



TikTok Cultures in the Asia Pacific Symposium

Monday 7 December 2020 0830-1445hrs GMT+8

The TikTok Cultures Research Network held its first virtual event TikTok Cultures in the Asia Pacific that took place 7 December 2020 hosted by Network founder [A/Prof Crystal Abidin](#), [Prof Michael Keane](#), and the [Centre for Culture and Technology at Curtin University](#). This event was a critical forum for cutting edge research on TikTok, the globally influential short video platform that has captivated international attention and made headlines over the past two years. In particular, this event focused on the cultures of TikTok (including but not limited to the platform, players, and politics) throughout the Asia Pacific Region.

Please find the full list of abstracts and speaker bios below.

Organised by A/Prof Crystal Abidin, Prof Michael Keane, and the Centre for Culture and Technology at Curtin University.

This event was supported by the MCASI Creative-Critical Imaginations Seed Fund at Curtin University, Professor Michael Keane, and the Australian Research Council.

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tiktokcultures.com/cultures-of-tiktok-in-the-asia-pacific/

TikTok Cultures in the Asia Pacific Abstracts and Speaker Bios

Who's Afraid of TikTok? Moral Panic and the Rise of Cultural Anxieties in South Asia

Anand BADOLA* (Queensland University of Technology)

Fatima Zahid ALI (Vrije Universiteit Brussel)

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Abstract

TikTok has taken the world by storm with its highly accessible user interface, in effect pluralising if not democratising the social media space. It has emerged as a true equalizer for citizens hailing from diverse economic backgrounds in terms of providing a platform to express themselves. However, often touted as the “cringe” app, content produced on TikTok is deemed substandard and low-brow in South Asia, particularly India and Pakistan. The conversation around TikTok, in both countries, seem to revolve around ‘immoral’ or ‘vulgar’ content resulting in temporary ban in the case of Pakistan and an indefinite one in India. This paper looks at the debates around the app leading up to the ban in both countries while focusing on moral panics and its supposed array of societal ‘evils.’ We argue that the rise of these anxieties is linked with the apprehension of the ‘middle-class’, in both countries, towards the proliferation (and dominance) of content creators from lower or marginal fractions of society in digital spaces like TikTok. In doing so, it also aims to highlight TikTok’s democratizing nature in the South Asian context, where numerous TikTokers from lower socio-economic backgrounds carved spaces with ample influence and millions of followers. By offering a deeper insight into emerging South Asian TikTok communities, this paper underscores types of popular content in both countries while outlining opportunities to content creation, self-identity, and economic prospects for otherwise marginalized users, irrespective of ‘bans’ or reactionary politics.

Bios

Anand Badola is a doctoral student at the Digital Media Research Centre, Queensland University of Technology. His research revolves around emerging digital cultures in India

and South Asia at large. Other research interests of his include intersection of digital media, gender, and political culture.

Fatima Zahid Ali is a PhD Researcher in Media and Communication Studies at Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium. Her research revolves around nationalism, polarization, and self-identity within diasporic digital cultures in the European Union. Other interests include populism, online discursive practices, and emerging digital publics in South Asia, in particular Pakistan. Fatima is also a Teaching Assistant for the BSc in Social Sciences international program at the VUB.

Humor and TikTok influencers in the Philippines

Samuel CABBUAG (University of the Philippines Diliman)

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Abstract

This study explores the phenomenon of the use of humor in establishing “celebrity” or “influencer” status among TikTok users in the Philippines. Through a case study approach and digital ethnography on five TikTok influencers, I examine how these influencers curate content, mostly through the use of humor and other humorous skits, gain following and the status as “social media influencers”. I also look at the examples of product placements and the expansion of their influence through other digital platforms as the affordances of TikTok do not allow longer videos. I argue that this new wave of influencers not just rely solely on authenticity as with many established social media influencers, especially on YouTube, but rather relies on curating relatable content through humor.

Bio

Samuel Cabbuag is an assistant professor at the Department of Sociology, University of the Philippines Diliman where he finished both his BA and MA degrees. His research interests include digital sociology, fan studies, popular culture, and digital cultures.

Platform Sinophobia: TikTok and ByteDance Controversies

Dr Xu CHEN (Xiamen University)

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Abstract

In late 2020, amid threats of bans and accusations of national security concerns, international political rhetoric over the fate of breakout Chinese short-video platform, TikTok, has intensified in the public domain. India, Australia, and the US have led the charge against TikTok and parent company ByteDance and some observers have pointed to the hypocritical positions taken by government officials in their framing of TikTok as a threat. However, long before the recent controversies in mid-2020, quotidian press coverage of TikTok highlighted the national origins of the platform and its parent company. ByteDance has become a lightning rod of controversy as the first major digital platform to find mainstream success outside of the self-sustained Chinese digital media ecosystem (McLelland et al., 2017). Not only has ByteDance faced criticism, bans, and threats of buyouts in international markets, the embattled tech giant has also faced scrutiny from within China, creating an identity crisis to the company (Kaye et al., 2020).

