

## “Unhinged Marketing” on Social Media Marketing: How Duolingo's Content Engage the Audience

Keenan Jeremy Kusuma<sup>1</sup>, Choirunnisak Fauziati<sup>2</sup>, \*Angel Damayanti<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Universitas Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>Universitas Indonesia

<sup>3</sup>Universitas Kristen Indonesia; angel.damayanti@uki.ac.id

\*Correspondence

---

**ABSTRACT:** In September 2023, Duolingo was deemed the most-used language learning application worldwide, with over 16 million downloads, and it showed a consistent increase in downloads since 2017. This paper aims to examine how the integration of memes and unhinged content in Duolingo's marketing on social media is successful in maintaining customer engagement. The method used here is qualitative content analysis. Further, Katz's and Blumer's uses and gratifications theory about how people seek specific content to generate specific gratifications is used to find out how the audience perceives Duolingo's content fulfilling their desire. Moreover, the paper also concerns the humorous communications for marketing which is also pertinent due to correlating with Duolingo's marketing strategy. The research argues that Duolingo's creativity in unhinged content in their social marketing succeeds in consumer engagement, which will be recommendations for marketing practitioners to enhance social and content gratifications.

**KEYWORDS:** *brand identity, consumer engagement, Duolingo, social media, unhinged marketing*

---

### I. INTRODUCTION

Duolingo was first released on 19 June 2012. Five years later, the Internet created memes referring to Duolingo, namely the Evil Duolingo Owl. The meme explains how the Duo Owl would hurt its students if they had missed learning with the app. Firstly, the Streaks system is a Duolingo feature that distinguishes it from any other language-learning app. The rule is to motivate players to keep learning to accumulate streaks. Whenever the player does not continue its streak, Duo will remind them through the player's notification. A user then edited Duo with a gun, threatening its students if they neglected Duo by ignoring its notifications. The meme went viral, reaching over 150,000 impressions (Matt, 2019). Currently, Duolingo is the most used language learning application worldwide, with over 16 million downloads, and it has had a consistent increase in users since 2017 (Ceci, 2023; Daniel, 2023).

With the widespread use of social media nowadays, marketing can raise product awareness and attract consumers. Social media is one of the ways for people to communicate with one another or an organisation to the public. For example, popular social media are Instagram, LinkedIn, X, TikTok, and more. Hence, social media is a significant instrument for marketing and advertising (Goel & Diwan, 2022). Moreover, Duolingo has used this social media ever since the rise of social media platforms, specifically taking advantage of its memes. In this research, the author will discuss Duolingo's marketing strategy on social media, such as Instagram and TikTok, by integrating trends and how it can benefit other companies.

Other than its features, such as the streaks, premium account, and playful animation, its marketing strategy also plays a pivotal role in increasing its awareness and brand development. By integrating it into social media, Duolingo utilises trends and its viral memes—also known as the Evil Duo Owl (Brand Vision Insights, 2023). Other examples of Duolingo's marketing are reposting parodies of famous album covers originally created by an @duowlingo covers on Instagram. The parodies include Taylor Swift, Melanie Martinez, The Weeknd and other famous artists (Nguyen, 2023) and this has fostered community, especially engaging with Gen Z (Gagne, 2023). There will be more content discussed in later chapters; however, these contents highlight entertainment; therefore, the usage of memes is a primary part of Duolingo's marketing strategy (Brand Vision Insights, 2023).

Duolingo's marketing strategy, which involves its unconventional content, entertains people. One of Duolingo's videos on TikTok reached 4,5 million likes (McCoy, 2021). However, as the author is writing this sentence, the highest number of likes Duolingo has reached on TikTok is 5,4 million likes. This is because Duolingo embraced the meme that began in 2017—the menacing image of the green owl. Brendan Gahan, the chief social media officer at Mekanism Creative Agency, exclaimed that the humanisation of Duolingo is the selling point. He added that other brands are not as brave as Duolingo since memes can be risky in damaging other companies' reputations. Duolingo's marketing strategy may be seen as luck; however, it is a byproduct of

# “Unhinged Marketing” on Social Media Marketing: How Duolingo's Content Engage the Audience”

a coherent strategy (Gahan, 2021). With the growth of audience engagement through Duolingo's unhinged marketing, this paper argues that embracing eccentricity in a marketing strategy can benefit a company.

## II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This paper aims to examine how the integration of memes and unhinged content in Duolingo's marketing on social media is successful in maintaining customer engagement. The study proposes a content analysis which will collect primary data from Duolingo's social media platforms (Instagram and TikTok). This paper will also conduct research by compiling and discussing the findings of relevant scholars and journal articles regarding meme marketing, humorous communications, and Duolingo's unhinged marketing itself. Then, the study will use the engagement rate of post formula to calculate Duolingo's engagement rate. Additionally, Katz's and Blumer's uses and gratifications theory is also apparent in elaborating the audience's perception of Duolingo's marketing. Additionally, these questions will also guide the author in writing, analysing, and forming the final conjecture:

1. Why Duolingo's marketing is considered “unhinged”?
2. What messages are delivered on Duolingo's content strategy and how did they frame them through their TikTok and Instagram?
3. How does the audience respond to Duolingo's unconventional marketing strategy?

## III. CONCEPTS

### A. *Uses and Gratifications Theory*

The Uses and Gratifications Theory is an extension of Maslow's motivation theory, which dates to 1970. Maslow's motivation theory discusses the people's behaviour in actively seeking satisfaction for hierarchy needs. By achieving their goal, mobilisation will happen. The concept of seeking satisfaction fits well with the ideas Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch brought up in their studies, hence the development of the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) (West & Turner, 2010).

Furthermore, the UGT discusses how people actively choose and use particular media to satisfy specific needs. For example, according to research led by Yang, the most frequent type of content that their subjects watched is comedy genre content on TikTok. Comedy includes a different range of topics that are suitable for different users, providing instant gratifications by making the users laugh (Yuxin, 2020). Additionally, according to Malodia, another example of a case of uses and gratifications, social gratifications can also be deliberated since people use the media to connect with one another (Malodia et al., 2022). Therefore, the framework adds precision in the case of Duolingo's marketing: entertainment and comedy.

### B. *Humorous Communications*

Humour in communication is deemed a social phenomenon under its pleasantness, rhetoric, and persuasion (Meyer, 2000). Based on the relief perspective, people experience humour and laugh because they sense stress has been alleviated (Berlyne, 1972; Morreal, 1983; Shurcliff, 1968 in Meyer, 2000). Moreover, from the incongruity perspective, people laugh at what they think is unexpected and bizarre (Berger, 1976; Deckers & Divine, 1981; McGhee, 1979 in Meyer, 2000). Lastly, in terms of superiority, it notes that people laugh outwardly or inwardly at others because they feel triumph or superior to their opponents (Feinberg, 1978; Grotjhan, 1957; Gruner, 1997, 1978; Morreal, 1983; Rapp, 1951; Ziv, 1984 in Meyer, 2000). This research emphasises on the usage of humorous communication perceptions in political communications.

Meyer also proposed the functions of humorous communications, including identification, clarification, enforcement, and differentiation. Identification serves to strengthen the commonality and shared meaning by the communication agents. They reduce their mutual uncertainty by engaging with the audience and increasing their sense of belonging. Clarification is also valuable for forming focus for media coverage since it utilises anecdotes. It consists of a short and memorable phrase that results in a clarification of issues or positions. This function mainly uses the topic of social norms in their messages without directly criticising someone.

On the other hand, enforcement delicately criticises those who deviate from social norms. For example, children's humorous misunderstandings of proverbs or concepts highlight areas where correction or education is needed, prompting laughter while indicating the need for learning. With humour, the critics can be delivered light-heartedly, creating a positive image while fostering learning and positive connections. Lastly, differentiation highlights the contrasts of the audience between the in-groups and the out-groups. It is primarily used in political campaigns, where candidates employ humour to underscore their distinctions with the other political parties. This humour, however, may trigger conflicts due to the contextual harshness of a joke. Since it is divisive, it effectively embraces the divisions and oppositions among opinions (Meyer, 2000).

As previously mentioned, Meyer's research (2000) emphasises on the usage of humorous communication perceptions within political discourse. Similarly, Mukhopadhyay researched humorous communications, extending it from Meyer and applying the theory to marketing communications in lieu of political communications. Building upon Meyer's foundation of humorous communication, Mukhopadhyay's research offers additional insights into the utilisation of humour in marketing communications. Combining these two bodies of research provides a comprehensive framework for understanding what humour communication is and its benefits on marketing communications, which is pertinent in discussing Duolingo's usage of humour in its marketing communications.

## **“Unhinged Marketing” on Social Media Marketing: How Duolingo's Content Engage the Audience**

Mukhopadhyay also stated that the foundational levels of humorous communication are from the relief, incongruity, and superiority theories. To understand comedy in marketing, imagining our brain as a hard drive is suggested. One's emotions act as a 'save' button since an individual is incapable of recalling a time without an associated feeling. The humour evokes one's emotions and helps remember the brand, leading to purchasing the brand. Therefore, it speeds up the process of making someone interested in purchasing the product. Moreover, he provided examples of other companies that utilise memes as their marketing, such as Zomato and a government entity, the Mumbai Traffic Police (Mukhopadhyay, 2023).

To summarise, Meyer introduced the foundations of humorous communications, and then Mukhopadhyay expanded the idea and applied it specifically to marketing communications. Humorous communications are exceedingly relevant to Duolingo due to its humorous marketing on social media platforms, such as Instagram and TikTok. The author can further analyse Duolingo's marketing communication with a more profound understanding from Meyer and Mukhopadhyay.

