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Minority Language Media and TikTok: Exploring Use by Broadcasters and News Outlets in Basque

Abstract

In the context of the rise of short-form audiovisual media content, this article examines how traditional legacy media outlets operating in a minority language are adapting to TikTok. While prior research has examined the use of Facebook and Twitter/X, the role of TikTok within minority language media ecosystems remains underexplored. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study examines 26 TikTok accounts belonging to television, radio, and newspaper outlets. The dataset, collected in 2025, combines quantitative engagement metrics with qualitative analysis of content purpose, format, language use, and interaction. The findings reveal uneven performance across outlet types: broadcaster sub-brands and entertainment-oriented accounts achieve higher engagement, while newspapers show more limited impact. Overall, performance is shaped by both platform adaptation strategies and structural constraints linked to outlet type and its position within the immediate media ecosystem.

Keywords

minority languages, Basque, minority language media, social media, TikTok, broadcasting

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1. Introduction

The challenges faced by traditional legacy media¹ in adapting to social media environments are ongoing, dynamic, and were notably accelerated by the global COVID-19 pandemic. While this affects all traditional legacy media, minority language contexts are particularly precarious, where failure to adapt can result in outlet loss and fractures in the “functional completeness” of a media sphere (Moring 2007). Minority language scholarship has therefore welcomed social media as creating new domains or opportunities, or “online breathing spaces”, for the use of minority languages (Belmar & Glass 2019).

Despite adaptation efforts to the different platforms – Facebook and Twitter/X (Costecalde 2019; Díaz-Campo & Fernández-Gómez 2020; Bober & Willis 2021) – the landscape of social media has significantly changed in recent years, both in terms of platforms used and content. Previous market leaders such as Facebook and Twitter/X have declined in relevance for younger demographics, while newer platforms such as Instagram and TikTok have grown, creating a strong generational divide (Ipsos European Public Affairs 2022). The popularity of TikTok confronts outlets with the need to create relevant content for younger audiences and avoid losing them to majority language media (Moring 2013; Jones et al. 2020). Recent research in the Basque Autonomous Community and Navarre, drawing on Ikusiker data, highlights both the growing dominance of TikTok among younger audiences and the limited presence of Basque on the platform (Goirizelaia et al. 2025; Ikusiker 2025). More specifically, survey data among university students ($n = 2,021$) in the Southern Basque Country indicate that 69.8% of respondents had a TikTok account, yet Basque accounted for just 0.4% of language use, compared to Spanish (72.4%) and English (19.9%) (Ikusiker 2025).

Regarding content, TikTok is increasingly used not only for entertainment but also for news consumption (Newman 2022), thus challenging outdated assumptions about the platform. This suggests that TikTok is a vital platform for media outlets, including those operating in minority languages, and therefore an important object of study.

Although academic research has begun to consider the importance of TikTok for traditional media (e.g., Vázquez-Herrero et al. 2021), its use within the minority language context remains largely unexplored. This article contributes to addressing this gap by analysing how Basque-language media outlets use TikTok, focusing on the Basque Autonomous Community as a well-established minority language media sphere. Thus, this research does not aim to capture the use of Basque on TikTok in its entirety; rather, it focuses specifically on traditional legacy media

accounts. It therefore excludes other actors on the platform – such as independent creators, influencers, online-native media, or third-sector initiatives – which may engage with the platform differently but fall outside the scope of this study. Likewise, the use of TikTok as a tool for learning Basque is not a focus here, even if this could be an element of some of the accounts.

Drawing on a mixed-methods approach, the study examines 26 TikTok accounts through quantitative engagement metrics and qualitative analysis of content, format, language, and interaction. The findings demonstrate how the uneven performance of Basque-language media on TikTok is shaped by platform-specific dynamics, outlet type, and the broader minority language context.

2. Literature Review on Minority Language Media

Research on minority language media (MLM) emerged primarily from sociolinguistics and the sociology of language rather than from media studies. Early scholarship was strongly influenced by Joshua Fishman's work on reversing language shift (Fishman 1991), with language revitalisation playing a central role in minority language media studies. Since the late 1980s, the subfield has expanded substantially, progressing to a second wave of literature with the emergence of social media in the mid-2000s and, more recently, stepping into a third wave of literature since the late 2010s (Willis 2024a).

2.1 The Emergence of MLM as a Subfield

Early work on minority language media focused on defining the purposes of the media and identifying the core challenges of the outlets (see Riggins 1992; Browne 1996; Cormack & Hourigan 2007). A significant contribution was Moring's (2007) application of the notion of functional and institutional completeness to the context of minority language media: a certain level of completeness needs to be available in the minority language to prevent minority language speakers from being lost to majority language media. This includes not only different institutions – television, radio, and newspapers – but also a variety of genres, from news to entertainment. Studies in the Basque context have also emphasised the importance of entertainment content when fulfilling the objectives of public media companies (see Azpeitia Iruretagoiena 2022).

Regarding challenges, the importance of funding from the relevant authorities was emphasised, as was the need for support from wider

society (Riggins 1992; Browne 1996). The ability to maintain this support was discussed in the context of perceived utility and whether public provision was delivering value for money to the taxpayer (Browne & Uribe-Jongbloed 2013). The difficulty of balancing delivering professional media production and maintaining language and culture was also discussed (Uribe-Jongbloed 2016). Basque language broadcasting is an illustrative example; both scholars and practitioners have argued that ETB1, the Basque-language channel, has not been as successful as similar channels in other minority languages because the broadcaster prioritises its Spanish-language channel, ETB2 (Amezaga et al. 2013; Urkizu 2024).

