

Hinting and Soft Requests: A Pragmatic Study of TikTok Short-Form Interactions

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Abstract

This paper examines the pragmatics of hinting and soft requests on **TikTok** short-form interactions and how creators use indirectness to control face wants, keep viewers engaged and manage platform-specific constraints. The study relies on politeness and implicature theories and computer-mediated discourse, which examine a set of 200 **TikTok** videos and user comments of various English-speaking creators. The linguistic and multimodal strategies, including mitigated directives, playful ambiguity, prosodic softening, emoji-based clues, and algorithm-oriented self-request, are identified in the analysis as means used by users to request support, stimulate the action, or suggest the needs, not providing blatant instructions. The results indicate that hinting on Tik Tok is an art of strategic combination of socio-pragmatic consciousness and visual-based performance aesthetics: the creators employ humour, self-deprecation, and visual grounded hints to minimize imposition, and the audience reciprocates this measure with collaborative uptake and collaborative meaning. Soft requests (implicit requests to like, share, follow, or comment) are commonly coded using formulaic patterns based on the participatory norms of the platform. It is concluded that indirectness in TikTok discourse is an adaptive pragmatics phenomenon, which is conditioned by the digital attention economy and where face-saving, engagement maximization, and algorithmic visibility interact to form a unique genre of social requests. The results add to the modern digital pragmatics by providing an example of how short video setting changes the classic request strategies and redefines communicative politeness in the fast-paced multimodal situation.

Keywords: hinting, soft requests, implicature, politeness strategies, digital communication, multimodal interaction

التلميح والطلبات المخففة: دراسة تداولية للتفاعلات القصيرة على تيك توك

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المستخلص:

تتناول هذه الورقة البحثية التداويات اللغوية للتلميح والطلبات اللطيفة في تفاعلات منصة تيك توك (Tik Tok) قصيرة الشكل، وكيف يستخدم المنشئون فيها الاستلزام الضمني (اللامباشرة) للتحكم في "الرغبات الوجهية" والحفاظ على تفاعل المتابعين وإدارة قيود التواصل الخاصة بالمنصة. وتعتمد الدراسة على نظريات الكياسة والاستلزام الضمني وتحليل الخطاب بوساطة الحاسوب، من خلال فحص مجموعة تضم 200 مقطع فيديو وتعليقات المستخدمين لمنشئين ناطقين بالإنجليزية. وقد حدد التحليل الاستراتيجيات اللغوية والمتعددة الوسائط، والتي تشمل: التوجيهات المخففة، والغموض اللعوب، والتلبيين النغمي، والإشارات القائمة على الإيموجي، والطلبات الذاتية الموجهة للخوارزمية، كوسائل يستخدمها المنشئون لطلب الدعم أو حث المتابع على فعل ما أو التلميح إلى احتياجات معينة، دون تقديم توجيهات صريحة. وتشير النتائج إلى أن التلميح في تيك توك هو فن يجمع ببراعة بين الوعي الاجتماعي التداولي وجماليات الأداء المرتكز على الصورة؛ حيث يستخدم المنشئون الفكاهة والانتقاص الذاتي والتلميحات المرئية لتقليل فرض الرأي، ويقابل الجمهور هذه المقاييس باستجابة تعاونية وبناء مشترك للمعنى. وغالباً ما تُرمز الطلبات اللطيفة (الطلبات الضمنية للإعجاب، أو المشاركة، أو المتابعة، أو التعليق) باستخدام أنماط صيغية ترتكز على أعراف المشاركة في المنصة. ويُستنتج أن الاستلزام الضمني (اللامباشرة) في خطاب تيك توك هو ظاهرة تداولية تكيفية، تتحكم فيها اقتصاديات الاهتمام الرقمي، حيث تتفاعل آليات حفظ ماء الوجه، وتعظيم التفاعل، والظهور الخوارزمي لتشكيل نوع فريد من الطلبات الاجتماعية. وتضيف النتائج إلى مجال التداويات الرقمية الحديثة من خلال تقديم مثال عملي لكيفية إعادة إطار الوسائط القصيرة تشكيل استراتيجيات الطلب الكلاسيكية وإعادة تعريف مفهوم الكياسة التواصلية في سياق متعدد الوسائط سريع الوتيرة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التلميح، الطلبات اللطيفة او المخففة، الاستلزام الضمني، استراتيجيات الكياسة، التواصل الرقمي، التعبير، التفاعل متعدد الوسائط.

1. Introduction

TikTok has quickly become one of the most powerful platforms of the short-form communication where the meaning is created by combining the use of language, images, gestures, sound effects, and algorithm-based forms of engagement. In contrast to the conventional social media, **TikTok** focuses on conciseness, inventiveness, and swift response, determining how people articulate their aim, bargain social dynamics. A prominent characteristic of **TikTok** speech that is worth noting is the extensive adoption of hinting and soft request strategies which are subtle means by which creators pressure viewers to like, share, follow, purchase, or engage without giving direct commands. To achieve less imposition and a friendly, non-threatening interactional environment, these indirect strategies are based on implicatures, humor, facial expression, and multimodal cues. Online politeness, indirect speech, and request strategies have been studied in research on digital pragmatics, but Tik Tok is not well explored, particularly in relation to its short-form and very visual communication form. This paper fills this gap by exploring

the way **TikTok** creators build hinting and soft requests and how viewers understand and act on the indirect means. With the help of pragmatic approach, the study explores the correlation between linguistic decisions, platform conventions, and sociocultural anticipations that inform communication within short-form video settings.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Even though indirectness is a well-documented theme in both the traditional speech act theory and digital communication investigation, scant attention has been given to the functioning of indirect pragmatic expressions in brief, visually cosmetic, algorithmic platforms like **TikTok**. Users often insert cues and subtle requests in funny videos, storytelling videos, makeup tutorials, reaction video, and miniature vlogs, but the linguistic and multimodal processes, which form such requests, are not well understood. The issue that is considered in the given research is that there is no systematic, practical examination of how creators draft, encode, and provide hints and soft requests on **TikTok**, how they are perceived and read by the audiences. In the absence of these insights, scholars and pedagogues may ignore the idiosyncratic communicative conventions that have come into being because of short-form digital discourse.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the linguistic patterns of hinting and soft requests on **TikTok**.
2. To analyze the multimodal features (gestures, visuals, audio, captions) used in these strategies.
3. To examine the pragmatic functions of hinting and soft requests (politeness, face-work, engagement).
4. To investigate audience responses to these indirect strategies.
5. To explore the influence of **TikTok** platform norms on shaping these strategies.

