a precaution, a “just in case”, in the event that I, as a researcher, have spotted any. It does, however, illuminate a certain lack of overview of a public comment section where comments about himself or his colleagues could occur. One could argue that such an overview should be acquired, as negative comments about employees in the comment section of commercial content would essentially mean that they are being harassed at work, arguably something the management is responsible for preventing.

The manager herself seem to believe that such an overview is acquired in response to whether they carry out any form of moderation of the comment section:

We do pay attention to what comments we get, but we have not experienced any need to moderate anything (R03).

This once again speaks to a certain level of the operation of the account being unorganised. When reviewing the employees' answers about the comments section, as accounted for in the previous section, it further illuminates a lack of internal communication, as some of them describe their experience with some comments as uncomfortable to such an extent that either deleting the content or closing the comment section has been discussed among them.

4.4.4 Main take aways

The examples and reflections from the employees generally illuminate that negative comments directed at the participants in the videos are rare but that they do occur. There is only one employee who describes what can be labelled as an explicitly mean comment in the comment section, and another employee mentions what she perceives as ridicule of her colleague in direct feedback. Apart from explicit negative feedback, the employees generally mention variations of non-positive feedback but often of a character that is understood as humour or from a source where it is communicated as humour (e.g. someone the employee knows personally). Such comments typically entail the performance of the employees in the videos without addressing appearance, such as how someone looks.

Many employees describe negatively oriented feedback directed at the brand or store as something they make a note of and as something they or their colleagues, to a certain extent, are affected by. The responsible employee labels such feedback as "mean", while its character, for my purposes, is described as criticism or feedback of a negative kind, directed at the brand. It is noted that where they are mentioned, negative feedback directed at the appearance or performance of the employees is not detected or mentioned by the responsible employee.

The analysis of the interviews with respect to the comment section also depicts a lack of communication between the manager and the responsible employee and illuminates a general lack of total oversight of the comments the videos receive, in line with my previous analysis of the operation as unorganised.

5. Discussion

The discussion is presented in two parts to address the two questions posed at the beginning of this thesis. The first part discusses the implications that spontaneous approaches to social media marketing constitutes for low-wage earners and thus addresses the first research question: *In what ways can unorganised approaches to social media marketing (e.g. through spontaneous attempts to attain online visibility on social media platforms) affect work culture, and how may such a culture constitute increased pressure on low-wage earners?*

One of the most prominent findings from the analysis is how the approach to social media visibility, in the case study presented, lacks organisation. The respondents' statements do, at times, depict it in ways that make it appear as a private profile considering how informal the operation of it is. I do underline that the informal approach to operating the account is not to be confused with the informal nature of the content itself. The first part of the discussion will argue that this unorganised nature can contribute to pressure in the workplace due to its facilitation of an environment where norms are produced without much contradiction or renegotiation. I will further account for some implications of such pressure in the workplace.

The second part of the discussion applies a more political approach in terms of contextualising the current research in a broader discussion of immaterial labour. It emphasises the inherent difficulties in the relationship between organisational strive for "authentic" marketing and individual self-expression as it addresses the second research question: *How can organisational striving for 'authentic' marketing through employee social media ambassadorship be understood as potentially 'value-reducing' for employees?*

The organisational strive for "authentic" marketing content through the focus on employee brand ambassadorship is interrogated from the perspective of individual privacy and experiences of context collapse. The second part of the discussion further challenges the notion that sees brand ambassadorship as rewarding to employees (as a consequence of

them building stronger brands) by introducing two potential “value-reducing” aspects of employee brand ambassadorship.

5. 1 Facilitating Pressure

Initially, literature on organisational commitment and organisational norms have been presented as two central factors that could lead to employees participating in commercial social media content, even when compensation for that labour is absent. I have further underlined how both organisational norms and social norms need to be considered when raising questions about employee social media participation. The following discussion will therefore focus on the role that norms play in general in an individual’s proclivity to participate in brand ambassadorship. This is because, throughout the analysis, this was seen as a prominent explanation for participation in the context of the presented case study. However, what is interesting for the purpose of answering the research question is how the existing norms have emerged in the work context and how they can be experienced as pressure for some employees.

To briefly recapitulate, norms serve to discourage self-interested actions and to encourage behaviours that are beneficial for social collectives (van Kleef, Gelfand, and Jetten 2019, 1). Organisational norms are not equivalents of job demands but cover a broader set of demands about a wider variety of behaviours than what employees will experience as they carry out their individual jobs (Hammer et al. 2004, 84). Within the analysed data from my case study, one norm that was implicitly depicted was to participate in social media content, even when it countered the employee’s interests. This norm was expressed through the expectancy placed on employees to down-prioritise their own feelings of self-awareness in favour of the company’s wish to produce promotional content for social media distribution. This correlates with statements about how an organisational work performance norm “describe the nature of the exchange relationship between employer and employees in the form of prescriptions for, and expectations of, behaviours that relate to the employee’s contribution to overall organisational performance.” (Hammer et al. 2004, 84).

The expectancy placed on employees to participate in content, regardless of their own feelings of insecurity, manifested itself through depictions of how employees in certain scenarios had been convinced to participate in digital content despite their expressed self-awareness. There were two participants that described situations where they persuaded a colleague to either upload content or refrain from having content deleted. The expressed self-awareness of the colleagues being persuaded can be described as explicit in the sense that it is mentioned by the employees who were the instigating parties in the described situations. Since the colleagues in question are, in the situations described, specifically made aware of what their peers think they should do, and consequently influences them to perform the desired behaviour, they can be characterised as pressure (Loiacono and McCoy 2018, 971). The given examples thus illuminate how norms are communicated explicitly and how pressure form as a result. It is underlined that, in the examples given here, interviews were only conducted of the employees who worked as instigators and none of the employees who expressed their self-awareness. Therefore, it is unclear how these situations were perceived from the other point of view. However, some general implications of pressure in the workplace will be accounted for.

Before returning to some possible implications of the described norms and associated pressure, I will elaborate on how said norms might be allowed a foothold in the workplace. Firstly, it is noted that the two employees depicting the situations where they had acted as instigating parties did not hold any managing responsibility in general, nor for the operation of the account. This illuminates that work performance norms, within the current case study, are not only a result of “the exchange relationship between employer and employees” (Hammer et al. 2004, 84), but also of the exchange relationship between colleagues. This underlines that certain employees feel both comfortable — and responsible for the operation of the account — to the extent that they actively persuade colleagues to act in favour of the company. I assert that this exchange relationship between colleagues arises as a result of the otherwise informal approach to operating the TikTok account. Since no clear boundaries or guidelines are set, and no one oversees the project in an organised manner, employees may, only by virtue of their own enthusiasm for the project, find it appropriate to act as initiators for their colleagues to join in as actors in commercial content. On this level,

the lack of organisation increases the chance of pressure among the employees to the extent where norms, that dictate employee behaviour to align with organisational goals, are defined independent of management interference.