2.2 Minority Language Use on Social Media and New Threats to Traditional Media

The emergence of social media in minority languages in the mid-2000s also attracted the attention of scholars. This was initially approached as a separate phenomenon from traditional media, but it was afterwards discussed as a potential threat (e.g., Jones & Uribe-Jongbloed 2013). In the Basque context, several studies have addressed the broader question of the digital health of the Basque language (e.g., Fernandez Asotobiza & Zabaleta Urkiola 2017; Mimenza Castillo 2017; Waliño 2021), particularly focusing on the opportunities and challenges that the Internet presents (Amezaga 2014; Goñi 2019; Palacios Eiguren & Arakistain Aizpiri 2020).

Research during this period assessed the use of minority languages on Facebook and Twitter (e.g., Cunliffe et al. 2013; Zubiaga 2016; Nic Giolla Mhichíl et al. 2018; McMonagle et al. 2019; Belmar & Heyen 2021) and later expanded to include Instagram (e.g., Jongbloed-Faber 2021; Elordui & Aiestaran 2022; Ackermann-Boström & Glass 2024). Notably, this work also examined minority languages that had little to no traditional media outlets (see Dołowy-Rybińska 2014; Soria et al. 2018). Thus, much of this literature discussed the online arena as a new opportunity for using minority languages, leading scholars to conceptualise social media as “online breathing spaces” for minority language use in digital contexts (Belmar & Glass 2019; Cunliffe 2019).

Linking these developments to traditional legacy media, research argued that a growing digital market could negatively affect minority language media in the absence of targeted public support, impacting both online provision and traditional legacy media in minority languages (Moring 2013). Changing media consumption habits have also been

linked to further endangerment of traditional minority language outlets (Jones et al. 2020).

2.3 Minority Language Media Outlets' Use of Social Media

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As social media became an increasingly important part of the media landscape, the focus of scholarly attention shifted to the institutional use of platforms by minority language media outlets at the end of the 2010s. For example, Zabaleta et al. (2019) showed that 76.4% of the 123 Basque outlets analysed had at least one social media account – with 90.4% of these on Facebook, 86.2% on Twitter, and only 10% on Instagram – a pattern similar to that observed among Galician and Catalan media outlets. Research across different linguistic contexts suggests that media organisations have primarily used social media as promotional tools to attract viewers to their content rather than as interactive spaces for audience engagement (Costecalde 2019; Díaz-Campo & Fernández-Gómez 2020). Within the scope of minority language newspapers, Bober & Willis (2021) found evidence that these outlets engage with readers through Facebook and Twitter. The COVID-19 pandemic further reinforced such trends (Bober & Willis 2026).

However, presence on social media platforms and evidence of engagement with the audience do not necessarily imply a coherent strategic approach by traditional media outlets. Explicit analyses of strategic coherence in minority language media organisations' social media practices remain relatively scarce. In the Basque case, Mimenza Castillo (2019) found widespread presence of Basque language media outlets² both online and on social media, but only inconclusive evidence of clear or coordinated social media strategies. Similarly, analysis of the public broadcaster EITB indicates growing follower numbers across different social media platforms – the study covered accounts on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram, but not TikTok – but limited success in counteracting the long-term audience decline (Mendieta-Bartolomé 2024).

2.4 TikTok in Minority Language Media

The growth of TikTok accelerated during the pandemic, moving beyond its early stereotype of dance videos and pure entertainment. As a result, academic research on TikTok is slowly growing, including the broader field of journalism and media. Studies in the latter field acknowledge

that TikTok is a significant tool for (mis)information (Alonso-López et al. 2021), underlining the importance of the platform for the profession and the need to adapt research methods to the characteristics of the platform (Vázquez-Herrero et al. 2023). However, the focus on institutional use of TikTok remains limited, although some comparative studies found that most channels that had joined TikTok seemed to be exploring the format without a clear strategy (Vázquez-Herrero et al. 2021).

When considering the minority language element, existing studies in several minority languages have largely explored individual users and hashtag practices, focusing on the use of the minority language and thematic analysis of the content (e.g., Tudela-Isanta & Milá-García 2022; Urionaguena et al. 2023; Cunliffe 2025; Müller). Therefore, the field of minority language media research on TikTok is rather limited, particularly in the case of minority language media organisations. Preliminary quantitative work on the use of TikTok by outlets in Basque, Catalan and Galician (Willis 2024b) showed some well-performing accounts – such as DigochoEu in Galician (Willis 2023) – alongside other accounts with very low engagement.

Building on this literature, this article examines the use of TikTok by traditional Basque-language media outlets as part of their social media practices. It therefore aligns with one of the core elements of the suggested third wave of minority language media research (Willis 2024a); the use of social media by traditional outlets in direct competition with individual content creators.

3. Methodology

This study combines quantitative and qualitative approaches to analyse how Basque-language traditional legacy media use TikTok. The methodology is outlined below in terms of sampling, data collection, and analysis.

The sample is composed of traditional Basque-language media outlets operating in the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC), where Basque enjoys official status and thus has a comparatively higher degree of institutionalised traditional media provision in Basque. The following criteria guided the sample selection: (1) regional scope within the BAC, including regional, provincial, and local accounts; (2) Basque as the primary language of both the media outlet and its TikTok account; (3) traditional media status (as opposed to digital-native outlets);

(4) outlet type limited to television,³ radio, and newspaper. Accordingly, the sample of TikTok accounts totals 26, which belong to both Basque-language traditional media outlets and their subchannels. The sample was compiled through an exhaustive search on the platform, including direct searches and snowball sampling (i.e. accounts followed by those initially identified), and represents all identifiable accounts that met the selection criteria at the time of data collection in April 2025. Other Basque media outlets were considered but ultimately excluded because they did not have a TikTok account. These included the weekly magazine *Argia*, the local outlet *Tolosaldeko Ataria*, and the local newspaper *Irutxuloko Hitzza* – notably, the latter two joined TikTok after the data collection period concluded.

