



TikTok & Children Symposium

Monday 8 May 2023
0900-1610 hrs GMT+8

The TikTok Cultures Research Network holds its seventh virtual event **TikTok & Children Symposium** on 8 May 2023. This Symposium is held in collaboration with the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for the Digital Child and organised by Prof Crystal Abidin, Dr Jin Lee, and Prof Tama Leaver.

In response to the potentials and pitfalls in children's use of TikTok, this one-day online Symposium will discuss crucial issues to understanding children's rights on TikTok and examining their wellbeing and safety on the platform. The Symposium will showcase the emergent research on characteristics, climate, concerns, and chances of children growing up with and on TikTok, and discuss these issues with the industry and TikTok studies scholars. The event features a conversation with TikTok, and an academic round table with leading ECR scholars on TikTok, moderated by Prof Crystal Abidin.

A full list of Abstracts and Bios can be found on the following pages.

Organised by Prof Crystal Abidin, Dr Jin Lee, and Prof Tama Leaver

This event is brought to you by the [TikTok Cultures Research Network](#) and the [Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for the Digital Child](#), and supported by the [Centre for Culture and Technology \(CCAT\)](#) and the Faculty of Humanities at [Curtin University](#).

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<https://tiktokcultures.com/tiktok-and-children/>

TikTok & Children Symposium: Abstracts and Bios

Young people and TikTok use in Australia: Digital geographies of care in popular culture

Jessica MCLEAN, Macquarie University

Abstract

The short-form video-sharing app TikTok is the fastest growing social media platform globally, particularly among young people, and the app is attracting significant academic interest. However, the voices of young people have been mostly absent from these debates. This article offers a qualitative study of how young people are using TikTok to make care-full digital worlds in and around Sydney, Australia, drawing on interviews with sixteen young people and bringing together literatures on geographies of care, digital geographies and TikTok practices. Research participants identified care-related themes in these interviews, including that they enjoyed using the app to nurture relationships, found that it facilitated greater awareness of their relative privilege, and provided support and opportunities to express themselves. These practices proved important forms of connection and self-care during COVID-19-related periods of physical isolation and disruption to everyday routines. But a lack of care was also evident, from other users and the app itself, suggesting tensions in how care is negotiated in this digital space. Young people articulated structural problems with the app and offered constructive remedies that are practical and feasible.

Bio

Associate Professor Jess McLean does research on how humans, more-than-humans, environments and technologies interact to produce geographies of change. Her research focuses on digital technologies, water politics, climate action and activism. She works in the School of Social Sciences at Macquarie University where she teaches smart urbanism, Anthropocene politics, and environmental justice. In 2020, her book *Changing Digital Geographies: Technologies, Environments and People* was published that has contributed to shaping the emerging subdiscipline of digital geographies. Jess was founding co-Editor-in-Chief of the open access *Digital Geography and Society* journal and is currently an Associate Editor of *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*.

“I’m My Own Target Audience”: Platform Affordances and Neurodivergent Young People’s Cultural Production on #Autistok

Meryl ALPER Northeastern University; **Jess RAUCHBERG***, McMaster University; **Ellen SIMPSON**, University of Colorado at Boulder; **Josh GUBERMAN**, University of Michigan; **Sarah FEINBERG**, Tufts University

*Presenting author

Abstract

Heavily used by members of “Gen Z,” content creation platform TikTok’s emphasis on play, genre, and authenticity offer youth a novel chance to curate digital identity and build culture online (Kennedy, 2020; Boffone, 2022; Rauchberg, 2022). The platform’s unique multimodal affordances and algorithmic infrastructure facilitate opportunities for youth self-reflexivity (Cheng Stahl & Literat, in press). Notably, TikTok hosts several disability communities who use the platform for advocacy and education (Milton et al., 2023), community building, and digital accessibility awareness (Simpson et al., 2023). For youth on the autism spectrum, who are all too often spoken for by others in society (Alper, 2023), their engagement with TikTok may in some ways be similar to autism advocacy on older platforms (e.g., Twitter; Guberman, in press), but diverge in other respects (e.g., mobile video self-narration). Our paper extends attention to the cultural production and creative practices of neurodivergent youth through a study of #Autistok, a platform enclave centering “actually autistic” perspectives. Combining quantitative and qualitative methods, we draw on a set of 639 TikTok posts and over 20,000 associated video comments. Our initial findings point to both opportunities and challenges for neurodivergent youth with respect to health information seeking, cross-movement activism, and negotiating diagnosis on the platform, with both theoretical and practical implications.

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Bios

Meryl Alper is an Associate Professor of Communication Studies at Northeastern University, where she researches the sociocultural implications of communication technologies, with a focus on disability, digital media, and children/families' tech use. She is the author of *Digital Youth with Disabilities* (MIT Press, 2014) and the award-winning *Giving Voice: Mobile Communication, Disability, and Inequality* (MIT Press, 2017). Her forthcoming book, *Kids Across the Spectrums: Growing Up Autistic in the Digital Age* (MIT Press, 2023), explores the often-misunderstood technology practices of young people on the autism spectrum, as well as what it means to be "social" in a hypermediated society.