Secondly, since face-to-face discussion has been shown to be effective in facilitating cooperation in situations in which members of a group are faced with a conflict between maximising personal interests or maximising collective interests (Chen 1996, 192), such interactions are likely to influence the individual's decision to participate in content. When the operation of the account is unorganised to the extent where "anyone" feels inclined to facilitate cooperation in maximising "collective" — or organisational — interests, it may create a dynamic where certain norms may appear particularly focal. This is important because, as Cialdini and Goldstein (2004) explain, the impact of social norms will be determined by the extent to which the norm is focal, meaning that relevant norms direct behaviour only when they are in focus (597-598). As this implies, the norm that encourages participation in social media content may not be particularly behaviour-changing throughout the work day, but mainly felt when one is directly addressed about participation. In such a situation, it may further be experienced as pressure since one is specifically made aware of what others think one should do.

Moreover, one of the clearest implications of our desire to affiliate with others is that the more we like and approve of them, the more likely we are to take action to cultivate close relationships with them (Cialdini and Goldstein 2004, 598). Our desire to affiliate with others is accomplished via a number of means, including responding affirmatively to requests for help (Cialdini and Goldstein 2004, 598). This becomes particularly interesting for my purposes because we are no longer talking about a desire to fulfil expectations expressed by an employer, but a desire to affiliate with colleagues. In light of this, we can further consider R06s statements about "giving in" when R01 returns to ask him to participate for a second time. The likelihood of face-to-face discussion having an effect on maximising collective interests in the described situation is increased when we consider that he is being addressed by his colleague. The example further underlines how a norm may appear more focal when communicated by, for example, a colleague the target likes.

Here it is noted that while R01 is characterised as a managing employee throughout this thesis, by virtue of him creating most of the TikTok content, he is not *the* manager. Although he has access to upload or delete content, he, as the analysis uncovered, does not seem to present as a leader figure with marketing responsibility (with the responsibility such a position would entail in relation to, for example, taking precautions), but rather as an employee who happened to be given the responsibility because of his spontaneous creation of the account. Hierarchically, he can therefore be placed together with the other employees, with the exception of his role as a “gatekeeper” of content. R06s inclination to participate when he is asked by R01 may, therefore, both be prescribed to a desire to fulfil expectations expressed by an “employer” (the person perceived as the manager of the profile), while at the same time a desire to affiliate with colleagues. It is also noted that the relatively flat hierarchal structure of the case study is not uncommon in similar industries, and this could further underline the general implications of such workplaces approaching promotion on social media in an unorganised manner.

This once again describes how the unorganised approach to running the social media account may have implications for employees, as certain roles may be hard to separate. It is accordingly argued that the unorganised nature, in general, has created a very informal way of approaching the marketing that takes place on TikTok. This informality has perhaps created a dynamic where all employees that are engaged with the profile find it appropriate to expect the same engagement of their colleagues, since no clear boundary in terms of who is responsible is established.

The arbitrary context in which content is produced, where internal communication is lacking, does, in light of the above, seem to facilitate an introduction of norms without these being negotiated collectively. They rather seem to be introduced in one-to-one or few-to-one encounters. Therefore, it is claim that the aforementioned statements, describing situations where employees have persuaded colleagues, do not only describe the norm in action but also illuminate how the norm was allowed to both emerge and get a foothold in the first place. Furthermore, it is argued that the nature of how these norms are communicated constitute a pressure for employees that are subject to being persuaded by

colleagues. These norms are both produced and reinforced by employees regardless of their managing responsibility, facilitated by the environment in which commercial social media activity is approached in an unorganised way.

The normative expectations that seem to have emerged within my case study are expectations placed on the individual to join in on the organisation's social media activity by putting themselves at the company's disposal for exposure in social media. Since research have depicted how individual focus on self-presentation on social media differ according to multiple factors (Marwick and boyd 2011; Hjetland et al. 2022; You and Liu 2022) and indicated that employees' private social media activity influence sensitivity to the endorsement of their employer brands (Cervellon & Lirio 2017) it is safe to state that individual preferences apply when considering how people relate to exposure in social media. Within any given workplace, one could therefore assume that certain individuals would find such norms to be problematic to meet. It is thus argued that such norms should not exist as a default.

As previously established, when expectations are inconsistent with personal preferences or conflict so that the fulfilment of one set of expectations prevents one from meeting other sets, the result is psychological tension, which can create stress (Hammer et al. 2004, 84). It is therefore highlighted that a general implication of pressure in the workplace is an elevated possibility of stress among employees. This is also reflected in research that has found a strong connection between social norms and an increase in users' felt technostress (976-977). We can, in light of this, understand expectations of social media ambassadorship as technostress that have negative implications for certain employees, such as creating a feeling of loss of control for those with conflicting preferences for self-presentation strategies on social media. Furthermore, Loiacono and McCoy's (2018) study does provide insight into how part of the stress from feelings of invasiveness is related to pressure placed on them by their peers, in the case of work, their coworkers and managers (978). accordingly, we can understand the origin of the pressure that arises in the described work environment and how certain norms may constitute psychological tension and stress for employees who experience them as conflicting with their own preference for self-presentation or other sets of expectations.

It is also noted the above constitutes a disadvantage for the organisation, as stress could arguably influence an employee's perception of their workplace in a negative way. Employees satisfied with their jobs are more likely to act as ambassadors for their organisational brands (Yuan et al. 2022, 1). Maintaining a comfortable workplace does therefore mean increasing the likelihood of better employee ambassadorships. Moreover, among the factors noted to stand in the way of employee branding behaviours on social media is a lack of understanding among employees of the organisation's social media strategy (Cervellon and Lirio 2017, n.p), further underlining how the lack of organisation (which entails a lack of communicating strategies to employees) can stand in the way of employees developing positive attitudes towards social media participation.

One could argue that any organisation that incorporates the use of social media in a way that includes exposure of its employees should be considerate of plausible pressure that can arise and take measures to ensure that organisational norms are not experienced as conflicting with an individual's personal preferences for self-presentation. In order to do so, however, it is argued that an elevated level of organisation is required. For example, the described dynamic among colleagues in which pressure arises could perhaps be changed — or at least corrected — if a collective negotiation of norms was facilitated by a selected few with a more defined managing responsibility. Since research describe experienced members of the workgroup to provide valuable support for less experienced members and as a source for employees to learn how to deal effectively with work problems (Lages 2012, 1264), it is argued that a more formal organisation could reduce the experience of pressure for some employees.