1.4 Questions of the Study

1. What linguistic patterns are used to express hinting and soft requests on **TikTok**?
2. What multimodal features support the realization of hinting and soft requests?
3. What are the pragmatic functions of hinting and soft requests in **TikTok** interactions?
4. How do audiences interpret and respond to these indirect requests?
5. How do **TikTok** platform norms influence the construction of hinting and soft requests?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The study has great theoretical importance as it adds to the ever-expanding body of digital pragmatics by extending prior research on indirectness and politeness to multimodal, algorithmic settings. It applies the classical theory of speech acts to the short-form audiovisual communication, providing a contemporary simile through which scholars may comprehend how implicatures are created, negotiated, and perceived as a part of the situation characterized by rapid and fast-paced interaction as is typical of such a platform as **TikTok**. Placing indirectness and soft request in these changing digital ecosystems, therefore, the study transforms the traditional pragmatic frameworks into modern communicative realities. In practice, the research can be very helpful to those who develop

content to create engagement strategies that would not sound intrusive and too demanding. It also helps language educators by providing them with the appropriate examples of the contemporary digital discourse that could increase the pragmatic competence of learners in EFL situations. Furthermore, the results can help the researcher to study platform-related communication standards that are determined by emerging technologies, and provide marketers and communication experts with more profound understanding of persuasion style and online request patterns in the context of the short-form media.

1.6 Scope and Limitations

The present paper discusses 200 **TikTok** videos created using the English language along with commentary on the videos and studies two pragmatic phenomena, namely hinting, or the indirect expression or connotation of a message, and soft requests, which are heavily mitigated or indirect directives. Based on pragmatic and multimodal analytical models, the study offers a narrower analysis on the manner in which these strategies operate in short-form digital discourse. Nonetheless, other platforms like Instagram Reels or YouTube Shorts are not covered by the study and the conclusions cannot be fully applicable to non-English content or culturally diverse **TikTok** communities. Also, the communicative norms might be formed under the influence of the rapid development of the **TikTok** algorithm over time, which can affect the permanence and the functionality of the findings in the future.

2. Literature Review

The proposed study on hinting and soft requests on **TikTok** is situated at the intersection of pragmatics, digital discourse analysis, and social media communication. While no existing study directly examines "hinting" as a specific speech act on this platform, a growing body of research explores related pragmatic phenomena in **TikTok** interactions. This literature review synthesizes findings from three key areas: the performance of speech acts in **TikTok**'s unique environment, the use of indirect language strategies, and the recontextualization of communicative norms in short-form video contexts.

The current studies on digital pragmatics prove that there is growing academic attention on the issues of indirectness, politeness, and multimodality in the virtual world. Investigations by Herring (2013), (Bou-Franch & Garces-Conejos Blitvich, 2019), and (Seargeant & Tagg, 2014) point to the redesign of pragmatic norms on platforms through digital discourse. The study of requests in email (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2006), Facebook (Darics, 2013), Instagram (Page, 2012), and YouTube (Frobenius, 2014) proves that online communicators often use indirect strategies to maintain relational harmony and to fit the platform requirements. Nevertheless, there is a very limited amount of literature that discusses the pragmatics of **TikTok** itself because it is a relatively new phenomenon. Identity performance, influencer culture, and digital creativity on **TikTok** are covered in a limited number of works (Zhao, 2021), Haenlein et al. (2020), (Zulli & Zulli, 2022), but none of them has a more detailed pragmatic analysis of hinting and soft requests. The identified gap highlights the necessity of further development, as the current research will become an important part of the developing discipline of digital pragmatics and studies of short-form media.

O'Neill's 2025 study on digital pragmatics and medical discourse on **TikTok** provides a foundational understanding of how the platform reshapes language use. By analyzing how medical professionals employ speech acts to educate and build rapport, the research found that these utterances possess unique lexico-grammatical features and are structured differently than in face-to-face or traditional written contexts. The study concludes that **TikTok**'s specific affordances—its short-form video format and algorithm-driven feed—create a distinct pragmatic environment. This is highly relevant to the current study as it establishes that any communicative act on TikTok, including soft requests and hints, will likely exhibit platform-specific characteristics that deviate from conventional forms of requesting.

(Budiono & Yuliasri's, 2024) analysis of illocutionary acts in **TikTok** live streaming offers a more targeted look at directive language on the platform. Focusing on the context of real-time digital selling, the researchers identified a prevalence of commissive, directive, representative, and expressive acts. Most importantly for this study, they found that directive acts, which encompass requests, suggestions, and commands, are strategically employed by sellers to engage viewers and drive sales. This confirms that directive speech acts are not only present but are a functional and pervasive element of **TikTok** interactions, providing a crucial baseline for understanding how requests operate before narrowing the focus to their indirect forms.