The quantitative data draws on publicly available data on TikTok: number of followers, total likes, date of first post, and total number of videos posted. This selection of data regarding user profiles and analytics allows the 26 selected accounts to be compared. The quantitative data were collected on 23 April 2025. Thus, a descriptive statistics approach is first applied, from the time the earliest accounts were created in 2020 until 2025 (see Table 1). For comparison, quantitative data are represented visually in Figures 1–3 and colour-coded by outlet type: Television (red), Radio (green), and Newspaper (white).

Additionally, a qualitative analysis examines how the selected outlets use TikTok, with particular attention to patterns and the extent to which these practices reflect coherent and consistent strategies. The analysis was conducted in two stages. First, an exploratory phase involved repeated viewing of the video content and note-taking, allowing dimensions relevant to the research objectives to emerge inductively from the data, which were then organised into categories of topic, purpose, format, language, and interaction. Second, these categories were aligned with existing methodological approaches to TikTok analysis, drawing on selected dimensions for sampling, user profiling, content, and analytics (see Vázquez-Herrero et al. 2023, 48–49), and adapted to the scope of this study. Moreover, given the centrality of language in minority language media, language is treated as a distinct analytical dimension rather than being treated indirectly. The resulting framework was applied systematically across all accounts to enable comparison. The qualitative analysis was conducted by a single researcher.

This study is based exclusively on the analysis of publicly available data on TikTok and did not involve direct interaction with individuals or the collection of sensitive personal data.

Table 1: Details of TikTok accounts assessed

Medium	Outlet	TikTok handle	Date of first post	# followers	# likes	# total videos
Television+Radio	EITB	@eitbeus	05.10.2021	5,522	217,900	722
Television	ETB	@euskaltelebista	24.08.2023	5,469	172,300	278
Television, sub-brand	Artefaktua	@artefaktua_eitb	28.10.2022	413	736	88
Television, sub-brand	Barre Librea	@barrelibrea	01.06.2020	3,656	47,300	45
Television, sub-brand	Golazen	@goazen_ofiziala	20.08.2021	14,500	335,200	285
Television, sub-brand	Hamaika Entzuteko	@11entzutekoetb	25.04.2024	1,005	19,900	485
Television, sub-brand	Herri Txiki	@herritxiki_etb	27.12.2022	12,000	441,300	592
Television, sub-brand	Lotsagabeak ETB	@lotsagabeaketb	13.07.2023	2,953	7,427	176
Television, sub-brand	Makusi	@makusi_eus	18.04.2024	1,069	23,100	331
Television, sub-brand	Mihiluze	@mihiluze_eitb	23.08.2023	1,591	51,000	235
Television, sub-brand	Primeran	@pr1meran	12.09.2023	2,513	34,214	422
Television, sub-brand	Sukaldarien Liga	@sukaldarienligaetb	18.12.2023	1,320	4,112	35
Television, sub-brand	Ztanda	@ztanda_etb	01.09.2023	2,524	82,900	480
Television	Hamaika Telebista	@hamaikatb	03.02.2023	2,432	73,250	790
Television, sub-brand	Kolpez Kolpe	@kolpezkolpe	01.09.2021	1,165	20,800	182
Radio	Bizkaia Irratia	@bizkaiairratia	31.10.2022	2,020	105,900	393
Radio	Euskadi Irratia	@euskadi_irratia	20.02.2023	6,275	329,000	1,382
Radio, sub-brand	Benetan Zabiz?	@benetanabiz	18.09.2022	8,325	225,500	260
Radio, sub-brand	Ez Hain Ondo	@ezhainondo	23.02.2024	1,024	3,966	39
Radio	Gaztea	@gaztea	23.01.2020	21,122	959,900	562
Radio, sub-brand	Zulora	@zulora_	16.09.2022	1,802	20,100	99
Newspaper	Aiaraldea	@aiaraldea	05.05.2023	1,107	17,500	301
Newspaper	Arabako ALEA	@arabako.alea	05.10.2022	825	17,800	91
Newspaper	Berria	@berriagunkaria	03.04.2023	1,507	19,800	483
Newspaper	Goiena	@goiena.eus	18.04.2023	2,070	76,400	343
Newspaper	Hiruka	@hiruka_eus	23.11.2023	345	4,010	31

Source: Authors’ own representation, data collected from the TikTok accounts of each outlet.

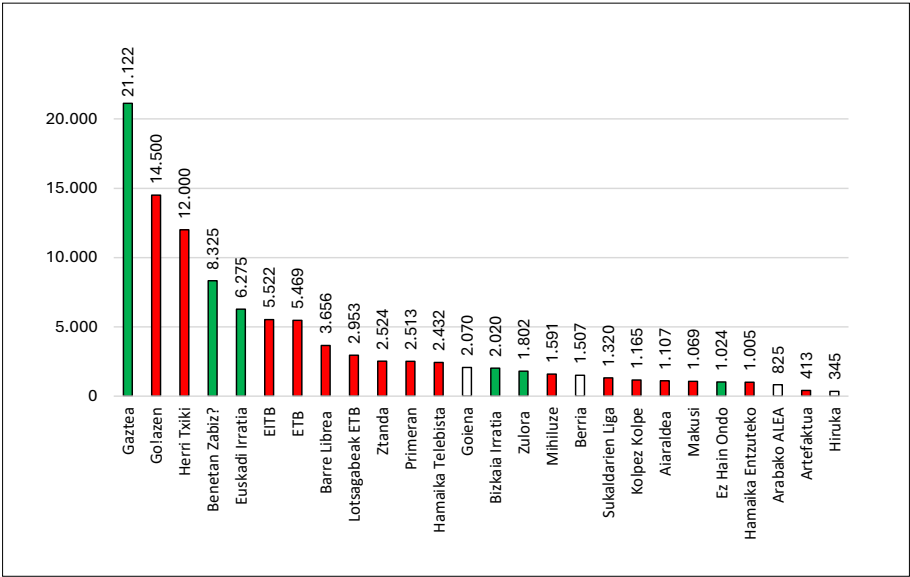
4. Results

4.1 Quantitative Data

The information on the date of first post (Table 1) shows that the adoption of TikTok by Basque-language traditional media occurred largely after the COVID-19 pandemic. @Gaztea is the only account that pre-dates this trend, which aligns with its youth-oriented profile.⁴ Indeed, out of the selected 26 accounts, 21 first posted in 2022 or later. Early adopters were predominantly television or radio sub-brands; parent organisations created TikTok accounts later, and the last ones joining the platform were newspapers – not surprising given their traditionally written form and generally older readership.