While the analysis does depict one employee as a responsible employee, he does, at the same time, not seem to act with particular caution when the employees express their uncertainty. Moreover, as the organisation of the account is of the established nature, the manager nor the managing employee may be aware of pressure if it arises among the employees, as it is not spoken properly about. This represents the lost opportunity of negotiating unwanted norms or unwanted pressure in the workplace. These findings suggest that an operation of a corporate social media profile that lacks guidelines or strategy and internal communication among employees may facilitate an environment in which some

individuals can have an elevated experience of stress related to felt pressure of norm adherence as a result of norms not being collectively negotiated.

While not contradicting these findings, it is also important to underline that the unorganised nature of the account can be viewed as having some positive implications for employees. Firstly, organisational commitment does present itself as a factor that influences some of the employees' proclivity to participate in social media. The analysis illuminate this, as certain employees seem to be enthusiastic enough about the TikTok profile to the extent of persuading others to participate for the greater good of the organisation. This reflects a commitment that is perhaps already there, or at least one that is produced as a result of the TikTok project. Since it has been hypothesised that social involvement will produce commitment to the organisation and found that informal clique membership help produce commitment (Sheldon 1971, 148), the unorganised nature of the operation could be argued to facilitate this.

R05 describes that she finds participation to elevate her social relationships with her colleagues as “you get a good connection with your colleagues in a different way” and that it contributes to making it easier to get to know them outside of work. In this sense, one could characterise the production of social media content as a socialising activity and participation in this as a social involvement. In this sense, the act of participating in content could be viewed as an action that both produces and reinforces commitment. This implies that the unorganised approach could, due to its un-bureaucratic nature, be positive in the sense that it allows for informal clique memberships to arise through the use and production of spontaneous social media content. Such a spontaneous social activity would perhaps otherwise be hampered by the need for review and approval at a higher level. One could therefore make the argument that an unorganised approach contributes to a laid-back work environment that would otherwise be hampered by bureaucracy.

However, it is the level of how organised it is that is highlighted here. An elevated level of organisation does not mean that it has to be lifted to the level of the central organisation. I argue that the approach to visibility on TikTok could be increasingly organised without

hampering the positive exchange of ideas that the TikTok project represents for some employees. For example van den Berg and Verhoeven's (2017) study depict how managers were concerned with which employees to stimulate to be active and how they would make them comfortable with the social medium. Some organisations selected a specific group of employees to operate as online ambassadors (159). An approach organised at the level of selecting specific employees to stimulate as ambassadors could possibly reduce the likelihood of involuntary participation taking place because it requires informed consent on the employees' part and could therefore work to assure that the individual employee actually wants to get involved in the ambassadorship.

5.2 Ambassadorship, Authenticity and Context Collapse

Research offers recommendations to help organisations foster employee branding behaviours and highlights how brand ambassadorship benefits organisations (Dreher 2014; Cervellon & Lirio 2017) and, as depicted within the current case study, low-wage earners are used as brand ambassadors in online commercial content. Terranova (2004) explains that the expansion of the Internet has given ideological and material support to contemporary trends towards increased flexibility of the workforce, continuous reskilling, and the diffusion of practices such as bringing supplementary work home from the office (n.p). Since these observations were made, one could argue that additional trends have emerged and that the expectancy of employees to participate as brand ambassadors is the newest addition to trends dictating the conditions under which employees work, given support by the expansion of the Internet.

Literature has suggested that organisational reputation acts as a "brand," adding value to a job beyond the attributes of the job itself, such as pay, (Cable and Turban 2003, 2244), that it acts as a bond of identity among employees (Basu 2006, 29) and that social media tasks can "create a competitive yet positive atmosphere" and let employees see their success evolve over time" (Dreher 2014, 351). One could make the observation that employee branding behaviours are often claimed to offer not only advantages for the organisation but for the employees. However, as Andersson (2019) states, since employees are encouraged to think of themselves as ambassadors, it is reasonable to expect that employees relate to

this role expectation, as such expectations are important to their identity work through which they construct and negotiate their identity (703). In accordance with this, the current research wishes to explore brand ambassadorship from the perspective of the employees' identity work. More specifically, how the ambassador persona may be in tension with other self-presentation strategies. I will account for employee branding behaviours, not as behaviours that are neither neutral nor beneficial for employees, but as behaviours that can reduce their experienced value of a job. I will introduce two potentially "value-reducing" aspects of employee brand ambassadorship related to received feedback and the relationship between context collapse and authenticity.

Firstly, personifying a brand through the use of a spokesperson is a strategy that some companies use to humanise their brands. Such personification can be accomplished in advertising by, for example featuring "regular people", such as a person employed by the brand (Fleck, Michel, and Zeitoun 2014, 84). Within the current case study, possible implications of "humanising" the brand have been noted through how employees notice comments directed at the company and describe them as negative comments. One possible explanation for this, as previously stated in the analysis, is that the employees are aware of their own affiliation with the brand and thus that they themselves might come across as the organisation itself (e.g. as a personification of the organisation).

One employee mentioned a comment from a customer regarding mouldy strawberries when asked about the state of the comment section. While this could be because it stood out as one out of few comments on the content in question, it could also indicate that negative feedback directed the organisation is essentially felt as negative feedback directed at oneself. Accordingly, as found by Andersson (2019) employees seem to especially experience the ambassador persona as an undesired persona at times when their organisation has been involved in a scandal or crisis (709). While reports of customers buying mouldy strawberries definitely do not constitute a "scandal", it does illuminate how the ambassador persona can be experienced as an undesired persona at times of negative feedback. Therefore, We can consider employee brand ambassadorship as an activity that allows for the organisational reputation to be reflected onto the employees.

Since organisational reputation acts as to add value to a job (Cable and Turban 2003, 2244), one could further make the counterargument, that negative statements about the organisation might reflect a bad reputation, which would, on the contrary, reduce the value of the job. In the context of negative feedback then, one could state that employee brand ambassadorship is an activity that is not only immaterial and unpaid, but that it further constitutes a risk of reducing the value of a job. This constitutes one understanding of brand ambassadorship as value-reducing, related to how employees note feedback as a reflection of their organisation's reputation and, consequently themselves.

Secondly, since social media, in addition to providing more opportunities for self-presentation, also offers a range of opportunities for feedback on one's self-presentation (Hjetland et al. 2022, 2), I wish to address the notion of authenticity in relation to context collapse. The participants in my case study were asked about feedback from friends or acquaintances, as it was considered likely that the content would have reached their peers outside of work. Multiple employees mentioned feedback from acquaintances in some form. One employee gave an example that illuminate how felt context collapse can arise in the context of brand ambassadorship. He depicts how his friends comment on his participation as something "incredibly awkward" in face-to-face interactions with them. This can indicate that the employee's actions in his role as an ambassador for his organisation is perceived as deviating from how he is known to appear around his friends and, thus, that following the norms of the organisation entails breaching the norms attaining to another group.

