LATIN AMERICAN CREATOR (SUB)CULTURES ON TIKTOK: VISIBILITY, RESISTANCE, AND CONTEXTUAL RESEARCH

Daniela Jaramillo-Dent
University of Zurich, Switzerland

Tom Divon
Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel

Adriana da Rosa Amaral
Universidad Federal Fluminense, Brazil

Rafaela Tabasnik
Universidade do Vale do Rio dos Sinos, Brazil

David Craig
University of Southern California, USA

Arturo Arriagada
Universidad Adolfo Ibáñez, Chile

Matías Cifuentes
Cultura Social Media Lab, Chile

Melanie Lopez del Pozo
Chakakuna Lab, Peru

Vanessa Valiati
Universidade Feevale, Brazil

Camila Ferrareli
Universidade Feevale, Brazil

Maria Perevedentseva

University of Salford, UK

Sandra Montardo
Universidade Feevale, Brazil

Latin America features diverse cultures, landscapes, life experiences, and ethnicities, shaped by socioeconomic inequalities and ongoing political turbulence. These structural disparities extend to the digital sphere, shaping the opportunities and challenges faced by content creators in the region. The promise of fame, financial success, and global visibility celebrated in Western content creation is often unfulfilled in other regions. Instead, Latin American creators must navigate layers of discrimination and (in)visibility, stemming from linguistic, geographic, and identity-based vulnerabilities, while also contending with algorithmic systems that privilege certain types of content.

Despite the global expansion of influencer and creator industries, research on creators outside the West remains scarce (Abidin & Brown, 2019; Poell et al., 2024). This panel seeks to address this gap by focusing on Latin America's diverse creator landscape and platform dynamics. Given its high penetration in the region, TikTok provides an ideal lens to examine these challenges. By 2025, TikTok is projected to reach 173 million users in Latin America (Bianchi, 2022), making it a dominant force in the region's digital ecosystem. Unlike earlier platforms, TikTok's algorithm-driven discovery system (Abidin, 2021) enables creators to reach new audiences beyond their immediate networks. Additionally, short vertical videos have become central to entertainment, music industries (Jaramillo-Dent & Divon, 2025), and news consumption (Mulier et al., 2021; Newman et al., 2024). This has led to the broader "TikTokification" of social media where competing platforms such as Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts have adopted similar algorithmic structures, interfaces, and affordances to mimic TikTok's engagement-driven model (Agile Brand Guide, 2024).

This panel draws from the findings of the Latin American Cultures on TikTok report (Jaramillo-Dent & Divon, 2025), examining the evolving landscape of content creation in the region. Panelists will explore the shifting landscape for Latin American creators, addressing (1) the opportunities and challenges they face in the digital economy, (2) the monetization and visibility barriers shaping their sustainability, and (3) the complex interplay between their politics, subcultures, and the region's rapidly expanding influencer industry. Bringing together scholars specializing in creator economies, platform governance, and digital cultures, each paper features researchers from across Latin America with deep-rooted experience in the region's social, economic, and cultural contexts —from MA students and PhD candidates to assistant and associate professors.

Setting the foundation for the panel's broader discussion, the first paper presents a research agenda for studying Latin American creators on TikTok, focusing on governance, (de)monetization, and visibility divides. It examines how platform regulations, economic barriers, and algorithmic inequalities shape the region's creator economy, revealing how TikTok privileges certain content and geographies while

marginalizing others. By mapping the structural constraints that Latin American creators face, this paper establishes a critical framework for understanding the tensions between platform governance and local creative industries.

Shifting towards local creator cultures, the second paper examines the so-called "Chilenazo" phenomenon —the return of Chilean creators to their homeland, navigating exclusion from global creator culture, after struggling to compete in the Mexican creator industry. It explores how platform nationalism (competition between U.S. and Chinese platforms), and cultural imaginaries shape creators' professional aspirations, mobilities, and their perception of Chile as a site of creative and economic limitation.

Continuing the theme of resistance, the third paper explores the contested identities of Latin American creators in Peru, analyzing how Peruvian activists repurposed TikTok's affordances during the 2022-2023 political crisis. Drawing on the framework of everyday politics, it examines how creators strategically leveraged TikTok's affordances to circumvent censorship, counter state narratives, and document human rights violations. This paper illustrates how TikTok, designed for entertainment, was transformed into a grassroots political tool, where digital creativity became an instrument of local defiance.

The fourth paper shifts focus to activism and community-building, exploring the Brazilian TikTok subculture of prisoners' wives (#MulherDePreso). It examines how women in relationships with incarcerated men in Brazil use TikTok to construct digital support networks, share survival strategies, and navigate the bureaucratic complexities of incarceration. Through hashtag activism and digital storytelling, this subculture reclaims visibility for an often-overlooked demographic, demonstrating how TikTok facilitates alternative forms of advocacy and solidarity beyond traditional activist spaces.