Maulani & Rosita's investigation (2025) into euphemisms and the "underhand function" in **TikTok** comments provides a direct parallel to the concept of hinting. Their pragmatic analysis revealed that netizens predominantly use subtle or disguised language—specifically semantic innovation and other indirect patterns—to express sensitive views, soften criticism, or disguise opinions. This finding demonstrates that indirectness is a common and strategic pragmatic tool for navigating potentially face-threatening interactions in the public and semi-anonymous space of **TikTok** comments. It directly supports the current study's premise that users would similarly employ indirectness to formulate soft requests and hints as a politeness strategy.

Finally, Mussagazina's study (2025) on the recontextualization of traditional Kazakh blessings in **TikTok** comments provides a powerful illustration of how established speech acts are adapted to new digital contexts. The research found that these ritualized blessings are transformed into "multialogic and asynchronous speech acts," accommodating fresh forms of addressivity and audience participation while retaining their core social function of bestowing goodwill. This directly supports the theoretical premise of the current study by demonstrating that the speech act of "requesting" is not static; it is actively reshaped by the unique interactional framework of **TikTok**, potentially evolving into new, platform-specific forms like the subtle, indirect hint.

3.Theoretical Background

This study is anchored in three foundational pillars of pragmatic theory, which together provide a robust framework for analyzing how users imply meaning (hinting) and mitigate face threats (soft requests) within the unique context of **TikTok**.

3.1 Introduction to Pragmatics and the Foundations of Indirect Meaning

As one of the core branches of linguistics, pragmatics examines the way in which speakers generate and receive meanings in the real-life situation with a focus on knowledge and assumptions, as well as social norms that are common to interlocutors. Classical texts like Austin (1962), Searle (1969) and Levinson (1983) developed the assumption that meaning goes beyond literal semantics and needs to be interpreted in reference to intentions, relationships and contingency of circumstances. In this interpretive process, indirectness is a very important aspect since most speakers tend to employ inferred meanings so as to avoid direct use of expressions that might be offensive or hurtful to others, as well as to cushion demands or to mirror social statuses (Brown & Levinson, 1987), (Leech, 2014). The pragmatic meaning is thus based on the contextual inference, background knowledge and communal norms of communication. In online communication, this is further complicated in the context of digital apps like **TikTok** where messages are influenced not only by language but also by multimodal elements and visual aesthetics, as well as conventions unique to the platform (Herring, 2013). **TikTok** is all about performance, which is inherently algorithmic, thereby enhancing pragmatic processes, and indirectness, in turn, is an effective characteristic of digital discourse. In these spaces, designers rely on context-bound and brief cues that can be used to express subtextual messages, showing the continued applicability of pragmatic theories that were initially conceived of face-to-face interactions. As one of the main branches of linguistics, pragmatics studies the construction of meaning in respect of context, common knowledge, and social norms, where the idea of communication goes much beyond the traditional perception of words. Early researchers like Austin (1962), Searle (1969) and Levinson (1983) accentuated that intentions, relations, and situational dynamics are the basis on which speakers express their meanings, whereas indirectness is an important scheme of avoiding face threats, softening a request, and negotiating social hierarchies (Brown & Levinson, 1987), (Leech, 2014). These pragmatic means get even more stratified in the digital realm, such as **TikTok**, where communication is not only supported by language but also visuals, sound, gestures, editing techniques and pattern of interaction produced by algorithms (Herring, 2013). The extremely performative and speedy character of the platform enhances the operation of inference, urging users to call on brief context-based signals in order to articulate subtle intentions. It shows that even the most pragmatic theories based on the traditional and face-to-face means of communication will be of the utmost relevance and provide an effective approach toward interpreting the concept of indirectness and meaning-making in the contemporary brief form of digital discourse.

3.2 Hinting

Hinting is one of the most subtle indirect communications that entails the selective avoidance of direct meaning in such a way that the audience has to deduce the intended message. Thomas (1995) argues that hinting is ambiguous in nature, which also gives speakers an opportunity to present requests, desires, or criticisms without necessarily denying it. In previous research, including that by Weizman (1985), (Faerch & Kasper, 1989) and Trosborg (1995), hints are categorized as direct, conventionally indirect, and

non-conventional in accordance to the transparency level. Hinting, in its turn, becomes even more multifunctional in digital communication, which performs the functions of politeness, relational alignment, humor, and persuasive engagement (Tagg, 2015) and (Bou-Franch & Garces-Conejos Blitvich, 2019). Narrative gaps, exaggerated gestures, use of trending audio clips, and playful captions are common by creators on **TikTok** as a way to give a hint to request a like, follow to see part two, or watch to the end. These clues conform to the rules of online authenticity and platform etiquette since overt, explicit self-promotion can be considered as being socially undesirable (Page, 2012). Hinting as a pragmatic device and a cultural adaptation to an informal, creativity-driven setting of **TikTok**, then. Hinting is the most complex type of indirect communication, and it is based on the intentional omission of direct meaning in such a way that there is need to deduce the intentions of a speaker. Hints as explained by Thomas (1995) are ambiguous and, as intentionally ambiguous items, allow speakers to state wants, criticisms, or suggestions without raising any doubts on their part. The hints may be relatively direct and conventional as in the earlier classifications by Weizman (1985), Faerch & Kasper (1989), and Trosborg (1995), to very opaque and non-conventional hints that need more contextual interpretation. The hinting receives extended roles in the context of digital discourse, which serves to enhance politeness, interpersonal alignment, humor and persuasive interest (Tagg, 2015), (Bou-Franch & Garces-Conejos Blitvich, 2019). On **TikTok**, creators use gaps in the story, gestures, trending sounds, exaggerated visuals, and joking or minimal captions to suggest, obliquely, what actions to take, like liking, following, or watching. The strategies comply with the platform standards, which discourage blatant self-promotion that can be viewed as socially awkward or inauthentic (Page, 2012). As a result, hinting is a pragmatic tactic as well as a cultural strategy as an adaptation to the ecosystem of informal communicative creativity that is characteristic of **TikTok**.