In this critical essay, we historicize the othering of Asian individuals and technologies (Morley & Robins, 1992; Said, 2003) in Western societies to situate the recent political coverage of ByteDance within debates over Western digital hegemony and sovereignty (McLelland et al., 2017; Gray, 2020). While acknowledging all new digital technologies may evoke moral/media panics (Burgess & Green, 2018), we argue TikTok, as a platform of Chinese origin, additionally faces what we term 'platform Sinophobia' due to the ever-lasting Sinophobic and (techno-)Orientalist sentiments in Western societies.

Bio

Dr. Xu Chen is an Assistant Professor at the School of Journalism and Communication, Xiamen University, China. His research interests include platform studies, digital cultures, and race, ethnicity and sexuality. Recent publications include peer-review journal articles on *Information, Communication & Society*, *Mobile Media & Communication* and *Chinese Journal of Communication*.

D. Bondy Valdovinos Kaye is the Editorial Assistant for *Media Industries Journal*, a PhD candidate in the Digital Media Research Centre at Queensland University of

Technology, and an avid musician. His research interests include digital music, cultural policy, and platform studies. He has recently published research on TikTok in the *Chinese Journal of Communication*, *Mobile Media and Communication*, and the *International Journal of Communication*.

TikTok use in Rural India and its Appropriation as a Daily activity for children

Puwati DUTTA

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Abstract

India had one of the largest user bases for the app Tik-Tok as well as one of the largest number of downloads in the world. The popularity of Tik-Tok in India is not limited to only the urban spaces and to a particular class of people which has been the initial trends for most of such media applications. Tik-Tok has traversed across age, class and caste and all social groups. The purpose of this paper is to look into the everyday use of TikTok in the age group of 12 years and below. The attempt is to explain the following with the help of case study based in a rural area of India. The main purpose is to first look into how TikTok was appropriated by the parents in this rural area as a part of their everyday activity to bond with their children, this had become normalized in this part of the world. It also attempts to look into how the other Indian apps have not been able to replace the popularity of the TikTok app which has been banned due to political issues by the government. The paper is based on case study which has been conducted in a entire rural block of India in the state of Assam, which is considered as one of the most backward areas in the country. It is an attempt to explain about cultural appropriation where the user's major concerns are not related to any other external debates and gains such as political issues, rise as a celebrity and economic benefits, it is just a part of daily life without any economic and political gain.

Bio

My name is Puwati Dutta. I have completed my Masters of Art in Cultural Studies from Tezpur University on June 2020. I am currently applying to various institution for my PhD. It was during my course work that I was introduced to the topics of Digital Culture, Popular culture as well as social media as an academic discipline. My Master's thesis was based on Social Media in the state of Assam In India and it was during my academic research that I learned about Dr. Crystal Abidin which introduced me to the entire world of Influencer culture and Internet Celebrity. Her work has had a deep influence on me especially due to my desire to work in areas related to social media, identity and popular culture.

Inter-generational interaction on TikTok and the image of the third age in the Chinese diaspora

Chen GUO(Curtin University)

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Abstract

Existing studies of TikTok have largely focused on younger generations who are heavy consumers of online content. Inter-generational interaction on TikTok remains under-researched. The meme #xuehuapiaopiao beifengxiaoxiao, provides an interesting case to explore how younger generations in the Chinese diaspora interact with their diasporic parents through the meme, specifically what scholars refer to as the third age cohort, and what image of the third age in the Chinese diaspora has been represented through the meme. The meme is a line of lyrics from Yijianmei, a pop song by Fei Yuqing from 1983, circulated virally on TikTok during the pandemic in 2020. Diasporic Chinese third agers mainly use WeChat, a Chinese online messaging app which has multiple functions. TikTok is yet to be taken up to the same degree as younger people. The meme #xuehuapiaopiao beifengxiaoxiao makes the younger generations bringing their parents on TikTok, although their parents probably are not TikTok users. The meme has cultural significance, evokes collective memory, and demonstrates how younger generation can facilitate their parents to participate in TikTok. This study will explore what image of diasporic Chinese third age has been shown based on their collective memory and the inter-generational interaction through the meme.

Bio

Chen Guo, is a PhD candidate at the School of Media, Creative Arts and Social Inquiry, Curtin University from 2016 to 2020. Her Ph.D. project is about mobile use among third agers in China. Her interests include digital internet, social media and gerontology. As an early researcher, she labels herself as a 'Chinese social media' researcher at this stage. Her ORCID is 0000-0003-4291-5412.

