

SCROLLING TELEVISION

VIDEO-SHARING PRACTICES OF TELEVISION TEXTS ON TIKTOK

Ellenrose Firth 

Sapienza Università di Roma
ellenrose.firth@uniroma1.it

Alberto Marinelli 

Sapienza Università di Roma
alberto.marinelli@uniroma1.it

Abstract: This article introduces the concept of scrolling television to describe TikTok-based viewing practices where television content is experienced through continuous, personalised scrolling. Drawing on an empirical study of TV-related videos on TikTok and a case study of Netflix Italia's editorial strategies, the research examines how platform affordances, algorithms, and user practices co-construct a televisual flow. The findings show that scrolling functions not as passive distraction but as an active mode of televisual engagement, in which user-generated clips, edits, and remixes coexist with professional content, reshaping television consumption and fandom practices within algorithmically curated environments.

Keywords: algorithmic flow, Netflix, scrolling, Tiktok, TV video, viewing experience

1 Why Scrolling, Why Television

Scrolling on TikTok can be interpreted as a cognitive attitude that finds expression in a behavioural practice structured by platform affordances.

Although it can be considered a mere mechanism that entraps users in an infinite sequence of content, which provides mere distractions and instant gratification through its repetition, scrolling appears to be a fully functional habit that contributes to build viewing experiences on TikTok. Moreover, it contributes to the co-construction of a continuous flow of images, sounds, audiovisual content that reflects users' interests and allows them to constantly redefine their projected identities.^{1 2} Platform algorithms, particularly those working within the For You page, work to organise its flow, assigning different relevance criteria to the content that is uploaded. Users tend to be aware of the

personalisation algorithms at play, and of TikTok's surveillance practices,³ and develop situated trust in their agency and ability to direct ongoing datafication processes.

Through physical interactions with the screen, and through the control that they exercise through their gaze and viewing habits, users are contributing to the development of new co-shaping practices when it comes to content flow, which can be placed at the intersection between

- the push of profiling mechanisms aimed at building and exploiting filter bubbles,⁴ and
- an intentionality, seldom unnoticed, towards making oneself available to experience new content, or fleeting suggestions that can capture one's attention.

What can be seen as an escape from one's 'bubble' into a new realm of content is, in truth, part of what the platform aims to do, leading users into new 'bubbles' of content. The extreme diversification, the surprising redundancy and the hybridisation between editorial and user generated content, produce a compromise that users have thus far considered acceptable, thereby determining the platform's success both commercially and in terms of its cultural and social practices.

The expression **scrolling television** holds a double meaning. The first is encompassed in the evolutionary process of the medium, which we can still largely continue to call television, in terms of the adaptation of the viewing experience. The second meaning refers to the style of content that is being shared on platforms such as TikTok. For the purposes of this analysis, we are distinguishing the experience of producing flow through scrolling on TikTok from other forms of social television or second screening practices,⁵ arguing that viewing practices on media-sharing platforms have become forms of innovative viewing, that often prescind from editorial television programming.

Throughout the last two decades, waves of digital transformation have driven the convergence of television with IP-based audiovisual flow distribution and with devices such as PCs, tablets, and smartphones, now fully integrated into the technological ecosystem and cultural practices.⁶ More recently, this process has involved an increasingly intense hybridisation with on-demand audiovisual media services⁷ originating on the web and social media platforms, particularly user-generated content and its specific formats. When looking at the medium's structure, the process has progressively placed user generated flow alongside linear systems, which were originally confined to broadcasting and its specific production and distribution channels (traditional television or 'producer-generated flow').⁸ While on larger screens designed for long form videos, when focusing on viewing experiences, this transformation coincided with access to on demand catalogues (as in the case of SVOD services), on smaller screens, with short form (vertical) videos, it found its footing in the scrolling experience.

Lotz and Lunardi provide the essential framework which allows us to place hosted video⁹ within the more complex audiovisual ecosystem: as it becomes increasingly complicated to provide clear-cut definitions of different types of audiovisual material present on platforms such as TikTok, the focus must shift towards viewing processes.¹⁰ Amateur and professional content converge with editorial products, and distribution processes are progressively more aligned, providing users with an algorithmic flow of audiovisual material that seamlessly blends content with varying origins into a single viewing experience.

The television framework, historically interlinked to experiencing a **flow** of content, finds in scrolling a fundamental evolutionary step: physically interacting with the device's surface personalises the video sequence, by comparing each video to the content used for algorithmic profiling. Speed, mutability, and exploratory nature shape user experiences in which the empowerment of the viewer/user is fully achieved: in a short period of time **scrolling television**, television that is generated through scrolling, has acquired a dominant position in users daily video consumption. For this reason, we believe that for many users watching TikTok is an authentic and rewarding televisual experience.^{11 12}

The second meaning of the expression scrolling television is tied to the vast diffusion of TV content on TikTok, produced professionally or by amateurs (or a mix of the two) which generates high levels of audience engagement. The elements that contribute to the development of this phenomenon are:

- on the editorial side, the availability of a platform undergoing rapid growth, in which user experience is centred around watching different video formats. Its innate attunement to television formats is heightened by platform affordances that enable effective marketing-oriented profiling, both for promotion and for the long-term management of communities of enthusiasts;
- on the audience side, focusing on video-sharing practices, the platform's ability to host and refine the migration of Generation Z fandoms from text-based platforms to predominantly audiovisual environments.

