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## ENTERING THE METAL(TOK) SCENE: COMMUNITY, CULTURAL IDENTITY, AND LATIN AMERICAN CREATORS

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### Introduction

Since the edge of content share in the digital sphere, online videos have been a form of entertainment that can be affordable to both produce and consume. Evidence of this is seen in the continued use of YouTube, a video platform launched in 2005 that has not experienced a decline in access since its inception (Arthurs, Drakopoulou, Gandini 2018). Today, it is the second most used social media platform (Shepherd 2025). Another indication of the public's interest in video consumption as entertainment is the emergence of dedicated short video platforms, starting with Vine (active from 2012 to 2017) and more recently, TikTok.

TikTok is fundamentally “an app that allows people to create, share, and consume short-video content” (Schellewald 2021: 1437) but that is not the only factor that made the platform so popular. Since its emergence in 2018, TikTok has evolved as a platform that facilitates the creation of identities and functions like a stage, with its own unique aesthetics and expectations. At the same time, it encourages network practices that connect people through daily life and political realities (Bermúdez 2025). In doing so, TikTok creators portray their own way of life, performing with the aid of the platform's constructed language. Schellewald (2021) divided this language into six communicative forms: comedic, documentary, communal, explanatory, interactive, and meta. I wonder, however, if these categories make sense to every type of grouping existing inside TikTok.

Although TikTok is primarily a short video application, it was always thought to be a social media platform. Due to the ease with which its content (such as trends and challenges) can be reproduced, it facilitates the gathering of large groups and the exchange in communication, paving numerous ambient affiliations (Zappavigna & Martin 2018). Drawing on more classical studies, such as Baym (2010), it can be asserted that TikTok's reach “allows people to form new communities of interest and new relationships” (10).

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The field of study surrounding TikTok is relatively new due to the platform's recent emergence. Consequently, research conducted in Western countries has primarily focused on a general understanding of the platform from a Global North perspective. To address this gap, the objective of this paper is to contribute to the body of research on social media platforms, specifically TikTok, by offering insights into the content produced within the context of Latin America. Since November 2024, I have been conducting observational and analytical work on the content created by 20 TikTokers—content producers on TikTok—residing in Latin American countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, and Mexico). This group consists of 5 men and 15 women, all of whom are connected to the heavy metal, gothic, or rock scenes and dedicate their content production to this musical universe. The research, which began in 2024, forms part of a larger postdoctoral investigation aimed at understanding the construction of women's representation within the metal community on TikTok and examining how these women perform in this context.

This study investigates how TikTok, as an aural platform (Abidin and Kaye 2021), aids in identity construction through music, considering gender and cultural contexts. It examines if TikTok's glocal nature influences the intercultural dynamics of music scenes like metal. The focus is on transcultural practices in metal music and the online identity formation of its fans.

Based on an initial observation of 20 TikTok users from Latin America, 130 videos were analyzed, considering each account's content, publication time, political subtexts, and related research on rock and metal scenes (Amaral 2018; Calvo 2019; Medeiros 2017; Santos Silva & Queiroz 2023; Straw 1991). This context helps formulate questions for these users as part of ongoing ethnography, aiming to observe practices in an asynchronous multimedia environment and demonstrate interrelations within the field (Bermúdez 2025).

In this paper, I present an analysis based on a review of 40 videos—two from each creator—to provide a representative sample of the material collected. The critical analysis of these audiovisual materials is part of the qualitative process that aids in the interpretation of society (Schnettler & Raab 2008), while also considering how the metal scene is constructed as a glocal community through the identities formed by its members (von Helden 2012).

### **Preliminary conclusions**

As Bermúdez (2025) also concluded, in looking at the interactions and creations made by TikTokers, it is possible to find communities being shaped by the videos produced, published, shared, and reacted by these people. Interestingly, when looking specifically into the “metaltok” community, social conducts tend to follow patterns already observed in pre-TikTok eras. For instance, content that focuses on themes such as nominating or choosing the best bands or artists usually gains a significant amount of engagement, with people even having long discussions in the comments. In this scenario, there are disputes of taste involving the rejection of bands from borderline genres (or more connected to a feminine construction, such as Babymetal) or sub-genres that have historically been considered less heavy in the metal universe (as is the case with nu-metal).

The discussions emerging from these sorts of content are notable parts of the structure around metal scene—and metaltok—as a global enterprise. For instance, TikTokers do follow trends and keep up discussions that are going around different countries about international bands. However, they also employ other ways to “deal with their own history and national identity” (von Helden 2012: 387) to establish their presence as fans of heavy metal from Latin American countries. This goes beyond calling themselves *metaleros* or *metaleiros* against the anglophone term *headbangers* as preferred by some. It is also by demonstrating pride in rock bands and artists from their own countries, as some of these TikTok contents make evidence, and showcasing their everyday life—relating to scene events or everyday life occurrences.

Identity construction is highly evident on dance trends in which some TikTokers dance to cumbia, with several Spanish speakers TikTokers dancing to “Cumbia Metalera”, a song by the Costa Rican band Querubines Negros del Molocotongo. Many of these constructions are relayed using a comedic language, making use of superpositions and contrasts these people feel when they do listen to metal and characterize as metal fans (heavy makeup, black shirts, long hair, piercings, tattoos and an apparent intimidating disposition) but live in the countryside of Brazil or Chile, where the culture of sertanejo and cueca are more widely accepted.

Ultimately, the dynamics observed in metaltok reveal both the persistence of traditional metal community practices and the adaptation of these practices within a digital, audiovisual framework. The interplay between global metal narratives and local cultural expressions showcases how Latin American TikTok users engage with and reshape the genre’s identity. Whether through comedic self-representations, national pride in local rock scenes, or participation in transnational debates over authenticity, these users construct a hybrid space that bridges online and offline musical experiences. This study highlights the importance of digital platforms in shaping contemporary metal fandom, suggesting that metaltok is not merely an extension of existing subcultural structures but a site of negotiation where gender, identity, and taste are continuously contested and redefined.

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