Jess Rauchberg is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Communication Studies and Media Arts at McMaster University. Writing at the nexus of new media and critical disability studies, Rauchberg investigates the discursive relationships between race, disability, and marginality in computing systems, platform

governance, and digital culture. Her work appears in *Feminist Media Studies*, *the Journal of Applied Communication Research*, *the Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, *First Monday*, and several edited collections. To learn more about Rauchberg's work, visit www.jessrauchberg.com.

Ellen Simpson is a Ph.D. student in the Information Science Department at the University of Colorado at Boulder. Her research focuses on creativity and creative work in online contexts, examining the platform sustaining work of everyday users. She holds a MSc from Royal Holloway, University of London and a BA from the University of Vermont.

Josh Guberman is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Michigan School of Information. Drawing on science and technology studies and critical disability studies, he interrogates approaches to and constructions of autistic people within the field of human-computer interaction (HCI), works to theorize the propensity for well-meaning HCI researchers to cause autistic subjects harm in the name of doing good, and explores new methods for uncovering alternative approaches to autism technology research through speculative futuring. His recent work appears in *Transactions on Computers in Human Interaction*, *First Monday*, and *DisAppearing: Encounters in Disability Studies*.

Sarah Feinberg is an incoming undergraduate student (Fall 2023) at Tufts University. She is interested in the intersection of anthropology, disability studies, and medicine.

TikTok Discourses: Youth and the transition to high school

James SHANAHAN, Columbia University

Abstract

Entering secondary schools in the United States is an important transition for young students. Although there is a large body of research documenting challenges and interventions in the transition to high school, this research is largely bound up in adult notions of what matters and what a successful transition looks like. While accumulating required course credits, passing classes, and forming connections to schools through clubs or teams are central to this literature, it is not clear what the youth who experience this transition think matters. Therefore, this paper conducts a critical discourse analysis of youth TikTok videos that give advice about the transition to high school in order to determine what discourses are present and how they communicate ideas around what youth consider important in the transition to high school. The discourses present in youth advice TikToks show that the transition to high school is more than an academic challenge. Finding friendly peers, making romantic connections, and even just fitting into the new school setting take on complexities not easily captured in adult-centric views of the transition. These findings give additional perspective for anyone with a stake in high school entrance, youths' social lives, and the connection between starting high school and successful social and academic growth in subsequent years.

Bio

James Shanahan is a doctoral candidate in Curriculum and Teaching at Teachers College, Columbia University in New York City. James is interested in online and digital research related to youth, education, and teacher preparation. James is happy to research and write collaboratively and welcomes inquiries. He also teaches education courses at Queens College and Hunter College, part of the City University of New York. Presently, James is conducting analysis of his dissertation data and working toward completing his doctorate with a few publications under his belt.

Scarce Commodity: TikTok and Yorùbá Children Influencers

Ganiyat TIJANI-ADENLE*, North-West University; **Abiodun SALAWU**, North-West University

*Presenting author

Abstract

Although Great Britain did not overtly rule Nigeria with a view at complete assimilation, Nigerians are obsessed with British and Western cultures and rate them over their own, despite their culturally-rich and diverse ethnicities and languages. The Yorùbá People are one of the three dominant tribes in Nigeria, located in the South-West and in the commercial nerve centre of the country (Lagos State), the Yorùbás are anecdotally regarded as the tribe with the least cultural assertiveness. This shows up mainly in their language, as majority of Yorùbá children below the age of 12, especially among the middle and upper classes do not speak their indigenous language. Even parents who are non-English literate communicate with their children in Pidgin-English. Majority have realised the error and are now seeking to correct it, with the Federal government mandating the teaching of at least one indigenous language in primary and secondary schools. It is always refreshing, therefore, when the Yorùbá people see young children who can speak Yorùbá Language fluently. Children-influencers and their handlers are taking advantage of the novelty to promote their acts and generate followings using Yorùbá Language. Some Children-influencers have gotten modeling roles and other opportunities due to their productions in Yorùbá language on TikTok. This study, a work in progress, will review the themes in the contents of Yorùbá Children-influencers' productions on TikTok, their subscribers' demographics and perceptions of their selling points, and how the trend may help preserve and promote Yorùbá language, along with other local and international efforts.

Bio

Ganiyat Tijani-Adenle (Ph.D.) is a postdoctoral research fellow in the Indigenous Language Media in Africa (ILMA) research entity at North-West University, South Africa. She obtained a Ph.D. in Media, Gender and Communication from De Montfort University, Leicester, United Kingdom. She practiced as a journalist at Voice of Nigeria (VON) before joining the academia. Her most recent work is 'Women FM (W.FM): the women-focused radio station amplifying the voices of Nigerian women'. In Lindgren, M and Loviglio, J. (Eds.), 'The Routledge Companion to Radio and Podcast Studies' (2022). Routledge: London and New York, pp. 327 – 338. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003002185-38>

Abiodun Salawu is a Professor of Journalism, Communication and Media Studies and Director of the Research Entity, Indigenous Language Media in Africa at the North-West University, South Africa. His major areas of research interest include indigenous language media, development communication, critical studies and new media. He has to his credit numerous journal articles and book chapters. He has authored a book on indigenous language media and development, edited/co-edited five other books on African language media among others. He is rated as an established researcher by the National Research Foundation of South Africa.