The discrepancy in his behaviour is made visible through social media, as content is uploaded to TikTok, a platform to be regarded as the individual's private sphere. While the participant in my case study does not express any discomfort related to the above-mentioned example, he describes how compiling to the norms of the organisation entails breaching the norms of his friend-group and how a context collapse is created. Regardless of his rather relaxed reaction to this feedback from *his* friends, one could state that others who find themselves in a similar situation may not be as comfortable with this navigation

of audiences. As Davis and Jurgenson (2014) found, navigating multiple audiences can lead to embarrassment when messages intended for one person or group leak out into others (483). The, at times, delicate situations organisational promotion on social media puts their employees in is here underlined, and it is claimed that it is reasonable to assume that some individuals would find similar experiences of context collapse uncomfortable when threatening their self-presentation strategies.

Moreover, since the idea that “organically” produced content can be perceived as a measure of the organisation’s authenticity (Macnamara and Zerfass 2012; Newlands and Fieseler 2020), it needs to be taken into account what this entails for employees in their role as brand ambassadors. In relation to authenticity, I therefore further claim that there exists a tension that should particularly be paid attention to, the one of whom such authenticity benefits. Up until this point, I have not attempted to define or characterise what constitutes “authenticity”. This is, firstly, because the extent to which something can be defined as appearing authentic is highly subjective. Secondly, it is because I assert that a clear definition of authenticity need not exist in order to discuss how a hypothetical perception of it may affect either those who figure in online content or the company who benefits from it. Therefore, it is the notion of “authenticity” itself that is interesting.

In light of the already discussed topic of context collapse, authenticity in promotional content can be argued to be among the factors that increase this experience. For example, while the experience of context collapse arises when two (or more) roles need to be played out at once, one could argue that it is further amplified when presented as if both are equally authentic. For example, this would not necessarily present itself as a problem for a celebrity in a commercial. Because the roles played out in this scenario are not presented as equally authentic. We understand that the role played out in the commercial is not equal to the celebrity’s private persona in terms of authenticity by virtue of it being presented as a commercial. For an employee at a grocery store, however, who is participating in content that aims to present as authentic, this may constitute a greater tension due to a greater blurring of boundaries. Moreover, in the context of employee brand ambassadorship, it would be impossible for the employee to deliver the promise of authenticity to both

customers and an audience who knows him or her personally, as the presentation of both roles as equally authentic would essentially appear insincere or — unauthentic to the audience that already knows the employee. This ultimately means that if the promotional content from an organisation is perceived as authentic, it would often prove disadvantageous or unfavourable for the employee visible in that content, as it acts in conflict with other roles.

It is important to underline that the difference in private or professional roles does not always need to vary to the extent that it is directly damaging to the employee. What is highlighted is, however, that this tension may constitute a challenge for some. For those this does constitute a challenge for then, participation in social media content could be perceived as to reduce their credibility in other roles. Here I point out how research has suggested that individuals may be willing to accept a lower wage with a firm that increases their pride and self-esteem (Cable and Turban 2003, 2251). And while Daniel M Cable and Daniel B. Turban's (2003) study focuses on pride related to the general value of the organisational brand, we can still apply it to understand that work-related activities that decrease an employee's feelings of credibility in the eyes of others can reduce the felt value of a job. As a context collapse restricts the performance through which self-presentation is achieved, I argue that it can entail reduced feelings of value. This constitutes the second understanding of brand ambassadorship (that facilitates context collapse) as value-reducing for employees, related to the relationship between context collapse and authenticity.

I have suggested two potentially value-reducing aspects for employees who conduct brand ambassador labour for their organisations, connected to the internalisation of the brand and the experience of feedback and to the experience of context collapse and organisational strive for the “authentic”. This thesis does, in line with my arguments, see employee branding approaches where low-wage earners are utilised as highly visible brand ambassadors as a promotional approach with a high potential to reduce employees' experienced value of a job. This entails that visibility of promotional content online mainly creates value for the brand, whilst possibly decreasing the felt value of a job for employees.

We are briefly reminded how brand ambassadorship was previously argued to be both “labour that creates immaterial products” and “unpaid labour that is voluntarily given.” (Jin and Feenberg 2015, 52). I once again underline the aspect of voluntariness. Within my case study one employee did for example explain that she participated in content to become more confident in similar situations (e.g. she views participation valuable for personal reasons). However, I argue that while employees carry out this labour voluntarily (to whatever extent), it can be seen as exploitative, as Iqani (2019) underline, since there exists a complex tension between self-empowering action and possible exploitation by economic power structures (233).

Due to the intricacy of aspects that can be value-reducing and focal norms that dictate behaviour that favours participation, employees may find it difficult to resist behaviours that promote the brand. They may, in some instances, identify that they are uncomfortable with exposure but be led to believe that this self-awareness is an unsociable trait or deviant behaviour, despite the fact that research verifies that the blurring between work-related and personal contexts can feel “invasive and stressing to an individual, who is used to keeping these realms separate” (Loiacono and McCoy 2018, 972). Here, it is also underlined that, while relevant concerning all social media platforms, my case study utilises TikTok. As TikTok tends to invoke “post-based” virality due to how it curates content (Abidin 2020, 79), this entails great unpredictability surrounding how many views a video will get. As mentioned within the analysis, one participant explained that she had wanted content to be deleted at some point because “It got a lot of views in a very short period of time. That was a bit awkward (...)”. It is therefore underlined that the nature of the platform can make it increasingly challenging for employees to make informed decisions about participation, as it is essentially impossible to understand how much visibility it will grant them.

It is, in light of what has been argued above, particularly underlined that immaterial labour does not only entail labour that is exploitative due to the lack of compensation but also labour that can reduce the felt value of a job. This is countering a widespread, often corporate, notion about brand ambassadorship that tend to focus on how branding behaviours can add value to employees and their labour. This does perhaps further

illuminate that some of the approaches we see to social media marketing in the present days are not too far from being characterised similarly to how Lazzarato (1996) described the practice of immaterial labour almost 30 years ago: “Today’s management thinking takes workers’ subjectivity into consideration only in order to codify it in line with the requirements of production. And once again this phase of transformation succeeds in concealing the fact that the individual and collective interests of workers and those of the company are not identical.” (135)

6. Summary and conclusion

This thesis has depicted a current moment in time where “shop-floor TikTok stars” are compared to Kim Kardashian and seen it as descriptive of how employees are considered a commodity in the digital era. It has described how individual inclination to exposure on social media is seen as an increasingly valued trait in business culture and interrogated how organisational emphasis on building employee brand ambassadorships can affect the work environment. My case study has exemplified how employers leverage social media in ways that affect low-wage earners, and the findings suggest that a “spontaneous” approach to social media can entail a lack of proper organisation. It is accounted for how an unorganised approach can potentially lead to pressure among the employees to the extent that it dictates employee behaviour to align with organisational goals, even when such behaviour runs counter to their interests. The pressure that can arise among coworkers to participate in promotional content is not only seen to describe a norm in action but has also illuminated how an unorganised nature of social media promotion allows norms to emerge among employees through the lack of interference from management. It is noted that expectations of adherence to norms that describe behaviours that are inconsistent with personal preferences can create stress.