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Figure 1: Number of account followers

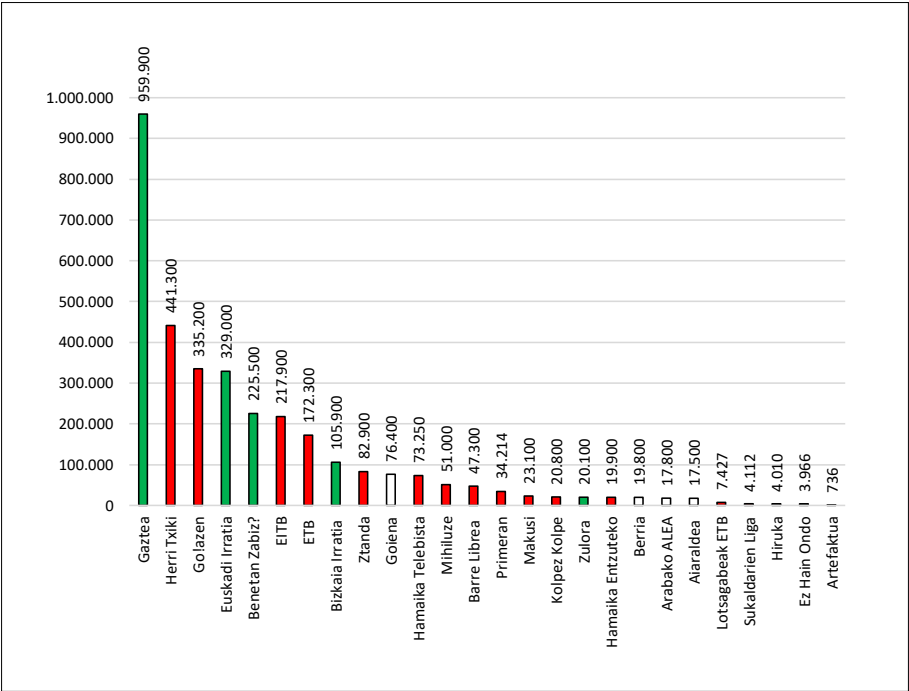


Source: Authors’ representation, using data from Table 1. Y axis shows the number of followers, whilst the X axis lists the TikTok accounts.

Figures 1 and 2 show the number of followers and likes across accounts, with @Gaztea topping both. Overall, radio and television accounts perform much better than newspapers, although performance varies considerably within these categories. Notably, parent brand accounts – such as @eitbeus, @euskaltelebista and @euskadi_irratia – have significantly fewer followers and likes than many of their sub-brands, including @gaztea, @goazen_ofiziala, and @herritxiki_etb. Both figures show quite

a similar pattern, with no major differences in account performance in terms of followers and likes – albeit the number of likes is consistently much higher than the number of followers. This pattern suggests that, on TikTok, audience reach is more closely tied to the appeal and positioning of specific sub-brands than to institutional prominence.

Figure 2: Number of account likes

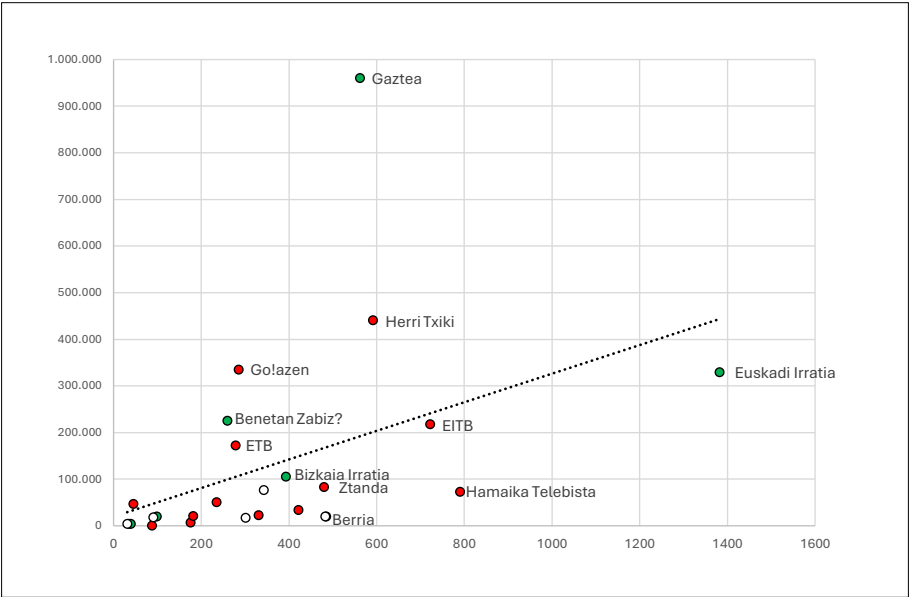


Source: Authors’ representation, using data from Table 1. Y axis shows the number of likes, whilst the X axis lists the TikTok accounts.