We are facing the potential emergence of a new form of content, as well as personal(ised) interaction with this content, which is situated at the intersection between grassroots practices and editorial material. Through the affirmation of viewing experiences centred around scrolling and deeply personalised flows of content, videos that were once interpreted as orienting paratexts,¹³ aimed at expanding television texts,¹⁴ can now be understood as self-sufficient units of viewing.

On the audience side, we noted that an increasing quantity of TV content, defined as any video which includes content from TV shows, films, actors from TV shows or films, references to TV shows or films and characters from TV shows and films, on TikTok comes from bottom-up productions, once again confirming that spectators become part of the viewing process through sharing, commenting, and publishing videos of ever-increasing quality created using in-app affordances. Our observation focuses on identifying content fruition models for several highly successful serial products with a long-standing presence, with the aim to understand whether certain creative practices tend to converge regardless of the content being watched.

On the editorial front we have chosen to look at one of the biggest players in the SVOD markets, Netflix, because due to the particular configuration of its production and distribution mission in the global market, it must structure editorial plans and promotional campaigns aimed at entering bubbles, with a highly differentiated management of content and formats for each individual product on TikTok. In managing the release schedule of the editorial plan, it must also account for the autonomous activation of content creators and handle the capacity for interaction and dialogue with grassroots creative initiatives.

2 TV Content on TikTok

This research was conducted in two distinct phases: the first had the aim to understand what kind of televisual content was being uploaded to TikTok, the second shifted the focus to editorial responses to grassroots practices, taking the Netflix Italia TikTok account as a case study.

The first phase was conducted between the 2nd and the 8th of August 2025; using the existing profile of one of the researchers we impacted the platform algorithm by searching for keywords: *New Girl*, *Friends*, and *House M.D.*. The shows that were selected for this first stage of research were amongst the most popular in discourse surrounding this viewing practice on TikTok, as well as being shows that are both shared via grassroots accounts and official editorial accounts.

Existing research¹⁵ used a similar approach to conduct research on the platform, while preferring to create a brand-new account to avoid algorithmic bias. Our choice of using an existing account was based on the ambition to understand how impacting our actions can be on an already established algorithm, aware that this would lead to potential biases within our results. For every show that was searched for we scrolled through the results page,

interacting with the videos that were suggested by watching them fully; once the algorithm had been impacted, for the data-collection week the rule would be to only use the app for data collection purposes, and only engage with TV content. Searching for serial dramas surely limited the type of TV content that was suggested throughout the week, however for the main purpose of this research we were interested in the distribution of a type of content after impacting an existing algorithm, as well as understanding user practices within a given field. The research design could be replicated with other known genres of editorial material.

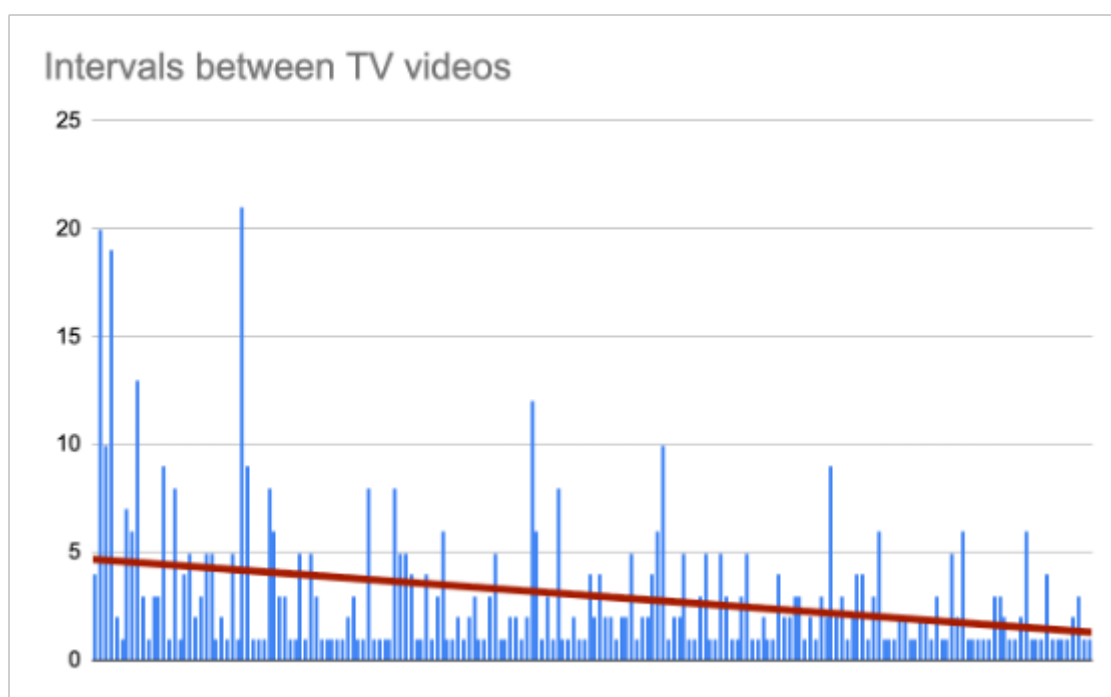


Figure 1. Number of non-TV videos between every TV video. Source: Primary data collected by the authors.