Although it is noted that an unorganised approach to social media promotion may generally lead to a fun and creative environment, it is the level of how organised it is that is highlighted within this thesis. When no one is formally accountable for the operation of the account, it becomes challenging to gain an overview of the experiences the employees express and how they treat each other. I have suggested that an elevated level of organisation can be achieved without hampering the positive affect brand ambassadorship has on some employees. It is suggested that organisations, to reduce involuntary participation, should be considerate regarding whom they choose to stimulate to be ambassadors through, for example, selecting a specific group of employees to operate as such.

Furthermore, this thesis has depicted the challenging task of telling private individuals apart from brands and underlined that brand-related labour needs to be understood as linked to self-expression and the possible exploitation by economic power structures. It has shown that low-wage earners, who are referred to as “building relationships with customers in a way glossy TV spots can’t”, are expected to perform this brand-labour for free. In this sense, employee brand ambassadorship has been problematised in the context of immaterial labour. It has depicted how the bodies of low-wage earners are utilised to create a sense of corporate authenticity and argued that such approaches do not only commodify labour without compensation for the labourer but can further reduce the felt value of a job. The feedback culture that exists in our digital age, through, for example, comment sections, is seen to potentially amplify the employees’ possible negative experience of participation in promotional content, as even harmless comments can potentially be burdensome for employees in their roles as ambassadors. It has been further argued that ambassadorship can reduce the felt value of a job from the point of view that sees the visibility granted individuals through ambassadorship as interfering with individual self-presentation strategies. This has highlighted how organisations’ strive for authenticity can amplify experiences of context collapse, which can entail reduced feelings of value as employees lose some control over the performance through which self-presentation is usually achieved.

Finally, in relation to social media, it can be said that people are naturally differently disposed towards wanting exposure in different situations. Therefore, particular caution should be exercised towards each individual employee when an organisation wants to involve their employees in their marketing practises and use them in content for external use. The responsibility that rests on organisations to be attentive to employees who are put in a position of acting as the organisational face to the external world is underlined in my research, especially on platforms that grant visibility in ways as unpredictable as TikTok.

6.1 Strengths and limitations

While this study adds to our understanding of how employees are utilised as brand ambassadors today and how employers at times approach such practices, it has its limitations. Firstly, as this is a focused case study, these findings are drawn from a small number of participants. It is a relatively broad sample of employees, as the only criterion that needed to be met in order to participate was that the participants were employed at the grocery store in question and had participated in content. It is recognised that it could be useful to have interviewed a more focused set of employees, for example, one more specifically divided into age groups. This would have offered an opportunity to detect potential differences between generations. However, as the sample was as small as it was, the division of the participants into age groups was dismissed early on due to the inefficiency it would serve in a sample this size. It was further not directly relevant to divide the participants according to age to support the findings emphasised for my purposes.

Moreover, due to the limitations of time and resources in this research, it was decided not to include a sample of employees who had not participated in content. However, including employees who had never participated in content would have been valuable in terms of offering a more elaborate examination of why certain employees find participation problematic or uncomfortable. Moreover, this could have nuanced the aspects of pressure, as it would allow for more elaborate descriptions of how “challenging” it is to decline participation since such participants would have had first-hand experiences with explicitly rejecting participation.

This research further mentions a number of examples that could be better illuminated if follow-up interviews were conducted. For example, some employees gave secondhand descriptions of situations they observed or situations that included others. It would be beneficial if these were informed by descriptions from the different people involved.

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Appendix

Appendix 1 – Examples of translations

Examples of translations

R06

Norwegian

Det er faktisk bare mindre formelt, for vi visste jo ikke hvordan det her skulle gå videre. Det var ikke sånn tanken at “oi, det her skal vi satse fullt på og vi skal poste hver dag” og alt det der. Det var mer sånn at “okei, vi kan teste ut og se hvordan det går”. Eh, om det blir noe mer ut av det eller ikke.

English

It was quite informal because we did not know how it would develop. It was not an idea of “Oh, we are going to put our full effort into this, and we are going to post every day” and all that. It was more like, “Ok. We can try this out and see how it goes”, whether something more will come of it or not.

R03

Norwegian

Så ser vi det at sosiale plattformer er jo også en viktig del av det å nå ut til kundene og vi har jo vært mest på Facebook, (~~det er liksom det [navnet på butikk] har brukt, også er det noen butikker som har dratt av gårde på TikTøk.~~) Også tenker jeg at “hva er hensikten med det liksom, det er jo ikke.. hvem når vi der?” Men vi snakker jo også på langsikt, om fremtidens kunder og ungdommen er jo også en sterk kjøpegruppe de har jo faktisk, bruker mye penger i butikken dem i forhold til etter skole og treninger og den biten der. Så det er jo en gruppe som er viktig å nå frem til. Og vi ser jo det sprer seg jo mye fortere blant ungdommen enn den voksne, litt mer satte gruppa på Facebook.

English

We see that social platforms are an important part of reaching the customer and we have mostly been on Facebook (...) And then I can think, “what is the purpose of that, who are we going to reach there?”. But then we are also talking about the long term, about the future customer and the young people too have a strong purchasing power, they actually spend a lot of money in the shop after school and training and so on. So it is a group that it is important to reach. And we see that it [content] spreads much faster among young people than the more adult group on Facebook.

R02

Norwegian

~~Ja, eller liksom det har vært dager hvor han har bare~~ “har du lyst til å være med på TikTøk i dag” ~~også er jeg liksom bare sånn..~~ det er jo ofte dager hvor man ikke helt føler seg selv, at.. ja, “i dag vil jeg ikke være med” på en måte. Så har jeg sagt nei så har det som oftest kommet av det.

English

(...) there are many days when one does not quite “feel oneself”, like “today I do not want to participate” kind off. So when I have said no, it has usually been due to that.

Interview guide

1. The company's ambitions

The responsible professionals own ambitions/goals with the content: personal enjoyment/ better working environment/ marketing/ a combination? Uncover which reflections and assessments are made from the management perspective. Have the person responsible for the content formulated any guidelines (formally or informally) or any overarching goals set?