3.3 Digital Discourse Soft Requests and Mitigation.

The other indispensable territory of pragmatic inquiry is soft requests, or softened orders. Empirical studies of mitigating strategies, such as those by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), Biesenbach-Lucas (2006) and Mir (2009) indicate that linguistic strategies such as modal verbs, conditional clauses, hedges, past tense looking-glass self, and politeness markers are commonly used to minimize the imposition by speakers. It is through such mitigation that speakers can retain positive and negative face, interpersonal harmony and request formulations as cooperative instead of authoritative (Lakoff, 1973), (Holmes, 1995). Soft requests in technologically mediated situations are designed to fit the platform conventions: brevity, multimodality and expectations in the audience influence the way requests are made and interpreted (Thurlow & Mroczek, 2011), (Sifianou, 2019). Masculine request forms that **TikTok** creators heavily use include: possibly I should make a part two? or "if you want... I can proceed, and the nonverbal cues that enforce the implied request are added. Such indirect formats are in keeping with the informal and hurried nature of a short-form video content where a direct command may hinder the audience-manager connection or be overly self-advertising (Abidin, 2020). In this way, soft requests on **TikTok** demonstrate the further development of politeness strategies in digital pragmatics. Soft

requests or diluted commands constitute a major component of pragmatic research since they enable the speaker to reduce the command of his requests without compromising on social harmony. Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), Biesenbach-Lucas (2006), and Mir (2009) studies show that speakers usually use a variety of linguistic devices to formulate requests so that they sound optional, negotiable, or collaborative: modal verbs, hedges, conditional clauses, softening past-tense requests, and politeness. These are some of the strategies played in keeping positive and negative face needs and make sure that requests are made in a way that does not violate interpersonal boundaries (Lakoff, 1973), (Holmes, 1995). In online environments, soft requests are additionally formatted by the technical provision, anticipations of the audience, and platform-related norms (Thurlow & Mroczek, 2011), (Sifianou, 2019). Creators often say things such as maybe I should post a part two on **TikTok**. or, as desired, I can go on, usually with an appropriate expression on the face, or gesture, or effect of editing, that reinforces the implied command. These watered-down requests blend with the informal, rapid video content that is likely to be overlooked, since it is preferable to have a clear command be announced as overly rude or even over-promotional (Abidin, 2020). Consequently, soft requests on **TikTok** depict how conventional politeness strategies are still being updated in dynamic and multimodal online spaces.

3.4 Gricean Implicature

The theory of implicature by Grice (1975) offers a fundamental basis of the hinted meaning analysis and soft request in online communication. Grice states that speakers use the Cooperative Principle and its maxims, namely: quantity, quality, relevance, and manner to interpret. In instances where speakers deliberately ignore or break these maxims, then they create implicatures, which need to be unpuzzled by the listener (Huang, 2007). The creators of **TikTok** often capitalize on implicatures in the multimodal setting of this app by stating nothing exactly, communicating through unclear signals, using popular audio clips, or adding humor that leaves the audience to interpret. The same trends have been noticed with the previous digital platforms where users of these communication tools rely on ellipsis, irony and stylized ambiguity to encourage dialogue or indicate attitudes (Attardo, 2001), (Dynel, 2011). **TikTok** videos being short and highly visual, creators tend to reflect many layers of meaning in a few words and leave the contextual elements, memes, and platform culture to make inferences about what the creators intended to convey (Varis & Blommaert, 2015). Gricean implicature has therefore been core in understanding the way meaning is effectively bundled, and that which is co-read in a short online interaction.

3.5 Politeness and Face-Work

Face-work and politeness remain significant to digital communication research. The concept of face introduced by Goffman (1967) and the politeness model suggested by (Brown & Levinson, 1987) have been used to inform studies on how people deal with social identity and interpersonal sensitivity in the context of the Internet. Subsequent researchers like (Scollon & Scollon, 2001), Culpeper (2011) and Sifianou (2013) revealed that digital politeness is not fixed, is culturally dependent, and is in the process of constant development. On **TikTok**, the maxim of politeness is not only predetermined by

interpersonal norms but also by the culture of participation, within which creators build a sense of proximity, informality, and relatability to their audience (Burgess, 2020). Direct commands like follow me now can be construed to mean aggressive or performatively false, which encourages creators to use less direct, indirect ways of interaction. By means of humor, self-derision, diluting statements and open emotions, creators preserve the positive face and stimulate interaction with the audience. This mixture of linguistic politeness and performative sociality exemplifies more general tendencies in social media communication where audiences are demanding authenticity but also appreciate creators who expertly negotiate the demands of relations (Kadar & House, 2021). Politeness and face-work push to center-stage in online communication, and greatly relies on the idea of face and theory of politeness introduced by Goffman (1967) and (Brown & Levinson, 1987), which are critical to understand how social identity, as well as inter-personal sensitivity in interaction, is managed. Later studies by (Scollon & Scollon, 2001), Culpeper (2011), and Sifianou (2013) reveal that politeness in the Internet is dynamic and culturally diverse, and constantly being restructured by the digital conventions. Politeness on **TikTok** is also shaped by both the conventional rules of interacting with another person and by the participatory culture, where content creators build intimacy, informality, and relevance with their fans (Burgess, 2020). Since direct requests on the theme of follow me now can be seen as too pushy or unnatural, creators tend to employ the strategy of indirect engagement, through humor, self-incrimination, softened wording, and excited delivery, to preserve positive face and encourage viewer engagement. This pragmatic politeness and performative sociality is representative of larger trends in the area of social media, in which consumers appreciate genuine authenticity but react positively to creators who manage to balance expectations in relationships and persuasive motives (Kadar and House, 2021).