Pedagogical practices on Tik-Tok: the effort to promote kin-keeping practices among Arab women content creators from the Gulf States

Sara AL DERHAM, Newcastle University

Abstract

In this paper, I have analysed popular female content creators from the GCC who have used TikTok as a tool to teach self-disciplining strategies to other users. TikTok's popularity has rapidly increased among young adults particularly in the MENA region. In terms of platform's reach and penetration within the GCC, TikTok has identified four GCC countries that ranked among the top five worldwide : Saudi Arabia at 87.9%; UAE at 81.3%; Kuwait at 75.4% and Qatar at 62.1%. This paper has looked at content and engagement from users across all GCC countries. The self-disciplining strategies that this paper has analysed, through Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis method, are those related to gendered kin-keeping responsibilities among women, such as cooking, tidy-up hacks and parenting advice. The analysis of the themes were critiqued using a postfeminist and Foucauldian framework. The main aim of the study was to understand how new communication technologies, such as social media platforms, have recently and voluntarily been utilised by Arab Gulf women to train others to perform gendered labour-intensive and emotional tasks through the creation of appealing socio-emotional content.

This paper has also touched upon how TikTok and other social networking platforms present themselves as innovative technologies that allow for the interaction and managing of social and familial relationships, which is a gendered kin-keeping responsibility in itself. TikTok's instant vlogging feature has not only made it a highly pedagogical space but one that can be categorised as a kin-keeping technology for young users in the region.

Bio

Sara Al Derham is a PhD student at Newcastle University in Media, Culture and Heritage researching Instagram usage and wellbeing among young women in Qatar. Her research interests primarily focuses on media, culture, and women in the Middle East and the Arab Gulf in particular.

Al Derham is also an award winning documentary filmmaker. And was the founder and previous manager of Alkass Digital, a digital media platform based within Alkass Sports Channels in Qatar covering sporting news across the MENA region.

#parentingtips: A descriptive study of information for parents on TikTok

Tess FLETCHER, Telethon Kids Institute

Abstract

Background: Parents use the Internet and social media as a means to seek information and support on raising children. However, there is a rise in the spread of misinformation online, which has the potential to affect children's health and wellbeing. TikTok is an increasingly popular social media platform which is popular amongst parents, however there is limited research on how parents engage with TikTok to disseminate and seek advice about parenting. Therefore, this study aims to explore the types of information parents and caregivers are being exposed to on TikTok and the potential credibility of the information.

Method: A cross-sectional sample of 250 videos were selected for analysis, categorised by 50 videos in each hashtag: #parentingtips, #parenting101, #parentingadvice, #parentinghack and #parenttips. A content analysis was conducted using a defined codebook to categorise the information, source of information and techniques used in each video.

Results: Findings show that almost half of the videos studied were instructional or educational in nature, with 53.9% of those videos created by someone claiming to be a trustworthy source such as 'Parenting Coach'. Most videos related to children's behaviour and/or social-emotional development, representing the areas that parents feel they need the most support with.

Conclusions: These findings may inform child health professionals when working with parents, and health promoters wishing to disseminate information on TikTok. Future research should investigate the evidence base behind the parenting-related information and advice presented on TikTok, and the actual effect on parents and their parenting behaviours.

Bio

Dr Tess Fletcher is an early career researcher who has worked as a Research Assistant and Research Officer for the past 10 years. She has considerable experience in a broad variety of research areas, resulting in a wide-ranging breadth of skills in child health research. She was recently awarded her PhD in Psychology in which her research focused on women's intentions to consume alcohol in pregnancy. Her primary area of interest is identifying and understanding the drivers of effective behaviour change.

Mediated Parental Absence: Parasocial Relationships between Children and their “TikTok Parents”

Jacob SMITH, University of North Carolina; **Emily MENDELSON**, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

Abstract

TikTok creators construct imagined communities with their audiences in hopes of increasing retention, monetization, and longevity. These are often described as parasocial relationships (PSR), an imagined two-way relationship between an individual and a mediated persona/individual. Although PSRs may enable mediated communities, PSRs, and their communities, may also exist as sites of harassment, grooming, and mediated violence. This paper extends research on PSR by investigating the techniques by which children and adolescents construct relationships with self-identified “TikTok parents,” and vice-versa. We undergo a critical discursive analysis of two creators (Alex Griswold, Your Korean Dad) as examples of an emerging rhetorical genre that we term the “TikTok Parent.” Both creators enact the parenting role on TikTok, yet have differing relationships with their audiences and self-constructed role identity as a parasocialized parent. By highlighting the discursive nature of gestural care inherent to these two expressions of a parasocial familial relationship, we offer up three insights. First, that PSRs thrive in the absence of close familial relationships by highlighting how content creators appeal to children with a parasocial parental relationship. Second, we describe how TikTok emerges as a way that children come to sensemake about their own familial relationships. Third, we identify how Griswold’s later disidentification with a parental PSR role foregrounds the stakes of a parental PSR breakup, and how children may experience mediated parental absence when creators dis-identify from their parenting role. Ultimately, this paper understands how children’s wellbeing may, in part, be affected by PSRs with parental figures on TikTok.