To management:

- How did you get the idea to create a TikTok account on behalf of the company?
- What were your initial goals/motivation for starting it (have they changed?)
- Where do you find the inspiration for content?
- Do you follow other grocery stores on TikTok for inspiration?
- Do you typically do trends that are currently popular? (What is your impression of what it takes to get views?)
- Do you communicate with colleagues of other stores about your TikTok content and possible strategies for them to do the same?

(These questions are designed to illuminate the company's motivation for operating a social media platform and to uncover whether it is mainly done for fun or if it is strategic communication.)

2. Information provided by the management to the employees

How does the management communicate with the employees about the content that is published? Do the employees feel like they can say no/request that content be deleted after it has been published? Have the employees ever asked their leader to delete comments or turn off the comment field? Is there an agreement about what kinds of content should or should not be published?

To management:

- Have there been any staff meetings specifically regarding the store's presence on TikTok, or has it ever been on the agenda?
- Who has access to upload or remove content?
- Do you operate according to any specific guidelines?
- Have anyone (employee) asked to have content deleted?

- What is the policy if someone wants a video they feature in to be deleted?
- Does/would that policy change accordingly with the number of likes, comments or views on the video in question? (Would there, for example, be an additional conversation about the removal of it?)
- Have anyone asked for the comment sections to be closed or for certain comments to be deleted?

(These questions are designed to uncover how conscious of—or active in—the store is of their responsibility as an employer to look after the interests and privacy of their employees)

To employees:

- How did you first learn that the store was on TikTok? (Before or after employment)
- How have you been addressed when asked to participate in content? (Or did you yourself ask)
- Have you participated more than once?
- Have you had a conversation about saying no to participating in content if you do not want to?
- Have you, or anyone you know of, asked for content to be deleted?
- Have you, or anyone you know of, wanted to ask for content to be deleted (but did not ask the management)?
- Have you, or anyone you know, asked for specific comments to be deleted or for the comment sections to be turned off?
- Have you, or anyone you know, wished that the comment section was closed or certain comments deleted (but not asked)? (If yes, why did you not ask?)
- Have you ever been encouraged to engage with Methe store's social media (through commenting, liking or sharing on your own personal profiles)?

(These questions are designed to uncover how the store communicates their responsibility as an employer to look after the interests and privacy of their employees)

Individual commitment

Why do employees want to be visible in the content, or why not? How involved is the individual in the design of the content itself? Do they experience a sense of ownership? Do they try to contribute to spreading the content themselves, e.g. by sharing in their own channels?

- Why did/do you say yes to participating in content?

- Did you feature in the content alone or with someone else? (did that influence your decision)
- Do you come up with your own ideas for content or follow other grocery stores on TikTok for inspiration?
- Have you ever had any thoughts about the content being as visible as it is? (Have you, for example been excited about likes or regretted being in a video?)
- Is there anyone you do not want to see the content? (Family members, friends, acquaintances, love interest?)
- If you were to quit your job, would you want the content to remain on your profile?
- Have you ever said no to feature in content, and why?

(These questions are meant to open up the conversation about how the employees feel about participating in content)

The individual's personal experience with social media generally

The individual's private presence on TikTok (which is the platform the store is visible on) can potentially affect the person's experience of a "professional" presence on the same platform. If you, as a private person, spend a lot of time on a platform, it will perhaps feel more private. If you are not familiar with or use the platform, exposure on it may feel less private. Thus, each individual's familiarity with/use of the platform outside of work is important to survey.

- Which social media accounts do you have? (Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, TikTok)
- Do you post things yourself on social media, or do you just follow others?
- If you post, which of the following do you post to (Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, TikTok)
- Are your profile on any of the platforms you post to private?
- Are most of your friends active on any of the following platforms (Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, TikTok)
- Screentime from TikTok the last week?

(These questions are included to illuminate whether or not an experienced user finds engagement in social media through their workplace more or less comfortable or if a higher social media "literacy" affect an individual's sense of professional presence)

Feedback on the workplace's TikTok profile and experience around it

To what extent do the employees register the digital feedback? Do they read the comment section? If so, does it differ between content in which they themselves figure and content in which they do not participate? Have they ever experienced feeling proud, happy, sad, scared etc., of comments they have read? Furthermore, it is relevant to ask questions about non-digital feedback they receive/hear about. Or feedback that comes directly to the individual in the form of online messages.

- Do you follow the store on TikTok?
- Do you engage with the content in any way (likes, shares, comments)
- If you like, can other users see which posts you like on TikTok (or are your settings private)?
- If you share/stitch/duett, why do you do it?
- Have anyone ever commented about you on the content?
- Have anyone you know ever commented about you on the content?
- Have anyone you know ever sent you the content you feature in / or the content from the store, because it is your workplace?
- Have anyone you know commented in real life about the store's activity on social media?
- Are the comments set in any particular tone, e.g. do people find it funny, informative..?

(These questions are designed to uncover whether or not the employees have any direct examples of negative or positive feedback, how aware the management is of this, and to what extent these experiences shape their experience of being visible on the profile)

Appendix 3 – Approval from Sikt - Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research

29/05/2023, 19:14 Meldeskjema for behandling av personopplysninger

 Sikt

[Meldeskjema](#) / [The value of views](#) / Vurdering

Vurdering av behandling av personopplysninger

Referansenummer 414202	Vurderingstype Standard	Dato 19.12.2022
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Prosjektittel
The value of views

Behandlingsansvarlig institusjon
Universitetet i Oslo / Det humanistiske fakultet / Institutt for medier og kommunikasjon

Prosjektansvarlig
Jon Inge Faldalen

Student
Julie Skrøder

Prosjektperiode
03.10.2022 - 01.06.2023

Kategorier personopplysninger
Alminnelige

Lovlig grunnlag
Samtykke (Personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 bokstav a)
Allmenn interesse eller offentlig myndighet (Personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 bokstav e)

Behandlingen av personopplysningene er lovlig så fremt den gjennomføres som oppgitt i meldeskjemaet. Det lovlige grunnlaget gjelder til 01.09.2023.

[Meldeskjema](#)

Kommentar
OM VURDERINGEN

Sikt har en avtale med institusjonen du forsker eller studerer ved. Denne avtalen innebærer at vi skal gi deg råd slik at behandlingen av personopplysninger i prosjektet ditt er lovlig etter personvernregelverket.

LOVLIG GRUNNLAG

UTVALG 1

Prosjektet vil innhente samtykke fra foresatte til behandlingen av personopplysninger om barna. Personer over 18 år samtykker selv. Vår vurdering er at prosjektet legger opp til et samtykke i samsvar med kravene i art. 4 og 7, ved at det er en frivillig, spesifikk, informert og utvetydig bekreftelse som kan dokumenteres, og som den registrerte/foresatte kan trekke tilbake.

