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## Araştırma Makalesi • Research Article

# Sympathizing with Gen-Z: Reflections of Social Media Culture in TikTok

## Z-Kuşağını Anlamak: TikTok'ta Sosyal Medya Kültürünün Yansımaları

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### ÖZ

Son yirmi yılda bireylerin hayatında önemli bir yer kaplamaya başlayan sosyal medya bir taraftan yeni bir toplumsal durum, dijital bir toplum yaratırken bir yandan da gündelik hayat alışkanlıklarını önemli ölçüde şekillendirmektedir. Sosyal medya, onunla büyüyen genel olarak Z-kuşağı olarak adlandırılan gençlerle bu yeni duruma uyum sağlamakta zorlanan eski kuşaklar arasında bir kuşak çatışmasını derinleştirmektedir. Sosyal medya üzerine yapılan çalışmaların önemli bir kısmında bu çatışma hâlinin bir yansıması olarak genç kuşaklara dönük önyargular önemli bir yer kaplamaktadır. Bu çalışmalarda sıklıkla gençler, şöhret olmak için her türlü yolu mübah gören, çıkarıcı ve toplumun ahlaki değerlerini yozlaştıran aktörler olarak betimlenmektedir. Bu türden yaklaşımların bir eleştirisi olarak ortaya çıkan bu çalışma, sosyal medyanın yarattığı yeni toplumsal koşulu anlamaya çalışmaktadır. Çalışma, 2021 yılının başlarında TikTok'ta gençler arasında akım hâline gelen Buss It Challenge kapsamında çekilmiş olup en çok izlenme oranlarına sahip 58 videonun netnografik analizine dayanmaktadır. Çalışma, bir taraftan gençlerin ideal yaşam ve ideal beden anlayışlarını ortaya koyarken, diğer taraftan kültürler-arası ve cinsiyetler-arası farkların bu tür videolardaki izdüşümlerini sorgulamaktadır. Sonuç olarak çalışma, sosyal medya kültürünün önemli bir bileşeni olan kadın bedeninin cinselleştirilmesine dayalı bir şöhret anlayışının neoliberal ve ataerkil beklentiler tarafından önemli oranda şekillendiğini iddia ederken sosyal medyanın zaman ve mekân algısını önemli oranda değiştirdiğini, bunun da özel olan ile kamusal olanı yeniden şekillendirdiğini iddia etmektedir.

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### ABSTRACT

Social media, which has become more essential in people's lives over the last two decades, on the one hand, creates a new social condition, a digital society, and on the other, changes people's everyday lives to a large extent. Social media deepens an intergenerational conflict between the young people who grew up with it, commonly referred to as the Z-generation, and the older generations, who are struggling to adapt to this new situation. As a reflection of this situation of conflict, bias towards younger generations occupies an important place in a significant part of the studies on social media. In these studies, young people are often portrayed as actors who, by all means, are permissible to become famous, pragmatists, and corrupt the moral values of society. Emerging as a critique of such approaches, this study tries to comprehend the new social condition created by social media. The study is based on a netnographic analysis of the 58 highest-rated videos shot under the Buss It Challenge, which became a trend among young people on TikTok in early 2021. The study, on the one hand, reveals young people's perceptions of the ideal life and ideal body; on the other hand, it questions the projections of intercultural and gender differences in such videos. As a result, the study claims that an understanding of fame based on the sexualization of the female body, which is an important component of social media culture, is significantly shaped by neoliberal and patriarchal expectations, and social media alters the perception of time and space, which in turn reshapes the private and the public.

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## Introduction

*No quality of human nature is more remarkable, both in itself and in its consequences, than that propensity we have to sympathize with others and to receive by communication their inclinations and sentiments, however different from or even contrary to our own (Hume, 1888/1960, p. 316).*

The 2019 COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in China affected almost every aspect of life in the rest of the world, as well as having an irreversible impact on human conditions. Many people looked for new hobbies to relieve boredom and compensate for their daily routines and habits during weeks-long lockdowns. Many people, particularly young people from Generation Z (GEN-Z), discovered TikTok at the time, a China-based short video-sharing social media platform that had recently launched in the international market with the tagline "make your day." It became one of the most downloaded applications of its genre in 2020, and the number of its users skyrocketed in many countries (Kaye, Chen, & Zeng, 2021; Kennedy, 2020, p. 1070; Peredy, Laki, & Fukati, 2020; Wang, 2020) until the question of its legitimacy was raised due to security and moral concerns (Anguiano, 2023; Baker-White, 2022; Fung, 2023; Maheshwari & Holpuch, 2023; Stokel-Walker, 2019). Despite this, TikTokers, also known as content creators or influencers, have shared millions of videos on the platform that they either created or snipped from longer videos. They filmed their amusing and absurd moments, as well as their cooking, mimicking or lipsyncing, singing, and dancing abilities. The most popular ones were frequently imitated or reproduced by other TikTokers by adding unique characteristics, which initiated trends or types of fashion known as challenges.

Erika Davila, a female TikToker, uploaded a 15-second video to TikTok on the second day of 2021, dancing to the song "Buss It" by American rapper Erica Banks and mimicking the figures performed in the official video clip. In the text embedded in the video, she asked her followers to replicate her performance and upload their videos to the same platform to start a new trend.<sup>1</sup> In just one week, hundreds, if not thousands, of females, mostly from "Generation Z" (Gen Z) from all over the world uploaded similar videos in response, spawning one of TikTok's most popular trends known as the "Buss It Challenge" (BIC). By analyzing the content of videos released for the trend, this article sets out a sociological approach to some behavioral patterns reflected in social media.

## Method and Challenges

Traditionally speaking, this study has relied on content analysis of videos. However, unlike classical reality shows, social media performance is less fictitious and factitious and more intimate and personal, which makes social media a new socio-cultural environment and a new type of community. Videos serve as windows through which we can see the natural condition of communal life and comprehend the mental world in this setting. As a result of the idiosyncratic nature of social media, this method is akin to anthropological observation, which is known as nethnography.

Because social media has nebulous borders, it is challenging to narrow down the research subject and obtain a reliable sample. In our endeavor to define the universe and sample of the study, we experienced difficulty in multiple ways. First, the algorithms used in TikTok made it almost impossible to determine the exact border of the trend or to draw a precise sample out of it. 3.6 million videos have been sorted in the search for "Buss It." However, as any tag

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<sup>1</sup> She tagged the video with the following message: "PLEASE TAG ME. And if this has been done I'm sorry, i just fux wit the song #transition #fyp #newtrend #newdance".

containing the phrase, as well as any content or username that is remotely linked to the term, is included, some irrelevant videos are also listed. The second issue is that users developed many hashtags for the same trend, such as "#BussIt", "#bussitchallenge", "#bussitchallenge", and so on. Any typo that occurs while tagging or adding a new letter or an emoji results in the establishment of a new category. All such hashtags containing "bussit" have received over 8 billion views in total. These statistics may be misleading because unrelated videos might be posted using the same hashtag to gain visibility. Third, a video that is part of the trend may not have any tags or hashtags that include the phrase "buss it." As we realized later in our research, some of the videos are not listed unless you search by the name of the trend creator (Erika Davila) or the name of the soundtrack used in her trend-igniting video (from now on, it will be called source video). That is not even the case for some others since they renamed the soundtrack. For example, we were unaware that the well-known TikToker Charli D'amalio participated in the challenge until we came across some online pages addressing it (Lisitza, 2021). Fourth, searching "buss it" together with some other keywords like country names and gender categories may list new videos. Fifth, depending on the time and place, searches may provide different results. Sixth, TikTok's features can change depending on the device on which the application is downloaded. The software downloaded to phones provides different options than the app downloaded to a PC. Additionally, accessing the app through web browsers gives additional choices. While the application for Android facilitates sorting in terms of popularity, others do not. The Android version, on the other hand, displays the number of likes rather than the number of watches. Therefore, it is better to utilize all of them together for a complete statistic. Last, some videos can be removed by users. For example, the creator of the trend, Erika Davila, changed her nickname *from Zazatopia to Erikajiselle* during our research and removed her BIC video.