### ***C. Meme Marketing***

Before jumping into meme marketing, it is recommended to fathom the phenomenon of memes. The word 'meme' is based on a word from Ancient Greece, 'Mimeme', which translates to 'imitated item.' The word 'meme' was first coined by Dawkins in 1976 to spread ideas and social phenomena based on evolutionary principles in his book *The Selfish Gene* (Mukhopadhyay, 2023; Malodia et al., 2022). In 1980, memes evolved into a unit of cultural transmission using principles of genetic evolution, also known as 'memetics.' It then evolved again and became a unit of the Internet culture, mainly used on social media platforms in 1993. Memes were considered a factor in the participatory internet culture. By 2016, memes had been deemed a component of a linguistic discourse consisting of words, phrases, expressions, iconic imagery, or recognisable references. Popular memes are adorned with intentional spelling errors, abbreviations or acronyms, and nonstandard language (Malodia et al., 2022).

From Meyer's humorous communications, humour helps to link individuals with one another—or at least increases one's sense of belonging in a particular group—which is the primary intention of memes. However, memes are not only for entertainment; they can also be essential to facilitate communication, belonging, and digital activism (Brown, 2022). Additionally, as Meyer mentioned, Brown also stated that memes can unite or divide people into groups. For example, in Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, memes were used to spread ideas by both anti-government and pro-government activists. These show how memes, as an Internet culture—or some might say a subculture (Mukhopadhyay, 2022; Brown, 2022)—are not only for entertainment but are also a powerful medium to coax the audience or to spread messages.

Mukhopadhyay also differentiated the definitions of viral and memes. Shifman (2014) perceives memes and viral as two different materials at the end of opposites (Mukhopadhyay, 2022). Viral material is a single cultural unit spread by numerous users, garnering millions of views. On the other hand, memes are the products and the drivers of the virality phenomenon. They are drivers of the virality phenomenon because they are the contents, and as memes, to be considered viral is when a vast number of agents share the content to their social media platforms, their followers, and more. Hence, memes also contribute to the viral spread of content.

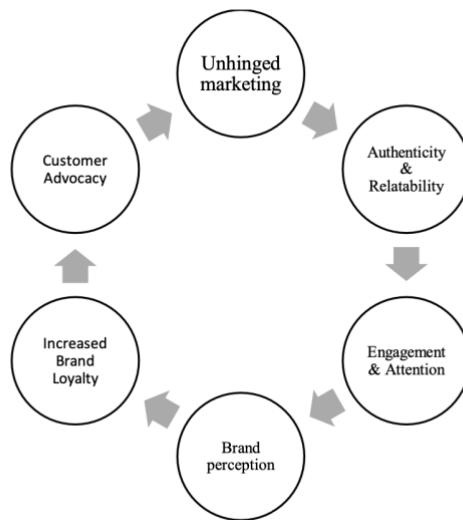
Meme marketing is the integration of memes into how a company communicates its products to the public in digital advertising. According to a study by Sagin in 2020, 84% of millennials are influenced by user-generated content (Malodia et al., 2022). Another research led by Paquette (2019) reported that using memes in advertising generates a 30% engagement rate on social media compared to a 1% CTR in the case of Google AdWords. Additionally, Malodia proposes that gratifications are apparent in meme marketing, especially for customer engagement. In this research, the paper will further analyse Duolingo's content for its unconventional marketing strategy and how it engages with the consumers.

### ***D. Unhinged Marketing: Duolingo***

According to a study, Duolingo's most recognised content mainly revolves around brand community, emotional brand, and current event posts, while cause-related brand, customer relationship, and sales promotion posts were less frequent. Moreover, Duolingo publishes more visual storytelling, gamification elements, trendy content compared to reSheak & Abdulrazak, 2023; Bilecen & Canarslan, 2021). This section investigates more on how unhinged marketing engages with the customers.

Unhinged Marketing is a recent phenomenon which differs from traditional advertising characterised by its boldness, irreverence, and willingness to push boundaries to capture consumer attention and differ from other brands that utilise conventional marketing (Mogaji, 2021 p.; Noor, 2024, p. 6). In this case, Duolingo is well-known for its unconventional marketing techniques. Unlike meme marketing, which focuses on creating content based on internet memes to increase brand awareness (Sheak & Abdulrazak, 2023; Bilecen & Canarslan, 2023), unhinged marketing pushes even further by incorporating the ethos of irreverence and boldness in every part of how a brand communicates.

# “Unhinged Marketing” on Social Media Marketing: How Duolingo's Content Engage the Audience”



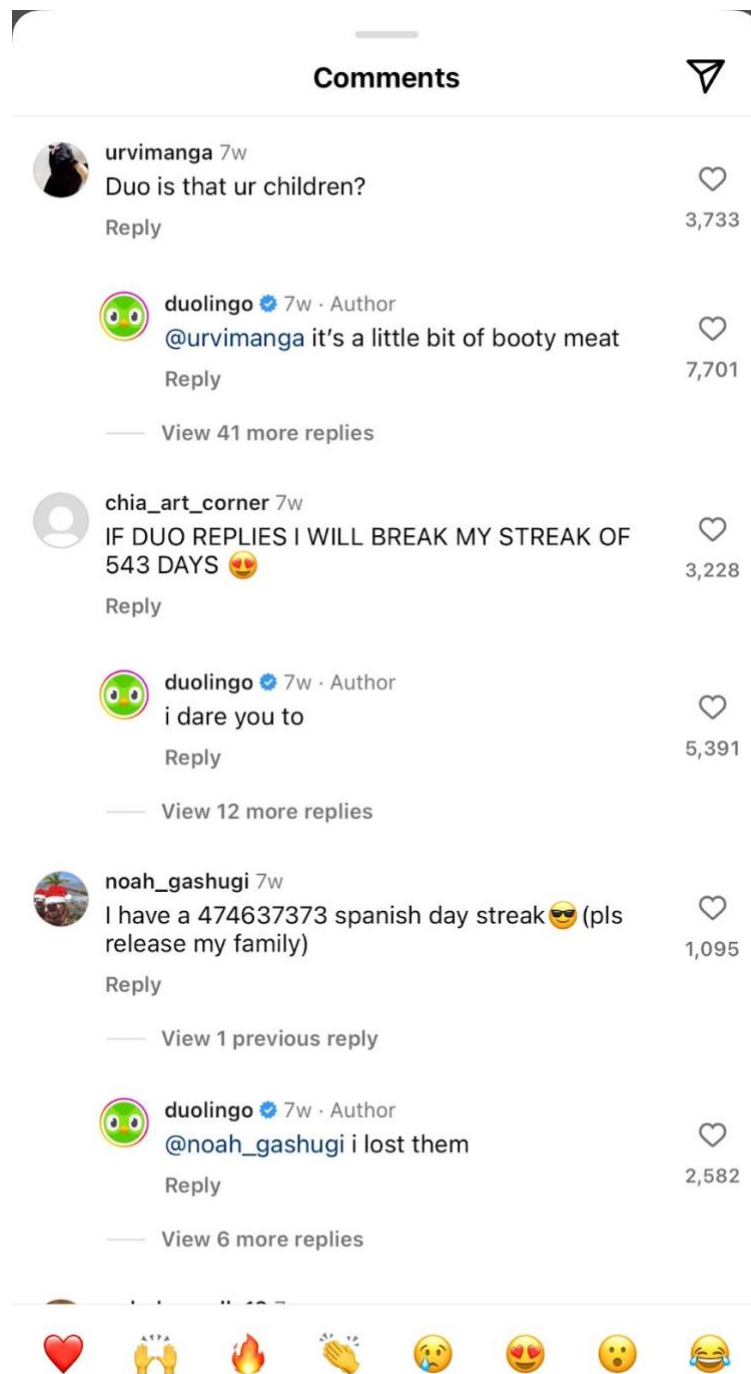
## 1. Unhinged Marketing Impact Model (Noor, 2024, p. 38)

The success of Duolingo’s “unhinged marketing” does not only revolve around chaos, but it perceives the Duo Owl as a creator to engage satirically with audiences, capitalising on contemporary cultural trends (Zaria, 2021). It is important to note that this unhinged marketing is also planned, executed, and framed relatable with the audience. As this approach highlights the brand’s eccentricities, Duolingo has its social media strategy objectives. For example, one of Duolingo’s campaigns is that the Duo Owl incorporated famous figures like Dua Lipa, Taylor Swift, Harry Styles and more by dressing up as them and being in a photoshoot for their albums. By doing this, Duolingo remains relevant by creatively reinforcing its identity as a language-learning platform. This approach keeps the audience engaged while also strengthening trust in the brand's ability to deliver entertaining and up-to-date content (Noor, 2024, pp. 19-21). This strategy can be seen in Figures 2 and 3.



## 2. Duolingo Dressing up as Taylor Swift (Duolingo, 2024, from Instagram)

## “Unhinged Marketing” on Social Media Marketing: How Duolingo's Content Engage the Audience”



3. Duolingo interacting with a consumer (Duolingo, 2024, from Instagram)

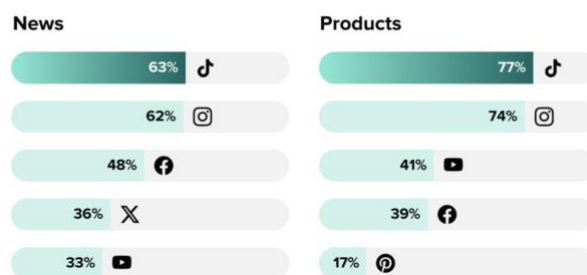
### IV.METHODOLOGY

This research is a qualitative study that will primarily utilise content analysis. The uses and gratifications theory is used to support findings regarding the audience's perception, whereas humorous communications, meme marketing, and unhinged marketing are used to elaborate further on Duolingo's marketing strategy. The last two concepts are foundational since it grasps Duolingo's marketing strategy. As part of qualitative research methods, the author will analyse Duolingo's content on social media platforms since content analysis studies videography, multimedia, visual content, and many more (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). Therefore, by doing content analysis, it will help the author garner secondary data regarding Duolingo's content and the reviews of how the audiences perceive the content.