To collect data we screen recorded 30 minutes of TikTok every day for a week, noting profile names, film/show titles, likes, comments, sounds used, types of videos. The For You page was very responsive to the initial search and to the chosen engagement strategy with televisual content, so much so that, while on the first day of the experiment the first TV video appeared after 16 videos, from day 2 onwards - with exception of day 4 - TV content was suggested on the FYP within the first four videos. Moreover, the interval between TV videos went down as time progressed, as can be seen in Figure 1.

This responsiveness, however, backfired in that by day 4 the vast majority of TV content we were being shown was related to *House M.D.*; for this reason we decided to re-calibrate the algorithm by searching for other shows or characters: *New Girl*, *Friends*, *Family Guy*, *Spiderman*, *Severance*, and *Young Sheldon*. Once again, the shows or characters/films were chosen based on popularity and consistent mention in discussions surrounding the trend. On day 5 the choice was made to skip *House M.D.* videos, as well as *Glee* videos, in that they were both monopolising the FYP (Figure 2).

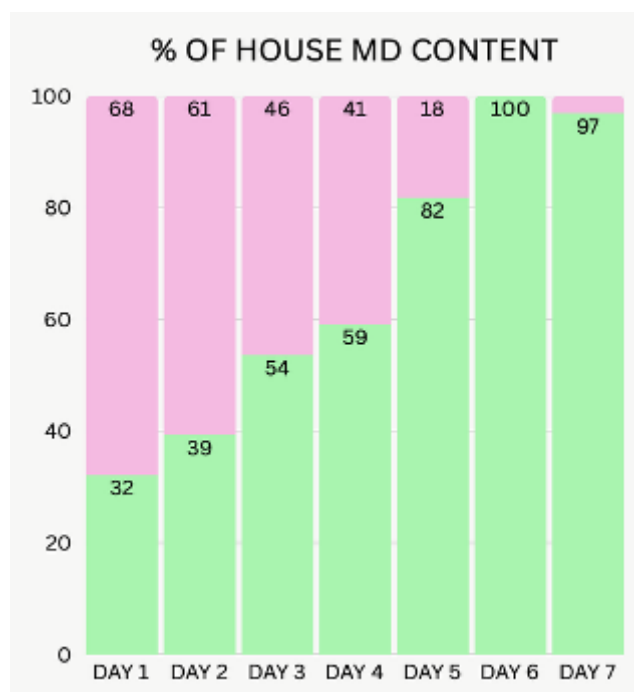
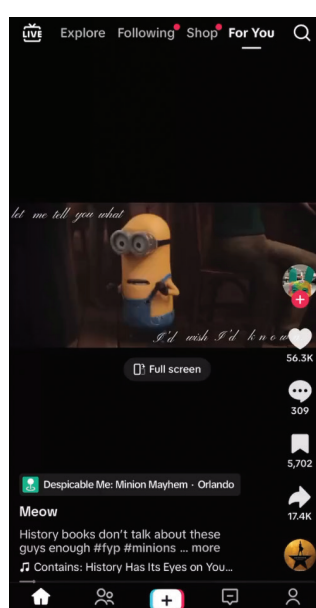


Figure 2. Daily percentage of House MD videos relative to the total of TV videos. Source: Primary data collected by the authors.

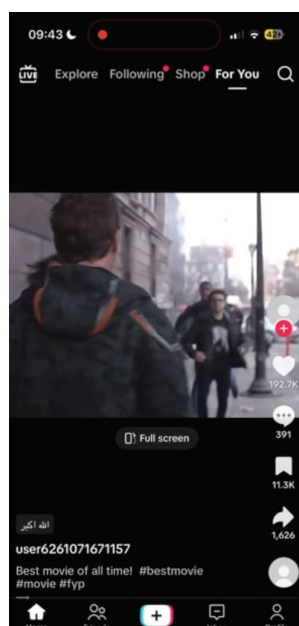
When analysing the data we looked at how many videos came from editorial pages and how many from ordinary users, the sounds that were used, the type of format that was chosen to create the video, whether there was a correlation between type of video and page of origin. Of the 584 videos we were shown over a week, 191 were categorised as TV content; of these, only 23 came from professional profiles, and half (12 videos) came from the House M.D. TikTok page. The main types of videos shared by all users on the platform were:



Video 1. Video edits / Remix (62). Video from TikTok user Meow representing a Minion themed montage using music from Hamilton the Musical.