‘Mr Luke’ and teachers of TikTok: generative figurations of professional practice, pedagogy, and identity

Dr Catherine HARTUNG* (Swinburne University of Technology)

Dr Rosie WELCH (Monash University)

Dr Natalie HENDRY (RMIT)

Professor Kath ALBURY (Swinburne University of Technology)

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Abstract

During a tumultuous year marked by a global health crisis, forced lockdowns, and the need for schools to go ‘digital by default’, TikTok has emerged as a key platform through which teachers can connect and share their experiences. These online practices have been celebrated for providing light relief at a time when traditional pedagogy has made way for a kind of ‘panic-gogy’. However, these practices also have the potential to shape professional identities and the perceptions of teachers in myriad ways. In this presentation we focus on a young Year 3 teacher from South Australia, ‘Mr Luke’, whose upbeat TikTok videos capturing #teacherlife have seen him grow a significant following over the last year. His followers include school students, parents, young people who are aspiring to be teachers themselves, as well as pre-service and early career teachers. We link an analysis of his videos and their reception to the wider politics of TikTok, the growth of ‘edupreneurialism’ via social media, and changing societal expectations of what it means to be a ‘good’ male, White primary school teacher in Australia.

Bios

Dr Catherine Hartung is Senior Lecturer in Education at Swinburne University of Technology. Catherine’s research explores figurations of youth in political discourse and the ways that young people negotiate and resist institutional governance. Twitter: @catharty

Dr Rosie Welch is a Lecturer in curriculum and pedagogy in the Faculty of Education at Monash University. Her teaching and research engages with the socio-cultural complexities of health across school, teacher education, institutional, government, media and community settings.

Dr Natalie Hendry is Vice-Chancellor's Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the School of Media and Communication at RMIT. Natalie's research explores everyday social media and digital technology practices in the context of critical approaches to education, mental health, media, wellbeing, youth studies, and policy. Connect on Twitter: @projectnat

Professor Kath Albury is Professor of Media and Communication at Swinburne University of Technology. She co-leads the Swinburne Social Innovation Research Institute's Digital Inclusion program, and is an Associate Investigator in the Swinburne node of the ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making and Society.

“TikTok didn’t die, it merely fainted”: Gender, Class and Emerging Digital Cultures in Pakistan

Sidra KAMRAN (The New School for Social Research)

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Abstract

The Pakistani government banned TikTok for 10 days in October 2020. Within two days of the ban, Amna, a young working-class retail worker, found a substitute app for TikTok and began posting videos on it. The extreme popularity of TikTok in Pakistan is shaped by two counterintuitive phenomena. One, it is not the digitally savvy middle-classes and elite who embrace TikTok. Rather, the working-classes are at the forefront of using this app whereas the middle-classes and elite are more likely to use Instagram and Facebook. Second, the app is populated with public videos of young women dancing and lip-syncing to flirtatious dialogues and songs in a country where such behavior is condemned and is frequently met with violence. Drawing on interviews with working-class women users and an analysis of videos and comments, this paper investigates these puzzles and makes three claims. One, I find that the infrastructure of the app and the specific possibilities for play it enables makes this app particularly appealing to young working-class women. Two, these women use TikTok in multiple ways that creatively straddle the boundary between public and private thereby both challenging, and reproducing, norms of gender and sexuality. Three, while women on Twitter often experience misogynistic vitriol, videos on TikTok appear to invite largely positive comments from men. This paper reveals how TikTok has enabled a digital counterpublic shot through with class and gender dynamics in new ways and allowed under-represented groups to become key players in cultural production.

Bio

Sidra Kamran is a PhD Candidate in Sociology at The New School for Social Research. Her research analyses how global capitalism shapes local configurations of class, gender, and space. Her dissertation examines the lives of beauty and retail workers in the new feminized service economy in Pakistan and her second project explores how working-class women embrace new digital cultures in Pakistan. Her research has been funded by the Wenner Gren Foundation, American Institute of Pakistan Studies, the Heilbroner Center, and The New School. She previously worked at the Collective for Social Science Research in Pakistan and has an active interest in labor and feminist politics in the US and Pakistan.

Snippets of Precarity: TikTok and Storytelling Practices of Low-Wage Migrant Workers

Satveer KAUR-GILL (National University of Singapore)