3.6 Multimodality in Making meaning in short-form platforms.

The multimodal discourse analysis (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), (Jewitt, 2016) offers a very powerful approach to comprehending how the creators of **TikTok** combine linguistic, visual, gestural, and auditory information to create meaning. Multimodal studies point out that communication is not just textual but in certain digitally mediated communication when design is greatly dependent on visual and aural channels (Norris, 2004), (Baldry & Thibault, 2006). On **TikTok**, creators frequently co-use eye gaze, body language, camera shots, emojis, background music, filters and captions and edits in order to direct interpretation and support hints or subtle requests. The pragmatic force of these multimodal forms can be similar to the explicit expression of a certain verbal form, in particular, when they are introduced into the context or platform-specific tendencies (Zhao, 2021). An example can be given of a producer employing a dramatic zoom, a smile of hesitation, or a trending cliffhanger audio to suggest to the audience that they want to see the next in the series. The **TikTok** practice of using linguistic, visual, gestural, and auditory modes to create meaning beyond verbal communication makes such practices useful in understanding how the **TikTok** creators construct pragmatic meaning using several types of information simultaneously, such as linguistic, visual, gestural, and auditory. Multimodality scholars underline the fact that communication within online environments

is always layered and it is based on coordinated semiotic resources (gaze, movement, sound, and design) to influence interpretation (Norris, 2004), (Baldry & Thibault, 2006). Creators using **TikTok** often utilize eye contact, facial expressions, camera movements, emojis, background music, filters, captions, and quick cuts to cue the audience to respond in a way and enhance the power behind hints or gentle suggestions. These multimodal signs are pragmatically active in their own right, and their implications may even be competing or even stronger than the communicative power of explicit language, especially when they align with platform trends, common cultural knowledge, or context (Zhao, 2021). Dramatized zoom, a jovial wink, or a clip of music can collaborate with each other to suggest that audiences ought to like, comment, or request part two, proving how speech acts on **TikTok** can be converted into a multimodal performance that will compel the audiences to discern meaning through a combination of verbal and non-verbal cues.

3.7 TikTok as an Algorithmic

The communication conventions of **TikTok** are defined by an individual algorithmic form and the participatory culture. According to Bucher (2018), Bishop (2019), and Klug (2020), user visibility, engagement, and content circulation are guided by the algorithmic systems, and thus, they influence communicative behavior. The For You Page (FYP) on **TikTok** is an incentive that provides creators with motivation to promptly engage people when it comes to get likes, comments, shares, and replays, which are the four features of the FYP. The use of this incentive system has given rise to special communication behavior, including comment baiting, soft requesting, and hint-driven storytelling. Digital culture research findings (Abidin, 2021), (Zulli & Zulli, 2022) indicate that the creators tend to present their requests based on engagements in playful, narrative-based formats in order to not break the entertainment aspect of what they do. These indirect strategies are further promoted by **TikTok** cycles of trends and meme conventions and the audiovisual remix culture, which creates an environment of communication that is both algorithmic literacy and social performance.

4. Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative research design. The data consist of short-form **TikTok** interactions selected purposively based on their relevance to hinting and soft requests. Publicly available videos and comment exchanges were collected through systematic observation and manual transcription. The data were analysed using pragmatic discourse analysis, focusing on speech acts, indirectness, and implicature to identify recurring patterns and interpret communicative functions.

4.1 Research Design

The research design used in this study is a qualitative descriptive research design based on pragmatic and multimodal discourse analysis to examine how **TikTok** creators create hinting and soft request strategies in short-term interactions. Qualitative method is suitable as the object of the study is not to measure the events but to be aware of subtleties, hiddenness, and contextualism of indirect communication hidden in the linguistic, visual, and audio messages. Pragmatics is predisposed to how context is interpreted, implicature

and that meaning is constructed collaboratively between speakers and hearers and would therefore be compatible with a qualitative paradigm and the ability to provide deep interpretative analysis. The principles used in the study are specifically focused on the pragmatic theory (such as politeness theory, Gricean maxims) and multimodal analysis (the analysis of gestures, gaze, sound, and visual framing) to address the richness of **TikTok** discourse. The brief and algorithmic structure of **TikTok** requires a design that will be able to analyze how users strategically blur or allude to requests within time constraints, i.e., the analysis will have to look at not only language but also camera movements, visual effects, time, and references to memes and conventions of the platform. Thus, this methodology design allows the researcher to delve into the theme of indirectness as a multi-layered response to platform norms and audience expectations, and, finally, to facilitate an in-depth insight into the nature of soft requests and their practical roles in online communication.

4.2 Data and Participants selection.

The participants of this research are the **TikTok** content creators whose videos will include elements of hinting or soft requests towards viewers, but no direct interaction between the creators and the researchers is needed since the program is based solely on the publicly available content. The creators who have consistently employed indirect strategies like a request to take part two were selected using a purposive sampling technique. or "I'm not saying follow me, but..." and even videos in which the indirectness is incorporated in facial expression, gesture, or text overlay, which is used to hint at something one wants a viewer to do. There were 200 **TikTok** videos by English speaking creators who were chosen under different categories which included comedy, lifestyle, storytelling, daily vlogs, promotion of products and educative videos. The choice of these categories was to have a broad contextual perspective in which indirect requests naturally come out. Videos were gathered in regards to hashtags that are related to engagement (likeforpart2, fyp, storytime, follow suggestions) and recommendations presented on the "For You" page of the Instagram algorithm. Besides video material, about 10,000 viewers comments were also used so as to examine how audiences understood and adopted the implicit requests of the creators. Ethical matters were considered by making sure that the only publicly available content was utilized, no personal data was gathered, and there was no action or contact with creators. Such sampling procedure will make the dataset large enough to display tendencies and at the same time varied enough to show the variation in the functioning of the indirectness mechanism within the contexts of different content genres and user groups.

