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## **TIKTOK'S AI HYPE - CREATORS' ROLE IN SHAPING (PUBLIC) AI IMAGINARIES**

Vanessa Richter  
University of Amsterdam, University of Bremen

### **Introduction**

Artificial Intelligence (AI), often hailed as a transformative force, has become an ambivalent buzzword, simultaneously promising utopian possibilities and fueling dystopian anxieties. This paradox of hope and apprehension, driven by the hype surrounding AI, underscores the critical need for a more nuanced and informed public discourse. Within this evolving landscape of AI discussions, social media platforms have emerged as pivotal spaces where the public narrative about AI takes shape, especially through content creators, significantly influencing our collective vision of the future with AI. The concept of "imaginaries" has proven to be highly valuable in this context, particularly in shedding light on how perceptions, discourses, and future outlooks play a role in the intricate processes of co-constructing technological advancements (Anderson, 1983; Taylor, 2004). This line of research has served as the foundation for more recent investigations into "sociotechnical imaginaries" (SI) (Jasanoff, 2015; Mager & Katzenbach, 2021), characterised as "collectively shared, institutionally stabilised, and publicly enacted visions of desirable futures" (Jasanoff, 2015, p. 4). While previous research has considered imaginaries formed around social media platforms by influencers and their impact on their labour and self-perception (Arriagada & Bishop, 2021; Richter & Ye, 2023), there is a lack of research on the role of creators in shaping public imaginaries acting as cultural intermediaries (Hutchinson, 2017). Therefore, this paper inquires into the role of creators, such as content creators, influencers, and social media channels, in shaping public imaginaries of AI through their content.

During the last decade, a new industry has grown out of a previously informal market with influencers, creators, and other online personalities on social media platforms becoming points of access and distribution (Poell et al., 2021). Simultaneously, the professionalisation of this industry has created precarious working conditions (Duffy 2017, Duffy et al., 2021, Glatt, 2023) with creators balancing multiple sets of expectations heightened by established platform imaginaries between the platform, business partners, and end users as audiences (Richter & Ye, 2023). Platforms as

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multi-sided markets (Nieborg & Poell, 2018) have a clear interest in mitigating risks to their reputation by pushing responsibility toward platform complementors (Poell et al., 2021). Therefore, it is relevant to question the role of creators as platform complementors in bringing a variety of stakeholders into conversation on societally relevant topics such as AI and consider how they shape AI imaginaries beyond the platform itself. The study does this by inquiring into the different types of AI content, types of creators posting on AI, different topical foci, and lastly larger AI imaginaries.

## **Methodology**

The paper is based on TikTok as a site of entrance for investigating the role of social media platforms and creators in shaping public imaginaries and ongoing discourses of AI. TikTok is chosen as a case study as it is currently the basis for short video content, often distributed on YouTube and Instagram to alleviate the risk of platform dependence and diversify income streams (Cunningham & Craig, 2019; Glatt, 2021). Therefore, the first analysis of AI content is based on a hashtag network analysis and mapping of TikTok content on AI to understand the composition of video content and account clusters. Sorting creators by genre and style of content helps to differentiate educational and commentary content from listicles. To understand the role of creators within this ongoing AI discourse, a hashtag network analysis is paired with a critical discourse analysis (Wodak, 2015) of creators' content on AI.

Lastly, following Sophie Bishop's work on algorithmic gossip – gossip, defined as loose, unmethodological talk that is generative (Bishop, 2019) – creators' reflections and internal discourses are understood as a valuable form of knowledge production and exchange between creators. Considering these technical discussions as sense-making as well as learning processes has been beneficial in current research. Hereby, creators' statements and comments on the platform environment as well as their work and relation to AI applications provide another layer of insights into shaping their AI imaginaries. This content can further provide an entry point to understand the public negotiation of AI imaginaries through creators on social media platforms.

## **Results**

The preliminary results show three dominant genres of AI content based heavily on 1) AI tools, especially visual, and their employment including videos on AI development, AI avatars, and other visual AI prompts; 2) Listicles on AI tools often focused on the "best" tools for specific tasks, user groups, or type of tools that always follow a similar style usually connected to hashtags such as #trends; and 3) educational content including critical AI content varying from commentary and educational videos to AI news and educational AI interactions such as interviewing robots often by media outlets. In contrast, critical commentary style videos on AI impacts, ethical challenges, and questions of responsibility are often addressed and made explicit by individual content creators.

Considering the creator types behind the content, a high amount of content is produced by content farms creating listicles and easily clickable content as has been previously observed by Ashley Mears (2023) work on content production in content farms. This

easily replicable content also includes AI prompt videos and visual AI videos with high engagement rates but low-status value. While tech TikTokers produce similar content types, their content production is often more elaborate, with non AI voice overs, themselves as a brand within videos as well as a focus on their “expertise as added value” narratives. Compared to the first two content types, Media outlets and commentary TikTokers dominate the third content section with different foci. While media channels strongly emphasize educational and newsworthy content on AI, commentary TikTokers often stress critical perspectives on AI, its implementation, and implications.

Across the different AI content genres and creator types, four types of AI imaginaries are foregrounded. Especially the visual AI content by content farms and channels emphasize a high AI mystification pushing a trend of large corporations in envisioning AI as fast paced and inherently life changing. In a similar vein, AI avatars and AI girlfriend content is often heavily underscored by an AI futurism making it out as the inevitable trajectory of AI innovation integrating into everyday life. Contrastingly, a high AI pragmatism is prevalent in the ongoing tool discourse around AI applications and their specific and often also limited use where AI becomes represented and emphasized as work in progress and amplifying human capabilities and time. Lastly, the critical but also very factual and scientific leaning educational content mostly counteracts these imaginaries with a strong AI realism highlighting the complex and nuanced aspect of AI innovation, the prominent differences in what is considered AI, as well as its future implications and responsibilities towards implementation.

Therefore, the analysis offers key results for understanding how creators’ AI content on social media platforms such as TikTok shape and push AI imaginaries through their amplified reach. It further emphasizes that AI is both a sociotechnical phenomenon and an object of public communication that is formed through ongoing discourses in various public domains. Inquiring further into these public negotiations becomes highly relevant in this formative phase of technological innovation falling under the umbrella term AI. As public imaginaries on AI institutionalise and become normalised across larger stakeholder groups, these imaginaries play a decisive role in the future development of AI technology.

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