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Abstract

Low-wage migrant workers in Singapore constitute workers from the Global South employed in precarious labor conditions. Foreign domestic workers (FDWs) conduct caregiving labor, while foreign construction workers (FCWs) partake in 3D labor (dirty, dangerous, and difficult) (Kaur-Gill & Dutta, 2020; Silvey, 2016). They remain a subaltern sector unable to activate, organize, and speak about their subalternity in the city-state and are dominantly represented by civil society actors (Yeoh et al., 2020; Yeoh & Annadurai, 2008). During the COVID-19 pandemic, FCWs were disproportionately afflicted by the COVID-19 outbreak (Kaur-Gill, 2020), and FDWs were found to face an increase in mental health concerns (HOME, 2020) due to limited agentic capacities to negotiate their off days. The unequal power relationships faced by workers in employment have been theorized by Parranes et al. (2020) as soft violence, referring to the multiple structural contexts that marginalize workers. In making sense of pandemic narratives during the lockdown, TikTok was adopted by migrant workers to share their labor conditions and lived experiences. TikTok was a digital site of intimate storytelling stitched carefully and deliberately by migrant workers, anchoring their voices in agentic ways. This study sought to make sense of migrant workers' lived experiences during the COVID-19 outbreak via TikTok videos by adopting digital ethnography to study the phenomena. These storied descriptions were central narratives that revealed the structural conditions and cultural and contextual insights on migrant precarities. Digital ethnography was employed to observe and understand migrants' storytelling practices in precarity and capture these intimate narrative deliberations. The initial dataset sought to observe and code the digital narratives produced by workers. The second aspect of the study adopts an emic perspective by reaching out to migrant workers via TikTok to understand the guided intentions and perspectives on content creation through in-depth interviews. Theoretically, a culture-centered approach (CCA) is adopted to make sense of these findings. A CCA provides a critical lens on marginality, precarity, and inequality when studying subaltern sectors (Dutta, 2008).

Bio

Satveer is a critical health communication scholar studying migrants' experiences of health disparities and inequalities. Studying migrant workers employed in precarious conditions, she interrogates these inequalities from the perspective of migration (im)mobilities using a culture-centered approach.

Connecting the global and the local through TikTok Stage in the COVID-19 pandemic

Jin LEE (Curtin University)

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Abstract

This study examines how TikTok has expanded its market and culture in the South Korean social media landscape by utilizing K-pop. Focusing on a series of TikTok Korea's media events during the COVID-19 pandemic, called TikTok Stage, I trace how the app that had a notoriety for collecting users' personal information for the Chinese government) was finally able to land in the Korean media culture successfully. Firstly started in May 2020, five TikTok Stage events have been hosted so far as media events where celebrities, including K-pop stars and Korean actors, can meet and interact with their global fans through non-face-to-face music concerts and fan meetings. Through a mixed methodology that includes press archival research, participant observation of online fan communities, and online observation on the platform, I investigate that how the K-pop industry and TikTok work together and deploy fan-audience intimacy for their market expansion, despite and thanks to the pandemic. On the one hand, TikTok Stage events that were live broadcast globally have provided opportunities for the K-pop industry to remain connected with global audiences. On the other hand, the events served their role for TikTok to shake off its notoriety for being the 'Chinese app', to expand the market, and to differentiate itself from other social media platforms especially in the pandemic time. This study provides an understanding of the close working of the traditional celebrity industry and the newly emerging social media platform, enabled by the cultural hybridity of the global and the local in K-pop.

Bio

Dr Jin Lee studies media intimacies in social media cultures, particularly focusing on media practices and visibility of non-white women and LGBTQ+ people across the "old" and "new" media. Her work appears in peer-reviewed journals including *Media International Australia*, *Social Media + Society*, *Critical Studies in Media Communication*. She is a Research Fellow in Internet Studies at Curtin University, Australia.

TikTok's Politics of Transnational Flirtation: the Example of Migrant Workers In Malaysia

Ain NABILA (University of Nottingham, Malaysia)

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Abstract

This paper takes a close look at the politics of transnational flirtation on TikTok via considering how migrant workers based in Malaysia utilise the platform in ways that are appealing to local women. The politics of transnational flirtation, in this case, refers to forms of playful affection that are performed deliberately to transcend national boundaries, fostering relationships that are otherwise taboo, risky or frowned upon for upsetting the local hierarchy between citizen and non-citizen. Upon an overview of various examples, emphasis will be given to Arjun Pasi, a Nepali migrant worker with about 8.1 million likes on his account. Of particular interest is how his masculinity is expressed in comical yet culturally significant ways, as he continues to increase his local female following. This paper concludes that the interactive format distinct to TikTok is allowing for new forms of connectivity to occur through content that appear to be 'just entertainment.' They are profound for being both subversive yet subtle, making them difficult, if not impossible, to stop.

Bio

Ain Nabila is a major in International Communications Studies at the University of Nottingham Malaysia. Currently, she is the TikTok content lead for 'Leveraging Media for Advocacy Objectives,' a research initiative by Projek Dialog that aims to provide detailed and methodical insights into the challenges of attention hacking for social advocacy. She is also a research assistant for Democracy Discourse Series, a media literacy initiative committed to promoting digital media literacy and political awareness among youths in Malaysia. Other than that, Nabila is also a dedicated cinephile, currently solo hosting a film podcast called 'The Nabsflix Show.'