4.3 Data Collection Procedures

The gathering of data was done in a systematic way to provide consistency, reliability and transparency in the process of gathering **TikTok** videos and comments. To begin with, the researcher used associated hashtags and keywords, which are usually related to requests, i.e., part 2, follow more, and phrases that are typical of engagement-seeking posts. The search feature and recommendations provided by the **TikTok** algorithm were utilized in order to find videos that showed the use of soft request or hinting behaviors. After the selection, every video was downloaded or screen-recorded in its entirety (including

captions, on-screen text, and related audio). The time of uploading the video, video duration, user name of the creator and the number of likes, comments and shares were noted. Thereafter, the comments were collected manually by cutting or recording them off the comment box and care was taken to ensure that viewer feedback related to either the hinted or un-specified request made by the creator were recorded. Other metadata including the tone in the responses, how often it was picked up (We want part 2!), rejection or humorous rereading was also recorded to be analyzed later. They stored all the data collected in a safe digital archive in thematic categories, content type and hinting strategy. The process helped in creating uniformity during data selection, storage and preparation to be pragmatically and multimodally analyzed without breaching ethical principles.

4.4 Data Analysis Procedures

Pragmatic analysis, multimodal discourse analysis, and thematic coding were used in the data analysis. The initial step included the identification of explicit and implicit signs of hinting and soft requests in the videos with the emphasis on such linguistic features as rising intonation, mitigated expressions, incomplete sentences, humour, rhetorical questions, vague references, and gaps in narratives. The second step was to analyse multimodal cues such as body language, gaze direction, and sound effects, transitions, visual filters, and the text on the screen that led to the indirectness of the request. Coding of each video was inductive, and categories were not defined prior to the analysis but they appeared during the analysis of data. Categories were represented by larger themes, which included narrative-based hints, humour requests, emotional requests, algorithmic requests (e.g. the algorithm has told me to ask), and vague or playful request. To identify how audiences understood the hints, such as whether or not they complied, made a joke, opposed, or came up with new meanings, the comment sections were examined. A second trained coder was used to code 20 percent of the dataset independently so that reliability could be achieved, and an inter-coder agreement of 0.86 was achieved, implying a high level of consistency. Synthesis of patterns was the last step to the analysis in order to demonstrate how the pragmatics of indirectness is fuelled by **TikTok** short-form format, cultural trends, and interactive norms. The multi-layered analysis enabled the researcher to generate a clear-cut description of the functioning of hinting and soft requests as multi-modes and socially entrenched communicative modes.

5. Findings and Analysis

This paper examined 200 English speaking videos on **TikTok**, with highlighting and cajoling techniques. Approximately 10,000 comments were reviewed to obtain interpretation and involvement among the viewers. The linguistic categorization and multimodal cues, as well as viewer interactions, were used to categorize data and analyse them through pragmatic and multimodal discourse analysis. **TikTok** creators often incorporate the short-form storytelling, humour, captions, and gestures to incorporate indirect requests. Viewer reactions indicate the interactive aspect of meaning-making, which is compliance, humour and playful reinterpretation. The findings have been provided

below in expanded tables of the linguistic strategies, multimodal features, thematic coding, audience responses, and SPSS-types of engagement data.

The linguistic strategy analysis of TikTok videos shows that all communications favour moderate and engaging forms of communication with the most common one at 68 (34) instances through hedging and tentative verbs which soften the incumbency of the speaker and allows the audience to react, like I guess, should you want, we could do part 2... Instances of narrative-based hints come next, with 54 instances (27 percent) in mini-story form or by outlining a plot twist, such as "So yesterday, something happened... maybe you'll see more next time," which brings about curiosity and creates a desire to watch more. There were 32 instances of rhetorical questions (16 per cent), many in the form of tag or open-ended questions such as Wouldn't it be fun, I tried this? to stimulate interaction. Humour and self-deprecation were used 29 times (14.5%), and used to develop rapport by taking advantage of an ironic or over-the-top situation, such as; "I am most likely doing this wrong but... follow me? Less common were conditional requests, indirect hints, emphatic hinting, being between 7.5% and 9% but still used to make viewers actively interested in the choices, soft hints, or emphasis, such as If this video gets 50 likes, I will do the secret, could you check this out? and "You want to know what happens next, all right? On the whole, these strategies can be seen as the focus of TikTok creators on indirect, entertaining, and audience-centric communication to ensure engagement and interaction.

Table (1) Linguistic Strategies in TikTok Videos

No	Linguistic Strategy	Subcategories	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Example from TikTok Video
1	Mitigated Statements	Hedging, tentative verbs	68	34	"I guess if you want, we could do part 2..."
2	Narrative-Based Hints	Mini-stories, suspenseful storytelling	54	27	"So yesterday, something happened... maybe you'll see more next time."
3	Rhetorical Questions	Tag questions, open-ended questions	32	16	"Wouldn't it be fun if I tried this?"
4	Humor / Self-Deprecation	Irony, exaggeration, playful insult	29	14.5	"I'm probably doing this wrong, but... follow me?"
5	Conditional Requests	Likes, comments, engagement-dependent statements	17	8.5	"If this video gets 50 likes, I'll post the secret."
6	Indirect Suggestion	Suggestions framed as options	18	9	"Maybe you could check this out?"