Unstandardized hashtags, performances, and videos raise the issue of defining a BIC video. Therefore, in the first place, the videos should be picked to classify the proper ones regarding the source video. First and foremost, the source video is categorized as a "transition video", which is based on the reflection of at least two different states, usually labeled "before" and "after", of a thing, a person, or a phenomenon in one video. The transition in the source video was not so apparent compared to the following videos. Davila did not change her clothes, makeup, or anything else except for the rhythm and dance. But she planned for the trend to have a transitory character. In the message that is embedded in the video, she asks people to do that: *"someone, plz do this transition but all prettied up omg plzzzz."* Those who joined the trend created videos according to this instruction. And the transition became an explicit characteristic of the trend.

In the source video, the transition comes out in two phases, each featuring a different part of the song "Buss It". The first phase of the transition featured two verses from Nelly's song "Hot in Herre" constituting the intro to the official video clip of the song *Buss It*. The second phase, however, is marked by the two reprisal verses of the song.

*Checkin' your reflection and tellin' your best friend  
Like, "Girl I think my butt gettin' big" [originally by Nelly - Hot in Herre]  
Buss it, buss it, buss it, buss it  
Is you fuckin'? [the snippet of Buss It used in the challenge]*

As a result, the performances in the two stages correspond to the shift in the song's rhythm. The slow and unsure dance of the first phase suddenly switched to twerking in a crouching position, which is a sort of imitation of the figures performed by dancers in the official video clip.



**Figure 1:** Typical performances from before and after phases

There might be thousands of videos that suit the above description, and it is almost impossible to determine incontrovertibly the prevalence of the trend and the popularity of each case due to the possibility of videos being reshared by multiple users on TikTok or in different social media channels. In the determination of the size of the sample, we considered only videos shared by their creators (from now on, we will call them participants) on TikTok.

Eventually, the unit of analysis was limited to the most popular videos, i.e., those with at least ten million views. Our search on TikTok spanned from August 19 to September 30, 2022, which was updated on April 5, 2023, and came up with the result of 58 videos meeting the criteria. The sample may contain more than one video of the same person since some of the participants shared multiple BIC videos.

**Table 1:** Sample of BIC videos by popularity

| #  | Participant(s) | Username         | Age | Video watch (millions) | Video likes (millions) | Video Duration (seconds) | Upload Date |
|----|----------------|------------------|-----|------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|-------------|
| 1  | Female         | bellapoarch      | 23  | 131,0                  | 13,3                   | 15                       | 8.01.2021   |
| 2  | Female         | lelepons         | 24  | 129,8                  | 11,0                   | 15                       | 10.01.2021  |
| 3  | Female         | gjuanita         | 21  | 89,0                   | 10,1                   | 15                       | 3.01.2021   |
| 4  | Female         | virginiasanhouse | 20  | 80,7                   | 8,8                    | 15                       | 7.01.2021   |
| 5  | Female         | nikitadragun     | 25  | 70,5                   | 6,5                    | 15                       | 12.01.2021  |
| 6  | Female         | jocelynmeiere    | 18  | 55,5                   | 6,2                    | 14                       | 4.01.2021   |
| 7  | Female         | lorengray        | 18  | 53,4                   | 5,8                    | 15                       | 5.01.2021   |
| 8  | Couple (FM)    | victoriamiraanda | 17  | 47,6                   | 5,0                    | 15                       | 14.01.2021  |
| 9  | Female         | hannahstocking   | 29  | 47,5                   | 4,8                    | 8                        | 21.01.2021  |
| 10 | Female         | charlidamalio    | 16  | 45,3                   | 5,9                    | 10                       | 10.01.2021  |
| 11 | Female         | riley            | 19  | 44,1                   | 4,9                    | 15                       | 7.01.2021   |