Figure 3 presents the number of posts against the number of likes to ascertain whether there is a linear relationship between output volume and engagement. There is a weak positive correlation, with considerable outliers on both sides of the trend line. One of these is @Gaztea with around 900,000 likes from just over 500 posts, while other accounts have posted close to 800 times but accumulated fewer than 100,000 likes. Most of the newspapers are much lower in performance, generally falling under the trendline and thus attracting fewer likes than would be expected based on posting frequency alone. For example, @berriaegunkaria has posted almost 500 times while receiving fewer than 20,000 likes. Taken together, these results indicate that posting frequency alone is insufficient to explain engagement outcomes, point-

ing instead to the importance of content-related factors and other elements such as audience type and language use, which are explored below.

Figure 3: Relationship between likes and number of posts



Source: Authors’ own representation, using data from Table 1. Y axis shows the number of likes, whilst the X axis is the number of posts an account has made.

4.2 Qualitative Data

The results are presented below by analytical dimension, focusing in turn on topic, purpose, format, language and user interaction.

4.2.1 Topic and Purpose

The topic varied according to the type of media and the scope of each account. Both television and radio accounts followed a similar pattern, which was grouped into two categories. First, the general or overarching accounts lack a specific thematic focus as they include a wide range of content from different shows. In this case, videos with decontextualised funny or catchy moments were prominent among the clips, that is, content that works independently. Secondly, sub-brands or programme-based accounts are dedicated to a specific programme, which allows a clear thematic focus in line with the topic of the show in question.

For example, @goazen_ofiziala – the official account of *Go!azen*, a long-running Basque-language musical television series aimed at young audiences – focuses on content related to the show in a balanced way, combining clips of episodes, musical clips, behind-the-scenes, and promotional content. In the case of newspapers, they have a clear news-oriented focus, but they also have promotional clips to attract subscribers to the newspaper. In this case, a distinction needs to be made between @berriaegunkaria, which has a Basque Country-wide approach including all seven provinces, while the rest of the accounts have a regional or local news scope.

The purpose of the content – i.e. information, promotion, humour, or participation in trends – was closely linked to outlet type and often combined more than one dimension. Television accounts, particularly programme-based sub-brands, centred their content on humour and entertainment (e.g., @makusi, @mihiluze_eitb), occasionally incorporating platform trends (e.g., @goazen_ofiziala). Radio accounts frequently repurposed interview segments into short, self-contained videos, combining informational content with elements of humour and, in some cases, trends. The balance varied according to audience orientation: @euskadi_irratia leaned more towards information, whereas @gaztea prioritised humour and trends. Newspapers relied primarily on information-oriented videos. Finally, promotional content appeared across most outlet types but rarely constituted the dominant purpose of an account.

4.2.2 Format: Caption, Branding, and Content Adaptation

This first aspect examines the format of TikTok use, focusing on the caption, branding, and content adaptation. First, regarding captions, the majority of accounts used them to frame the video content through brief introductions or summaries, adopting tones ranging from descriptive and catchy to humorous or more informative. While caption tone often aligns with the type of content and outlet – for example, @berriaegunkaria typically employs headline-like formulations as it is a news-oriented account – most accounts combine descriptive, attention-grabbing, humorous, and informative tones (e.g., @euskaltelebista, @bizkaiairratia), suggesting a flexible approach to captioning.

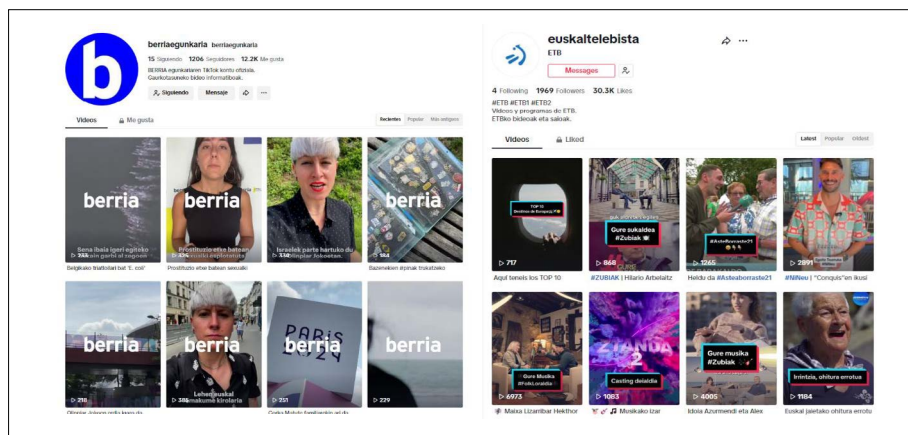
Hashtags were used extensively in captions. Most accounts use hashtags with their media outlet name (e.g., #eitbeus) or the name of their show (e.g., #herritxikietb, #goazen, #11entzutekoETB, #EzHainOndo or #KolpeZKolpe), thus maintaining consistency and enabling searches.

Moreover, several accounts use changing thematic or location-based hashtags; for instance, @benetanzabiz uses thematic hashtags depending on the guest and topics discussed, i.e. #psikologia with a post interviewing a psychologist. Interestingly, hashtags referring to the use of Basque on TikTok stood out as a prominent thematic pattern, demonstrating coherence with their overall media output (e.g., #euskaldunaktiktoken or #tiktokeuskaraz by @eitbeus, @euskaltelebista, @benetanzabiz and @EzHainOndo).

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Second, the branding of a TikTok account is often immediately apparent when viewing individual videos or the profile and varies clearly across accounts. A substantial group – 12 of the 26 – adopts a personalised and consistent visual style through the systematic use of corporate brand elements at the beginning of the video, while others display limited stylistic uniformity. Branding practices include the use of watermarks or brief title captions at the beginning of videos, applied in a consistent visual format to reinforce brand identity. Figure 4 illustrates these approaches: @berriaegunkaria inserts a title only at the start of each video, whereas @euskaltelebista employs a recurring title design following a uniform visual style.