7	Emphatic Hinting	Emphasis on certain words to trigger attention	15	7.5	“You really want to see what happens next, right?”
Total			233	100	

The multimodal features analysis of **TikTok** videos reveals, as shown in table (2), that their creators need visual, auditory, and temporal information to increase the degree of engagement and provide the viewer with a direction of interpretation. Facial expressions are the most commonly utilized feature with 75 appearances (37.5) and with smiles, eyebrow raises, and wide-eyed glances indicating the element of playful hesitation or anticipation. Body movements, including gestures and body language, are used 53 times (26.5 percent) and are used to support weak requests or to draw the attention of the audience. Captions and on-screen text are used 36 times (18%), which can be interpreted as clarity or hinting of what is necessary to do, which is usually expressed using overlay text, hashtags, or arrows. Sound and audio elements such as music, trending audio, and sound effects are utilized 22 times (11%) in order to create cultural context or to underscore hints, and camera and zoom effects are utilized 14 times (7%) in order to draw attention and highlight important moments. The emphasis of colour and filters is more infrequent, at 10 (5%), subtly leading to interpretation, but timing and pauses are 19 (9.5) times more common, creating suspense or anticipation. In general, the multimodal strategies allow saying that the creators of **TikTok** unite visual, auditory, and temporal indicators with overlapping features to make the material more attractive, convincing, and more interactive.

The thematic analysis of **TikTok** videos shows the strategic combination of content, style, and multimodal cues by creators to stimulate viewers. The most prevalent theme is narrative engagement which appears 56 times, which in many instances are mini-stories or episodic content, which has a hint, which leads to the viewer watching more. Humour and relatability is 48 times, with self-deprecation, irony, or an amusing exaggeration of a request that makes dealing with an individual more attractive. It applies to conditional interaction, which is seen 34 times, and makes use of likes, comments, or shares as an implicit stimulus to receive audience engagement. Suspense and curiosity, which occur 29 times, are based on cliffhangers or to be continued. clues to create expectations and take action. Polite hedging, which is listed 33 times, is used to use tentative and non-infering language to keep the social interactions in balance, and to take the pressure off the audience. Emphasis and exaggeration (21 occurrences) involve dramatic tone or emphasis of particular words in order to instil the desired behaviours, whereas multimodal reinforcement (38 occurrences) involves the combination of gestures, captions, and audio in order to clarify and reinforce the verbal hints. All these themes together indicate that the **TikTok** creators use storytelling, humour, indirect requests, and multimodal approaches to design interesting, persuasive, and interactive short content.

Table (2) Expanded Multimodal Features

No	Multimodal Feature	Subcategories	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Function / Example
1	Facial Expressions	Smiles, eyebrow raises, wide-eyed look	75	37.5	Signals playful hesitation or expectation
2	Gestures / Body Movement	Shrugs, hand waves, pointing	53	26.5	Reinforces soft request or directs viewer attention
3	Captions / On-Screen Text	Overlay text, hashtags, arrows	36	18	Clarifies or hints at desired viewer action
4	Sound / Audio Cues	Music, trending audio, sound effects	22	11	Evokes cultural context, emphasizes hint
5	Camera / Zoom Effects	Close-ups, panning, focus shifts	14	7	Directs attention, signals importance of action
6	Color / Filter Emphasis	Highlighting objects or words	10	5	Subtle emphasis to guide interpretation
7	Timing / Pause	Dramatic pause or timing of gestures	19	9.5	Enhances suspense or anticipatory response
Total			229	125.5	Note: overlapping features in videos; multiple cues per video

The following table summarizes the main themes identified through thematic coding, showing their frequencies and typical features. Overall, it highlights how narrative techniques, humour, politeness and multimodal strategies are frequently used to encourage audience engagement and interaction, with narrative engagement and humour appearing as the most dominant patterns.

Table (3) Thematic Coding

Theme No	Theme Name	Subcategories	Frequency	Description / Example
1	Narrative Engagement	Suspense, cliffhanger, episodic storytelling	56	Mini-stories ending with a hint for continued viewership
2	Humour and	Self-deprecation,	48	Humour softens requests,

	Relatability	irony, playful exaggeration		encourages voluntary engagement
3	Conditional Interaction	Likes-based, comment-based, share-based	34	Audience interaction triggered by implied conditions
4	Suspense / Curiosity	Cliffhangers, “to be continued...”	29	Generates anticipation and implicit requests for action
5	Polite Hedging	Tentative statements, non-imposing language	33	Reduces imposition, maintains positive/negative face
6	Emphasis / Exaggeration	Dramatic tone, stress on certain words	21	Draws attention to intended viewer behaviour
7	Multimodal Reinforcement	Gesture, caption, audio synergy	38	Supports and clarifies verbal hints
Total			259	

Viewer engagement reflects the effectiveness of hinting and soft requests. While compliance dominates, humour, playful interpretation, and sarcastic responses show the collaborative and interactive nature of **TikTok** pragmatics, as shown in table (4) below.

Table (4) Viewer Responses

Response Type	Subcategories	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Example Comment
Compliance / Following	Part 2 requests, subscription follow	4235	42.35	“I’m following for part 2!”
Humour / Playful Reaction	Emojis, jokes, memes	2678	26.78	“You’re so dramatic lol 😂”
Request for More Content	Comments asking for continuation	1582	15.82	“Can we get a part 3?”
Rejection / Ignoring	Negative, off-topic	1225	12.25	“Not interested”
Neutral / Other	General praise, emojis	280	2.8	“Cool video”
Mixed / Sarcastic	Playful misinterpretation	500	5	“Yeah, sure, I’ll do everything you say”
Total		10,500	105	Note: multiple interpretations per comment

Table (5) presents the descriptive statistics for key **TikTok** engagement metrics across 200 videos, summarizing central tendencies and variability within the dataset.

Overall engagement appears relatively high, with a mean of 14,752 likes and an average audience uptake of 42.6%, though the large standard deviations indicate substantial variation across videos. Comments and shares show more moderate mean values, suggesting that active interaction occurs less frequently than passive engagement (likes). The average video duration is 37.5 seconds. Linguistic and multimodal cues display moderate means (3.8 and 4.2 respectively), indicating consistent but varied use of stylistic features. Videos with higher numbers of linguistic and multimodal cues tend to receive greater audience uptake and engagement, confirming that hinting and soft requests effectively drive interaction on **TikTok**.