| #  | Participant(s) | Username                 | Age | Video watch (millions) | Video likes (millions) | Video Duration (seconds) | Upload Date |
|----|----------------|--------------------------|-----|------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|-------------|
| 12 | Female         | rubirose                 | 23  | 42,8                   | 5,9                    | 15                       | 15.01.2021  |
| 13 | Couple (FM)    | brookeashleyhall         | 27  | 41,9                   | 4,2                    | 15                       | 6.01.2021   |
| 14 | Female         | sssniwerwolf             | 28  | 41,6                   | 4,7                    | 15                       | 27.01.2021  |
| 15 | Female         | syeraplitt               | 20  | 39,4                   | 5,3                    | 15                       | 6.01.2021   |
| 16 | Female         | darianrojasc             | 24  | 36,0                   | 5,0                    | 14                       | 12.01.2021  |
| 17 | Female         | montpantoja              | 18  | 34,1                   | 4,1                    | 15                       | 8.01.2021   |
| 18 | Male           | tonioskits               | 34  | 30,6                   | 1,5                    | 20                       | 16.01.2021  |
| 19 | Female         | thetfamm                 |     | 29,9                   | 3,3                    | 15                       | 5.01.2021   |
| 20 | Female         | ingridohara              | 24  | 29,7                   | 3,3                    | 17                       | 13.01.2021  |
| 21 | Female         | kirakosarin              | 23  | 24,5                   | 3,3                    | 10                       | 5.01.2021   |
| 22 | Female         | bellapoarch              | 23  | 23,6                   | 2,3                    | 15                       | 14.02.2021  |
| 23 | Female         | siennamae                | 16  | 22,8                   | 2,7                    | 14                       | 5.01.2021   |
| 24 | Female         | iza                      | 30  | 22,4                   | 3,8                    | 15                       | 13.01.2021  |
| 25 | Female         | rutheterra               | 25  | 21,4                   | 2,3                    | 12                       | 9.01.2021   |
| 26 | Male           | jamescharles             | 21  | 21,1                   | 3,1                    | 15                       | 9.01.2021   |
| 27 | Female         | erikajiselle (zazatopia) | 18  | 20,5                   | 2,1                    | 15                       | 2.01.2021   |
| 28 | Duo (FF)       | keirlutman               |     | 19,2                   | 2,7                    | 15                       | 8.02.2021   |
| 29 | Female         | wejdene.bk               | 16  | 17,2                   | 1,8                    | 15                       | 20.01.2021  |
| 30 | Female         | russiankreammm           |     | 17,0                   | 1,9                    | 15                       | 7.01.2021   |
| 31 | Female         | domelipa                 | 19  | 16,8                   | 2,2                    | 15                       | 12.01.2021  |
| 32 | Couple (FM)    | pricyllapedrosa          | 39  | 16,8                   | 1,9                    | 15                       | 17.01.2021  |
| 33 | Female         | challxn                  | 22  | 15,9                   | 2,9                    | 15                       | 8.01.2021   |
| 34 | Female         | tiktokmomma7             | 50  | 15,3                   | 1,3                    | 15                       | 9.01.2021   |
| 35 | Female         | thenewclassic            | 30  | 14,8                   | 2,2                    | 15                       | 16.01.2021  |
| 36 | Female         | zayzayyy03               |     | 14,2                   | 2,0                    | 15                       | 4.01.2021   |
| 37 | Female         | larasilvan               | 19  | 14,2                   | 1,8                    | 18                       | 7.01.2021   |
| 38 | Female         | sailormel369420          | 27  | 14,0                   | 2,0                    | 13                       | 9.01.2021   |
| 39 | Female         | jadethirlwall            | 28  | 14,0                   | 1,7                    | 12                       | 27.01.2021  |
| 40 | Female         | hamelpatel_              | 23  | 13,5                   | 2,1                    | 15                       | 25.01.2021  |
| 41 | Female         | jasminechiswell          | 27  | 12,7                   | 1,9                    | 14                       | 8.01.2021   |
| 42 | Female         | hunnichey                | 22  | 12,5                   | 2,4                    | 15                       | 5.01.2021   |
| 43 | Female         | lillianhepler            | 19  | 12,5                   | 1,6                    | 15                       | 10.01.2021  |
| 44 | Male           | gavinboyd024             | 18  | 12,0                   | 3,4                    | 13                       | 12.01.2021  |
| 45 | Couple (FM)    | jostasy                  | 23  | 11,8                   | 1,4                    | 15                       | 12.01.2021  |
| 46 | Female         | valeriaccarruyo          | 17  | 11,6                   | 1,6                    | 15                       | 7.01.2021   |
| 47 | Female         | the.navarose             | 30  | 11,5                   | 1,5                    | 17                       | 4.01.2021   |
| 48 | Female         | _agentgirl_              | 30  | 11,1                   | 1,3                    | 25                       | 30.01.2021  |
| 49 | Female         | charlyjordan             | 21  | 10,9                   | 1,5                    | 15                       | 6.01.2021   |
| 50 | Female         | sjbleau                  | 19  | 10,7                   | 1,6                    | 15                       | 10.01.2021  |
| 51 | Duo (FF)       | bassidybondie            | 22  | 10,7                   | 1,5                    | 15                       | 6.01.2021   |
| 52 | Female         | abbieherbert             | 24  | 10,7                   | 1,3                    | 15                       | 5.01.2021   |
| 53 | Duo (FF)       | kirst_karabo             |     | 10,5                   | 1,6                    | 10                       | 12.01.2021  |
| 54 | Female         | annaxsitar               | 23  | 10,3                   | 1,4                    | 15                       | 8.01.2021   |
| 55 | Female         | amandacerny              | 29  | 10,2                   | 1,2                    | 15                       | 9.01.2021   |

| #  | Participant(s) | Username          | Age | Video watch (millions) | Video likes (millions) | Video Duration (seconds) | Upload Date |
|----|----------------|-------------------|-----|------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|-------------|
| 56 | Female         | dominiquizecst    |     | 10,2                   | 1,5                    | 15                       | 9.01.2021   |
| 57 | Female         | cacilbillyeonnice | 19  | 10,1                   | 1,7                    | 15                       | 3.02.2021   |
| 58 | Female         | crissa_ace        | 31  | 10,0                   | 1,4                    | 14                       | 7.01.2021   |

In BIC videos, the transition is characterized by a change in actors' clothing, body care, facial expression, energy, and mood. Thus, the transition came to symbolize a binary opposition between two different lifestyles, i.e., between the tedious everyday life and a desired ideal life, which is the main focal point of the analysis in this article. By doing so, we hope to gain insight into Gen-Z's perceptions of privacy, beauty, sexiness, humor, and the ideal life. Second, it problematizes whether this sensation is uniform and universal or has culture-based variations to discuss the main determinants of the transition reflected in the videos. To this end, we will compare popular videos to less noticed ones or those created by people from different cultures. As a result, we'd like to find out why some videos are more popular than others. And how the culture in which the TikTokers were raised influences their videos' popularity and their perception of the transition. In other words, we would like to question the interactive relationship between social and virtual realms to make a symbolic interpretation of the audio-visual contents of social media.

### Some Critical Notes on Literature

In recent years, social media, in general, and TikTok in particular, have been subjected to many studies from almost all academic fields (Du, Liechty, Santos, & Park; Eghtesadi & Florea, 2020; Haenlein et al., 2020; Hayes, Stott, Lamb, & Hurst, 2020; Lovett, Munawar, Mohammed, & Prabhu, 2020; Mhalla, Jiang, & Nasiri, 2020; Subramanian, 2021; Vázquez-Herrero, Negreira-Rey, & López-García, 2022; Weimann & Masri, 2023), which primarily try to understand why and how people use social media. Despite claiming to examine the issue from various theoretical perspectives, positivist and descriptive studies account for a sizable portion of the literature, typically providing information about the cinematographic dimension of videos, technicalities in performances, and body representations. The main problem in these studies is being too mechanical and descriptive, which refrain from questioning or digging up the findings and do not go beyond the statistical classification of users, videos, content, and texts embedded in the videos as tags or hashtags.

TikTok studies frequently employ *Functional Theory* or *Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT)* to explain user motives in social media usage (Alhabash & Ma, 2017; Bossen & Kottasz, 2020; Cheung, Chiu, & Lee, 2011; Falgoust et al., 2022; Lu & Lu, 2019; Omar & Dequan, 2020; Pelletier, Krallman, Adams, & Hancock, 2020; Phua, Jin, & Kim, 2017; Stanley, 2015; Whiting & Williams, 2013). Indeed, the subject was on the academic agenda long before the development of social media (Ruggiero, 2009). While the users' motivations and priorities can be slightly varied depending on the type of media, early studies identified users' motivations as *Information, Personal Identity, Integration and Social Interaction, and Entertainment* (McQuail, 1983, pp. 82-83). In their research on TikTok, Falgoust et al. (2022), added the list *Virality and Fame, Self-Presentation, Preserve Memory of Time or Place and Representation*.

The main problem in UGT is the typification of user motives, which might have relative and ambivalent elements. What if someone enjoys seeing videos of brutality and violence? During the heydays of civil war in Syria, we witnessed how individuals exchanged films of torture, mass executions, and beheadings with one another for entertainment purposes. Then, should we name this motivation entertainment or sadism? The dilemma here is about the relative position of the researcher and the social media user in naming the motivation.