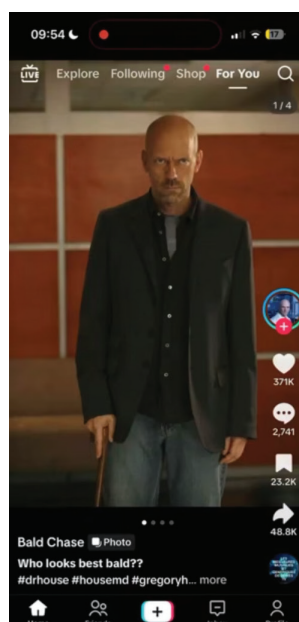
We categorise here videos that are defined as remixes¹⁶ or fan edits, using platform vernacular,¹⁷ and include fan-made videos often set to music, frequently dedicated to a theme, a character, relationships between characters

(Figure 3a); these practices allow the text to spread further than its original context,¹⁸ and expand its meaning according to the intentions of the video-editor [Video 1].



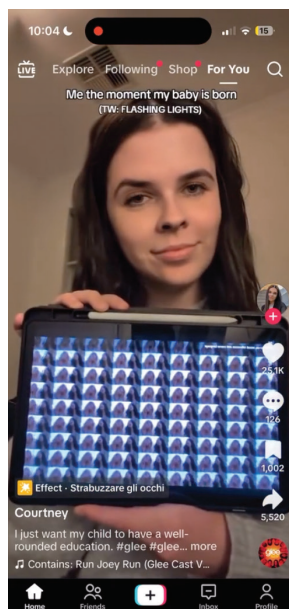
Video 2. Clips (42). Video from TikTok user user6261071671157 representing a clip from the film Avengers Infinity War.

We categorise here all clips, in both vertical and horizontal formats, taken from films, tv shows, talk shows, with or without overlaying text describing the scene (fig.3b); these are of varying length, and usually correspond to specific scenes from shows or films that may spike interest in the product (using, for example, cliffhangers) [Video 2].



Video 3. Carousels (16). Video from TikTok user Bald Chase including edited images of House MD characters with a bald head.

These are videos made of picture slideshows (fig.3c); the inclusion of carousels may be problematised as they are not strictly televisual, rather are only aligned with the general theme of the research (televisual products) [Video 3].



Video 4. Personal videos (11). Video from TikTok user Courtney intitled “Me the moment my baby is born” representing a girl holding and iPad showing a video from the TV show Glee.

We categorise as such all videos made by TikTok users, used to talk about TV shows, films, or characters, which may or may not include recordings of tv/laptop/tablet screens playing the content they are referring to [Video 4].

It is evident that the categories do not greatly differ from those typically present within fandom practices; the difference lies in access to this material, which is not conditioned by traditional spreading practices¹⁸, but rather by algorithmic suggestions, which may even be independent of fandom communities. When looking at the videos the algorithm proposed coming from editorial pages the proportion shifts: of the 23 videos, 19 were clips (from tv shows, films, awards shows, or edited into a compilation). The fact that the videos were suggested by an algorithm implies that these results cannot be indicative of a broader phenomenon, however they suggest that official pages rely on the *clip* format to fit into a grassroots phenomenon.

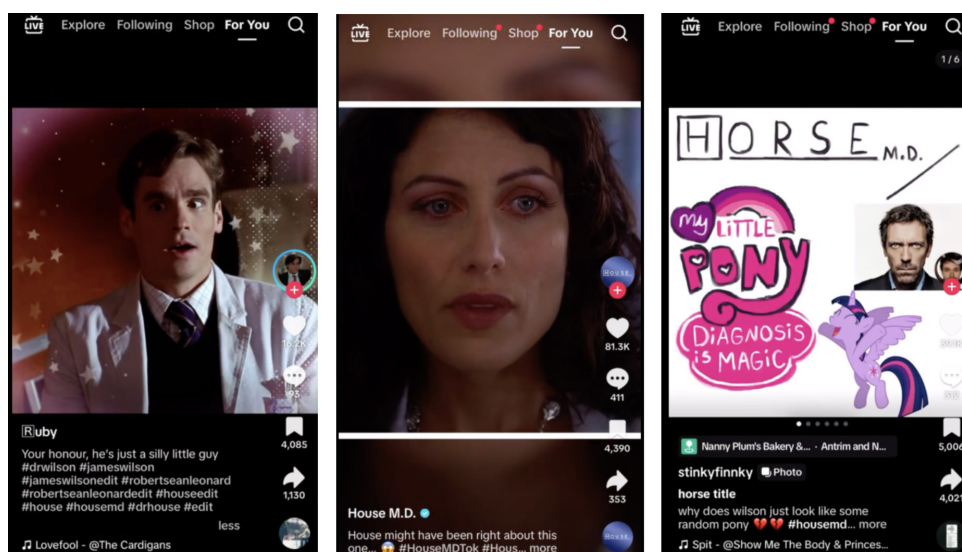


Figure 3. (a) Dr Wilson themed fancam from TikTok user Ruby; (b) clip from House MD formatted to best fit the screen from the House MD official TikTok; (c) House MD themed meme carousel from TikTok user stinkyfinnky.