Everyday TikTok talk: a method for a reflexive encounter with #donorconceived

Giselle NEWTON (UNSW, Sydney)

Clare SOUTHERTON* (UNSW, Sydney)

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Abstract

On video-sharing app TikTok, the diverse experiences of both donor-conceived people and recipient parents sit uneasily alongside each other, drawn together and collated in hashtags like #donorconceived and #spermdonor. The attitudes and priorities expressed by donor-conceived people and recipient parents often reflect their very different positions, for example the desire to create a family of one's own using 'donated' gametes versus the right to access information and establish relationships with one's biological parents and siblings. In this paper, we bring the concept of 'Kitchen table reflexivity – everyday talk' to the context of donor conception related TikToks in order to reflect on our own identities and positionality, as a donor-conceived person (Giselle) and a queer woman who would need donor sperm to have a child (Clare). We seek to develop a methodological approach that uses Tiktoks as a generative element of the research encounter, prompting conversations between the authors and eliciting situated insights on tensions within TikTok communities, that might not be readily observable. As such this method is orientated towards considering the experiential and dialogic dimensions that result from interacting with social media, rather than viewing the Tiktoks themselves as the only empirical material. This paper offers some preliminary reflections from our exploratory method, which aims to contribute an understanding of how donor conception narratives are emerging on TikTok, while developing a reflexive method whereby Tiktoks can help facilitate sensitive informal conversations.

Bios

Giselle Newton is a doctoral candidate at the Centre for Social Research in Health at UNSW, Sydney. Her research explores the experiences, views and support needs of donor-conceived people.

Clare Southerton is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the Vitalities Lab, Social Policy Research Centre and Centre for Social Research in Health, UNSW Sydney. Her research explores the intersections of intimacy, communication technologies,

surveillance and health. Her work has been published in *New Media & Society*, *Social Media + Society* and *Girlhood Studies*.

From ratchet to riches: Tiktok and transnational hip hop culture in Vietnam

Dang NGUYEN (University of Melbourne)

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Abstract

This paper discusses the case of So Y Tiết, a Vietnamese Tiktoker who gained international notoriety after his Tiktok videos, in which he counts in English to various melodies, were reposted by Black American hip hop artists Snoop Dogg and Chris Brown on Instagram. Wiz Khalifa later released a track entitled “Number Song (From 41 to 49)” which sampled one of Y Tiết’s viral Tiktok videos and credited him as a collaborator; Y Tiết is, as such, inducted to the world of Anglophone hip hop. A buffalo herder from a small town in one of the poorest provinces in central Vietnam who had led a difficult life before his rise to fame inspired many of his compatriots, Y Tiết symbolises the playful and disruptive nature of Tiktok not only as a short-form video platform, but also as part of an emergent ecosystem that intersects with other social media platforms as well as the well-oiled machinery of the culture industry. Shortly after Y Tiết became Tiktok famous, he signed with a local content creator network who helped him expand his content practice to Youtube, which has a much more established monetisation model in Vietnam. After getting a talent manager based in the US on Instagram who also helped him develop a comprehensive merchandising collection, Y Tiết frequently features paid content with local and international streetwear and fitness brand. This paper discusses the mechanisms with which Tiktok culture becomes monetised in the context of Vietnam and as it intensifies transnational cultural flows.

Bio

Dang Nguyen is a doctoral candidate at the School of Historical and Philosophical Studies at the University of Melbourne. She was a 2019-2020 Fox Fellow at Yale University and holds a Master of Science in Social Science of the Internet from the Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford. Dang’s research interests broadly concern the following topics: digital communication, social studies of technology, internet studies, health informatics, and internet pop culture.

Participatory Ethnographic Filmmaking through TikTok and Video Diaries in COVID-19 Pandemic Times

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Abstract

The onset of 2020 brought the world into a series of shocking and tragical events from the disastrous Australian bushfire to the Beirut explosion (Nafie, 2020; Leca, 2020). But what made this year truly unforgettable is the manifestation of the coronavirus disease with its relatively impending risks and destructive aftermaths. COVID-19 pandemic brought serious and widespread socio-economic damages, hampered public life, interfered humans' daily routines and stirred fear, panic and anxiety to the public. Research is one of the greatly impacted field of study, where COVID-19 affecting the researchers' ability to carry out their field research and participant observation and leaving them with no choice but to look and resort for alternative methodologies in order to continue their research activities. One of which is the participatory ethnographic filmmaking that allowed researcher-filmmakers to continue with their projects with flexibility and teamwork, ignoring the geographical, cultural and social limitations of researching and filmmaking. This approach permitted the participants to partake and collaborate with the ethnographer or filmmaker by shaping their own representations through media and in generating new collaborative information and knowledge. This paper discussed how TikTok as a video sharing social network and the video diaries were contributory in creating a collaborative ethnographic film. The ethnographic film titled 'The TikToker-ers!' was created through the amalgamation of TikTok videos and video diaries of selected Filipinos during the COVID-19 lockdown or quarantine. The researcher-filmmaker and the participants worked together from the inception of the project until its post-production phase. In this research film, TikTok was perceived to be of great significance for the participants, specifically, as a way in confronting and coping their isolation and maintaining their sanities. Moreover, TikTok was deemed to be more than a platform for sharing videos rather an avenue for recreation, self-expression, escapism and extension of one's reality.