Bio

Jacob Smith is a second-year doctoral student in the Department of Communication at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill. Jacob’s research focuses on the relationship between platform companies and live-streaming communities on platforms such as TikTok and Twitch.TV. Additionally, Jacob investigates the myriad of intersections between the far-right and environmental activism in eco-fascist digital communities.

Emily Mendelson is a first-year doctoral student in Interpersonal Communication at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. She researches processes of mediated

sensemaking on TikTok to the extent that individuals understand their own identities and relationships, in part, from the content they view and interact with online. Secondly, Emily utilizes critical disability studies to research consent, sexual communication, and communicative disenfranchisement in healthcare settings.

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The Influence of TikTok on the Development of Children's Critical Thinking Skills: Parents' Perceptions

Youssef YAKOUB, Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Abstract

Numerous research studies explored the negative impact of TikTok on users, especially children, (Pruccoli et al., 2022; Rana & Iqbal, 2022; Beutell, 2020; McCashin & Murphy, 2023), yet less attention was paid to the other potential positive outcomes. In my research project, I investigate the influence of TikTok usage on children's critical thinking (CT) skills. CT skills, in my project, refer to the ability to solve problems or answer questions individually by examining different options and choosing the most suitable and logical one (Alsaleh, 2020). This research aims to explore parents' perceptions regarding the positive and negative impact of TikTok as a learning tool on the development of their children's CT skills. This is A qualitative study where ten parents of children who use TikTok were interviewed. The inclusion criteria for participants included having at least one child who is between 8-12 years old, and who has access to TikTok. My findings indicate that parent's mentoring of the application had a crucial role in determining the positive and negative impact on children's CT skills. Parents who frequently monitored their children's TikTok accounts reported observing higher CT skills than those who do not monitor their children's applications. The reported skills included math tricks, science experiments, and quick and easy DIY projects. In my presentation, I will provide a context of my research topic, exigency, and data collection method. Then, I will present my findings in themes followed by implications for parents and teachers, as well as suggestions for future research directions.

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Bio

My name is Youssef Yakoub. I am a Ph.D. student in the Department of Communications Media at Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP). I am also a teaching associate (TA) in the same department. I teach various production classes, such as digital storytelling, animation, and web design. My research interests are production and media effects. I earned my bachelor's degree in electrical engineering and computer science from Helwan University in Egypt. Then, I earned my master's degree in Employment and Labor Relations from IUP.

Skinamarink and the Algorithmic Uncanny Interface between Children's TikTok and Horror Film Cultures

Jessica BALANZATEGUI, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology

Abstract

Skinamarink, the surprise micro-budget horror film sensation of 2022, gained its unexpected international exposure by going viral on TikTok after a film festival accidentally leaked the film online. Propelled by TikTok's algorithmic distribution logics, two key enigmatic images from this grainy, experimental film achieved virality – one of a Fisher-Price toy phone and another of a seemingly headless barbie doll levitating from the ceiling. This paper examines how the viral circulation of this Skinamarink content was propelled by TikTok's dynamics of “intensified play” (Bresnick 2019) at the interface of children's digital and horror film cultures. In so doing, I extend my theorisation of the “algorithmic uncanny” (Balanzategui 2021) – a term I developed to describe “disturbing” children's content trends on YouTube – by analysing how the TikTok algorithm and young platform users collaborated to position “the most terrifying movie of the year” (Greenwood 2023) as a popular viral “challenge”. In so doing, I articulate how “Skinamarink TikTok” combines horror genre thematics and aesthetics with children's entertainment and play cultures. The film takes its name from a children's nursery rhyme and depicts an insomniac child's confused perspective as he wanders his house and watches cartoons in the middle of the night. Skinamarink thus continues the algorithmic uncanny's fixation with “childlike aesthetics and themes” deployed for “unsettling effect” (Balanzategui 2020) in productive alignment with TikTok youth cultures. I position the film's TikTok virality as a cultural flashpoint that illuminates cultural tensions and slippages between the algorithmic ambiguities of TikTok in relation to young people and the age-based classification regulations that demarcate children's from adult content in the realm of professionally and officially distributed films.

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Bio

Dr Jessica Balanzategui is a Senior Lecturer in Media at RMIT. Her research on the interface between technological and industrial change, screen genres, and entertainment cultures has been widely published in leading international journals including *New Media and Society*, *Convergence*, *The Journal of Visual Culture*, *Television and New Media*, and *Celebrity Studies*. Jessica specialises in horror and screen genres for and about children. Her 5 books include *The Uncanny Child in Transnational Cinema* (Amsterdam UP, 2018) and *Netflix, Dark Fantastic Genres, and Intergenerational Viewing* (with Baker and Sandars, Routledge, 2023). She is the Founding Editor of Amsterdam University Press's *Horror and Gothic Media Cultures* series.