Prioritizing the researcher in this case may result in a bias against the user. The opposite, on the other hand, may result in overlooking the underlying reason, since it may even transcend the user's consciousness, or the user may intentionally conceal their socially and legally disapproved motivations. Today's social media users are not as passive as classical media users of several decades ago. Trolling, for example, has become a very common phrase in our daily lives as social media has grown in popularity. Aside from personal initiations, troll armies of governments, political factions, organizations, or social movements can disseminate misinformation. So, without a critical viewpoint, how can we explain the behavior of who is trolling and who is being trolled? If it is not for fun, the former will naturally not reveal his/her true purpose. And the latter may not be as naïve as we thought. Because people were raised with a formation that made them selective in getting information. That is, we are not trolled most of the time; rather, we just need our (mis)beliefs to be satisfied. We sometimes escape from reality to relax, but this motivation is neither a need for information nor entertainment but is a maneuver in power conflicts.

Normativity is another frequent problem in social media studies. Initially, a normative approach evolved as a democratic and moral standpoint to emphasize the negative role of media on users (Christians, Glasser, McQuail, Nordenstreng, & White, 2009). However, in the current period, normativity has devolved into a sort of Neo-Luddist reactivity that is very biased and judgmental of social media, especially TikTok and its Gen-Z users (Taşođlu & Koca, 2022). The primary cause of this mindset is the fundamental shift in social conditions brought about by social media, which has resulted in intergenerational conflicts. It is certain that Gen-Z, who were born in the 1990s and after (Tam, 2022), raised with the internet and smart phones experience the world rather differently than previous generations. It is a serious problem for academic production since what is known about them was mostly produced by researchers from older generations who tend to judge them overtly or latently as being lazy, pragmatist, selfish, hypocritical, and immoral, who want to be rich and famous without spending a serious effort and can easily deviate from moral values for that sake (Stein, 2013). And they are novices in experiencing the harsh conditions of life, so they need senior consulting.

The theoretical perspectives utilized in social media research have a significant influence on perpetuating such generation-based biases. For example, celebrity is one of the most popular themes in social media research, and obviously, the ideas of Andy Warhol and Chris Rojek dominated the discussion. These two standpoints deepened the biases against new generations' appetite for fame by constructing a hierarchical typology of celebrity. Credited for the quote "In the future, everyone will be world-famous for 15 minutes," Warhol foresaw that with the development of the cultural industry and the spread of mass media, access for "ordinary people" to media that make them popular figures would be easier (Piechucka, 2014). Especially stories of many people who became known in a short time by masses all around the globe via social media make Warhol a name praised in this discussion. However, what he did is not just a prediction of the future but also devaluing, intentionally or unintentionally, the new type of celebrity.

Celebrity gained through social media is seen as not as prevalent and persistent as old type celebrities that go beyond national borders and their own time. Chris Rojek's distinction between "*celebrities*" and "*celetoids*" reflects and reproduces this idea. For Rojek (2001), generally, *celebrities* "enjoy a more durable career with the public" (p. 20) compared to *celetoids* who, by nature, "receive their moment of fame and then disappear from public consciousness quite rapidly." (p 21.) Theresa Senft (2008) goes further and applies this idea to underline that what people gain through social media is not a normal celebrity. Senft calls this new type of celebrity as "*micro-celebrity*" which is different from "*conventional celebrity*." She implies that micro-celebrities that were created by web conditions can only be recognized

by a closed community of web users, as blogger Momus rephrased Warhol's statement, "In the future, everyone will be famous to fifteen people" (p. 25).

Though conceptualizing social media celebrities as *micro-celebrities* received high acceptance (Abidin & Brown, 2019; Akyazı, 2020; Alperstein, 2019; Jerslev, 2016; Marwick, 2013; Tam, 2022), it is dubious that the terminology well explains the current celebrities. As a matter of fact, when Senft came up with this notion, social media and social media celebrities were not as prevalent as they are now. Because smart phones have practically eliminated all types of limitations, social media celebrities are no longer known just to a limited group of people; they have achieved worldwide popularity. Some of them become popular symbols without a great deal of effort; others increase their chance to reach as many people as they can through the proliferation of social media channels. Many TikTok content creators in our sample, for example, also have YouTube channels and active accounts on Instagram, *Twitter*, *Snapchat*, etc. Musicians promote their songs on platforms such as *Spotify*, *Deezer*, *Tidal*, *Pandora*, *Resso*, and others. Some of them create professional web pages; others use applications or web pages like *Linktree*, *linkfire*, *feature.fm*, and *hoo.be* to organize and use their all-social media accounts in one place. Some try to sell their products using sites like *Depop* and *OnlyFans*, some others receive professional assistantships to acquire "celebrity capital" (Brooks, Drenten, & Piskorski, 2021). They are no longer micro-celebrities, but their celebrities are recognized outside the platforms they create content for, as sites like *Wikipedia* or *Famous Birthdays* file their biographies along with historical and contemporary celebrities of all kinds.

It is obvious that their fame goes beyond the limits of virtual realms and even the borders of nations. Their long-lasting performances, on the other hand, prove at least that their celebrities are not for fifteen minutes. To be realistic, many of them (influencers) will probably lose their attraction soon or later, since, as Carillat and Ilicic (2019) claim, all celebrities have a life cycle. Nevertheless, some of them will exchange their "celebrity capital" with "economic capital", which is the ultimate goal for many (Brooks et al., 2021). This basic rule of do-or-die was not only true for social media influencers but for all other celebrities. The only difference between a classic media celebrity and a social media celebrity is that the former is faced with more barriers than the latter. In conventional media, celebrity is usually something bestowed, but with social media, the role that is played by elites mediated between celebrities and the masses is diminished, and those who dreamed about celebrities find more chances compared to earlier dreamers. As there are more contenders, it is natural to have more disappointments.

It is quite legitimate to create a typology to highlight the differences between traditional and social media celebrities. However, each notion naming the categories not only shows their distinctions but also creates a hierarchy among them. Labeling a social media celebrity as "micro" serves no purpose other than to relegate them to a secondary and inferior status. As a result, it is usual to credit par-excellence to the classic-type celebrity, as opposed to social media celebrities, who are viewed as a form of faux, inadequate, and shallow. We see this plainly in studies that equate social media celebrities with being "ordinary", implying that classic-type celebrities own some extraordinary characteristics (Arik, 2013).

People frequently criticize TikTokers' performances as being worthless and awkward, and it is difficult for them to comprehend why a ten-second lip-syncing video is watched and liked by millions. However, no one asks why Marilyn Monroe's three-second-long "the skirt blowing up" scene attracted many people and became so iconic. Özlem Yıldız (2019) uses *center* and *periphery*, which were set forth by Edward Shils (Shils, 1961) and popularized in Turkey by Şerif Mardin (1973/1990), to explain the different types of celebrities. According to Yıldız, TikTok is mostly dominated by the periphery, which has lower cultural capital. In contrast, the participation of the center, which owns high cultural capital and becomes an influencer (phenomenon) on multiple social media platforms, is limited (p. 2). She chooses an actress as



an example of the center. When comparing her videos with those by "periphery," Yıldız implies that her videos reflect her high cultural capital since she mocked others through her videos. That is, being aware of the banality on TikTok necessitates a high level of cultural capital, which is an important component of a traditional media celebrity for her. Indeed, this approach, which clearly shows the stereotypes in handling classical and social media celebrities, is too elitist and far from explaining how, for example, a person like Khaby Lame, who is the son of a Senegalese immigrant family in Italy, became the most-watched TikToker and how his popularity exceeds that of a world star like Will Smith on TikTok.