Bio

Marc Agon Pacoma is currently a master student taking Visual Anthropology, Media and Documentary Practices in Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster, Germany. He holds both a bachelor and master degrees in media and communication. He was a former lecturer and researcher for the Department of Communication and Center for Research and Development of Adamson University in Manila, Philippines. He is interested in environmental, film, gender, migration, media and digital studies. His short film, 'The TikTok-ers!' centers on the life and experiences of three (3) Filipinos and their utilization of TikTok during the COVID-19 massive quarantine or lockdown.

From karaoke to lip-syncing: TikTok use in Japan

Dr Sonja PETROVIC (University of Melbourne)

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Abstract

This paper aims to discuss the versatile use of TikTok among Japanese media users, particularly in the context of the growing appeal that the platform received during the COVID-19 lockdown in April-May 2020. Japanese young media users have adopted global trends of sharing TikTok 'dancing challenge' home-made videos across a range of platforms, and encouraging others to spread positive messages and a sense of togetherness through prominent hashtags. Although this trend is not particular to Japan, as it resonated with users across the world, this practice of singing and dancing in a highly entertainment-oriented and playful space can be interpreted as an extension of karaoke culture in Japan, especially among young audiences. In a time of lockdown, when karaoke bars are forced to close, and social forms of entertainment are paused and disrupted, practices of creating fun content that can be shared and enjoyed with other users correspond to the joy of singing your heart out with friends in private karaoke boxes to pass the time and 'blow off steam.' This paper suggests that TikTok communities serve as an alternative not a replacement to the karaoke culture, which remains a well-embedded part of Japanese cultural milieu, in terms of providing new spaces for intimate connections and communal belonging in an era of social distancing.

Bio

Dr Sonja Petrovic is an early career researcher in Media and Communication with a Humanities, and Social Sciences background, teaching subjects across the School of Culture and Communication and Asia Institute at the University of Melbourne. Her research interests span across intersecting fields of digital media, cultural studies, and crisis communication. With the conclusion of her doctoral research, she continues investigating connections in crisis, hashtag trends in the pandemic, and the patterns of disaster commemoration and social memory in digital space.

TikTok: The transformation of online beauty culture in Thailand

Nunnapan PUATHANAWAT (Mahidol University International College)

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Abstract

The paper contributes to examine the emerging online beauty culture through the use of video streaming platform, TikTok in Thailand. The aim of the paper is to explore the extent to which TikTok has opened up ways for Thai beauty influencers to construct their online personas that contribute to extending their businesses and the way in which they collaborate with brands online. While Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube have been known to be the dominant platforms for Thai beauty influencers to create online beauty contents, TikTok embodies a shift of platform transformation that facilitate the changing trend in shaping online beauty community that is increasingly emerge within the Thai society. Through engaging in lip-syncing practices, TikTok offers the opportunities for its users to create online video contents that are both entertaining and engaging. Despite its recent emergence during the Covid 19 situation in Thailand and elsewhere, the platform itself is gaining a lot of attentions throughout the Thai social media scenes. In particular, I intend to show how Thai beauty influencers cultivate their online personas that offer business opportunities to collaborate with beauty related brands. The paper extends my knowledge of how Thai beauty influencers utilize visual media site such as Instagram to participate in beauty practices. The paper argues that the emergence of TikTok challenges the normative beauty practices that are otherwise localized on sites such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. TikTok thereby plays an increasing role in shaping the norms of beauty that are increasingly enacted throughout the Thai society.

Bio

Nunnapan Puathanawat is an assistant lecturer at Mahidol University International College, Thailand. Nunnapan's research focuses on the business of beauty in which she focuses on the emerging online culture, online beauty entrepreneurs, whiteness and authenticity in Thailand. She is currently in her third year of PhD at the University of Sussex. Prior to doing her PhD, Nunnapan received her Masters degree from Coventry University in which she closely examined the digital online culture and the use of social media platforms regarding political matters among International students. Nunnapan received her BA in Journalism and Mass Communications at Thammasat University, Thailand.

From viewers to makers: Young people's TikTok cultures in India

Devina Sarwatay (University of Hyderabad)

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Abstract

Discourse around children and social media in India is laced with technopanics and parenting tips. Broad-based, largely quantitative industry research hints at increased access and usage by younger, even underage audiences. This fuels the technopanics and tips discourse further and fails to capture the important aspect that children and adolescents engage with social media very differently than adults. Academia and research offer some insight, largely directed by the Global North; however we need more in-depth studies to capture how young people experience social media in India, especially studies that foreground their voices. As part of my doctoral research, I interacted with young people (10-18 years) to map how they access, use, and experience social media platforms like TikTok. I have collected rich and exhaustive data on children and adolescents' practices online using a qualitative approach and multimodal methods: a) in-depth interviews, b) participant guided tours of their profiles/accounts, and c) by following each other on social media. With TikTok specifically, participants showed a transition from being viewers to becoming makers, (sometimes) irrespective of class, caste, and gender differences. This phenomenon was unique to TikTok which made me take further interest in the platform before the government banned access to it on 29 th June 2020. I wish to contribute to the symposium by sharing my work which has hopefully successfully foregrounded young people's voices about their media practices, and learn from everyone how I can take this study forward and try to impact education, research, and policy.