Lovlig grunnlag for behandlingen vil dermed være foresattes samtykke, jf. personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 bokstav a.

UTVALG 2

Formålet med prosjektet er å belyse hvordan arbeidshverdagen oppleves for personer i en bedrift som aktivt involverer sine ansatte i innhold som publiseres på sosiale medier, hvordan det påvirker arbeidsmiljøet, samt undersøke hvordan bedriftens egne målsetninger står i forhold til de ansattes opplevelser. Det er videre ønskelig å observere kulturen i kommentarfeltet fra utsiden for å få et inntrykk av hva hvordan brukerne opplever innholdet de interagerer med. Det er også ønskelig å sette tilbakemeldinger i sammenheng med hvordan de oppleves av mottager/den som vises i - eller har publisert innholdet.

Vi vurderer at behandlingen av alminnelige kategorier personopplysninger oppfylder vilkåret om vitenskapelig forskning, jf. personopplysningsloven § 8, og dermed utfører en oppgave i allmenhetens interesse, jf. artikkel 6 nr. 1, bokstav e). Vi vurderer personvernulempen for de registrerte som lav. Et stort flertall er kun representert ved brukernavn på TikTok. Da mange opererer med falske/anonymiserte profiler anses det også i stor grad som umulig å innhente deltageres faktiske identitet, men brukernavnene vil ytterligere også umiddelbart anonymiseres i forskningsmaterialet. Vi vurderer at samfunnets interesse av at behandlingen finner sted klart overstiger ulempen for den enkelte registrerte.

DE REGISTRERTES RETTIGHETER

<https://meldeskjema.sikt.no/031/5cd35-d41e-460c-94cb-cdd4619c5bc3/vurdering> 1/2

For utvalg 2 unntas det fra informasjonsplikt etter art. 14 nr. 5 b).

Det innhentes ikke opplysninger av privat karakter eller noen sensitive opplysninger. Vi vurderer at det vil kreve en uforholdsmessig stor innsats å gi informasjon til de registrerte sett opp mot nytten den enkelte har av å informeres.

Vi vurderer likevel at de øvrige rettighetene (rett til innsyn, jf. art 15, retting, jf. art. 16, sletting, jf. art 17, begrensning, jf. art 18, underretning, jf. art. 19 og protest, jf. art. 21) i utgangspunktet gjelder. Rettighetene gjelder så lenge sikker identifikasjon av den registrerte er mulig.

FØLG DIN INSTITUSJONS RETNINGSLINJER

Vi har vurdert at du har lovlig grunnlag til å behandle personopplysningene, men husk at det er institusjonen du er ansatt/student ved som avgjør hvilke databehandlere du kan bruke og hvordan du må lagre og sikre data i ditt prosjekt. Husk å bruke leverandører som din institusjon har avtale med (f.eks. ved skylagring, nettparreskjema, videosamtale e.l.

Personverntjenester legger til grunn at behandlingen oppfyller kravene i personvernforordningen om riktighet (art. 5.1 d), integritet og konfidensialitet (art. 5.1. f) og sikkerhet (art. 32).

MELD VESENTLIGE ENDRINGER

Dersom det skjer vesentlige endringer i behandlingen av personopplysninger, kan det være nødvendig å melde dette til oss ved å oppdatere meldeskjemaet. Se våre nettsider om hvilke endringer du må melde: <https://sikt.no/melde-endringer-i-meldeskjema>

OPPFØLGING AV PROSJEKTET

Vi vil følge opp ved planlagt avslutning for å avklare om behandlingen av personopplysningene er avsluttet.

Lykke til med prosjektet!

Vil du delta i forskningsprosjektet

”Value of views”?

Dette er et spørsmål til deg om å delta i et forskningsprosjekt hvor formålet er å belyse hvordan en bedrifts synlighet på sosiale medier kan påvirke arbeidstagere og arbeidsmiljø. I dette skrivet gir vi deg informasjon om målene for prosjektet og hva deltakelse vil innebære for deg.

Formål

Dette forskningsprosjektet er en del av en masteroppgave ved universitetet i Oslo. Forskningsprosjektet tar for seg kommersielt innhold i sosiale medier, hvor bedrifter engasjerer sine egne ansatte til å utforme og delta i innhold som i en eller annen form promoterer bedriften. Formålet med prosjektet er å:

- Undersøke hvordan de ansatte påvirkes av bedriftens synlighet på sosiale medier.
- Hvordan arbeidskulturen påvirkes av bedriftens engasjement i å publisere innhold på sosiale medier.

Hvem er ansvarlig for forskningsprosjektet?

Universitetet i Oslo er ansvarlig for prosjektet.

Hvorfor får du spørsmål om å delta?

Fordi XXX har et stort antall følgere, likes og visninger på TikTok ønsker jeg å snakke med ansatte hos dere som utgangspunkt for mitt forskningsprosjekt. Jeg er først og fremst interessert i å snakke med deg som ansatt fordi du har deltatt i innhold som er blitt publisert på TikTok. Det kan også hende du blir spurt selv om du ikke har deltatt i innholdet fordi jeg også ønsker informasjon om din generelle opplevelse av butikkens synlighet og eventuelt bakgrunnen for at du ikke selv har deltatt i utformingen av innhold.

Hva innebærer det for deg å delta?

Hvis du velger å delta i prosjekter innebærer det at jeg vil gjennomføre ett intervju med deg. Jeg tar lydopptak og notater under intervjuet. I intervjuet vil jeg stille spørsmål knyttet til synlighet på sosiale medier, blant annet om:

- Ditt eget bruk av og erfaring med sosiale medier generelt (for eksempel hvilke sosiale medier du bruker).
- Dine erfaringer med å delta i XXX sitt innhold (for eksempel hvem som spurte deg om å delta, om du selv var med på å utforme innhold, hvorfor du ønsker eller ikke ønsker å delta)
- Hvordan du opplever eventuelle tilbakemeldinger (for eksempel om dine venner, bekjente eller kunder har gitt deg tilbakemelding etter å ha sett innholdet)
- Hvordan dere snakker om innholdet internt på jobb (for eksempel om det er noe dere er enige om å ikke publisere)

Lengden på intervjuet vil ligge på ett sted mellom 30-45 minutter og svarene dine vil bli registrert av meg. Det vil samles inn personopplysninger om deg: din alder (men ikke fødselsdato), ditt navn (kun fornavn) og din kontaktinformasjon (e-postadresse).

Dersom du er under 18 år kan dine foreldre få se intervjuguiden på forhånd ved å kontakte meg.