Figure 4: Screenshots of TikTok accounts



Source: @berriaegunkaria and @euskaltelebista.

Finally, with content adaptation, we refer to the source of audiovisual material and the extent to which content is repurposed or created specifically for the platform. The strategies vary depending on the media type. Television outlets tend to repurpose existing material, clipping segments from previously broadcast content without necessarily creating original videos for TikTok (e.g., @euskaltelebista, @11entzutekoet,

@eitbeus, @ztanda). This allows for a more passive approach to content creation, relying on available video archives. However, some TV sub-brand accounts (e.g., @goazen_ofiziala, @kolpezkolzpetb) adopt a mixed strategy, combining repurposed footage with original content tailored for social media – a more curated, TikTok-first approach.

Radio outlets, despite their traditional audio-only nature, now often video-record their shows for video podcasts, enabling TikTok content based on these visuals. Some accounts rely solely on these clips (e.g., @ezhainondo, @benetanzabiz), while others incorporate purpose-made social media content (e.g., @euskadi_irratia, @gaztea). Newspapers, lacking a pre-existing audiovisual repository, are essentially required to create videos for social media – as they post the same video on different platforms (i.e. Instagram and TikTok) – as seen with @berriaegunkaria.

4.2.3 Language

Basque was the main language of most accounts selected for this research.⁵ We divided the use of the language, namely Basque, into two dimensions: subtitling and audio. Subtitling was widespread and served for both transcription and translation. Among accounts using subtitles for transcription, many used subtitles for all their content (@sukaldarienligaetb, @herritxiki_etb, @hamaikatb, @euskadi_irratia, @gaztea, @benetanzabiz, @ezhainondo). Fewer accounts applied subtitles selectively for certain types of content, for example, @goazen_ofiziala subtitled song lyrics but not all spoken content, while @arabako.alea used subtitles primarily for video podcasts.

Translation was closely linked to transcription, but the two did not always overlap. Accounts that regularly included content in languages other than Basque tended to use subtitles to translate non-Basque speech into Basque rather than transcribe to the original language, for instance, @gaztea. In a few instances, such as @kolpezkolzpetb, subtitles were used exclusively to translate non-Basque audio into Basque, with no transcription provided for Basque-language speech.

Regarding the linguistic component of the subtitles, the text was always written in standard Basque (*Euskara Batua*). This means that any dialectal variations were rendered in standard, grammatical mistakes made by speakers were corrected, and words or expressions in languages other than Basque – typically Spanish – were replaced with a Basque translation. This was more noticeable in accounts featuring unscripted interviews, such as @euskadi_irratia, @gaztea, @herritxiki_etb or @benetanzabiz.

In spoken language, we focused on the variety of language used in the videos, i.e. standard or dialect varieties of Basque, as this is a specific issue in minority language research (Elordui 2018). A key factor in this case was whether speech was scripted or improvised. First, scripted content – such as promotional material, fictional clips and TikTok-first videos – was predominantly delivered in standard Basque, which added a degree of formality and correctness. This is evident in television-derived content (e.g., @goazen_ofiziala, @makusi_eus and @pr1meran), as well as in journalist-led videos produced for TikTok (e.g., @euskadi_irratia, @berriaegunkaria, and @goiena.eus).

In contrast, unscripted content displayed a greater linguistic diversity. Here, the role of the speaker was crucial. Hosts and internal speakers generally used standard Basque, while guests and external participants displayed a wider range of varieties, from regional varieties to the incorporation of Spanish elements. This was particularly evident in interview-based accounts such as @euskaltelebista, @11entzutekoetb, @herritxiki_etb, @euskadi_irratia, @goiena.eus and @hiruka.eus.

4.2.4 Interaction: Comments

Finally, we turn to interactions, focusing on the comment section. This section draws on illustrative observations rather than a systematic analysis of comments. Overall, user interaction through comments is relatively limited across the accounts analysed. While some accounts accumulate a considerable number of likes (see Table 1), this does not translate into active participation in the comments section. In general, most posts contain zero or just a handful of comments, and some particular posts gather most comments. The most commented posts tend to be cases where content elicits stronger emotional responses or invites opinion, such as controversial topics, highly positive or negative events, or the presence of well-known figures. In these instances, commenting increases, suggesting that interaction is more closely tied to the affective or participatory potential of individual posts than to the overall strategy of the accounts.

However, there were two main exceptions with higher numbers of comments. First, @goazen_ofiziala showed the highest levels of engagement in our sample as each post had dozens of comments by seemingly younger followers – evident from usernames and comment styles, such as “kaixo”, “ze polita”, “abesti onena!”, or “maite zaituztet”,⁶ often accompanied by emojis. *Go!azen* is a show aimed at young audiences, and its TikTok appears to reach a similar demographic.

Secondly, @herritxiki_etb exhibited a unique pattern: most of their comments were written in Spanish despite both the TV show and the TikTok account being entirely in Basque. The comments – often in Spanish – predominantly addressed the language itself, making different types of remarks from “qué idioma más bonito” to “por favor, subtítulos en español, no me entero”,⁷ suggesting the broad reach of this account.

5. Analysis

Based on the quantitative and qualitative results, several patterns and differences in the use of TikTok emerge, but following the aims of this study, this section will focus on discussing the use of TikTok by Basque media outlets and how this might impact their performance on this platform.

Examining the engagement metrics (i.e. followers and likes), radio and television achieve better results than newspapers. This is not particularly surprising, given that TikTok is primarily an audiovisual format and thus naturally a fit for television and more approachable for radios, as they often film content nowadays. Newspapers, however, face the challenge of having to create original content, as they cannot repurpose existing content as a source, which is more evident on TikTok than on other social media platforms.