Revisiting the Nymphet Aesthetic: TikTok's Response to Tumblr's Sexually Attractive Girl

Summer **GAMBLE**, St Mary's University

Abstract

The popularity of fashion aesthetics and 'branded' identities have quickly grown to become one of the tenets of virality through TikTok's infamous algorithm. Whilst this may offer many the opportunity to experiment with their physical appearance and find a sense of belonging within online communities, the resurgence of older, more problematic, fashion aesthetics has also been revived, such as that of the Nymphet, largely associated with social media platform Tumblr throughout the 2010s.

Ascribed to the costumes of the filmic adaptations of *Lolita* by Vladimir Nabokov, the Nymphet aesthetic - candy-coloured, ribboned and lacy two-piece sets that the protagonist, Dolores Haze wears - saw great popularity throughout the platform's 'Golden Years', often coinciding with the Sad Girl Aesthetic of Lana Del Rey fame. Girls who identified with this aesthetic often fell into the trap of premature sexual maturity through the sexualisation of the clothes they wore.

It would seem TikTok's modernity offers a more concrete counteraction, responding to these romanticised interpretations of a victim of rape and multiple forms of abuse, through messages of empowerment and affirmation, with many being former Nymphet aesthetic followers themselves.

Guided by De Leyn et al's (2022) findings on teenage reflections of media literacy, this study aims to divulge in what ways the connotations of Tumblr's *Lolita* were misconstrued and used to groom and abuse followers, and in what ways current TikTok users are now reclaiming this lack of autonomy.

Bio

Summer Gamble is a current Media and Communications PhD student at St Mary's University, Twickenham. She completed her BA in Film Studies and Creative Writing at St Mary's in 2021 and was awarded her MA in Film studies from Kingston University in 2022. Her research interests currently focus on the Nymphet and 'Lolita-core' fashion aesthetics and their impact on self-objectifying behaviours within the tween demographic.

True Crime & TikTok: A Source of Misinformation, Sensationalism & Graphic Content for Children

Megan LUPTON, De Montfort University

Abstract

True crime on TikTok has grown in popularity; this is evidenced through the hundreds of millions of views that true crime content receives. Videos tagged with #idahokiller and other relevant hashtags, for example, have received over 396 million combined views (Delia, 2023). Considering that 32.5% of users on TikTok are between the ages of 10 and 18, the graphic nature of true crime content and the genre's popularity raises concerns about children's wellbeing on the app (Nguyen, 2021). The social media platforms 'For You Page' means that even if a young user does not seek out true crime content, they may still be shown graphic content about current or historic crimes on the app through its recommendation algorithm. To fully understand the extent of harmful content accessible to children, we must identify and analyse the types of true crime content and the techniques used by TikTok creators to engage viewers and spread misinformation. Additionally, by reflecting on the existing research into the effect of graphic content on peoples' wellbeing, this paper highlights the harmful impact of true crime content on child TikTok users. How may exposure to content about crime lead to anxiety in young TikTok users? Does violent TikTok content cause violent behaviour in children? Can true crime TikTok content create a skewed perception of crime rates?

Bio

Megan Lupton is a PhD Candidate investigating the ethics of true crime content, having completed her BA in Film and Creative Writing and her MA in Creative Writing. Megan is particularly interested in the way audio, written and visual mediums combine to create an immersive storytelling experience. Outside of her PhD, Megan is a Senior Content Executive, freelance social media manager, and the co-founder of The Great Central Gazette, Leicester's first co-operative newspaper.

The representation of dieting behaviours on TikTok: a descriptive content analysis'

Emily MUNRO, Telethon Kids Institute; University of Western Australia

Abstract

Background: In recent years, social media has become a strong influence on the eating behaviours of young people. The popularity of 'diet culture', or the labelling of food and bodies as 'good' or 'bad', has permeated the social media platforms that are popular amongst young, vulnerable viewers, such as TikTok. To create an understanding of the diet-related content young people are exposed to on this popular platform, the current study conducted a cross-sectional descriptive content analysis of diet-related videos on TikTok.

Method: A defined codebook was constructed inductively and deductively and tested rigorously between multiple raters. The final codebook was used to perform the content analysis on the top 50 videos from the following hashtags on TikTok: #Diet, #WhatIEatInADay, #WIEIAD, #Dietitian and #DietTips. Analysis was performed on R to compile the descriptive statistics.

Results: Concerningly, 6.4% of videos explicitly referenced or portrayed disordered eating and over half of the videos portrayed 'body checking' - an indicator of body image issues. Nearly half of the videos studied (n= 116) provided some sort of nutrition advice, mostly in regards to weight loss.