In order to better understand the approach of official TikTok pages we observed one month of activity (November 2025) of the Netflix Italia profile. We screen-recorded every video posted during the month, noting what show/actor/event it was in reference to, what format of video it was, whether it was placed into a playlist, what hashtags were used and the number of likes. We also noted post frequency and how this aligned with new releases on the platform. The total number of videos posted in a month was 95, with the main categories being clips (35), trailers (10), behind the scenes (8) and original social media content (6) (Figure 3). The types of videos used by Netflix, overall, matched quite closely those we identified during the first phase of our research, with the notable exception of ‘personal videos’: this makes sense if we consider NetflixIT as a brand account, meaning there is not an individual behind it, but rather a world-famous company. Although there were videos that included individuals - for example a vlog filmed by influencer Luis Sal to celebrate the 10th anniversary of Netflix’s launch in Italy – they did not match the amateur nature of those shared by other TikTok content creators. Although Netflix is widely known for its capacity to adapt to grassroots social content, on TikTok the material that is shared maintains an editorial style.

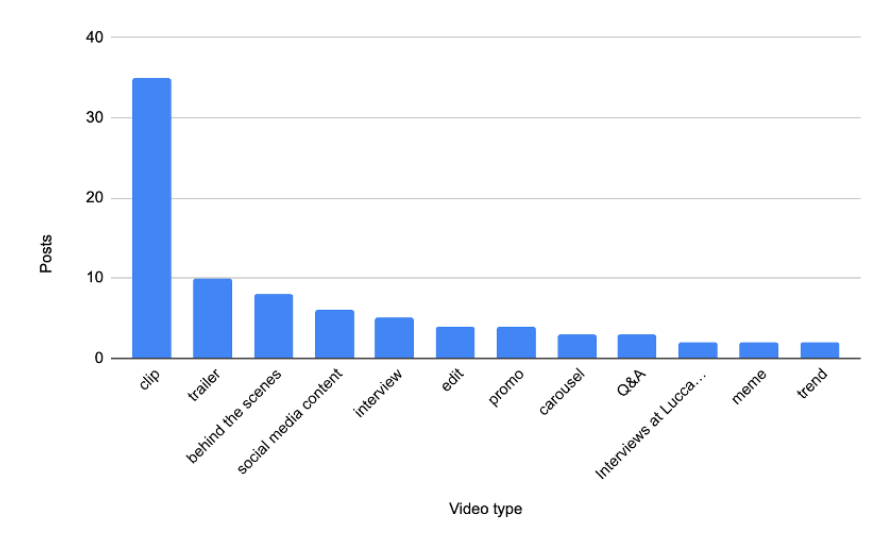
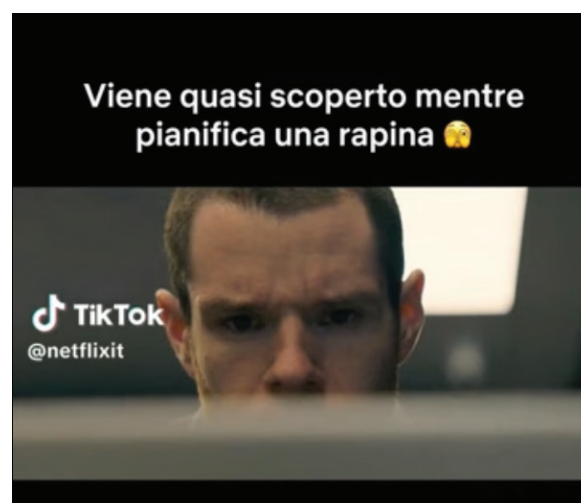
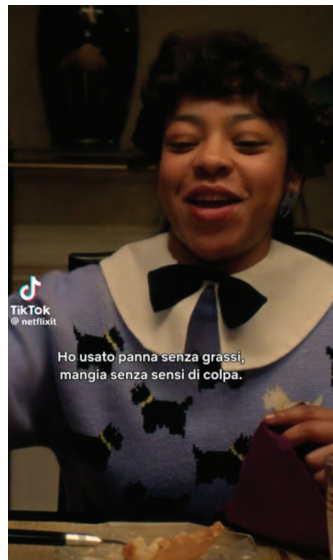


Figure 4. Categorisation of @NetflixIT TikTok posts for November 2025. Source: Primary data collected by the authors.

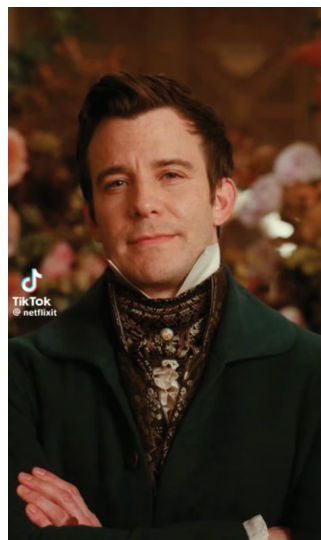
As the main category was, once again, ‘clips’ we created a further distinction in order to better understand how the company was engaging with this platform-native trend. We distinguished between:



Video 5. Horizontal episode/film clip + text on screen (19) from Jingle Bell Heist from the NetflixIT TikTok page.



Video 6. Vertical episode/film clip (12) from Stranger Things from the NetflixIT TikTok page.