A reason why this study focuses on Gen Z consumers is because data shows that they are the most active demographics on Instagram and TikTok (Sheikh, 2025). On Instagram, the number of monthly active users are 2 billion, and 31.7% of the largest age group ranges from 18-24. Akin to TikTok, with 2 billion monthly active users, 35.3% of them are ages from 25-34. With that said, this study will also investigate Duolingo's engagement rate with its demographics using the Engagement Rate of Post (ERP) (Popsters, 2025) based on the findings criteria below.

## “Unhinged Marketing” on Social Media Marketing: How Duolingo's Content Engage the Audience”

Gen Z's top social channels for...



The types of brand content consumers are most likely to interact with on TikTok



### 4. Gen Z Demographics on Social Media Platforms (Sheikh, 2025)

**Engagement Rate of Post**

$$ER_{\text{post}} = \frac{\text{Total reactions of post}}{\text{Followers}} * 100\%$$

$$\text{Av. } ER_{\text{post}} = \frac{\text{Total reactions of posts}}{\text{Count of posts} * \text{Followers}} * 100\%$$

-or-

$$\text{Av. } ER_{\text{post}} = \frac{\text{Total } ER_{\text{post}}}{\text{Count of posts}} * 100\%$$

 **Popsters**

### 5. Engagement Rate of Post Formula (Popsters, 2025)

## V. FINDINGS CRITERIA

Since this research utilises content analysis, here are the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the findings:

| Inclusion Criteria                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Exclusion Criteria                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contents are from Instagram and TikTok;</li> <li>Instagram                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The content reaches more than 100,000 likes;</li> </ul> </li> <li>TikTok                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The content reaches more than 1 million views.</li> </ul> </li> <li>Relevance and integration of memes.</li> <li>Contents are posted in January - April 2025</li> <li>Contents are organic posts</li> <li>Contents have humour, relevance, and entertainment</li> <li>Contents are original</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>User-generated contents</li> <li>Ads/promoted contents</li> <li>Duplicate posts across platforms, hence it will only be used once in one of the platforms</li> <li>Contents are posted outside of date range</li> <li>Contents are only announcements or technical updates</li> </ul> |

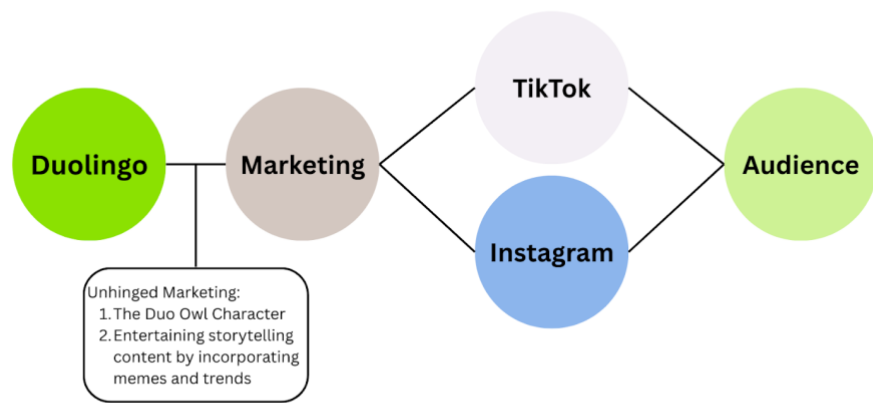
Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

““Unhinged Marketing” on Social Media Marketing: How Duolingo's Content Engage the Audience”

VI.FINDINGS

As this research focuses on Duolingo’s social media platforms, including Instagram and TikTok, this section analyses how Duolingo has engaged with its audience with its unhinged content. With that said, in the findings section, the author will provide content examples from Duolingo’s social media platforms, chiefly on TikTok and Instagram. The data are obtained directly from Duolingo’s official social media accounts on TikTok and Instagram.

Furthermore, here is a model of the research involving Duolingo, the meme integration, the marketing, the social media platforms, and the audience. This model illustrates the communication process of Duolingo’s unhinged marketing strategy. The model begins with Duolingo and its marketing, utilising memes and how it perpetuated, evolving to an unhinged marketing. The content is based on the Duo Owl character and its threatening, irreverent, and relatable image while maintaining its purpose as a language learning platform for users. Secondly, the unhinged marketing communication involves using trendy and viral content which are framed into Duolingo’s storytelling and engaging content with the audience. Afterwards, the content is published through social media platforms—as for this study, it will only include TikTok and Instagram. Lastly, the content will then be perceived by the audience from the two platforms.



- 6. Duolingo’s Communication Process
- 7. Table 2. Duolingo’s TikTok Content

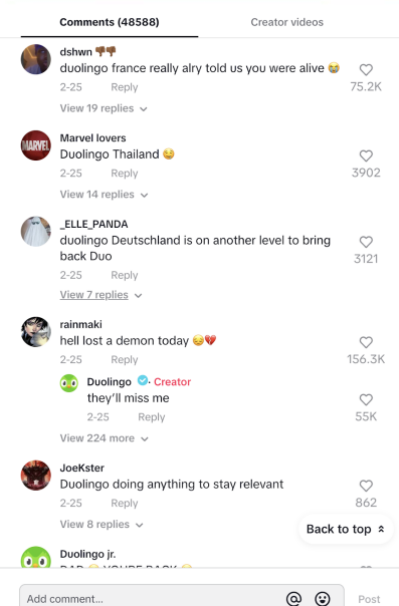
| 10 Duolingo’s TikTok Content from January 2025 - April 2025 |  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1.                                                          |  | <p>18 January 2025</p> <p>This TikTok video refers to the time when the United States was facing a TikTok ban (Montgomery, 2025), which ended up not being banned at all. This was a trend of people debunking what’s real on TikTok. By this, the Duo Owl joined the trend to reveal who is behind the Duo Owl Mascot. The reception in the comment section is good too. A clever strategy is to engage with the audience through the comments section. After knowing the information that TikTok is not getting banned, Duolingo responded “well this is awkward” since they thought TikTok will be banned for good.</p> <p>Source: <a href="https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSrcELqkN/">https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSrcELqkN/</a></p> |

## “Unhinged Marketing” on Social Media Marketing: How Duolingo's Content Engage the Audience

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <div><div>Comments (31276)</div><div>Creator videos</div><div>Search: STAN MARK</div><div><div><div>Bubble Skincare</div><div>STAN MARK</div><div>1-18</div><div>Reply</div><div>67.2K</div></div><div>View 133 replies</div></div><div><div><div>kartvelozavr</div><div>Duolingo face reveal before GTA VI</div><div>1-18</div><div>Reply</div><div>240.4K</div></div><div>View 87 more</div></div><div><div><div>Duolingo</div><div>Duolingo face reveal and TikTok ending before GTA VI</div><div>1-18</div><div>Reply</div><div>109.1K</div></div><div>View 87 more</div></div><div><div><div>unoandhachie</div><div>I have 5 streaks in Duolingo. It says duo misses me. Do I go back?</div><div>3-2</div><div>Reply</div><div>0</div></div></div><div><div><div>Eggo</div><div>Oh hi Mark</div><div>1-18</div><div>Reply</div><div>78.7K</div></div><div>View 227 replies</div></div><div><div><div>Duolingo</div><div>well this is awkward</div><div>1-20</div><div>Reply</div><div>View 1896 replies</div></div><div>Back to top</div></div><div><div>Add comment...</div><div>Post</div></div></div>                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <div>2.</div> <div><div><div><div></div><div>19M</div></div><div><div>Comments (25354)</div><div>Creator videos</div><div>Search: sega dance walk tutorial</div><div><div><div>Lucas vanier</div><div>Duolingo Brazil do this better</div><div>2-5</div><div>Reply</div><div>73.7K</div></div><div>View 168 replies</div></div><div><div><div>Andre</div><div>at this point, Duolingo is just a short form entertainment company that happens to have a language app.</div><div>2-5</div><div>Reply</div><div>125.8K</div></div><div>View 69 replies</div></div><div><div><div>e + hyein</div><div>I deleted my Duolingo account and moved on to babble</div><div>4d ago</div><div>Reply</div><div>0</div></div></div><div><div><div>team poire</div><div>duolingo France is better</div><div>2-6</div><div>Reply</div><div>367</div></div><div>View 12 replies</div></div><div><div><div>Lead</div><div>how many letters in duolingo?!</div><div>2-5</div><div>Reply</div><div>38</div></div><div>View 21 replies</div></div><div><div><div>~☆Peterr☆~</div><div>Wait why is duolingo kinda...</div><div>View 12 replies</div></div><div>Back to top</div></div><div><div>Add comment...</div><div>Post</div></div></div></div></div> | <div>5 February 2025</div> <div>Duolingo did this dance trend where they walk smoothly with fun movements.</div> <div>Source: <a href="https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSrcEh5nq/">https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSrcEh5nq/</a></div> |

## “Unhinged Marketing” on Social Media Marketing: How Duolingo's Content Engage the Audience

3.