Conclusions: Due to the popularity of TikTok amongst adolescents and their susceptibility to social learning, these results might be a cause for concern for the glorification of dieting and disordered eating. Dieting is certainly an effective technique for weight loss, however should be treated with caution for developing adolescents in consideration of the high rates of eating disorders in this population.

Bio

Emily Munro is a Research Assistant at Telethon Kids Institute in the Human Development and Community Wellbeing Team, and is currently studying a Masters of Public Health at the University of Western Australia. She has experience in research on cyber safety and children, and is currently leading a project investigating health-related videos on TikTok. She is also assisting with a project aiming to engage Early Childhood and Family Centres to support parents in managing their children's digital technology use.

The signs of times: choreographing life on TikTok?

Teresa Sofia CASTRO, Universidade Lusófona

Abstract

This presentation departs from longitudinal research with families (2017-2022), with diverse ways of living and different demographics, touched by the effects of the life course (internal and external factors (Zaman et al., 2016) and globalization (Castro & Ponte, 2021). The families are based in Portugal (n=16) and England (n=2) and as expected were not immune to the signs of these uncertain (deeply mediatized (Hepp & Hasebrink, 2018)) times, which prompted an unprecedented digital immersion of children's everyday lives with consequences on family dynamics and processes of digital mediation (Castro, 2022). A total of 33 children were eligible for the study (boys (n=19); girls (n=14)). In line with the theme of the symposium, I privilege a child-centric approach, where children are recognised as active agents with digital rights. In the cases I aim to bring to the discussion, children's first contact with video affordances was introduced by parents and integrated by children into their offline practices of play. But children themselves were the ones who brought TikTok (public) to the family sphere (private) – as digital brokers in control of this social media affordances (despite their age under 13), negotiating actively their digital autonomy and rights and how this has impacted in parents' reflexive revision of digital mediation. Some topics will organize the talk around children in the short-video culture, namely, i) the display of “doing family” (Morgan, 2015) through carefully choreographed moments, ii) experimentation of different roles; iii) self-display; iv) embodiment of TikTok body language in offline settings.

Bio

Teresa Sofia Castro is a Professor at Universidade Lusófona (Portugal) and a researcher interested in children's (0-18) digital lives, digital mediation, digital citizenship, innovative methodologies and participatory-action research. She is the Co-Pi in the project Youth, News and Digital Citizenship. She did a Post-Doc in the field of Communication Sciences - Media and Cultural Studies (2017-2022). She holds a European PhD in Sciences of Education, Educational Technology. She is a member of EU Kids Online (Portugal); collaborates with Safer Internet Centre; has dozens of (inter)national publications, in peer-reviewed and indexed journals and pedagogical resources built from her research.

Is it worth the laugh? Understanding memeification of videos with children subjects on TikTok

Madelyn GARCIA, University of the Philippines

Abstract

This paper examines the digital circulation of short-form videos of children on TikTok. Particularly, these videos where children were captured as subjects and were posted on social media often get shared, reposted, or repurposed multiple times commonly by popular meme accounts intended for humor and 'just for fun' profile pages. Oftentimes, viral videos involving children continue to circulate when users appropriate these contents to embed new meanings and meet certain gratifications. For instance, 'just for fun' profile pages with high following on TikTok have reuploaded numerous video contents including those whose subjects are children. In such cases, whether these videos of children were uploaded with their knowledge may not be ascertained as the original uploader might be difficult to trace. This paper thus looks into the underlying process of select Philippine viral videos that expose children in various acts such as TikTok-famous dance, prank, or lip-sync and have ended up on other platforms, reuploaded with a different caption for a different purpose devoid of their original contexts. In this process, it is argued that children are being subject to memeification wherein videos involving them turn out to be decontextualized and given new interpretations that could be far too different from the original historical or biographical narratives. As children's vulnerability increases due to limitless public exposure facilitated by meme and 'just for fun' accounts, widespread digital circulation of these children subjects without their knowledge or consent thus pose dangerous implications on children's rights in the digital age. Measures and regulations to guarantee children's protection on TikTok are also discussed.

Bio

Madelyn Garcia is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Humanities, University of the Philippines (UP) Los Baños. She has earned her BA Communication Arts degree from UP Los Baños and MA Communication degree from the College of Mass Communication, UP Diliman. She is also a member of the Philippine Association for Media and Information Literacy, a professional organization of MIL researchers, educators, and advocates from across the country. Her research interests include media literacy education, digital participation, and participatory and practice-focused studies in the field of media and information literacy.

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‘Um, cold take’: The memeification of youth experience on TikTok

Emilie OWENS, University of Oslo

Abstract

The main aim of this project is to understand how the social realities of young people are mediatized in a digitally saturated world. This will be undertaken through a study of TikTok, the shot-video creating and sharing app, and the role that it plays in the day to day lives of teenagers in the UK from both a social and individual perspective. The emphasis will be placed on the relationship between mediatization and the social reality of teenagers, meaning that the inquiry will move from questions about how to study teens on TikTok and where the app fits within a broader mediatization research trajectory and into empirical questions about the teenagers themselves – how they are enacting their identities with these media, and how that relates to their feelings/understandings about the social world more broadly. TikTok will be conceptualised as a memetic sphere in which young people construct and conceptualise their individual identities and, more broadly, their social worlds. It is hoped that this work will highlight the relevance of mediatization to the lived experiences of young people at present: their feelings, their fears, their understandings of themselves and others, as well as perceptions of their own agency within the social world.