The desire to be famous is frequently associated with narcissism. And, because social media has become the primary platform for people seeking popularity, its link to narcissism has been subjected to many studies (McCain & Campbell, 2016), which frequently allege that social media promotes a narcissist culture (Akyazı, 2020; Alanka & Cezik, 2016; Aydemir, 2021; Bergman, Fearington, Davenport, & Bergman, 2011; Coşan, 2022). Narcissism in this context is not a kind of extreme selfishness or hedonistic egoism but a mass psychological pathology. This approach is rooted in Christopher Lasch's book *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations (1979/1991)*. Lasch's was a conservative reaction to and an apocalyptic assessment of the change in capitalist world, blaming youth and feminists who deviated from holy family ideals. Drew Pinsky and S. Mark Young, in their book *The Mirror Effect: How Celebrity Narcissism Is Seducing America (2009)* use Lasch's lenses to analyze celebrities.

Many celebrities display unmistakable symptoms of classically narcissistic behavior, from high levels of specific personality traits to dangerous and self-destructive behavior. The word narcissism can be misleading: It's often taken to mean self-love but, in fact, narcissism has more to do with self-loathing than self-love. Celebrity narcissists aren't egomaniacs with high self-esteem. Rather, they are traumatized individuals who are unable to connect in any real way with other people (p. 7).

The real issue, according to them, rather than the pathological behavior itself, is the normalization of such behavior in media culture, which encourages ordinary people to imitate it. Social media, in particular, has become a haven for ordinary people to impersonate problematic celebrities.

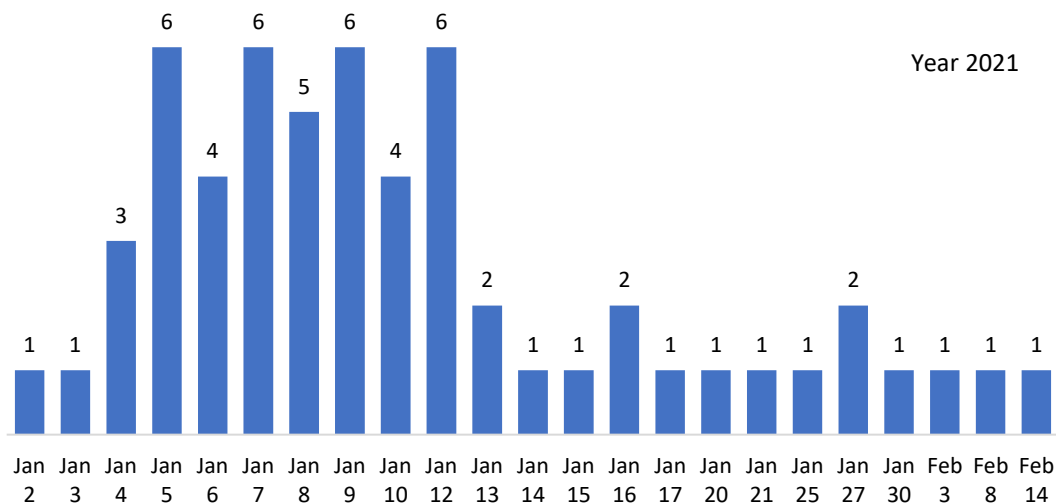
Indeed, it is hard to deny the detrimental impacts of social media, particularly on youngsters, but many studies go beyond criticism and demonize social media users. Anything indicating self-esteem, the desire for social acceptance, or simply focusing on oneself may have been regarded as narcissistic symptoms in their assessment. Even sharing selfies can be treated as an indicator of narcissism (Alemdar, İşbilen, Demirel, & Telli, 2017; Çaycı, Çaycı, & Eken, 2019). In fact, unless it is turned into a pathological problem, narcissism is an essential and healthy trait, especially in childhood, which aids in the development of self-esteem. However, among the many studies reviewed for this research, we can tell that only one (McGloin & Oeldorf-Hirsch, 2018) has a positive image of narcissism. Overall, social media content creators are stigmatized as greedy, deviant, and pathological in these studies.

Erving Goffman's *dramaturgy* is another frequently used theoretical viewpoint that leads to the negative reflection of social media users' behaviors (Hernández-Serrano, Jones, Renés-Arellano, & Ortuño, 2022; Ng & Indran, 2023). In his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (1956/1959)* Goffman primarily contends that an individual's identity is not stable but rather adaptable to diverse social contexts. Departing from this point, researchers tend to be skeptical about social media influencers' daily lives as reflected in videos. This skepticism led to a perception of them as two-faced displaying a different personality in their videos than their genuine ones (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013; Ünlü, Kuş, & Göksu, 2020; Yıldız, 2019).

According to some other researchers, the real problem is not their efforts for “impression management” but rather their carelessness in opening up privacy or dissemination of intimate information to both close and distant relationships by exposing oneself (Aydemir, 2021; Aydın, 2021; İnceç, 2020; Köseođlu, 2023). Serge Tisseron (2011) developed the concept of “*extimité*” (extimacy), which is the desire to make visible certain intimate aspects of oneself and the process by which fragments of the intimate self are offered to the sight of others to be validated. That is, it is a behavior that encourages individuals to draw attention to a part of their personal lives—their inner worlds—to receive feedback and validation of their way of life through the reactions of others. All these interpretations create an image of TikTokers as doing crazy, weird, and irrational behaviors just to be seen, liked, and followed by other users. Such an attribution can be true for some accounts, but statistics about popularity ranks prove that this is not a valid method to be famous.

### The Culture of Moments

For a long time, researchers considered time to be a one-dimensional phenomenon, until historians of the Annales School proposed temporal relativity as short (*événements*), intermediate (*conjunctures*), and long term (*longue durée*) for distinct units of analysis. When it comes to social media, we may need to reconsider this tripartite view. Because social media time goes by so fast, practically everything is condensed into very short moments. Glimpses replaced gazes; temporality replaced permanence; all online life turned to a flash in the pan. Most of the daily life experienced via short term memories and the culture in the virtual world lived as short trends. In the case of BIC, the number of users participating in the challenge surged to a certain level in just three days, and the trend cooled rapidly after a week. This does not necessarily imply that fewer videos were posted after one week, but as seen in the graph below, the first ten days are essential for gaining more attention.



**Figure 2:** BIC videos by upload dates

The centrality of moments in social media culture is not only reflected in trends but also in the length of videos uploaded to TikTok, which usually do not exceed one minute. BIC videos, for example, are just 14.7 seconds long on average. Yet these short videos can be very powerful to present a special moment that mediates a feeling, an idea, or a message. You don't have to wait for funny scenes in a long movie if you want to laugh. Instead, you can watch TikTok videos for funny moments. If you enjoy a video, there is no need to do anything because

TikTok allows you to loop it as many times as you want. Alternatively, you can simply skip and find other videos that have been prepared for a similar purpose.

