

Police Representations on TikTok

A comparative, explorative study of police-related content in Denmark and Germany

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TikTok is highly popular in Denmark and Germany, especially among young audiences. According to recent studies, 49% of young Danes (Hyldig Hansen, 2025) and 50% of young Germans (Tippelt, 2025) use the Chinese-owned social media platform. Currently, TikTok is the subject of intense debate due its supposedly addictive and polarizing algorithm (European Commission 2026; Kinast & Marquart, In press). However, scientific research on the platform is still surprisingly scarce. The available studies focus strongly on mental health (Conte et al., 2025; Motta et al., 2024) and political communication in the context of elections (Cartes-Barroso et al., 2025; Pinto et al., 2025). Other public actors, however, have not yet been scientifically investigated. We begin to address this gap by examining police-related content on the platform. This focus is particularly relevant, as user videos of alleged conflicts between officers and citizens tend to generate high engagement and, consequently, algorithmic traction. Simultaneously, both the Danish and German police use the platform as part of their employer branding strategies (Politiets Online Patrulje 2025; Polizeiakademie Niedersachsen 2026).

In our exploratory study, we analyze 2,460 Danish and 103,451 German TikTok posts published in 2025 including the keywords 'politi' and 'polizei,' respectively. The data was obtained with the official TikTok research API and analyzed in R. Our descriptive analysis provides an initial overview of the following. First, we examine the general visibility of the police on the platform. Second, we identify the accounts that most frequently post police-related content. Third, we analyze how the actor is set into assumed violent contexts. Fourth, we investigate how long collective attention persists. Finally, we compare how the findings differ between Denmark and Germany. We conclude by critically reflecting on our methodological experiences with the TikTok API in scientific contexts and how AI might assist in analyzing such large social media datasets.

Keywords: Strategic Communication, Police, TikTok, Denmark, Germany

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