Bio

Emilie Owens is currently a doctoral research fellow in the Department of Media and Communications at the University of Oslo, and a co-founder of The Queer Games Library. Her research seeks to examine the complex intersections among conceptions and iterations of youth, media, and culture. At present she is conducting a study examining how the lived experiences of young people are mediated by the popular app TikTok.

Digital gifting on Tiktok & Douyin: a cross cultural analysis of Chinese and the UK livestream audiences from different age groups

Jialin WU, Edinburgh Napier University

Abstract

As live stream content audiences among Generation Z continue to grow at a rapid pace, rewarding streamers has become an integral part of the process. People seek proximity, recognition, connection with streamers, or even to express a sense of gratitude. This proposal (part of an on-going PhD research) aims to explore these aspects, and understand the behaviour, motivations, as well as consumption and gifting patterns of different age groups for live streamed content. Additionally, it provides a cross-cultural analysis, examining the differences between Chinese audiences of Douyin and British audiences of Tik Tok.

Douyin - the Chinese version of TikTok - is the most popular dedicated livestream social media application in China today. Both, Douyin and TikTok are owned by the parent company ByteDance. In April 2020 alone, TikTok and Douyin accumulated a total of US\$ 78 million through in-app purchases on the AppStore and GooglePlay. This marked a remarkable tenfold increase from the previous year, positioning the two platforms as the world's leading applications in terms of in-app purchase volume. The numbers show that digital gifts have become an integral part of the social media economy and paid gifting has been widely adopted by Chinese live streaming firms.

This research is investigating this behavioural and cultural phenomenon, specially focusing on the virtual gifting practices. The study adopts the uses and gratification (U&G) theory and explores through interviews and questionnaires the motivations that drive Chinese and UK users from different age groups to spend money (or not) on these applications.

Bio

Jialin Wu is a PhD student at Edinburgh Napier University, in Scotland, United Kingdom. She graduated in Animation Design from Tianjin Technology University and has a Masters in Design and Digital Media, from The University of Edinburgh. Her research has a cross-cultural approach and explores what motivates users to engage in virtual gifting on Tik Tok and Douyin and how this differs across UK and Chinese cultures. She is also engaged on teaching Motion Graphic Design and Art Direction modules for undergraduate students on the design programme.

Children as Commodities: Ethnographic Observations and Legal Implications of Child Influencer Monetization on TikTok

Tom DIVON*, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem; **Catalina GOANTA**, Utrecht University

*Presenting author

The increasing popularity of content monetization on social media has renewed concerns about online harms. Particularly for children as monetization objects, questions arise about what is harmful and what makes children vulnerable, especially on viral platforms like TikTok. The legal analyses of this phenomenon remain limited and isolated from empirical observations into how parents monetize their children on social media (Fishbein, 2022; Winckler, 2022).

In this paper, we present a two-fold analysis of the monetization of children on TikTok. First, we develop a taxonomy of the monetization supply chain through ethnographic observations (Abidin & de Seta, 2020) of 10 profiles belonging to Israeli and US-based child influencers, family accounts, and child/family commentary accounts. Our qualitative analysis sheds light on the various roles children can play in content monetization based on the brand identity being commodified, including children as (1) main characters, (2) co-stars, or (3) supporters of monetized content.

To explore the legal implications of child monetization, in the second part we conduct a comparative analysis of core contract law principles from Israel and the US (California) such as legal capacity and freedom of contract, to examine their limitations when applied to the commodification of child influencer identities. Despite the over-representation of US influencer cultures in existing literature (Glatt, 2021), we acknowledge the impact of US common law on platform governance and legal transplants (e.g. TikTok's US law-based Terms of Service). Therefore, we include Israel as an under-represented Middle Eastern jurisdiction, which offers valuable insights into diverse commercial and regulatory cultures.

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Bio

Tom Divon is a digital culture researcher based in the Middle East and currently pursuing his PhD in the Department of Communication and Journalism at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. His research focuses on TikTok's social-political playful cultures within Palestinian, Jewish, and Israeli communities, examining three key areas: (1) users' engagement with trauma, memory, and history-related events for education and commemoration; (2) users' performative combat against antisemitism and religion-based community building; and (3) users' affective activism manifested in memetic practices (#challenges) for playful content creation during times of conflict.

Catalina Goanta is associate professor in private law and technology at Utrecht University and Principal Investigator of the 5-year European Research Council Starting Grant HUMANads, focused on fairness issues arising out of native commercial and political content monetization on social media.

