

D. Bondy Valdovinos Kaye, Jing Zeng, and Patrik Wikström, **TikTok: Creativity and Culture in Short Video**, Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2022, 251 pp., \$22.00 (paperback).

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Three years after its launch, TikTok became a digital behemoth as COVID lockdowns in 2020 left people around the world with idle time for viewing and creating viral videos and launching untold legions of viral dances and catchy soundbites across the Internet. Just two years later, D. Bondy Valdovinos Kaye, Jing Zeng, and Patrik Wikström have published ***TikTok: Creativity and Culture in Short Video***, a comprehensive examination of the platform that is well suited for students of media and communication or for scholars looking to familiarize themselves with the latest frontier of social media.

Kaye, Zeng, and Wikström artfully describe the history of short video platforms around the world and then contextualize TikTok within it, focusing on unique elements like its affordances, its Chinese ownership and relationship with sister app Douyin, its predilection toward the musical, and of course, its (in)famous recommendation algorithm. The book attends to how TikTok is shaped by the confluence of these technological, social, economic, and regulatory forces. These varying forces provide the structure of the book, with each chapter focusing on one perspective on TikTok.

In chapter 1, "A Brief History of the Short Video Industry," the authors introduce the defining characteristics of the short video format, namely, limited video duration, endless scrolling, built-in content creation features, and the replicability of video content. Surveying the history of this format on mobile devices, Kaye, Zeng, and Wikström turn first to its roots in the Chinese platforms Kuaishou and Meipai before considering the lessons TikTok learned from the failures and limited successes of its forbearers in Silicon Valley: Vine, Snapchat, Flipagram, and Musical.ly. The authors are careful to point out, however, that TikTok is not a *shanzhai* (a Chinese copycat of an internationally successful app) but the opposite: an export of the Chinese company ByteDance and its existing TikTok-like app, Douyin. This competition between centers of technological development in China and Silicon Valley is an ongoing theme throughout the book.

In the second chapter, "The TikTok Platform Infrastructure," the authors describe TikTok as a platform built for mobile use and music-centricity, always foregrounding ByteDance's proprietary For You algorithm. Next, the authors provide in-depth descriptions of some of TikTok's key affordances in a manner reminiscent of Light, Burgess, and Duguay's (2018) walkthrough method, carefully describing TikTok's Duet, Stitch, Video Reply to Comments, Use This Sound, effects, livestreaming, and accessibility features. Finally,



this chapter attends to practices that have emerged on top of and alongside these technical features, including lip syncing, challenges, and norms around attribution. Though featured throughout the book, the seemingly hand-drawn illustrations providing examples of TikTok's user interface will be particularly crucial in this chapter for those unfamiliar with using the TikTok app.

Chapter 3, "TikTok Communities," is perhaps the richest in its theory and most useful for readers interested in the unique social environment created by the centrality of ByteDance's For You algorithm. Citing Tönnies (1887/1965) and Ling (2012), Kaye, Zeng, and Wikström first describe the mainstream *Gesellschaft*-type community dominated by top users and pushed to the feeds of even new users by the For You algorithm before turning to the niche *Gemeinschaft*-style communities based on specific shared interests. These communities are demonstrated in this chapter through an extended case study of the "JazzTok" community of musicians and music lovers. Through interviews with JazzTok community members, the authors illustrate how technical features of TikTok, such as the recommendation algorithm and Stitch feature, allowed these strangers to discover and create with one another, eventually forming relationships and a digital community. The following chapter, "TikTok Activism," similarly utilizes case studies, in this case, the #forClimate and #saveTikTok movements. A bright spot of this particular chapter is its focus on TikTok as a deeply "generational social media" (p. 131) platform spearheaded by Gen Z, but with its short length and focus on only these two movements, the chapter might have benefitted from broader consideration of the ever-increasing political discourse happening on TikTok on both sides of the aisle and across it (see Guinaudeau, Munger, & Votta, 2022; Medina Serrano, Papakyriakopoulos, & Hegelich, 2020).

Chapter 5 takes on "The TikTok Economy," a vast topic that the authors carefully approach from various angles. The first of these is a focus on TikTok as an advertising platform, including such advertising products as in-feed ads, Brand Takeover ads on app startup, and branded hashtag challenges, stickers, and effects. Next, the authors detail the success of *daihuo*—livestreamed influencer product endorsements—and livestreaming more generally in China and particularly on Douyin, and describe possible futures for such practices on TikTok despite their slow start outside of China. From here, the chapter turns to the user-side economics, examining how TikTok creators may stand to benefit financially from livestreaming currencies, influencer sponsorships, and the TikTok Creator Fund and TikTok for Black Creatives fund, though noting that these revenue streams are paltry compared to those offered by other platforms such as YouTube. Finally, the chapter considers TikTok's musical DNA to describe the platform's relationship with the music industry, including as a launchpad for a lucky few viral stars and a force pushing the larger recording industry toward catchy, easily segmentable songs.

In their sixth and final body chapter, Kaye, Zeng, and Wikström address "TikTok Governance," particularly the challenges the platform has faced as a result of its young user demographic, its potential to share illicit video content, and its connection to China and the security concerns that come with this connection. Next, the chapter addresses the issue of copyright, which is particularly thorny for a platform that centers the spread and recontextualization of soundbites and with which TikTok has struggled compared with competitors like YouTube, particularly around creators of minoritized identities having their work appropriated by others. The chapter ends by addressing TikTok's strategy of "visibility governance" (p. 182) through practices such as "shadowbanning" or deprioritizing the reach of certain creators' content while prioritizing other content that is considered positive. While these practices show some promise, the authors are careful to note the ways in

which these practices have been discriminatory and harmful to user groups such as people with disabilities or those TikTok considers to be unattractive. It is in the area of governance, the authors seem to suggest, that TikTok has the most work to do and will face its greatest continuing challenges.

With *TikTok: Creativity and Culture in Short Video*, Kaye, Zeng, and Wikström have completed an impressive feat, providing a careful and wide-ranging but compact examination of TikTok as a technical artifact, a digital community engaged in social and creative practices, a moneymaking venture, and an object of regulatory contestation, all while providing space to address issues of inequity and appropriation on the platform. Students or researchers new to TikTok could select any chapter and find a solid, self-supporting examination of a key aspect of the platform or read the entire book for an overview of how these varying systems and pressures overlap. In this way, the book also presents a prime example of how to study social media, attending to the mutual shaping of affordances, user practices, and economic and legal constraints. Though this concise and multifaceted approach means that more seasoned scholars of social media may find themselves yearning for more on any given topic, the authors perform a commendable job in conveying considerable information with the concision and clarity of a TikTok For You Page that is bursting with short, punchy videos, one after the other. As an object of research, TikTok remains young and full of possibility, and this book provides a solid summary of the extant scholarship on the platform and a solid foundation for more projects to come.

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