Despite initial structural differences, engagement metrics are not explained solely by the type of outlet, so differences must also relate to other factors, and this is where the qualitative assessment provides more insights. It can be observed that the most successful accounts from the sample are sub-brands of broadcasters – both television and radio. For example, accounts like @goazen_ofiziala or @herritxiki_etb both have far greater reach than ETB’s main accounts. Connecting this with the first point of the qualitative assessment criteria, the accounts with specific topics, those earlier labelled as sub-brands or programme-based accounts, have more traction and, therefore, perform better than the general or overarching accounts, which might have more arbitrary content. Looking at the purpose of the videos, accounts focusing on humour-related content perform best, while information-oriented channels fall behind.

This pattern is also reflected in the timing of platform adoption: youth-oriented sub-brands were typically early adopters of TikTok, while parent brands and newspapers joined later, often with weaker performance, suggesting a more reactive or obligatory adoption of the platform rather than a strategically motivated one.

Moving on to the aspect regarding format, qualitative results show that most accounts try to have a coherent format and a recognisable branding through available elements (e.g., captions, watermarks). Although certain strategies in terms of branding can be observed, this alone does not lead to success. Indeed, it might be the weakest of the analysed elements, as there are accounts with clear and consistent branding (e.g., @berriaegunkaria in Figure 4) that show low performance on TikTok. Furthermore, the branding might be more visible when looking at the account, which is how the material was analysed for this study, but we are aware that most users consume TikTok by scrolling, in which case these stylistic elements might be diluted in the algorithm. However, editing and content adaptation have a clearer impact; in fact, @gaztea is the most successful account and is also the one most closely following the TikTok-style edits and generating content for the platform. Although repurposing content on TikTok can, to an extent, work for accounts that have certain traction through their seniority (e.g., @eitbeus, @euskaltelebista), creating content tailored for TikTok, or playing by the rules of TikTok when repurposing the content, has a positive impact on the performance of the account, as some prominent examples show – see @goazen_ofiziala, @herritxiki_etb, and @euskadi_irratia.

The use of hashtags is particularly relevant in this context, as tagging practices in minority languages have been widely observed across platforms and linguistic communities, including Welsh, Irish and Frisian (McMonagle et al. 2019), and Catalan (Belmar 2020; Tudela-Isanta & Milà-Garcia 2022). Previous research shows that such hashtags can serve a dual function: identifying content written in the minority language and marking content about the language itself. In the present case, media outlets predominantly use hashtags referring to Basque to signal that the content is in Basque rather than about Basque. In doing so, they connect dispersed pieces of Basque-language content across the platform and contribute to the formation of a virtual community of users engaging with the language. In line with Belmar (2020), these hashtags can therefore be understood as a form of audience selection, signalling both the linguistic context of the content and its intended audience. Analysing language as a separate category was key to identifying patterns specific to the minority language context that would not emerge through other analytical dimensions. Social media videos are known to also be consumed without sound (Greenberg 2021), so most Basque media outlets are also employing subtitling in their TikTok videos. As subtitles are in standard Basque, often translating

non-Basque words, phrases, and speakers into Basque, they foreground the standard variety, while reducing the visibility of linguistic variation and multilingual repertoires. Additionally, decisions around whether and how subtitles are used point to underlying language ideologies and institutional language policies. While a full examination of these decision-making processes lies beyond the scope of this study, the findings suggest the need for further research using complementary methods, such as interviews with social media managers. As the sample included two bilingual accounts – @eitbeus and @euskaltelebista – the use of Spanish in the accounts is a reminder that the broadcaster needs to consider its non-speakers (ETB2 audience) and possibly hinders the exposure and normalisation effect of the Basque language amongst the broader Basque society (Amezaga et al. 2013).

On interaction, the comment section showed that the engagement of the audience is rather small. This pattern appears consistent with the institutional nature of the accounts, as traditional media content tends to generate more passive forms of engagement. Previous research has shown that news publishers and similar actors typically receive lower levels of interaction on TikTok compared to other content creators, partly due to the use of repurposed material and a weaker alignment with the platform's entertainment-driven logic (Cheng & Li 2024). At the same time, lower levels of explicit engagement have been observed in other minority language contexts, with this being interpreted as a form of so called inactive or hidden participation, where users view or read the content without actively reacting (Belmar 2020, 122). Taken together, these findings suggest that limited commenting reflects a combination of the nature of institutional media accounts and platform dynamics, rather than being specific to Basque as a language, to TikTok as a platform, or to Basque TikTok in particular.

Although this pattern is consistent across most accounts, some exceptions point to the conditions under which more active engagement emerges. Higher levels of commenting also occur when content either reaches beyond its expected linguistic audience or aligns closely with specific demographic groups. For instance, the presence of Spanish-language comments in @herritxiki_etb suggests a reach beyond Basque-speaking audiences – not common for media fully in Basque. The account, therefore, is exposing non-speakers to the language, similar to the case of DigochoEu in Galician (Willis 2023). Second, @goazen_ofizi-ala, a musical show for children and teenagers, received many comments from young TikTok users, suggesting that demographic targeting – particularly towards younger audiences – also emerges as a key

explanatory factor of positive engagement metrics. Nevertheless, in general, there was no evidence to indicate that broadcasters are managing to engage closely with their audience as Díaz-Campo and Fernández-Gómez (2020) had previously critiqued. Finally, the limited impact cannot be explained solely by a lack of stylistic adaptation to TikTok, as some newspaper accounts do employ video-first and platform-aware formats, but rather reflects their structurally weaker position within both the platform ecology and the broader Basque media landscape.