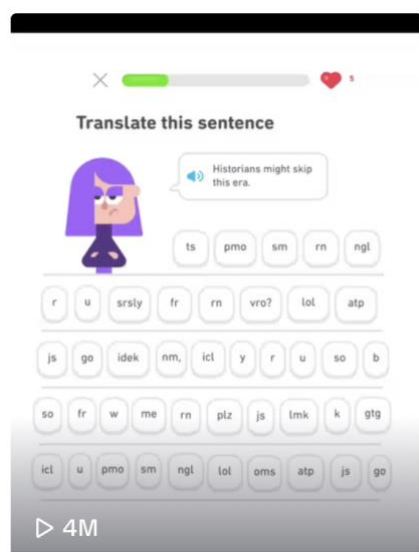


25 February 2025

This video is a continuation post of the death of the Duo Owl. They portrayed the Duo Owl passing away due to waiting for the players to do their lessons. This video responded that the Duo Owl faked its death and will continue to threaten learners.

Source: <https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSrcEFNx3/>

4.



8 March 2025

This video is just a photo with music and transitions. The humour here lies in the trendy abbreviations that are relatable to younger audiences (Gen Z and Gen Alpha) who understand the abbreviations. This shows how Duolingo is updated with trends.

Source: <https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSrcEFXy6/>

# “Unhinged Marketing” on Social Media Marketing: How Duolingo's Content Engage the Audience”

|    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|    | <div> <div> <div>Comments (7766)</div> <div>Creator videos</div> </div> <div> <div>Search: <a href="#">duolingo brainrot course</a></div> <div> <div> <div>athena</div> <div>Guys what does vro mean 🤔</div> <div>3-8 Reply 9599</div> <div>View 484 replies</div> </div> <div> <div>lala</div> <div>what does sybau mean 🤔</div> <div>3-8 Reply 10</div> <div>View 19 replies</div> </div> <div> <div>skibidiblek</div> <div>Ts pmo meaning??</div> <div>4-15 Reply 2</div> <div>View 7 more</div> </div> <div> <div>HOOD FREDDY</div> <div>too sweet and put me on</div> <div>4d ago Reply 6</div> <div>View 7 more</div> </div> <div> <div>jef</div> <div>sybau (can't find)</div> <div>3-8 Reply 2671</div> <div>View 28 replies</div> </div> <div> <div>Charmin</div> <div>this is why i always respond to everyone</div> <div>3-8 Reply</div> <div>View 936 replies</div> </div> <div>Back to top</div> </div> </div> </div>                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| 5. | <div> <div> <div> <div>Slap cheeks to play</div> <div> </div> <div>11.1M</div> </div> <div> <div>Comments (30340)</div> <div>Creator videos</div> </div> <div> <div>Search: <a href="#">lily duolingo r64</a></div> <div> <div> <div>byoma</div> <div>I wonder how Dua Lipa feels ab this</div> <div>3-13 Reply 14.3K</div> <div>View 27 replies</div> </div> <div> <div>Fenja</div> <div>TWENTY ONE PILOTS AND DUOLINGO OH MY LORD THE TWO REASONS I AM ALIVE</div> <div>3-13 Reply 936</div> <div>View 8 replies</div> </div> <div> <div>PeppaPig</div> <div>I gyatttt to learn how to read music</div> <div>3-13 Reply 84.4K</div> <div>View 773 replies</div> </div> <div> <div>Eggo</div> <div>Duo CHILL</div> <div>3-14 Reply 15.8K</div> <div>View 38 replies</div> </div> <div> <div>uhaul</div> <div>What's all that movement back there??</div> <div>3-13 Reply 18.2K</div> <div>View 83 replies</div> </div> <div> <div>Wondery Podcasts</div> <div>You know what yeah...</div> <div>3-13 Reply</div> </div> <div>Back to top</div> </div> </div> </div> </div> | <p>13 March 2025</p> <p>For this video, Duolingo utilises a trendy audio at that time, which is the song Ride by Twenty One Pilots remixed with traditional drums. They also incorporated its eccentricity by adding buttocks to the Duo Owl with the caption “Slap cheeks to play.”</p> <p>Source: <a href="https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSrcEoQXj/">https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSrcEoQXj/</a></p> |

## “Unhinged Marketing” on Social Media Marketing: How Duolingo's Content Engage the Audience

6.



Comments (38233)

Creator videos

Search: Ashton



**Duolingo** Creator

heard there's a guy named Aston copying my videos??

3-26 Reply

View 641 replies

408.4K



Erkhern

Duolingo is not Ashton hall

3-26 Reply

112.8K



**Duolingo** Creator

i'm better

3-26 Reply

View 263 more

112.2K



The handsome monkey

bro I don't think Duolingo is that built but I guess I was wrong

10h ago Reply

0



tauheed

theres a guy called aston hall copying your videos

3-26 Reply

View 27 replies

19.2K



Chaz Smith

Duolingo is undefeated

3-27 Reply

View 3 replies

Back to top

26 March 2025

This video refers to a viral “Get Ready With Me Routine: by Ashton Hall on X. Hall’s video went viral due to its insane routine from using mouth tape, ice water for the face, banana peels, and more (Kandangwa, 2025). It went viral and Duolingo took inspiration from it. From here, people were aware of the joke, leading to reaching over 50 million views.

Source: <https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSrcEn1DS/>

7.



29 March 2025

Duolingo utilises this viral sound during the Ramadan season. It seems that TikTok users were already aware of the joke from the original creator, and Duolingo embraced the joke.

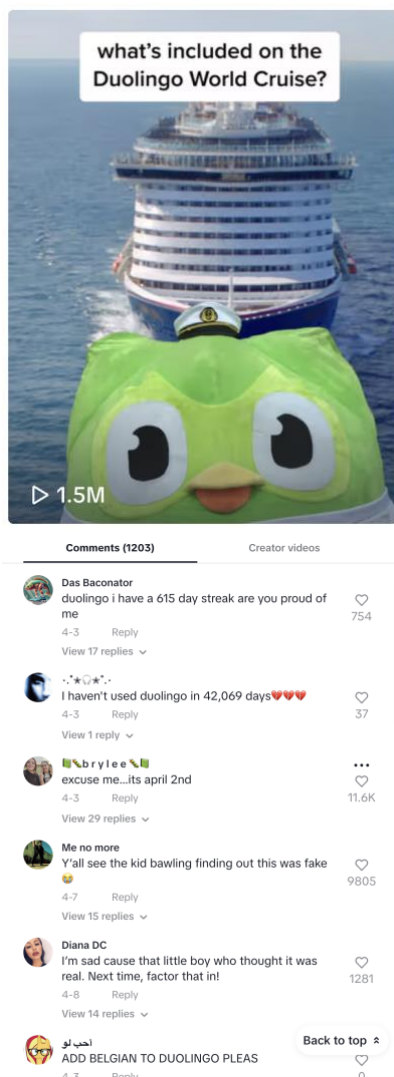
Source: <https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSrcfXcA/>

## “Unhinged Marketing” on Social Media Marketing: How Duolingo's Content Engage the Audience

|    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|    |  <p><b>Comments (3579)</b> Creator videos</p> <p><b>mantumuncher</b><br/>Duo are u leading taraweeh today<br/>3-29 Reply 13.3K</p> <p><b>Duolingo</b> <i>Creator</i><br/>not a hafiz bro<br/>3-29 Reply 12.5K</p> <p>View 7 more</p> <p><b>tytytucute</b><br/>Ain't no way bro knows about the 8 rakat and the Yemeni coffee<br/>3-29 Reply 6094</p> <p>View 14 replies</p> <p><b>Zariyah</b><br/>The way Duolingo is dialed into the culture is unreal<br/>3-29 Reply 7319</p> <p><b>Duolingo</b> <i>Creator</i><br/>and yall say I can't speak arabic sis listen to my tajweed<br/>3-29 Reply 6633</p> <p>View 28 more</p> <p><b>Duolingo</b> <i>Creator</i><br/>sorry for the late replies gotta attend the khatam<br/>3-29 Reply 14K</p> <p>View 82 replies</p> <p><b>Chaboimomo</b><br/>YO DUOLINGO USED MY AUDIO WHAAAA<br/>Back to top</p> <p>Add comment... Post</p>                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| 8. |  <p><b>Eid Mubarak from Dawood Lingo</b></p> <p>3.7M</p> <p><a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@duolingo/video/748762810...">https://www.tiktok.com/@duolingo/video/748762810...</a> Copy link</p> <p><b>Comments (9021)</b> Creator videos</p> <p>Search: <b>Duolingo Israel</b></p> <p><b>munna.1337x</b><br/>why is the search "Duolingo Israel"<br/>4-1 Reply 128</p> <p>View 8 replies</p> <p><b>Yahya Alhihi</b><br/>Eid Mubarak Dawood Lingo<br/>3-31 Reply 21.3K</p> <p>View 51 replies</p> <p><b>Akyas</b><br/>Thank you Tokopedia, Eid Mubarak! i hope Duolingo will do the same<br/>3-31 Reply 1381</p> <p>View 27 replies</p> <p><b>Duolingo is appropriating my culture, unfollowed...</b><br/>3-31 Reply 13</p> <p><b>xq.ren</b><br/>oh.<br/>3-31 Reply 57</p> <p>View 9 more</p> <p><b>Diego</b><br/>Why don't you ever say happy lent huh?<br/>3-31 Reply 63</p> <p>Back to top</p> | <p>31 March 2025</p> <p>This video is Duolingo celebrating the Eid Mubarak for the audience who also celebrates Eid Mubarak. The lack of effort for this video seems to be pleasing for the audience (based on the comments sections).</p> <p>Source: <a href="https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSrcoxTUf/">https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSrcoxTUf/</a></p> |

## “Unhinged Marketing” on Social Media Marketing: How Duolingo's Content Engage the Audience”

9.



3 April 2025

This video is a collaboration campaign by Duolingo with Carnival. It shows that the Duolingo crew is conducting a cruise holiday and it includes tuna crudo, roller coasters, the burden of consciousness, and more. The humour here lies in how random the storyline is. From food and entertainment category to existential crisis.