Video 7. Vertical save the date / promo clip 19 (6) from Bridgerton from the NetflixIT TikTok page.



Video 8. Horizontal episode/film clip (2) from Stranger Things from the NetflixIT TikTok page.



Video 9. Vertical episode/film clip + text on screen (2) from Madame Web from the NetflixIT TikTok page.



Video 10. Vertical trend clip (1) from Bridgerton from the NetflixIT TikTok page.

While in the case of vertical clips we can see how users are able to adapt to platform affordances, repurposing horizontal videos and making them work for an interface that is not built for them, in the case of horizontal clips (Figure 5) what we see is a form of platform resistance. Using the black background to introduce a scene and add subtitles is another form of vernacular creativity, a way to use the interface to its fullest (vertical screen) to repurpose space that would otherwise be empty; that being said, not editing a video to best fit the platform it is being uploaded on might be read as low effort. What is interesting, then, is that an important brand like Netflix would favour the latter format over the former, regardless of its prestige. The case with Netflix Italia, and the reason why the brand has, time and time again, had massive success on social media, is the capacity to seamlessly fit into already affirmed audience practices and make them their own.

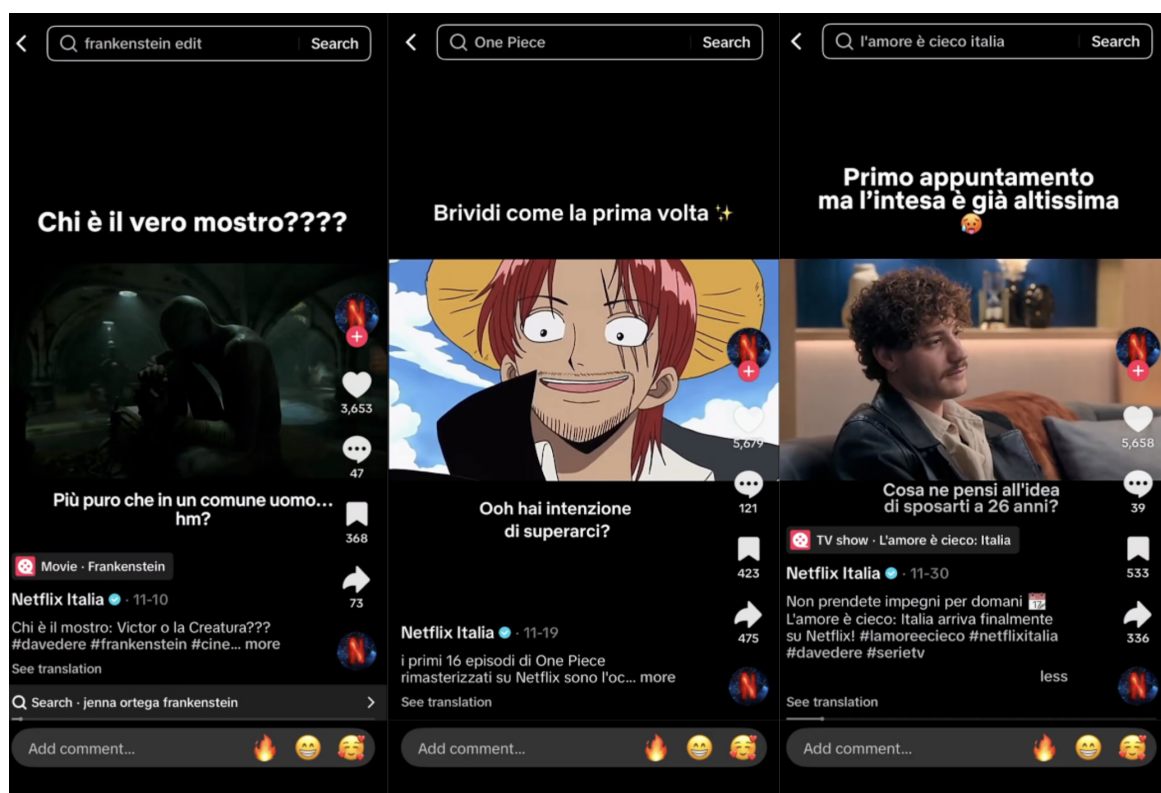


Figure 5. Horizontal clips from the @NetflixIT TikTok account, described and subtitled.

3 Scrolling Television



Figure 6. X post from user @ohremzel talking about watching films on TikTok.

A category that is largely missing from our empirical research is that of full movies, or tv shows, split into parts. It is not uncommon, in daily use of the platform, to encounter part x of a given TV content (Figure 6), or even full products, as in the case of Barbie in the Nutcracker, a Christmas classic (Figure 7). This is a case of adhering to platform logics, making full use of long-form video options within TikTok, while exercising platform resistance by uploading copyrighted content (a full-length film) in a format that differs from the one the platform favours.