The rise of miniseries or tracking news through short messages instead of newspaper columns is all related to this culture. In the culture of moments, people tend to express themselves in emojis, short texts, tags, acronyms, pictures, and short videos rather than long officialese texts, which makes relations more casual and intimate.

The culture of moments is rooted in the human desire for possession and deliverance from limiting social norms, which both led to and were shaped by liberalism. In today's world, this desire has converted into excessive consumption and individualism under neo-liberal conditions led by technological development in production, transportation, and communication. The comfort supplied by online shopping, movie platforms like Netflix, new genres of electronic games like Roblox, and sharing platforms like TikTok all promote consumption, hence the culture of moments. Because the rise in consumption brings about a shorter period of satisfaction, Producing or watching short videos in this context is nothing but consumer behavior, and TikTok addiction in this sense is a sort of consumption-mania.

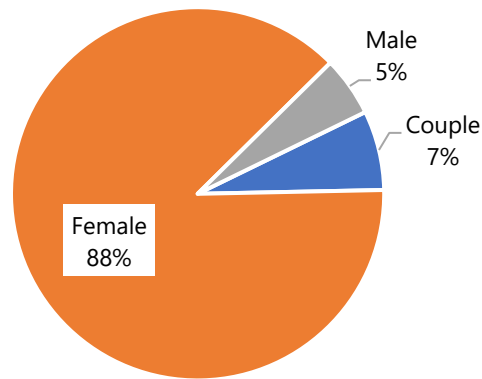
### Girls' Unintimated Private Spaces

The culture of moments brought about facility and simplicity in video production. A short video taken with an ordinary, cheap smart phone without any assistance and without any serious expenses or preparations can attract millions. More than that, home has become the main focal point of the TikTok culture. Of the videos analyzed in this research, 96.6% were taken at home. Of them, only one video was filmed in the backyard; the rest were taken inside the house. This fact is usually attributed to the lockdowns and measures taken due to the COVID 19 endemic (Kennedy, 2020, p. 1070). However, this fact is only the tip of the iceberg. A culture developed around femininity long before social media was developed seems to play a determinant role in the use of space in such videos.

**Table 2:** Space for BIC performances

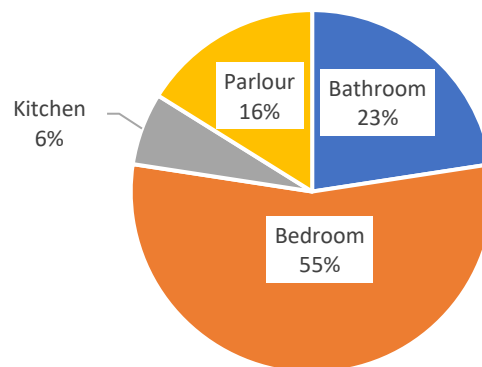
| Place          | Videos    | %            |
|----------------|-----------|--------------|
| Inside home    | 55        | 94.8         |
| Backyard       | 1         | 1.7          |
| Outside        | 1         | 1.7          |
| Hotel Corridor | 1         | 1.7          |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>58</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

The majority of the BIC performers are female. In our sample, for example, while males, including a transgender person, comprised only 5% of the total, in all other videos, females are the main performers, including those (7%) whose husbands or fathers, as one tagged "*o velho da lancha é meu pai*", appeared in their show as walking gentlemen. Indeed, such female dominance in this challenge needs an explanation.



**Figure 3:** BIC performers by gender

Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber stated in 1975 that although boys participated in outside activities as part of their socialization, ladies who were barred from the public realm stayed at home and established a "bedroom culture." (pp. 180-181). The origins of the bedroom culture on social media can be traced all the way back to the 1990s, when webcams were initially utilized for online streaming and young females known as "camgirls" began to use their dorm rooms or bedrooms for this purpose (Senft, 2008). Therefore, it is not a coincidence that the bedroom is the most common venue for BIC videos.



**Figure 4:** Indoor spaces for BIC performances

Indeed, the bedroom's prominence in BIC is due not just to "bedroom culture," but also to the highly sensual quality of the dance performed in the challenge. These two factors are inextricably linked to female status in the public sphere. Historically, females to a great extent segregated from public space especially in urban life. A woman's presence in public sphere was confined to her sexualized body, as in the Sumerian holly prostitutes and Hetaeras of ancient Greece. Similarly, as many camgirls experienced, their casual streaming morphed into erotic, even pornographic content over time in line with viewers' expectations (Senft, 2008). When top male and female TikTokers' videos are compared, males gain social acceptance for their talents in comedy, magic tricks, cuisine, or acting, while females gain approval for their adorability, attractiveness, and sex appeal. Almost all these females filmed their bodies in a sexy way through a pose, gaze, mimic, garment, or performance in some, if not all, of their videos. This idea may be challenged under the pretext that sexiness is relative. What is the standard, for example, for a pose to be sexy?

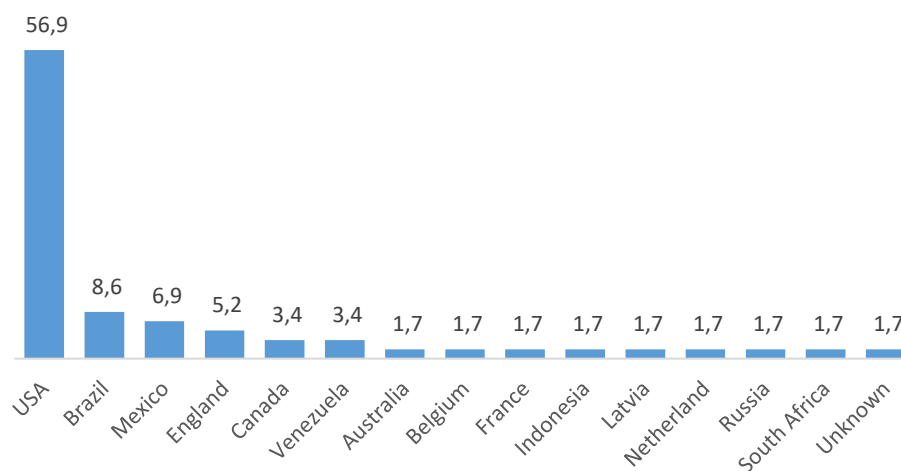
There is already a long debate on sexualization, especially of girls in media, in Anglo-Saxon societies. Feminists raised such concerns due to child and female abuses, and conservatives added that degeneration of values and holy family. Some liberals, on the other hand, oppose them on the grounds that they accentuate sexualization or portray sexuality as a problem. For them, seeing a child as asexual and deserving of protection is the middle-class

norm (Duschinsky, 2013; Karaian, 2015). As children born with sexuality, emphasizing sexualization does nothing but oppress children, leading to problems like slut-shame. According to Mulholland (2015), there is a panic about the sexualization of children in society; however, students of 12-16 ages do not attribute what adults attribute to sex and pornography. For them, porn is something funny, and seeing it humorous keeps it aloof (p. 328).