Bio

Devina Sarwatay is Senior Research Fellow (UGC-NET) and PhD Student, Department of Communication, University of Hyderabad, India. She researches young people and social media with Prof. Usha Raman. Recently, she joined the Media Education Lab, Harrington School of Communication and Media, University of Rhode Island, USA as Graduate Student member. Her research has examined media literacy, communication for development, and interpersonal communication, and was presented at IAMCR, ICA, Université Catholique de Louvain, Indian Institute of Management-Indore, and

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Cultural and ideological discourses in #learnchinese videos and comments on TikTok

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Abstract

A great deal of language learning occurs incidentally boosted by a situated use of digital technologies and social media. However, there is much to investigate concerning language exposure, intercultural communication, or the types of technology-mediated informal language teaching. This study explores the cultural and ideological discourses of TikTok teacher-influencers who produce language learning-related content. We explored TikTok teacher-influencers using an autoethnographic observation of three hashtags related to learning three foreign languages; Chinese (#learnchinese, 109.7 million views), Russian (#learnrussian, 10.5 million views), and Italian (#learnitalian, 14.2 million views) from 4th to 11th, September 2020, 30 minutes a day per language. The methodology helped us imitate possible learner-consumer behaviors, document preliminary reflections on video content, and analyze socioculturally situated and emergent identity discourses. To examine Chinese teachers' and learners' cultural and ideological discourses, we focused on the Chinese diary and used the Russian and Italian ones as points of comparison. The results showed that all of the teacher-influencers reinforced some cultural stereotypes, such as Chinese typical reactions to foreigners, heavy drinking or cursing in Russian or Italian mannerisms (hand gestures). However, we also found some idiosyncratic traits of #learnchinese including abundant ideological dispute in the comments concerning Mandarin/Cantonese or Covid19 — little or no politically engaged expression was found in Russian or Italian. This study adds knowledge to the exploration of cultural and ideological identification in the still uncharted context of informal language learning on TikTok.

Bio

Liudmila Shafirova is a postdoctoral researcher in the Department of Translation and Language Sciences, Pompeu Fabra University, Spain. She recently obtained her PhD in Pompeu Fabra University in July, 2020. Her research interests include informal language learning (Russian, English), multilingual computer-mediated interactions,

identity building online, and new literacies. Recent publications include articles in *Language Learning & Technology or Learning, Culture and Social Interaction*. For more information, you can visit her ResearchGate account:
https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Liudmila_Shafirova .

Boris Vazquez-Calvo is an Assistant Professor of English and Language Education at the Autonomous University of Madrid. Since obtaining his PhD with a thesis on languagetechnologies and language learning in December, 2016, he conducted postdoc research projects in Denmark and Spain on gaming as an academic and vernacular literacy practice of young people. His current research interests include minoritized language communities (Catalan, Galician), language education and informal language learning (Catalan, English, Galician, Spanish), fan communities, and online interaction. His recent publications appear in journals such as *ReCALL, Language Learning & Technology, Educational Technology & Society or Ocnos*. His research is accessible via ResearchGate: http://bit.ly/boris_rg .

Leticia-Tian Zhang is an Assistant Professor of Spanish at Beijing Foreign Studies University. She obtained her PhD in Translation and Language Sciences from Universitat Pompeu Fabra in June, 2020. She is interested in language on social media, such as danmu/danmaku (superimposed comments used in Chinese and Japanese video sharing sites), vlogging, fandom activities like fansubbing (amateur subtitling), and the informal language and intercultural learning opportunities provided by digital out-of-school contexts. Her recent publications appear in *Multilingua, Discourse Studies and Comunicar*. For more information, please visit her website:
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Creative labour and monetization in the age of TikTok: MCN and sustainability of Chinese short video industry

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Abstract

The concept of MCN (Multi-Channel Network) can be traced back to 2007, when Google started to professionalize YouTubers and get a hold of the fast-changing industry. Borrowing from Lobato (2016), MCN is by no means a new creation, but merely a remix of existing media roles that dealt with new media professions. Fast forward to 2020, Chinese short video platform TikTok/Douyin is sweeping over the world, bringing tens and thousands of internet influencers to a wider audience, generating and contributing to an ecosystem known as online celebrity (wanghong) economy (Cunningham et al., 2019). Despite Douyin and TikTok almost sharing the identical digital architecture, they may follow different trajectories of development in China and the overseas respectively (Kaye et al., 2020). While existing research has shown MCNs play a vital role in the short video industry in China (She, 2019), little is known on how Chinese MCNs might utilise TikTok. Through interviews with a cross-border MCN and their incubated internet influencers who deliver content both on Douyin and TikTok in China and abroad, as well as media practitioners of the field, this paper intends to examine the MCN-driven short-video industry in China, how they are adapting to as well as shaping the constantly changing digital video industry, and the implications for the creative class.