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6. Conclusions

This article examined how traditional Basque-language media outlets are using TikTok, combining both quantitative performance metrics and qualitative analysis. Although there are great contrasts in approach and performance, this study showed that most media outlets operating at the BAC regional level have engaged with TikTok as a platform, which supports arguments that minority language media outlets need to adapt to new trends. However, presence on TikTok alone is not sufficient to attract an engaging audience, and our analysis suggests that content topic, channel purpose, content creation/editing for TikTok, and audience targeting are key factors. Of course, this study has only focused on TikTok accounts of media outlets themselves and it is possible that individual content creators fill this gap. However, this was not the main aim of this article; rather, it sought to address the extent to which traditional legacy media engage with one of the newest social media platforms.

Overall, the uneven performance of Basque-language media outlets on TikTok appears to be shaped less by individual platform strategies than by broader structural constraints. While some newspaper accounts adopt video-first and platform-aware formats, their limited impact cannot be explained solely by difficulties adapting to TikTok but rather reflects their comparatively weaker position within both the platform environment and the Basque media system. By contrast, broadcaster sub-brands benefit from established audiovisual identities, entertainment-oriented genres, and programme-based audience communities. Therefore, TikTok use by Basque-language newspapers should not be interpreted simply through engagement metrics, but as part of a broader effort to maintain visibility, relevance, and linguistic presence within a rapidly changing digital media environment.

Within the context of minority language media studies, the use of TikTok by traditional legacy media certainly falls into the topics of the

suggested third wave of literature (Willis 2024a) and the findings of this article provide one of the most substantial empirical contributions to date on this novel topic. However, it also provides a contemporary assessment of the functional completeness (Moring 2007) of the Basque language media sphere – both in institutional and genre terms. It is also consistent with the points made in the Council of Europe new media report (Jones et al. 2020) and the most recent comments in the study on good practices for the Steering Committee on Anti-discrimination, Diversity and Inclusion (CDADI) which explicitly mentions TikTok as an important platform for reaching younger audiences of minority language media (Steering Committee on Anti-discrimination, Diversity and Inclusion 2026). Another thing the CDADI report highlights is the issue of discoverability of content and the role of social media algorithms, which is something this article could not ascertain (from a technical perspective) but could be a factor in explaining some of the poor performing accounts. Future research could utilise the new powers under the EU’s Digital Services Act and the European Centre for Algorithmic Transparency to investigate this issue further.⁸

It remains unclear whether TikTok as a platform will be a market leader, although the short-form audiovisual style appears to be growing in popularity. Thus, adapting to this format should be a priority for minority media outlets; however, despite considerable efforts, the outcome might remain limited. Further efforts should seek to identify and track the use of TikTok (and other social media platforms) in minority language – a positive example is the La Llista platform in Catalan, which focuses on content creators (non-institutional) and has become a salient platform in its own right (Crusafon Baqués 2026) – similar research on Basque language content could aid in ascertaining the balance of institutional and non-institutional actors. To this end, TikTok ought to be seen as a marketplace for consumers’ time or attention, much like the broadcasting spectrum or the newspaper stand, or perhaps now also streaming platforms. As such, minority language media outlets – in this case, in the Basque language – will face competition from majority languages and the global growth of English content, making it challenging to reach consumers. It is important for academic research to expand its focus to newer platforms such as TikTok, not only in Basque but also across other minority languages, to understand and scrutinise contemporary trends and actors, and thus help overcome the challenges these platforms pose to traditional legacy media while also identifying the opportunities they may provide.

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Notes

- ¹ Typically refers to traditional, non-interactive media forms: television, radio, and print (Jones et al. 2020).

- ² The sample of this research is limited to the 48 media that are part of the Basque Media Association Hekimen, which, as of the publication of the mentioned article in 2019, included two-thirds of the media outlets in Basque (Mimenza Castillo 2019, 56).
- ³ This includes the online streaming services of ETB: Primeran and Makusi.
- ⁴ Gaztea literally means “young” in Basque. It is a radio channel aimed at younger audiences compared to @euskadi_irratia.
- ⁵ The exceptions are @eitbeus and @euskaltelebista, which are bilingual channels in Basque and Spanish as they cover both ETB1 and ETB2.
- ⁶ Translation: “hi”, “so pretty”, “best song!”, “I love you”.
- ⁷ Translation: “what a beautiful language”, or “please, Spanish subtitles, I don’t understand”.
- ⁸ See further, Willis (2025).

Mediji v manjšinskih jezikih in TikTok: raziskovanje njegove uporabe med televizijskimi, radijskimi in časopisnimi mediji v baskovščini

Izvleček

Glede na porast avdiovizualnih medijskih vsebin kratkega formata članek proučuje, kako se tradicionalni mediji, ki delujejo v manjšinskih jezikih, prilagajajo platformi TikTok. Medtem ko so predhodne raziskave obravnavale uporabo platform Facebook in Twitter/X, ostaja vloga TikToka znotraj ekosistemov manjšinskih jezikovnih medijev še vedno premalo raziskana. Na podlagi podatkov, zbranih leta 2025, raziskava z uporabo mešanega metodološkega pristopa analizira 26 TikTok računov televizijskih, radijskih in časopisnih medijev ter združuje kvantitativne kazalnike angažiranosti s kvalitativno analizo namena vsebin, njihovega formata, rabe jezika in interakcije. Ugotovitve kažejo na neenakomerno uspešnost med posameznimi vrstami medijev: računi posameznih oddaj in računi, usmerjeni v zabavne vsebine, dosegajo večjo angažiranost, medtem ko je učinek pri časopisih bolj omejen. Na uspešnost na splošno vplivajo tako strategije prilagajanja platformi kot tudi strukturne omejitve, povezane z vrsto medija in njegovim položajem v neposrednem medijskem ekosistemu.

Ključne besede

manjšinski jeziki, baskovščina, mediji v manjšinskih jezikih, družbeni mediji, TikTok, radio in televizija