Det er frivillig å delta

Det er frivillig å delta i prosjektet. Hvis du velger å delta, kan du når som helst trekke samtykket tilbake uten å oppgi noen grunn. Alle dine personopplysninger vil da bli slettet. Det vil ikke ha noen negative konsekvenser for deg hvis du ikke vil delta eller senere velger å trekke deg.

Ditt personvern – hvordan vi oppbevarer og bruker dine opplysninger

Vi vil bare bruke opplysningene om deg til formålene vi har fortalt om i dette skrevet. Vi behandler opplysningene konfidensielt og i samsvar med personvernregelverket:

- Det er kun jeg som student og min veileder som vil ha tilgang til de opplysningene som lagres i forbindelse med prosjektet.
- Opplysningene vil lagres på et eget lagringsområde tilhørende Universitetet i Oslo.
- Dine personopplysninger vil fortløpende anonymiseres ved at ditt navn og din kontakt informasjon blir erstattet med en kode som lagres på en egen liste, adskilt fra øvrige data.

Når oppgaven publiseres vil informasjon som kan gjenkjenne deg være anonymisert. Din kontaktinformasjon vil ikke vises i publikasjonene. Ditt navn vil anonymiseres og din alder vil bli oppgitt som en del av en aldersgruppe, feks. "Sigurd, i aldersgruppen 15-20 år". Dette blir hovedsaklig gjort for at du ikke skal kunne gjenkjennes av dine kolleger, men også av hensyn til at ingen andre skal gjenkjenne deg.

Hva skjer med personopplysningene dine når forskningsprosjektet avsluttes?

Prosjektet vil etter planen avsluttes omkring den 01. juni 2023. Etter prosjektslutt vil datamaterialet med dine personopplysninger anonymiseres. Lydopptakene vil bli slettet ved prosjektslutt, men det transkriberte intervjuet vil beholdes av dokumentasjonshensyn frem til endelig sensur av prosjektet foreligger (ca. 01. september 2022). I transkripsjonen er ditt navn anonymisert (ditt navn og din kontakt informasjon blir erstattet med en kode som lagres på en egen liste).

Hva gir oss rett til å behandle personopplysninger om deg?

Vi behandler opplysninger om deg basert på ditt samtykke. På oppdrag fra Universitetet i Oslo har Personverntjenester vurdert at behandlingen av personopplysninger i dette prosjektet er i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

Dine rettigheter

Så lenge du kan identifiseres i datamaterialet, har du rett til:

- innsyn i hvilke opplysninger vi behandler om deg, og å få utlevert en kopi av opplysningene
- å få rettet opplysninger om deg som er feil eller misvisende
- å få slettet personopplysninger om deg
- å sende klage til Datatilsynet om behandlingen av dine personopplysninger

Hvis du har spørsmål til studien, eller ønsker å vite mer om eller benytte deg av dine rettigheter, ta kontakt med:

- Julie Skrøder: julieskroder@icloud.com
- Jon Inge Faldalen: j.i.faldalen@media.uio.no
- Personvernombud ved Universitet i Oslo: personvernombud@uio.no

Hvis du har spørsmål knyttet til Personverntjenester sin vurdering av prosjektet, kan du ta kontakt med:

- Personverntjenester på epost (personverntjenester@sikt.no) eller på telefon: 53 21 15 00.

Samtykkeerklæring

Jeg har mottatt og forstått informasjon om prosjektet ”Value of views”, og har fått anledning til å stille spørsmål. Jeg samtykker til:

- å delta i intervju
- at mine personopplysninger lagres etter prosjektslutt (frem til 01. september 2023), av dokumentasjonshensyn.

Jeg samtykker til at mine opplysninger behandles frem til prosjektet er avsluttet

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(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)

Appendix 5 - a full list of the quotes and the contexts these were put in, here as provided to R01 before the submission of this thesis.

Her er alle stedene du blir sitert. Jeg har inkludert noe mer enn kun rene sitater, slik at du ser litt i hvilken kontekst sitatene står. Selve sitatene er markert med fet skrift. Jeg har markert med — for å illustrere at noe er hentet fra et nytt sted i teksten (altså at sammenhengen fra forrige avsnitt opphører). Det er som du ser oversatt til engelsk, da hele oppgaven er skrevet på engelsk. Dersom det er behov for det så kan jeg sende deg sitatene på norsk også, gi i så fall beskjed.

It does however underline an unorganised nature of the project and illuminate a lack of set guidelines and framework for the stores presence on TikTok. This impression is further amplified in R01 description of how the account was created

It was originally the previous store manager, who was interested in joining TikTok. And I had the app and I am often on there scrolling, and it is fun to make videos. So then we agreed that we should create a profile for [name of grocery store] to create videos and inspire others and stuff like that. And I have seen that a lot of other [name of grocery store chain] stores have started after us. (R01)

In a follow up question about the goal setting for the profil, whether he himself have a goal for it or if he discussed a goal setting with the former manager, the impression that the profile was created somewhat on impulse, initiated by a few employees, is reinforced.

It is to show people who we are. Maybe we will get more customers, show off offers for example. So it is a way to get people to understand who we are (R01).

He adds that the platform have become popular with a younger generation, insinuating that their presence on the platform could help reach a younger audience.

When R01 is asked if he has any ideas about why certain content has gained the visibility it has he further amplifies a lack of strategy for the platform:

No, I have no idea. It is something called “For You Page”, but not all videos gets hype. But I feel like the videos we have made have gotten a lot of views. So I do not know if it is luck or if it is about the content we are making. No idea. But there are some videos where we receive almost no views, and then others where we receive ten, twenty, thirty, forty thousand (R01).

(...) an opportunity for content to be created independent on R01s presence at work. This is also underlined by his own statements:

I am the only one with access to the user, but I consider getting a few more people to join, then they could make some content on their own, because now we have to use my phone to make videos (R01).

R01 express a belief that it has a positive influence on the work environment:

(...) it's a bit of fun with the informality of it, it is. It kind of makes you smile, when you can make a video like that and, it's fun afterwards too (R01).

When asked whether or not he would try to convince an employee to leave a video on the page if the video in question have received a lot of likes of views he phrase himself as follows:

Yes, I try to say “please, we have gotten a lot of views on it”. But it depends, if they say “no, delete it” then I will do so. We had one that went quite viral, that we deleted (R01).

In a reply to a question regarding whether or not he was ever asked to delete certain comments or to make it unavailable for users to leave comments the employee responsible for the profile replies that they have considered shutting off the possibility for users to leave comments:

We have considered it on a few occasions, because there are some mean comments, but we do not really care about it (R01).

In his description of the character of the comments he uses the word “negativity” and “disagreement”. On questions of what users expressed disagreement about in the comment section he explained:

(...)for example about the advertisement and that the prices are too high and that Kiwi [another grocery store] is cheaper. There is a lot of that (R01).