Bio

Dr. Chunmeizi Su is a PhD graduate of the School of Communication in the Creative Industries Faculty at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT). Her research interests are mainly focused on digital media, Chinese internet companies (Baidu, Alibaba and Tencent), screen industry studies, and cultural soft power. Her thesis was on internet-distributed television in China. She is currently working as the course coordinator of International Media Practice at the University of Sydney, and a research assistant at QUT.

Dr. Xu Chen is an Assistant Professor at the School of Journalism and Communication,

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TikTok (Douyin) and influencer economy: Insights from a Chinese sport-focused multi-channel network

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Abstract

We explore the culture of the influencer economy in China from an agency perspective. Although influencer culture is commonly explored through observation of influencers (e.g., Abidin, 2016; Su et al., 2020), content delivered online is progressively controlled by professional agencies (Childers et al., 2019). While TikTok culture may be best characterized by its heterogeneity as niche micro-cultures arise and evolve, the homogenizing influence of professional management warrants academic attention. Through an in-depth longitudinal case study, we examine a Multi-Channel Network (MCN) company focused on sport content creators. The company signed 40 Douyin influencers known for creating sport content (e.g., running routines, skating performances). Based on interviews with the CEO, content managers, sport influencers, and users, we explore interactions between the MCN, advertisers, influencers, and consumers. This research advances knowledge of power shaping the influencer economy culture and identity work (Ibarra, 1999) of influencers. Preliminary findings reveal the company has developed a unique two-sided market (Rochet & Tirole, 2003), connecting advertisers with sport influencers. Sport influencers are a niche market in China, as compared to North American countries, due to the less prominent role sports play for Chinese people (Ma & Kurscheidt, 2020). Consequently, competition among sport influencers is classified as low-intensity. MCNs, therefore, wield substantial bargaining power over sport influencers when negotiating contracts and dictating content. The MCN received resistance from sport influencers when content managers set the agenda for a curated influencer identity. This suggests undercurrents of tension in presenting publicly desired personas and the influencers' authentic self.

Bio

Yiran Su is an assistant professor of sport marketing at the University of Georgia. Her research interests lie in the areas of brand management and consumer culture, with a focus on sport, health, and new media contexts. Her research program is interdisciplinary in nature and pushes the traditional boundaries of her field to

emphasize the importance of critical scholarship for inclusivity. Her latest project focuses on the bright and dark sides of athletes as social media influencers.

Bradley J. Baker is an assistant professor with the Mark H. McCormack Department of Sport Management at the University of Massachusetts, Baker focuses on the intersection of consumer loyalty, brand building, digital sport management, and emerging technologies. He teaches sports analytics at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. He is also a cofounder of D5ai, a start-up that conducts research on novel approaches in deep learning and artificial intelligence.

Playing Politics: Before and after India's ban on TikTok

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Abstract

Shortly before the Indian general elections in 2019, news reports uncovered right-wing content (Ananth) and hate speech against marginalized sections (Christopher) thriving on TikTok. In a forthcoming paper, I analyze how the app's algorithmic interface and vested interests interact with the sociopolitical context, tending Indians' playful political participation to polarizing and vitriolic modes (Vijay and Gekker). India's ban of TikTok, lauded as a retaliation against Chinese surveillance, leave these aspects unproblematized (Ghosh). This talk investigates how TikTok's conduct of – and influence on – political discourse has been addressed by the ban and the many apps that compete to take TikTok's place. The talk will discuss how Indians playfully participated in politics on TikTok (Glas et al.). Users critiqued and mocked current events by interspersing fragments from televised news media interviews with popular movie dialogues and songs, and hyperbolic 'acting-out'. The subversive potential of such playful participation is, however, modulated by the structures within which users play. TikTok's algorithmic architecture that is geared to maximize interactions and Indian majoritarian politics afford populist rhetoric wide reach. 'Use this sound', 'react' and 'duet' options facilitate the viral spread of a soundtrack, while the possibilities for contestation are limited. 'Homegrown' apps such as Roposo, Chingari and Mitron replicate TikTok's architecture to the best of their abilities, leading playful political participation to take place on similarly slanted lines. I conclude by emphasizing the need for alternative infrastructures with a stated commitment to public interest so that users retain control of the worlds they make through play.

Bio

Darsana Vijay holds a Masters (by research) degree in Media Studies, with a specialization in New Media and Digital Culture, from the University of Amsterdam. She is currently a Research Assistant with the ERC-funded Platform Labor project at the University. How digital platforms shape cultural production at both the experiential and the macro-level forms the crux of her research interest. She has carried out research into emergent modes of political participation on TikTok, Facebook's interaction with Indian alternative journalism and on-demand labor platforms' impact on migrant gig labor.