Source: <https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSrc049E3/>

10.



12 April 2025

The video consists of the Duo Owl skiing with a Spongebob Squarepants audio. Duolingo joins the trend “omw to the liqa sto” (On my way to the liquor store) by skiing. Contextually, the content showcases people using uncommon transportation with that caption.

Source: <https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSr3Roq1T/>

## “Unhinged Marketing” on Social Media Marketing: How Duolingo's Content Engage the Audience

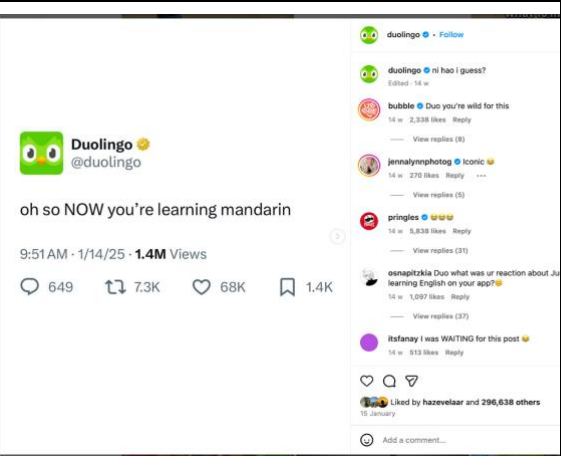
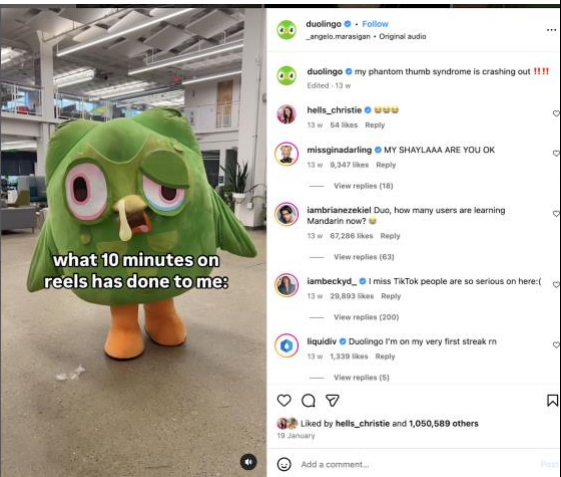
The image is a screenshot of a YouTube interface. On the left side, there is a list of comments under the heading 'Comments (3062)'. The comments are from users 'Sir Shmigus', 'EveryManJack', '24u', 'Marshmello', and 'urban decay'. The first comment from 'Sir Shmigus' is highlighted. It says: 'You shouldn't be going to the liga sto you should checking on Germany Duolingo 🤔'. Below it, there are options to 'Reply' and 'View 7 replies'. To the right of the comment is a heart icon and the number '4506'. The second comment from 'EveryManJack' says: 'Duolingo how many beers 🍺'. It also has 'Reply' and 'View 2 replies' options, and a heart icon with the number '82'. The third comment from '24u' says: 'duolingo! why are you're eyes red??? chill i only skipped 1 lesson bro 🤔'. It has 'Reply' and '4th ago' options, and a heart icon with the number '0'. The fourth comment from 'Marshmello' says: 'can u get me something'. It has 'Reply' and 'View 22 replies' options, and a heart icon with the number '2258'. The fifth comment from 'urban decay' says: 'that one unemployed friend on a wednesday at 2:17pm:'. It has 'Reply' and 'View 29 more' options, and a heart icon with the number '16.4K'. At the bottom of the comments list is a 'Back to top' button. On the right side of the image, there is a video player area with the heading 'Creator videos'. The video player shows a thumbnail of a person with a red heart icon and the number '16.4K'.

---

8.

9. Table 3. Duolingo's Instagram Content

## 10 Duolingo's Instagram Content from January 2025 - April 2025

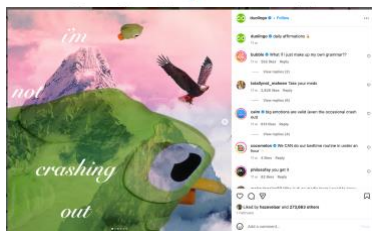
|           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>1.</p> |  <p>Comments Section:</p> <p>@duolingo - ni hao i guess?</p> <p>@bubble - Duo you're wild for this</p> <p>@jennalynnphotog - Iconic 🤔</p> <p>@pringles - 🤔🤔🤔</p> <p>@osnapitzkia - Duo what was ur reaction about Jungwon learning English on your app? 🤔</p> <p>@itsfanay - I was WAITING for this post 🤔</p> | <p>15 January 2025</p> <p>This post is a tweet-integrated post. In this post, Duolingo tweeted in a sarcastic way. This sarcastic joke refers to the TikTok Ban and people moving to RedNote, which is a similar platform like TikTok but it is based in China. That said, people are learning Mandarin to understand the language.</p> <p>Source:</p> <p><a href="https://www.instagram.com/p/DE0ZYu_ymBM/?igsh=bjUxejJqM3Ro_bjdk">https://www.instagram.com/p/DE0ZYu_ymBM/?igsh=bjUxejJqM3Ro_bjdk</a></p>               |
| <p>2.</p> |  <p>@duolingo - my phantom thumb syndrome is crashing out !!!</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <p>19 January 2025</p> <p>This is a campaign by Duolingo that portrayed the Duo Owl catching the bird flu. They also changed the icon of their application into the same face as the mascot in this video. The caption of the video suits well with the video content with the Duo Owl's revolting sick face which some people find humorous.</p> <p>Source:</p> <p><a href="https://www.instagram.com/reel/DE_l6S0tA4J/?igsh=cDlmNjAzc2E0d24=">https://www.instagram.com/reel/DE_l6S0tA4J/?igsh=cDlmNjAzc2E0d24=</a></p> |

## “Unhinged Marketing” on Social Media Marketing: How Duolingo's Content Engage the Audience”

|    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |  |
|----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
|    | <p>@hells_christie - 🤔🤔🤔</p> <p>@missginadarling - MY SHAYLAAA ARE YOU OK</p> <p>@iambrianexekiel - Duo, how many users are learning Mandarin, now? 🤔</p> <p>@iambeckyd_ - I miss TikTok people are so serious on here :(</p> <p>@liquidiv - Duolingo I'm on my very first streak rn</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |  |
| 3. |  <p>28 January 2025 ...</p> <p>This post is a reference to Lady Gaga's new mayhem album. The Duo owl dresses up as Lady Gaga and did a photoshoot for the parody cover. This post was then posted by Pop Base, a well-known Twitter account that updates pop culture posts. Duolingo then reposted this on its Instagram.</p> <p>Source:<br/> <a href="https://www.instagram.com/p/DFWI2m9xlBP/?igsh=YXBxa2N5YnlndXg4">https://www.instagram.com/p/DFWI2m9xlBP/?igsh=YXBxa2N5YnlndXg4</a></p> <p>@duolingo - who is this diva</p> <p>@mikeysul - Duo really said “I don’t speak German, but I can if you like!”</p> <p>@nycosmetics - oh hi diva</p> <p>@iambrianexekiel - Lady HooHoo</p> <p>@sxint4k - I deleted ur app u didnt teach me anything</p> <p>zachary_lumsden - Or should we say “hoo” is this Duo?</p> |  |
| 4. |  <p>30 January 2025 ...</p> <p>This post was a reference to a trend where people use this type of vintage artstyle, with an eerie stare in silence, as a way to express confusion.</p> <p>Source:<br/> <a href="https://www.instagram.com/p/DFbJC8tSw5y/?igsh=bW11aTM0NGVtMGZ3">https://www.instagram.com/p/DFbJC8tSw5y/?igsh=bW11aTM0NGVtMGZ3</a></p> <p>@duolingo - it's like our little secret</p> <p>@shafiga.hey - Hey Dup, you were on my “Hear Me Out” Cake, by the way</p> <p>@conans.koala_ - I'm crying I love this trend</p> <p>@itszsz_eli - Duo I'm in love with you</p> <p>@nyxcosmetics - pleaseee I'm dying 🥺</p> <p>@bubble - A duo of Duos</p>                                                                                                                                                   |  |

# “Unhinged Marketing” on Social Media Marketing: How Duolingo's Content Engage the Audience

5.



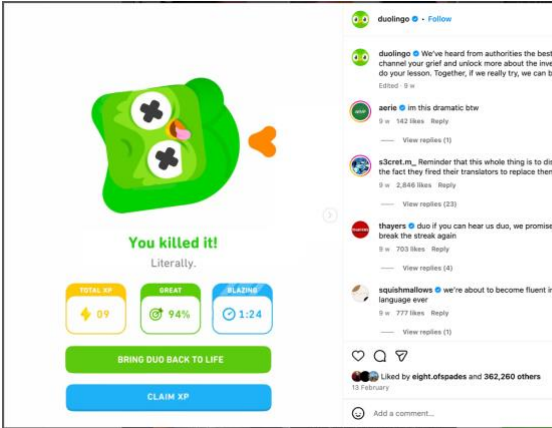
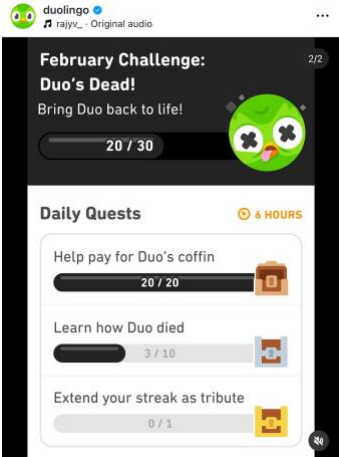
1 February 2025

This post consists of six pages filled with daily affirmations texts, except for the last page. This seems appealing to the audience due to the eccentricity of the overall design—from the images used, the font, and the content.