Table (5) Descriptive Statistics of TikTok Engagement Metrics

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Likes	200	14,752	5,231	1,200	32,450
Comments	200	50.1	21.8	5	152
Shares	200	12.3	9.7	0	45
Duration (seconds)	200	37.5	12.4	15	60
Linguistic Cues	200	3.8	1.2	1	7
Multimodal Cues	200	4.2	1.5	1	9
Engagement Ratio (Likes/Duration)	200	411.2	150.3	25	950
Audience Uptake (%)	200	42.6	18.2	5	85

6. Discussion

The results of the research show that hinting and soft requests on **TikTok** are complex multimedia pragmatic tools that are thoughtfully worked out to achieve the greatest possible involvement of the audience without losing politeness and acts that can face threat. The language analysis showed that creators often apply mitigated statements, narrative-related clues, rhetorical inquiries, humour and conditional requests as tactics in order to indirectly direct the audience behaviour. This is in conjunction with the politeness theory by Brown & Levinson (1987) which states that indirectness is the major device that must be used to accord the negative face of interlocutors, and yet attain communicative objectives. The broadened tables indicate that in addition to simple hedging, creators also use emphatic hinting and indirect suggestions, which proves that even the slightest changes in wording can cause a great impact on how the audience interprets and reacts. Pragmatically, these techniques are both informative on the part of the creator (they express the request of the creator), as well as indicating a non-imposing, friendly, or humorous position, which is critical in such a platform with a large, diverse, and mostly anonymous audience.

Along with language strategies, multimodal cues were also proved essential in the assistance of hinting and soft requests. To emphasize the indirect meaning, facial expressions, gestures, captions, sound effects, and playing with the camera were frequently

used as supplementary verbal cues. Indicatively, the narrative hints were usually accompanied by eyebrows raises, smiling in a playful way and suspenseful pauses, to make them easier to interpret. The captions used like not saying follow me, but... or overlay arrows is an example of the textual components occurring concurrently with spoken words and visual action, in a multimodal rich pragmatic space. This confirms the study of digital multimodality (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001), (Jewitt, 2017), proving that short video platforms, such as **TikTok**, cannot be analysed in terms of verbal and nonverbal components in isolation and that soft requests are made through the combination of both. The tables that depict multimodal aspects also confirm the idea that creators use cues to overlay on each other in order to have subliminal yet effective engagement signals.

The thematic analysis presented the various roles of hinting and soft requests in online communication. Thematic areas of dominance included narrative engagement, humour, conditional interaction, suspense, polite hedging, emphasis and multi modal reinforcement. These results suggest that the content on **TikTok** is not entertainment, but rather a well-orchestrated communicative environment in which creators adjust the degree of indirectness to the expectation of their audience, platform-related norms, and algorithmic publication. As an example, suspenseful cliffhangers are not only a source of curiosity but also an indirect prompt to likes, shares, and comments, whereas humorous exaggeration or self-deprecation makes an audience open to soft requests. The analysis of the audience response supported these results: the predominance of compliance, playful interpretation, and requests to watch more content indicated that the viewers of **TikTok** actively interpret, negotiate, and respond to the implicit requests in a humorous manner. This corresponds with the views by Haugh (2015) and Dynel (2021) that online meaning-making is interactive, co-constructed, and contextually based.

These strategies are also effective as shown by descriptive statistics. Videos that included more linguistic and multimodal cues had greater engagement ratios, higher audience uptake as well as more comments and shares. That indicates a positive relationship between strategic indirectness and interaction and supports the assumption that hinting and requests that are soft are more than just polite strategies, but also effective means of making oneself more visible and engaged in algorithm-based short-form platforms. The outcomes prove that the environment of **TikTok** enhances the pragmatic role of indirectness: brevity, multimodality, and algorithmic visibility, as well as the diversity of the audience, together, ensure that subtle requests are not optional but rather a necessity to interact.

Conclusion

According to the analysis, the research finding is that hinting and soft requests in **TikTok** videos represent a multimodal, linguistic, and contextual strategies that work within the context of digital pragmatics. First, creators are dependent on indirectness as a strategy of politeness to reduce imposition and positive interaction with a varied audience. Second, multimodal cues enhance linguistic strategies and make soft requests more understandable, which creators can use to express themselves in the context of the short-form content of

TikTok. Third, audience is actively involved in the processes of interpretation, response and construction of meaning, which emphasizes collaborative aspects of online pragmatic interaction. Forth, the density and quality of these cues have a direct correlation with the outcomes of engagement, which proves that like, share, comment, and follower engagement can be boosted with strategic soft requests. Lastly, the paper affirms that platform-related affordances (such as algorithmic promotion), video length brevity, and multimodality editing effects) of **TikTok** influence how the indirectness is accomplished, and short-form online interactions present a special environment to pragmatic study.

These findings highlight the fact that such digital platforms as **TikTok** make the traditional pragmatic theory be applied to multimodal, algorithmically mediated settings. Soft requests and hinting have also ceased to be linguistic phenomena but as socio-technical strategies that mediate content production, reader response, and platform specific conventions. They demonstrate the flexibility of human communication online and the essentiality of applying multimodal and pragmatic models to the study of online communications.

Recommendations

For Researchers:

1. Consider using other social media to compare the indirectness of various algorithms and multimodal settings.
2. Quantitative analysis should be used to correlate linguistic/multimodal cues and engagement measures.
3. The researcher will conduct cross-cultural research on hinting and soft requests across different communities within **TikTok**.

For Educators:

1. Embark on introducing **TikTok**-like engagement to impart practical competency and computer literacy.
2. Concentrated lessons on how to interpret indirect requests, multimodal cues and how to give a proper answer.
3. Promote critical thinking about the short-form content in order to learn about the subtle influence on engagement.

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