Indeed, some BIC performances can be classified as comedy, and at the end, everyone supposedly does it for entrainment. As can be understood from the video tags, some of them saw it as a matter of a performance challenge, while others attended the challenge to request it from their friends and others to get likes. In total, the challenges are done for socialization, and people, as the TikTok motto says, make their days. Nonetheless, the issue of sexualization, or hypersexualization, cannot be underestimated. Finding porn funny is not a proper indicator of distance from it. Because humor has always been a method to speak about an issue like sex in public and a cover to hide out sexual desire. Watching porn, for example, is mostly seen as humorous, not because it is found funny but because it is usually associated with being “horny” or “hopeless”, which people are usually labeled with, especially in a formal setting.

To broach the subject, we need to explain why BIC was performed by so many women or why female performances drew greater crowds than male performances. The answer is simple: because the standard performance of the challenge is too effeminate. And what makes it visible in that way is the expected twerking in the second part of the challenge. More than twerk usually being identified with females the very moment that participants borrowed from the dance performance in the video clip of *Buss It* is obviously inspired by the rhythmic moves of a woman having sex with a man. This perception made similar male performances categorically comedy, if not transexual. Because of that, males created a masculine version of BIC in which the twerk is replaced by male sex positions, macho acts, and sexy poses.

Indeed, every female participant did not dance in the same way, and it is obviously seen that some female performers bear down on their moves not to be considered too sexy and some others do not twerk at all. This fact can be vividly seen in an intercultural comparison. For example, in general, participants from Muslim countries are more conservative in their performance compared to those from western countries; Mainland Europeans compared to those from England, Latin America, and North America; and white Americans compared to Latin and African Americans. The distribution of cases in the sample by country also well reflected this fact.



**Figure 5:** The distribution of BIC performers by countries

The above figure shows how TikTok rapidly became part of American youth culture or how Gen-Z in the United States dominated the TikTok culture (Boffone, 2022). Not just the BIC but also many other popular challenges were blatantly developed in American Black hip-hop culture, in which “Black women’s bodies have traditionally been objectified and relegated to the role of the “video vixen,” a reiteration of the classic Jezebel stereotype of the “hypersexual” Black woman” (Davis, 2022, p. 32). Black women become identical with twerking or sensual dance figures, and many Black female rappers internalize and defend this as a Black culture, which can be read as a feminist reaction on the one hand to the male dominance in hip-hop on the other to the historical image of Black Jezebel (Perry, 2004; Richardson, 2006).

Dance is a cultural universal, and in essence, it is nothing but imitating the natural world, like fighting animals, flying birds, waving of flowers in the wind or human acts in relation to it like harvesting, hunting, the effect of a disease, etc. As human culture separated from nature, the reference to dance turned more into human acts in daily life, like drunken people, macho acts of city gangs, robotic moves, and sex figures. The reason behind twerks’ becoming so identical with women, for example, is their being inspired by female sex moves. Unlike traditional folk dances that are performed for rituals or communal celebrations, suggestive dances have usually been performed for money or survival. Long before becoming part of pop culture via black hip-hop, twerk figures can be traced back to oriental dances and pole dances in strip clubs arranged for entertaining men. Profitability is its *raison d’être* both in nightclubs and popular culture, as the lyrics of the song “Twerkulator” by *City Girls* state, “shaking my money maker.” That is, more than being related to the aesthetic of black women’s curves or their ability to dance, twerk became part of their culture because of economic inequalities between races in American society.

In a broader sense, it was part of liberal life to center sex on individuality, especially from the 1980s onward. In this period, sex was promoted in almost every aspect of daily life. Eroticism and pornography first dominated movie theaters, then TVs. Suggestive dances were promoted globally through songs like *Lambada* and *Soca Dance*, which were sponsored by TF1 (Télévision Française 1). Music is sexualized not only by such dances but also by its lyrics. In today’s black female hip-hop as Nicki Minaj, Erika Banks, Megan Thee Stallion, Normani, Cardi B, City Girls, and Ice Spice, all sorts of sexualization in music can be seen.

### **The Culture of Transition or the Desire for an Ideal Body and Life**

The idea of transition videos essentially found its inspiration in TV series about car customization, house renovation, and styling like *Pimp My Ride*, *Overhaulin’*, and *Man Caves*. The common format of these series is that experts find a car or house in an undesirable condition, fix it, redesign it, and personalize it to satisfy the owners or customers. At the end of each episode, they juxtapose the previous and new states of the thing that they handled. Such comparisons do not only reflect the talents of repairers and designers but also impose on viewers a sort of hedonism that considers change and aesthetics as the source of desire and happiness. Therefore, such series reflect the mentality of their creators about aesthetics and desire. Likewise, the binary opposition presented in transition videos can be used to understand the mental world of their creators.

The before phase of BIC videos mirrors undesirable life and body in contrast to the after phase, which reflects ideal life and a satisfactory body. We learn this dichotomy from participants facial expressions in each phase. In the first part, people pretend to be sad, dull, sleepy, and unhappy, which, in the second phase is replaced by happy, joyful, energetic, and seductive moods. In the before phase, the camera is often used as a mirror, and participants pretend to look at themselves in the mirror, checking their faces, hair, bellies, hips, and buttocks

to find defects and changes in their bodies. One of the criteria for their success in these performances is to what degree they recreate themselves in the second phase without defects. Such a construct reflects their sense of beauty and sexiness as well as how they present their “*erotic capital*”, which, according to Catherine Hakim (2010), consists of beauty, sexual attractiveness, social skills, liveliness, social presentation, sexuality, and in some cases, fertility.

Beauty is reflected in TikTok as something constructed personally. No matter if a woman is tall or short, thin or chubby, old or young, black or white, she can still be beautiful with makeup, which is seen as a kind of magic touch wiping out bodily defects and asymmetries on the face. You can see, for example, in many videos that an adult female turns into a beautiful teenager with makeup. In the BIC videos, makeup is the key to an ideal female beauty, and a lack of it is considered deficient, no matter if you have a natural beauty. To show its role, in the first phase of videos, 81% of users had no makeup; in the second phase, 81% showed up with full makeup. To show the magic of makeup, some users show naevus, moles, or acne on their face in the first phase, and in the second phase, they appear with a flawless face.

**Table 3:** The degree of makeup in the before and after phases

|        |              | After     |          |          |          |          | Total     |
|--------|--------------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|
|        |              | Full      | Moderate | Slight   | No       | N/A      |           |
| Before | Full         | 2         |          |          |          |          | 2         |
|        | Moderate     | 1         |          |          |          |          | 1         |
|        | Slight       | 4         | 1        |          |          |          | 5         |
|        | No           | 40        | 4        | 1        | 2        |          | 47        |
|        | N/A          |           |          |          |          | 3        | 3         |
|        | <b>Total</b> | <b>47</b> | <b>5</b> | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>58</b> |

Hair style is seen as another indicator of facial beauty. In the first phase, users usually show up with buns and uncombed hair. In the second phase, the majority have well done untied straight hairs. This sense of beauty is undoubtedly very relevant to white supremacy in this context. In some cases, makeup does not only cover the defects but also helps to whiten the skin color. And long, straight hair can be interpreted as a desire for whiteness.