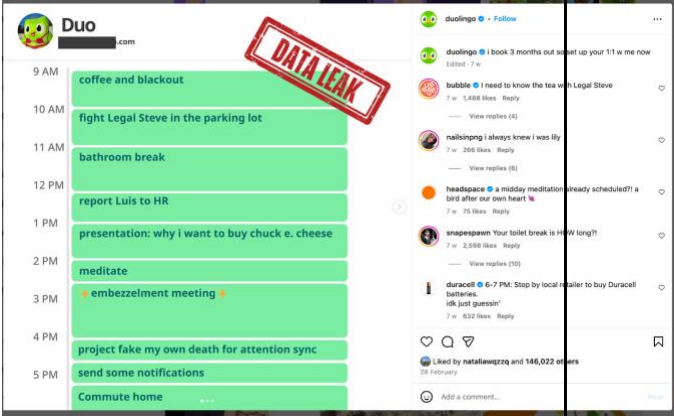
Source:

[https://www.instagram.com/p/DFfy\\_qWx4uz/?igsh=Z2FjeTVnaHF5cmhw](https://www.instagram.com/p/DFfy_qWx4uz/?igsh=Z2FjeTVnaHF5cmhw)

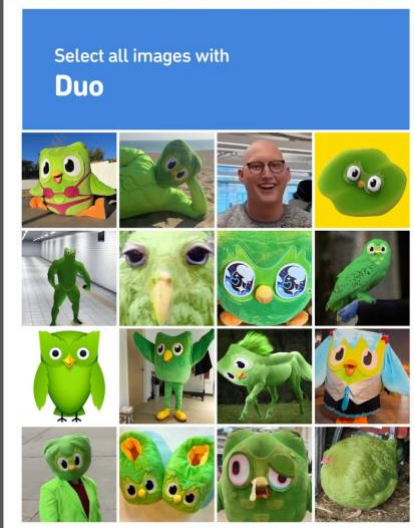
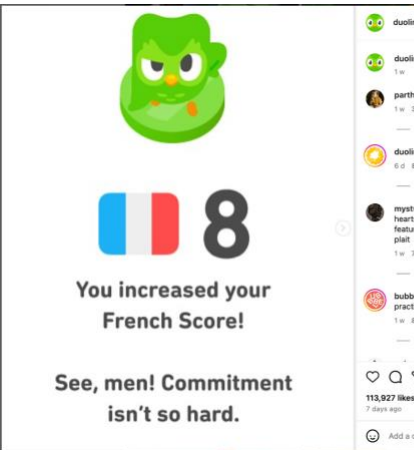
## “Unhinged Marketing” on Social Media Marketing: How Duolingo's Content Engage the Audience

|    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |  |
|----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
|    |  <p>duolingo • mcclawz • Original audio</p> <p>273K 673 62.6K</p> <p>Duolingo - daily affirmations 🧘<br/>         Bubble - What if I just make up my own grammar??<br/>         Totallynot_maheen - Take your meds<br/>         Calm - big emotions are valid (even the occasional crash)<br/>         Cocomelon - We CAN do our bedtime routine in under an hour 🌟<br/>         Philosophy - you get it</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |  |
| 6. |  <p>13 February 2025</p> <p>This post was a part of a campaign that portrayed the death of the Duo Owl. The caption “You killed it!” expresses ambiguous messages. You killed it can be taken literally and metaphorically. Supposedly, Duolingo is saying the user who has finished the lesson was exceptional, but in this case, relating back to the campaign, it says that the user has murdered the owl.</p> <p>Source: <a href="https://www.instagram.com/p/DF_LEpOS493/?igsh=MXVqbTRnYXh1b2VlZw==">https://www.instagram.com/p/DF_LEpOS493/?igsh=MXVqbTRnYXh1b2VlZw==</a></p>  <p>Comments</p> <p>@duolingo - We've heard from authorities the best way to channel your grief and unlock more about the investigation is to do your lesson. Together, if we really try, we can bring Duo back.</p> <p>@aerie - im this dramatic btw</p> <p>@s3cret.m - Reminder that this whole thing is to distract from the fact they fired their translators to</p> |  |

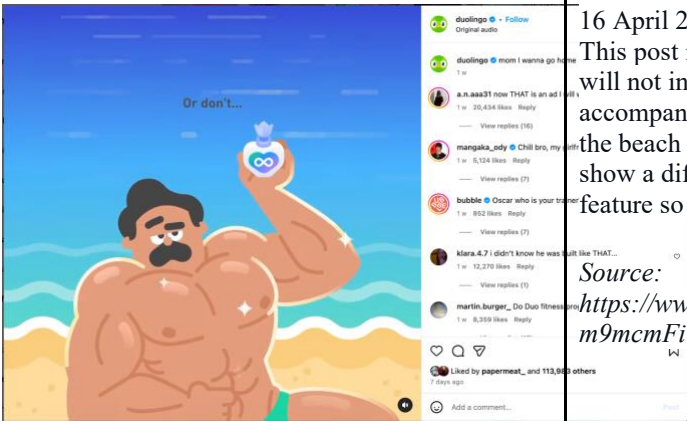
## “Unhinged Marketing” on Social Media Marketing: How Duolingo's Content Engage the Audience

|    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|    | <p>replace them with AI</p> <p>@thayers - duo if you can hear us duo, we promise to never break the streak again</p> <p>@squishmallows - we're about to become fluent in every language ever</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| 7. |    <p>Comments</p> <p>@duolingo - I book 3 months out so set up your 1:1 w me now</p> <p>@bubble - I need to know the tea with Legal Steve</p> <p>@nailsniping - I always knew i was lily</p> <p>@headspace - a midday meditation already scheduled?! a bird after our own heart 🐦</p> <p>@snapespawn - Your toilet break is HOW long?!</p> <p>@duracell - 6-7 PM: Stop by local retailer to buy Duracell batteries. Idk just guessin'</p> | <p>28 February 2025</p> <p>This post shows a data leak of Duo's, Lily's, and Falstaff's schedules. These show how random and unhinged the Duolingo characters are, building more unique characters to themselves.</p> <p>Source:</p> <p><a href="https://www.instagram.com/p/DGlnl77SWdp/?igsh=OTV6NWYxa21tdXhm">https://www.instagram.com/p/DGlnl77SWdp/?igsh=OTV6NWYxa21tdXhm</a></p> |

# “Unhinged Marketing” on Social Media Marketing: How Duolingo's Content Engage the Audience”

|           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|-----------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>8.</p> |  <p>Select all images with Duo</p> <p>Comments</p> <p>@duolingo - good luck trying to find me</p> <p>@eduardodemelorocho - Why not add a Dualipa photo? 🤖</p> <p>@inspo_by_jess - iconic because your ceo also invented reCAPTCHA</p> <p>@androgynus - I had a nightmare last night where there was an army of Duos in the sky moving slowly like hot air balloons. What does it mean y'all?</p> <p>@zachary_lumsden - They're all the same picture!</p> <p>@aspenanimation - 😂😂😂</p> | <p>4 March 2025 ...</p> <p>This post refers to Google reCAPTCHA for verification. In this case, the audience is asked to select all images with Duo. All of these images are references to Duo's other posts prior to this post. As you can see, you can see the sick Duo Owl in one of the squares, the original Duolingo owl, the Duo Owl in its swimsuit, and more!</p> <p>Source:</p> <p><a href="https://www.instagram.com/p/DGv8Qy7RjRk/?igsh=MXRnbHJkdGVmbGV6eQ==">https://www.instagram.com/p/DGv8Qy7RjRk/?igsh=MXRnbHJkdGVmbGV6eQ==</a></p> |
| <p>9.</p> |  <p>You increased your French Score!</p> <p>See, men! Commitment isn't so hard.</p> <p>Comments</p> <p>@duolingo - Introducing Duolingo Score</p> <p>@parth.p708 - see men 🤖🤖💕💕 ts pmo sb icl gng</p> <p>@duolingoenglishtest - Score &gt;&gt;&gt; streak</p> <p>@mystwhizzpuzz - Duo, can u pls make the feature of getting hearts with practicing after 5 hearts are gone. Pls, pls that feature was soo good. Alsjeblieft, bitte, por favor, sil vous plait</p>                  | <p>16 April 2025</p> <p>This post is a shady post towards men. Not only about committing to finish their lessons, but also a shade to how men are unable to commit in relationships. That said, Duolingo used ambiguous messages again to deliver the humour.</p> <p>Source:</p> <p><a href="https://www.instagram.com/p/DIejFs4z5dU/?igsh=MW54dzAyNGxqajF6cg==">https://www.instagram.com/p/DIejFs4z5dU/?igsh=MW54dzAyNGxqajF6cg==</a></p>                                                                                                          |

“Unhinged Marketing” on Social Media Marketing: How Duolingo's Content Engage the Audience”

|     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|-----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|     | @bubble - pls don't send me to the trench I promise I'll practice 🤖                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| 10. | <div></div> <div>Comments<br/>@duolingo - mom I wanna go home<br/>@a.n.aaa31- now THAT is an ad I will watch<br/>@mangaka_ody - Chill bro, my girlfriend is on this app.<br/>@bubble - Oscar who is your trainer?<br/>@kiara.4.7 - i didn't know he was built like THAT...<br/>@martin.burger_ - Do Duo fitness program 🙏🙏🙏</div> | <p>16 April 2025</p> <p>This post is a video that wants to promote how the Super Duolingo will not interrupt users with their studies with advertisements accompanied by Oscar, the man with exceptional physique laying on the beach with an inviting raspy voice. The comments, however, show a different reaction of not wanting to buy the Super Duolingo feature so that they can watch this ad on purpose.</p> <p>Source:<br/><a href="https://www.instagram.com/reel/DIeOT3YRPTp/?igsh=NXRxdmdqe m9mcmFi">https://www.instagram.com/reel/DIeOT3YRPTp/?igsh=NXRxdmdqe m9mcmFi</a></p> |

VII. DISCUSSION

A. Duolingo’s Unhinged Content and Engagement Metrics

The study analysed 20 pieces of content from Duolingo's social media platforms—10 pieces of content from each social media platform. Based on the collected data, it can be concluded that Duolingo does not cross-post, which is a recommended media strategy (Johnston & Rowney, 2018). Some posts are cross-post, but some are also not. Although all social media platforms create an image that the Duo Owl is deranged, conversely, the type of content is different. Most of TikTok's content is video-based, most of the content on Instagram is picture-based; therefore, each social media platform complements the other due to the distinguishing posts.