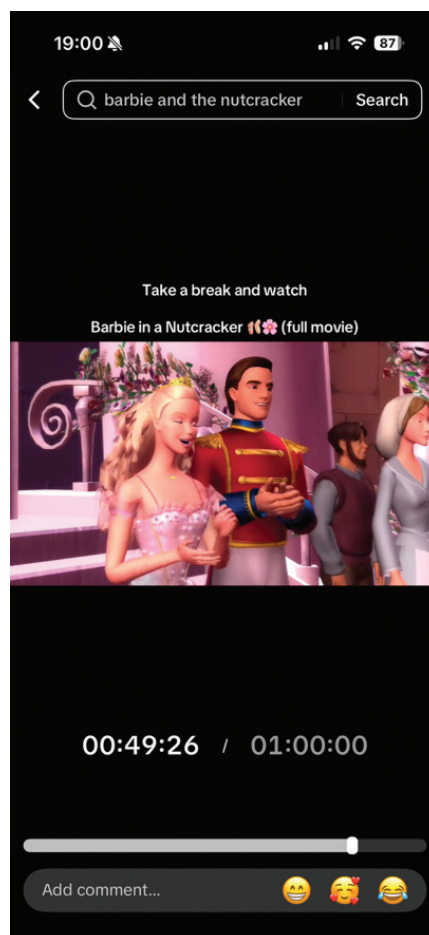


Figure 7. Screenshot from the full upload to TikTok of Barbie in the Nutcracker.

This is a practice that is only seen in editorial pages on special occasions (such as a release anniversary, as in the case of *Mean Girls* or *High School Musical*): while they have adapted to sharing clips from the shows and films they own, they upload them in such a way to promote the product, rather than offer an alternative viewing platform. In the case of Netflix Italia not only are they uploading clips, but they are ensuring that they are dubbed in Italian, and subtitled, to best match the region in which they will most likely be shown. The choice Netflix makes to share clips on TikTok allows it to seamlessly fit into audience practices, contributing to the increasing volume of televisual material present on the platform. It is worth noting that Netflix is in a preliminary testing phase to introduce a scrolling experience within its proprietary mobile app,²⁰ proving that the popularity of the phenomenon is worth investing in. Moreover, as the service has now launched podcast productions, the variety of content that can be clipped and shared will grow exponentially.

When focusing on the audience perspective, TikTok has become an amalgamation of content that was previously found on many other platforms, in particular when looking at fandom practices. Fancams, edits, carousels with memes, were (and still are) usually found on platforms where not only are they being shared, but imagined communities²¹ are generating around them: YouTube, Tumblr, X. Clips, which have always been used as promotional material on platforms like YouTube and Instagram, are uploaded as they were in YouTube's early days, when the platform was still largely unregulated.²²

Intuitive platform affordances, as well as editing apps users are prompted to use (such as CapCut) jumpstarted a new generation of video editors, who are now contributing to populating the app with different kinds of edits and montages.

On the other hand, there are accounts that, with no real creative skill, are populating the app with enough content to compete with major streaming platforms, but are largely going unnoticed due to the absence of explicit labelling or hashtagging, which leads to algorithmic invisibility. It is only through continuous engagement with TV content that users can encounter these archives and use TikTok either as a point of entry for discovery of new content, or as a free mobile streaming platform.

There is therefore a point of convergence between the previously identified sub-categories of 'Television on TikTok' and 'TikTok as Television':¹¹ the argument that TikTok can be seen as much more than a new social media platform, and it remains true that the linear, although algorithmically personalised, viewing experience users have are rooted in televisuality. Focusing exclusively on hosted video⁹ allows us to more attentively define scrolling television: as a practice, we refer to the experience of watching a continuous flow of fragmented clips; as a video format, we're looking at bite-sized clips, created by both amateur users and editors, taken from licensed content and remediated²³ for a mobile app.

Scrolling television, both as a practice and as a video format, is illustrative of contemporary preferences when looking at viewing practices: data collected by Deloitte²⁴ shows how Generation Z is increasingly attracted to video content on social media, especially if it is user generated. The fragmentation of longer-form audiovisual material into bite-sized clips is in tune with this preference for social content, and the stylistic choice editorial pages make to adhere to grassroots logics perpetuates this trend. What was once seen as second screening, has now become interchangeable with a main screen solution through the development of a form of video that not only adheres to platform logics, but builds on its innate characteristics.

Our argument is not necessarily that the content that is available on the platform is innovative, or that editorial pages such as NetflixIT are not adhering to grassroots phenomena to better market their service. The peculiarity of it all lies in user experiences, and the shift back towards enjoying a **linear** flow of content: the deep personalisation, which users are highly aware of, makes it so they are willing to lay back and enjoy the show – which, on TikTok, is composed of hundreds of fragments. We are now facing a further shift in how audiences perceive and experience audiovisual material, a shift grounded in what has thus far been defined as TV content, but which may even extend to all forms of video circulating within personalised algorithmic flows.