TikTok regulations in Vietnam: between the risks and the opportunities

Viet Tho LE, Van Lang University

Abstract

In Vietnam, to address these challenges regarding how children use the platform and how they are represented on TikTok, the Vietnamese Government has implemented several regulations and policies aimed at protecting children from harmful content and online predators (UNICEF, 2021; TTO, 2022). However, all of them are stuck at the level of preventing harmful content without paying enough attention to the opportunities and risks brought by TikTok. It has led to too restrictive rules that hinder these children's chance to develop resilience and coping methods. The UNESCO's approach to digital citizenship asks for a "balanced perspective to enable users to be self-regulated and resilient ICT users" (UNESCO, 2015, p.19) because "opportunity and hazards are positively correlated" (UNESCO, 2015, p.34). It requires policymakers and regulators to work closely with social media companies and other stakeholders to develop effective strategies for protecting children online while promoting innovation and growth in the digital economy (UNESCO, 2015, 2016).

This article uses thematic content analysis to analyse the Vietnamese Government's policies and discourses related to child protection policies on TikTok and compares them with UNESCO's Digital Literacy Global Framework (Laanpere, 2019; Shin et al., 2019). Policy implications will be made towards a child-friendly digital environment.

Bio

Dr Viet Tho Le is a professional journalist and a media researcher. He obtained a PhD in Media Studies, Communication and Journalism at Edith Cowan University (ECU) in 2020. He worked as a senior digital journalist at the BBC, a producer at SBS, and was managing editor at Binh Dinh newspaper in Vietnam. Viet was a research associate for an ECU/Digital Child industry partner research project with LEGO Asia Pacific, Digital safety and citizenship roundtables: using consultation and creativity to engage stakeholders (children, policy influencers, industry). He is a lecturer on media and communication at Van Lang University in Vietnam.

“Read the terms and conditions – if you are able to.” – The implications of TikTok usage in among children from a legal perspective focusing on children’s rights, policy making and regulation proposals.

Gergely LENDVAI, Pázmány Péter Catholic University

Abstract

TikTok has gained egregious popularity worldwide, especially among teenagers and young adults. Nonetheless, it has also come under scrutiny for its data privacy and child protection policies as well as their terms and conditions to which users agree to. The study aims to explore the need for effective regulation of TikTok, while ensuring the protection of users' privacy, children's safety, and freedom of expression.

This paper will examine TikTok's terms and conditions, privacy policies, and the European child safety guidelines to identify areas that require regulatory oversight. The research will analyze the challenges faced by TikTok in enforcing its existing policies and the implications of these challenges for users' safety and privacy and the current European trends related to platform governance (such as the Digital Services Act). The research will analyse the legal and ethical frameworks within which these regulations must operate and the implications of these regulations for free of expression. The study is to recommend policy solutions for regulating TikTok, including the development of comprehensive privacy policies, including child protection regulations, and enhanced transparency mechanisms.

In conclusion, the study argues that the regulation of TikTok and other social media platforms is currently insufficient to assess child protection and data safety issues comprehensively and correctly. The research is based on the holistic study of international case law, European policies and contractual law studies. The research also proposes ameliorative measures to be implemented to mitigate the alarming concerns that TikTok holds for minors.

Bio

Dr. Gergely Ferenc Lendvai is a legal expert at the National Media and Infocommunications Authority in Hungary and a PhD candidate at Pázmány Péter Catholic University. His main focus of research concerns platform governance and regulations, international comparative law, empirical legal studies in relation to social media usage and online platforms, digital constitutionalism, AI and law and data safety and child protection in the online sphere. He is a visiting lecturer at Corvinus University and Károli University teaching media law and media policies.

TikTok and the Privacy Rights of Babies and Toddlers

Octavia OLMOS-RODRIGUEZ, Aarhus University; Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile

Abstract

Unlike most of social media activity -which is conducted by individuals or groups in a voluntary manner- the presence of young children in social media contexts is a phenomenon that can only exist because of parents', carers' or third parties' actions. Toddlers and babies do not have the physical nor cognitive development to create social media profiles, let alone maintain them in a consistent, day-to-day basis. Yet there is a large amount of TikTok accounts that feature, systematically, the daily lives of babies and toddlers, what they eat, how they are dressed, how their parents cope with tantrums, even how they wake up in the morning and go to bed at night. The issue with these acts is that they do not befall with meaningful consent from the main party involved: the children.

In a social context that increasingly shines lights on the importance of privacy regulation and data protection, it is important to analyse how babies' and toddler's privacy rights are affected by the paradox of being put at risk by the people that are meant to protect them. In this article I will discuss the ongoing investigation that I am conducting as part of my master's Dissertation, analysing from a Children's Rights perspective how children's privacy rights are put at risk by their caretaker's social media practices.

Bio

Octavia Olmos-Rodríguez (she/her) is a Chilean early childhood educator from Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, and is currently a student in the Erasmus Mundus International Masters on Children's Literature, Media and Culture. She has worked as an early childhood teacher in Chile with a class of 1-2 year-olds, has done different volunteer work with childhoods in different contexts and is now focused on the field of Children's Rights in the Digital Age, especially advocating for the rights of the very youngest humans.