Furthermore, unhinged content and integration vary in their social media content. However, these contents still embrace Duolingo's image of being threatening, unhinged, and intimidating. Not only that, but it seems that Duolingo has been embracing and building more character to other characters in the Duolingo franchise other than the Duo Owl. Although some content was aimed at engaging with fans—such as the Lady Gaga parody album remake—Duolingo still succeeded in delivering varied humour in their content towards the Gen Z audience (Noor, 2024, p. 29), and the audience seems to play along, as seen in the comments sections from both social media platforms.

Thus far, Duolingo’s unhinged marketing strategy does not only leverage on trends, but they also establish their original content, such as the Sick Duo Owl, the Death of the Duo Owl, the reCAPTCHA post, and more. These original content still manage to receive as many likes as the posts who follow a particular trend. This shows how Duolingo’s unhinged marketing is sustainable in audience engagement. That said, the study will also calculate Duolingo’s engagement rate from the 20 content that have been selected for the content analysis

Another aspect that should be considered is the engagement rate of Duolingo on its social media platforms: Instagram and TikTok. The data is collected manually from each post’s likes, comments and shares to check Duolingo's engagement rates on TikTok and Instagram. As mentioned previously, these selected content are formulated through the Engagement Rate of Post to calculate the engagement rate (Popsters, 2025), and then the paper will use the engagement rate indicator based on industry standards (Polishchuk, 2022).

## “Unhinged Marketing” on Social Media Marketing: How Duolingo's Content Engage the Audience”

Table 4. Engagement Rate: Industry Standards (Polishchuk, 2022)

| Engagement Rate | Category     |
|-----------------|--------------|
| <1%             | Low          |
| 1%-3.5%         | Average/Good |
| 3.5%-6%         | High         |
| 6%>             | Very High    |

Table 5. Duolingo’s Instagram Engagement Rate

| Duolingo’s Instagram (January 2025 - April 2025) |        |           |                 |             |         |
|--------------------------------------------------|--------|-----------|-----------------|-------------|---------|
| No.                                              | Date   | Likes     | Comments        | Shares      |         |
| 1                                                | 1 - 15 | 296,638   | 2,674           | 53,700      |         |
| 2                                                | 1 - 19 | 1,050,590 | 5,503           | 179,000     |         |
| 3                                                | 1 - 28 | 120,115   | 325             | 4,955       |         |
| 4                                                | 1 - 30 | 111,485   | 263             | 9,655       |         |
| 5                                                | 2 - 1  | 273664    | 673             | 62600       |         |
| 6                                                | 2 - 13 | 362261    | 2031            | 26900       |         |
| 7                                                | 2 - 28 | 146023    | 723             | 8126        |         |
| 8                                                | 3 - 4  | 170464    | 653             | 10700       |         |
| 9                                                | 4 - 16 | 113927    | 616             | 11000       |         |
| 10                                               | 4 - 16 | 113,984   | 1547            | 40200       |         |
| <b>Total</b>                                     |        | 2759151   | 15008           | 406836      | 3180995 |
| <b>Posts</b>                                     |        | 10        | <b>ERP</b>      | 6.768074468 |         |
| <b>Followers</b>                                 |        | 4,700,000 | <b>Category</b> | Very High   |         |

Table 6. Duolingo’s TikTok Engagement Rate

| Duolingo’s TikTok (January 2025 - April 2025) |        |            |                 |             |          |
|-----------------------------------------------|--------|------------|-----------------|-------------|----------|
| No.                                           | Date   | Likes      | Comments        | Shares      |          |
| 1                                             | 1 - 18 | 2,700,000  | 31,300          | 182,700     |          |
| 2                                             | 2 - 5  | 2,800,000  | 25,400          | 166,700     |          |
| 3                                             | 2 - 25 | 4,500,000  | 48,800          | 557,600     |          |
| 4                                             | 3 - 8  | 548,500    | 7775            | 92,500      |          |
| 5                                             | 3 - 13 | 1200000    | 30400           | 362,200     |          |
| 6                                             | 3 - 26 | 6,900,000  | 38,200          | 858,300     |          |
| 7                                             | 3 - 29 | 237,600    | 3579            | 61,000      |          |
| 8                                             | 3 - 31 | 410,700    | 9,021           | 125,700     |          |
| 9                                             | 4 - 3  | 35,300     | 660             | 470         |          |
| 10                                            | 4 - 12 | 647,100    | 3066            | 114,200     |          |
| <b>Total</b>                                  |        | 19979200   | 198201          | 2521370     | 22698771 |
| <b>Posts</b>                                  |        | 10         | <b>ERP</b>      | 13.35221824 |          |
| <b>Followers</b>                              |        | 17,000,000 | <b>Category</b> | Very High   |          |

From the calculation based on the ERP formula, Duolingo’s Instagram’s and TikTok’s simplified engagement rates are 6.7% and 13.3%. These percentages show that their engagement rates fall into the “Very High” category. These calculations illustrate

## “Unhinged Marketing” on Social Media Marketing: How Duolingo's Content Engage the Audience”

how Duolingo's content on Instagram and TikTok succeeded in engaging with the audience through their visual content and comments engagement.

### ***B. The Beginning of Duolingo Memes***

Previously, Duolingo was discussed as a meme in 2017. The first meme shows the Duo Owl holding a gun, aiming at the audience while threatening them to open the language learning application. The meme received more than 150,000 impressions, leading to other audiences partaking in the wave. More Duolingo memes were created and posted on Tumblr and Twitter (formerly known as X) (Matt, 2019). Additionally, Duolingo's Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Luis Von Ahn (2023), added that using passive-aggressive notification to remind users to study led prosumers to produce more memes from the notifications. Duolingo, instead of distancing themselves from the jokes from these lighthearted jokes from the users, strategically embraced them (Gibbs et al., 2023).



7. Evil Duolingo Meme (Matt, 2019)

The company's marketing has harnessed the meme's humour, embracing the image of the threatening Duo Owl and integrating them into their social media marketing, including TikTok. From thereon, Duolingo's unhinged behaviour managed to connect with its younger audience, chiefly Gen Z. Duolingo users, who commented about how obnoxious the Duo Owl is, which supports the brand in gaining recognition. As seen in the comments section of the posts in the findings, the audience is contributing to support the Duo Owl's passive-aggressive, threatening, and intimidating image (Gibbs et al., 2023; Gagne, 2023). In the following section, the author will study how Duolingo's marketing is gaining recognition and firmly engaging with the audience.

### ***C. The Audience's Perception of Duolingo's Social Media Marketing***

In this section, the author will study how the audience perceives Duolingo's content and what made them engage with Duolingo's content based on previous literature reviews and findings. To recall, the users and gratifications theory defines how people actively choose and use particular media to satisfy specific needs (West & Turner, 2010). The author will delve into the comments of the audience towards Duolingo's content concerning how Duolingo's content is able to catch their attention. This shows how Duolingo's marketing strategy relies on interdependency (Atherton, 2023, p. 85) where they can engage with their community and audience based on their content.

The comments section is filled with the audience commenting on the joke and even contributing to the gimmick. This shows that the audience is enjoying the content Duolingo made. It is mentioned that Duolingo is humanised through its social media marketing, which becomes the highlight of the marketing as well. Hence, they took a more authentic and relaxed approach, which succeeded in engaging with the audience, especially Gen Z (RED, 2017; Marcelle, 2022).

Moreover, analysing Duolingo's humorous communications in its marketing is a significant factor in audience engagement. Meyer's perspective on how humour helps people find their sense of belonging shows how the audience's comments can relate to one another and the Duo Owl to understand its satire. Therefore, the audience and Duolingo itself can reply to one another, elongating the discussion. Not only that, but Duolingo also utilises its memes to spread a message—relating to Mukhopadhyay's meme marketing theory (2023). With that said, based on the data and findings this study has retrieved, Duolingo's integration of memes and humour leverages success in reaching a wider audience.

### ***D. Unhinged Marketing: Establishing Brand Identity through Original Eccentricity***

Learning from Duolingo's unhinged marketing strategy, it shows how Duolingo was able to give character to its mascot, the Duo Owl. Duolingo took the opportunity of its viral Duo Owl meme and decided to integrate it as part of its marketing strategy. However, as time passes, they evolved from just embracing the meme, to creating their own unconventional content that derives

## “Unhinged Marketing” on Social Media Marketing: How Duolingo's Content Engage the Audience”

from the meme. The creativity in its marketing is recommended to not only stick with one strategy—with time evolving, so do marketing trends (Quesenberry, 2024, p. 21). The novelty lies in how Duolingo not only adopts viral internet culture but also evolves it through original, unsettlingly humorous content—thereby creating a unique brand identity that resonates particularly with Gen Z audiences (Noor, 2024, p. 29).