Notes

1. Aparajita Bhandari and Sara Bimo, "Why's Everyone on TikTok Now? The Algorithmized Self and the Future of Self-Making on Social Media", *Social Media + Society* 8, no. 1 (2022): 1–11, <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051221086241>.
2. Nadia Karizat, Daniel Delmonaco, Motahhare Eslami, and Nazanin Andalibi, "Algorithmic Folk Theories and Identity: How TikTok Users Co-Produce Knowledge of Identity and Engage in Algorithmic Resistance", *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction* 5, no. CSCW2 (2021): 1–44, <https://doi.org/10.1145/3476046>.
3. Ignacio Siles and Ariana Meléndez-Morán, "The Most Aggressive of Algorithms: User Awareness of and Attachment to TikTok's Content Personalisation," paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association (ICA), May 27–31, 2021, <https://hdl.handle.net/10669/83230>.
4. We choose to use the term filter bubble while being aware that it is widely criticised; we believe it is the best way to describe the algorithmic segmentation that is ongoing in platforms such as TikTok, however we highlight some important contributions to its redevelopment, in particular in the fields of public communication and political science.
5. Pablo Cesar and David Geerts, "Past, Present, and Future of Social TV: A Categorization", paper presented at the 3rd IEEE International Workshop on Social TV – The Next Wave, Las Vegas, NV, USA, 2011, 347–351, <https://doi.org/10.1109/CCNC.2011.5766487>.
6. Tom Evens, Amandine Henderickx, and Lieven De Marez, "Generation Stream: The Audiovisual Repertoire of Teenagers", *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 65, no. 2 (2021): 185–204, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08838151.2021.1944146>.
7. Luca Barra, "La reinvenzione della ruota. O di quando le piattaforme hanno accettato di fare televisione", *LINK. Idee per la televisione* 29 (2023): 55–59.
8. Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (London: Routledge, 2004; originally published 1974).

9. Amanda D. Lotz and Gabriela Lunardi, "Understanding Hosted Video and Its Uses: Conceptualizing New Fields of Video Experience", *New Media & Society* (2025), <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448251338490>.
10. John Fiske, "Moments of Television: Neither the Text nor the Audience", in *Remote Control: Television, Audiences and Cultural Power*, ed. Ellen Seiter, Hans Borchers, Gabriele Kreutzner, and Eva-Maria Warth (London: Routledge, 1989), 56–78.
11. Ellenrose Firth and Alberto Marinelli, "Datacasting: TikTok's Algorithmic Flow as Televisual Experience", *Media and Communication* 13 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.9392>.
12. Ignacio Siles and Luciana Valerio-Alfaro, "From Feed to Flow: Watching Television on TikTok", *Television & New Media* (2025), <https://doi.org/10.1177/15274764251334576>.
13. Jason Mittell, *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling* (New York: New York University Press, 2015).
14. Ivan D. Askwith, *Television 2.0: Reconceptualizing TV as an Engagement Medium* (doctoral dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2007), <https://dspace.mit.edu/handle/1721.1/41243>.
15. Laura Bruschi, Alessandro Gandini, Giulia Giorgi, and Alessandro Gerosa, "Un approccio metodologico allo studio degli algoritmi di personalizzazione su TikTok", *Sociologia Italiana* 26 (2024): 193–210, <https://doi.org/10.1485/2281-2652-202426-10>.
16. Lawrence Lessig, *Remix: Making Art and Commerce Thrive in the Hybrid Economy* (New York: Penguin, 2008).
17. Jean Burgess, *Vernacular Creativity and New Media* (Doctoral dissertation, Queensland University of Technology, 2007), <https://creativitymachine.net/downloads/publications/JeanBurgessAoIR2006.pdf>.
18. Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green, *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2013).
19. We define promotional clips as short clips that are shared for the sole purpose of promoting the release date of a show, rather than showcasing entire scenes.
20. Lauren Forristal, "Netflix to Redesign Its App as It Competes with Social Platforms for Daily Engagement", *TechCrunch*, 20 January 2026, <https://techcrunch.com/2026/01/20/netflix-to-redesign-its-app-as-it-competes-with-social-platforms-for-daily-engagement/>.
21. Cornel Sandvoss, "Popular Culture, Fans, and Globalization", in *The Routledge International Handbook of Globalization Studies*, 2nd ed., ed. Bryan S. Turner and Robert J. Holton (Abingdon & New York: Routledge, 2015), 395–411.
22. Jean Burgess and Joshua Green, *YouTube: On Live Video and Participatory Culture*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019; first published 2009).
23. Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Competizione e integrazione tra media vecchi e nuovi*, trans. Alberto Marinelli (Milano: Guerini e Associati, 2003).
24. Deloitte Center for Technology, Media & Telecommunications, *2025 Digital Media Trends: Social Platforms Are Becoming a Dominant Force in Media and Entertainment* (Deloitte Insights, 25 March 2025), <https://www.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/industry/technology/digital-media-trends-consumption-habits-survey/2025.html>.

Biography

Ellenrose Firth (PhD) is a Post-Doctoral research fellow in the Department of Communication and Social Research at Sapienza University of Rome. Her research interests are the intersection between the evolution of television and social media platforms, the impact recommendation systems have on user experience and user agency, the effect digital media platforms have on tourist practices.

Alberto Marinelli (PhD) is full professor in the Department of Communication and Social Research at Sapienza University of Rome where he teaches Audience and Media Platforms, as well as the Deputy Rector for Innovative technologies for communication. His main research interests concern television and the ecosystem of connected viewing, civic engagement and participatory practices on social media, network society/platform society.