The transition in the BIC looks like a rite of passage, marking the transition from teenage to sex appeal for mature women. The lyrics of the first phase are “*Checkin' your reflection and tellin' your best friend Like, "Girl I think my butt gettin' big"*”, in fact, is about such a transition. When we initially saw these videos, our first impression was of the sexualization of teenage girls. However, after searching their ages, we found 23.7 as the average. Participants help that perception with their acts, mimics, makeup, and clothing, which reflect women in the second phase as more mature and sexier. Especially clothing is the most effective way of reflecting. In the first phase, people usually appear in indoor clothes like t-shirts, shorts, pajamas, and robes. In the second phase, they show up in lowcut bodycon, slips, glittery dresses, leather, and low waist pants, which are sort of outfits for a party. The change in clothing is relevant to the perception of the role of shoulders, breasts, hips, and buttocks in female sex appeal, which is further supported by high heel shoes, which are worn by the majority in the second phase. Moreover, sparking effects, colorful LED lights, accessories, twerking, and seductive acts contribute to their sexiness.

Though there was a common pattern in performances, the reason behind their popularity is not because they are more beautiful, sexy, or successful than others; rather, they were just appreciated by viewers for some reasons. Some of them are watched just because of their *celebrity capital* or social skills; others are watched for their liveliness. Some participants are

obviously appreciated due to the humor they added to their performances; others are seen as funny due to failures and accidents during performances. Courage, or self-esteem is another factor that brings popularity. Contrary to Khattab's (2019) claims regarding ageism, ableism, and body shaming via transition films, in BIC, people are encouraged to reveal their own natural look in everyday life in the first phase rather than generating exaggerated unattractiveness as a binary opposition of the second phase. A fifty-year-old participant received many comments of appreciation just because of her age. A young woman whose left side of the face is covered with naevus or who has pimples on her face does not refrain from showing them in the first phase, then successfully gets rid of these problems with makeup. Some pregnant women can freely show their bellies as transgender people, and lesbians can reflect their identity courageously.

One of the important symbols of the first phase is eyeglasses. Though thirteen participants wear ordinary eyeglasses in the first phase, in the second phase we barely see them (only three) with eyeglasses. Mona Khattab (2019) interprets this as:

In the first unattractive scene, the user is wearing eyeglasses, which he removes in the second scene. This underlines the stereotypical image of nerdiness as desexualized, as eyeglasses have a long-standing association with bookishness... The user's unattractive character wears eyeglasses, which is in line with the negative portrayal of physical weaknesses, as weaker eyesight here is portrayed as a sign of ugliness.

As a matter of fact, this explanation itself may contain biases toward eyeglasses and their usage in TikTok performances. Wearing glasses in BIC performances is hardly related to its identification with ugliness. When looking at the other videos of participants who wear glasses, some of them obviously had sight problems, and they wear eyeglasses in other videos as well. Rather than being an indicator of weakness or health problems, the eyeglasses in these performances are seen as accessories. For many, eyeglasses are not suitable for an environment like dancing in a party depicted in the second phase, yet three participants, who do not wear in the first phase but in the second, apparently think the opposite. The same personal preferences can be claimed for other accessories as well. Compared to the first, in the second phase, we see more earrings. Some wear long, big earrings; others wear small ones. Yet, the majority simply do not prefer to wear or show them.

In transition videos, the binary opposition alludes to more than just beauty and eroticism. The first phase is almost always about life at home, like bathing, sleeping, cleaning, teeth brushing, or just spending leisure time at home. Usually, videos give the impression that participants have just woken up, taken a bath, or are about to take a bath or go to bed. This temporal preference is related to the fact that a person is in a kind of natural state without makeup or formal clothing, which are more related to social presentation. Thus, we see in these videos the transition of human beings from natural beings to social beings. With this, participants reflect their desire to be social, of which sex and jollification occupy a large part. Thus, transition reflects their desire to be desired. Time, space, and things gained new meanings along with this desire. Bed and bedroom, for example, is a place of resting and sleeping in the first phase, which turns into an erotic and exotic place in the second phase together with soft lights, color filters, and suggestive dances.

A house is a private space, which in Goffman's terminology is a *backstage* or *back region*, in the first phase, and turns into a public space in the *front region* or *frontage* in the second phase. Backstage is the place where individuals escape, sometimes from distant individuals and sometimes from everyone, to act, talk, and seem in ways that they cannot do in the presence of others. Appearing with messy hair, a bathrobe, pajamas, or some animal costumes, or picking the nose, brushing teeth, or yawning with half closed eyes that we see in the first phase are such acts in many cultures. In the second phase, however, they appear neat and tidy, as if they are in the presence of people. Thus, in social media culture, public and



private sphere dichotomies are reproduced and overlapped at the same time, deconstructing intimacy, formality, and sexuality.

### Conclusion

Without a doubt, the shift in social conditions brought about by the advent of Web 2.0 over the last two decades is comparable in magnitude to the change brought about by the Industrial Revolution. A parallel social world, virtual society, came into existence, which is both affecting and shaped by the real social world. People are split into two opposing groups: those who have successfully adapted to new societal conditions and those who have not. People who are equipped with the norms of old society are hard put to understand new social conditions. They treat new generations as pathological narcissists who do not hesitate to undermine moral values and ignore social norms for the sake of being famous and rich or just for fun. The solution is to protect young people from the hazardous effects of social media, i.e., by banning or developing strict controls over social media. The efforts to prohibit TikTok are motivated in part by this conservatism.

We do not overlook the negative effects of social media, but we do criticize normativity-dominated social media studies that make youth the scapegoat for many problems, which are in fact related to patriarchal ideology, liberal capitalism, or being entrenched in the authentic history of nations. As a matter of fact, “digital spaces and practices force us to reimagine our identities and sociocultural practices. In this case, TikTok informs identity formation as well as group culture” (Boffone, 2022, p. 5). And a genuine insight into virtual society necessitates an analysis of the meaning and culture formed in or via social media.

Without a doubt, new generations experience time and space differently than previous generations, which deconstructs the meaning. As a result of technological advancement, particularly social media, people are now experiencing life through moments rather than events or stories, which was the main mode of comprehension for previous generations. On the one hand, momentization of comprehension is an unavoidable component of consumption culture in tandem with capitalist mass production; on the other hand, it is a practical strategy for overcoming epistemic pollution caused by the digitalization of life.

Home, or personal rooms, served as a focal point in the lives of especially young girls long before the development of social media. In virtual society, however, the function of the house as a private space is shifted. Like attendants of the *Big Brother* reality show, social media influencers open their house to everyone. This has frequently been blamed for undermining intimacy and leading to immorality. However, the transitions employed in BIC videos demonstrate a strong awareness of the dualism of private and public spaces. The deconstruction of intimacy, formality, and sexuality appeared as a strategy for reconciling their desires to be famous and/or wealthy with the cultural norms they were raised with and audience desires and expectations.

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