### V. CONCLUSION

As previously discussed, the paper aims to examine the effectiveness of meme integration and unhinged content in Duolingo's social media marketing in terms of maintaining customer engagement. With that said, in this section, the author will conclude the journal article with the findings that had been retrieved along with the summary of the discussion. However, to sum up, Duolingo succeeds in effectively communicating with its audience through its meme-integrated social media marketing.

Duolingo's social media marketing strategy demonstrates a keen understanding of its target audience and an adept integration of humour and memes to engage users across various platforms. By distinguishing the characteristics of each platform, Duolingo ensures that its messaging resonates effectively with users on TikTok, Instagram. Further, the integration of memes and their originality reinforces Duolingo's creativity and its quirky and unhinged brand image. This approach captures users' attention and encourages active participation and interaction based on engagement rates across all platforms.

Furthermore, Duolingo's embrace of its threatening, intimidating, and goofy persona has allowed the company to connect with the audience on a deeper level. Rather than distancing itself from the memes that originated in 2017, Duolingo strategically incorporates memes as a part of its marketing strategy, fostering a sense of community and shared humour among its users. This engagement enhances brand recognition and strengthens brand loyalty, due to users feeling a sense of ownership and investment in Duolingo's identity and messaging.

Through a combination of entertaining content, relatable humour, and strategic engagement tactics, Duolingo has cultivated a strong presence in the competitive landscape of language learning apps. As the digital landscape continues to evolve, Duolingo's ability to adapt and innovate in its social media marketing will undoubtedly remain a critical factor in its ongoing success and growth. Therefore, integrating memes in social media marketing succeeds in engaging with general users, increasing brand awareness.

#### *A. Recommendation*

For future research, the author recommends a more varied methodology, such as interviewing people who are aware of Duolingo's unhinged marketing and those who are not. From there, the future author can create comparisons about how Duolingo's unhinged marketing can engage with the audience. Moreover, for a better and approximate calculation for Duolingo's engagement rate, it is recommended to analyse all posts within one month.

# “Unhinged Marketing” on Social Media Marketing: How Duolingo's Content Engage the Audience”

## REFERENCES

### Journal Articles

- 1) Bilecen, O. and Canarslan, N.Ö., 2023. The role of humor in successful meme marketing campaigns: The case of Ryanair. *Zenodo*. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8017754>
- 2) Goel, R. and Diwan, M., 2022. Influence of social media marketing on buying decision making process of consumers. *Mathematical Statistician and Engineering Applications*, 71(4), pp.5525–5533. <https://doi.org/10.17762/msea.v71i4.1138>
- 3) Malodia, S., Dhir, A., Bilgihan, A., Sinha, P. and Tikoo, T., 2022. Meme marketing: How can marketers drive better engagement using viral memes? *Psychology and Marketing*, 39(9), pp.1673–1848. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21702>
- 4) Meyer, J.C., 2000. Humor as a double-edged sword: Four functions of humor in communication. *Communication Theory*, 10(3), pp.310–331. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2000.tb00194.x>
- 5) Mukhopadhyay, M., 2023. Humorous communication theory and its applications in marketing. *Social Science Research Network*. [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=4353751](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4353751)
- 6) Sheak, E. and Abdulrazak, S., 2023. The influence of social media marketing activities on TikTok in raising brand awareness. *Market-Tržište*, 35(1), pp.93–110. <https://doi.org/10.22598/mt/2023.35.1.93>

### Books

- 7) Atherton, J., 2023. *Social media strategy: A practical guide to social media marketing and customer engagement*. London: Kogan Page.
- 8) Daymon, C. and Holloway, I., 2011. *Qualitative research methods in public relations and marketing communications*. London: Routledge.
- 9) Johnston, J. and Rowney, K., 2018. *Media strategies: Managing content, platforms and relationships*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- 10) Mogaji, E., 2021. *Introduction to advertising: Understanding and managing the advertising process*. London: Routledge.
- 11) Quesenberry, K.A., 2024. *Social media strategy: Marketing, advertising, and public relations in the consumer revolution*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- 12) West, R. and Turner, L., 2010. *Introducing communication theory: Analysis and application*. 4th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill Higher Education.

### Theses

- 13) Hoek, F.V. and Badham, M., 2021. *Gamification on social media: A study on Duolingo's use of gamification on Instagram*. Jyväskylä University.
- 14) Noor, R., 2024. *Unconventional marketing and Gen Z consumer engagement: Exploring the realm of unhinged marketing*. Tallinn University of Technology.

### Online Media

- 15) Brand Vision Insights, 2023. Duolingo's amazing TikTok strategy: A unique marketing success story. *Brand Vision Marketing*, 2 November. [online] Available at: <https://www.brandvm.com/post/duolingostiktok-strategy> [Accessed 6 February 2024].
- 16) Brown, H., 2022. The surprising power of internet memes. *BBC Future*, 28 September. [online] Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20220928-the-surprising-power-of-internet-memes> [Accessed 3 March 2024].
- 17) Ceci, L., 2023. Top language learning apps by downloads 2023. *Statista*, 24 October. [online] Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1239522/top-language-learning-apps-downloads/> [Accessed 1 February 2024].
- 18) Daniel, 2023. Duolingo users and growth statistics (2024). *SignHouse*, 29 December. [online] Available at: <https://www.usesignhouse.com/blog/duolingo-stats> [Accessed 1 February 2024].
- 19) Gagne, Y., 2023. Why Gen Z is obsessed with the Duolingo Owl. *Fast Company Middle East*, 9 October. [online] Available at: <https://fastcompany.me.com/technology/why-gen-z-is-obsessed-with-the-duolingo-owl/> [Accessed 7 February 2024].
- 20) Gahan, B., 2021. How Duolingo created a formula for success on TikTok. *Sprout Social*, 13 December. [online] Available at: <https://sproutsocial.com/insights/duolingo-tiktok-success/> [Accessed 7 February 2024].
- 21) Gibbs, A. et al., 2023. Threatening note from the Duolingo Owl leaves internet in stitches. *Newsweek*, 5 December. [online] Available at: <https://www.newsweek.com/threatening-note-duolingo-owl-internet-stitches-1849686> [Accessed 25 April 2024].
- 22) Kandangwa, S., 2025. Who is Ashton Hall, the fitness influencer with an 'insane' morning routine? *South China Morning Post*, 27 March. [online] Available at: <https://www.scmp.com/magazines/style/entertainment/article/3304128/who-ashton-hall-insane-morning-routine-video-fitness-influencer-and-former-nfl-hopeful-quit-american> [Accessed 25 April 2025].
- 23) Marcelle, C., 2022. Duolingo's \$6-billion growth marketing case study: Guilt, memes, & engagement strategy. *Chantelle Marcelle*, 12 August. [online] Available at: <https://chantellemarcelle.com/duolingo-growth-marketing-case-study/> [Accessed 26 April 2024].
- 24) Matt, 2019. Evil Duolingo Owl. *Know Your Meme*. [online] Available at: <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/evil-duolingo-owl> [Accessed 6 February 2024].

## ““Unhinged Marketing” on Social Media Marketing: How Duolingo's Content Engage the Audience”

- 25) McCoy, K., 2021. How Duolingo is using its 'unhinged content' with Duo the Owl on TikTok. *Digiday*, 13 December. [online] Available at: <https://digiday.com/marketing/how-duolingo-is-using-its-unhinged-content-with-duo-the-owl-to-make-people-laugh-on-tiktok/> [Accessed 1 February 2024].
- 26) Montgomery, B., 2025. TikTok goes dark in the US ahead of ban. *The Guardian*, 19 January. [online] Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2025/jan/19/tiktok-us-ban> [Accessed 25 April 2025].
- 27) Nguyen, T., 2023. The secrets behind Duolingo's TikTok marketing strategy. *Rival IQ*, 4 November. [online] Available at: <https://www.rivaliq.com/blog/duolingo-tiktok-marketing-strategy/> [Accessed 6 February 2024].
- 28) Polishchuk, D., 2022. What is a good Instagram engagement rate in 2022? *PromoRepublic*, 18 August. [online] Available at: <https://promorepublic.com/en/blog/what-is-a-good-instagram-engagement-rate/> [Accessed 5 April 2024].
- 29) Popsters, 2025. Engagement rate: How to calculate ER for social media properly. *Popsters*, 9 January. [online] Available at: <https://popsters.com/blog/post/er-how-to-calculate-engagement-rate> [Accessed 24 April 2025].
- 30) RED, 2017. The rise of unhinged marketing: How Duolingo found success on TikTok. *Marketing by Red*, 9 November. [online] Available at: <https://marketingbyred.com/marketing/the-rise-of-unhinged-marketing-how-duolingo-found-success-on-tiktok/> [Accessed 26 April 2024].
- 31) Sheikh, M., 2025. Social media demographics to inform your 2025 strategy. *Sprout Social*, 24 February. [online] Available at: <https://sproutsocial.com/insights/new-social-media-demographics/?amp> [Accessed 22 April 2025].
- 32) Yuxin, Y., 2020. Understanding young adults' TikTok usage. *UCSD Department of Communication COMM 196B Senior Honors Seminar Undergraduate Honors Thesis*, June. [online] Available at: [https://communication.ucsd.edu/\\_files/undergrad/yang-yuxin-understanding-young-adults-tiktok-usage.pdf](https://communication.ucsd.edu/_files/undergrad/yang-yuxin-understanding-young-adults-tiktok-usage.pdf) [Accessed 29 February 2024].
- 33) Zaria Parvez and Fanbytes, 2021. 15 questions with Zaria Parvez social media coordinator at Duolingo. *Fanbytes*. [online] Available at: <https://fanbytes.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/15-Questions-With...-Duolingo.pdf>.