The fifth analyzes how young Brazilian TikTokers remix, adapt, and localize global music hits on the platform. It explores how platform aesthetics and algorithmic virality fuel new forms of digital nostalgia, and cultural remixing subcultures, transcending time and location through dance trends. Rather than simply reviving old songs, these adaptations reflect a distinctly Brazilian approach to musical reinterpretation, illustrating how local creative cultures interact with and reshape globalized digital content.

Together, these papers examine how Latin American creators engage with TikTok —as entrepreneurs, activists, or subcultural participants. By highlighting the region's dynamic creator ecosystem, we aim to provide a nuanced understanding of how local cultures both influence and are influenced by global platforms, shaping visibility, agency, and creative expression while reflecting the richness and diversity of Latin American experiences.

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PAPER 1
A RESEARCH AGENDA FOR LATIN AMERICAN CREATORS ON TIKTOK: GOVERNANCE, (DE)MONETIZATION, AND (IN)VISIBILITY DIVIDES

Daniela Jaramillo-Dent
University of Zurich, Switzerland

Tom Divon
Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel

Introduction
This paper outlines key insights and future research directions to better understand Latin American creator cultures and industries on TikTok. As content creation has evolved into a potentially lucrative yet highly uneven industry (Poell et al., 2021), scholarship has increasingly examined marginalized groups in Western-dominated social media markets (e.g., Glatt, 2023), including Latin American creators operating in the Global North (Arriagada & Craig, 2024). However, research often overlooks the distinct needs of Latin American creators, particularly those shaped by regional restrictions, economic barriers, and platform governance policies that remain invisible to global scholars.

Given the unique blend of geographic, regulatory, political, and cultural dynamics in Latin America, we argue for a context-specific research agenda that acknowledges these complexities and centers the voices of creators navigating this evolving digital landscape. We build on our work with minority creators, centering the challenges Latin American creators face in self-expression, branding, and monetization both locally and in global platform economies. This, we argue, highlights layered structural divides and opens new avenues for scholarly inquiry.

Platform Governance in Latin America

Technology companies exert varying levels of control across regions, reinforcing power imbalances in the global social media ecosystem (Van Dijck, 2021). In this geopolitical landscape of platform governance, the United States and the European Union offer two contrasting models of digital regulation, which in turn serve as reference points for Latin America's evolving regulatory frameworks. In the US, Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act shields platforms from liability for user-generated content, fostering a relatively unregulated digital environment (Leary, 2018). In contrast, the EU's Digital Services Act (DSA) has introduced strict regulatory measures, requiring platforms to meet higher standards for content moderation, algorithm transparency, and user protections (European Commission, 2024). Notably, Spain has taken a pioneering step in regulating influencers, recognizing them as major digital communicators, and establishing rules for their commercial activities (González, 2024).

Latin America, however, lacks a unified regulatory approach to governing platforms and content creators. Instead, each country develops its own fragmented policies, leading to inconsistencies in enforcement across borders —a challenge identified as a critical regulatory gap in the region (Collado Sanz & Fayed, 2022). Despite the growing prominence of content creators, the regulatory frameworks addressing their work remain underexplored in academic literature, particularly in relation to the diverse and uneven geographies of Latin America, which we critically examine in our paper.

Governance extends beyond state-level regulation, with platforms themselves exerting power through content moderation practices. TikTok, in particular, has become a dominant platform for user engagement in Latin America, particularly in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, where short-form video content continues to drive online interaction (Sued et al., 2021). This growing influence raises crucial questions about how creators in the region navigate visibility strategies. While TikTok offers opportunities for engagement, Latin American creators must constantly adapt to shifting algorithmic conditions, as frequent platform changes impact their ability to reach and sustain audiences (Arriagada, 2024). These dynamics dictate which voices gain visibility and which are marginalized. Karhawi and Grohmann (2024) illustrate this through Marxist creators in Brazil, showing how governance is both enforced from above and resisted from below, as creators push back against shifting platform regulations to maintain their presence.

Monetization and Visibility Divides: Diversifying Income
Latin American content creators face significant barriers to monetization, shaped by platform hierarchies, geographic constraints, and opaque governance structures. Researchers have explored the (de)monetization experiences of Latin American creators in the US (Arriagada & Craig, 2024) and the challenges faced by creators within national industries (Arriagada & Ibáñez, 2020; Karhawi, 2021). When creators gain access to monetization tools, they are incentivized to produce high-quality, engaging content, which in turn drives audience growth and platform engagement (Kopf, 2020). However, these opportunities are not distributed equally, creating deep regional divides in creators' ability to sustain a digital career.

One of the key barriers is the limited availability of platform-based monetization programs. While TikTok offers various revenue-generating avenues, including brand

partnerships, Live Gifts, TikTok Shops, affiliate marketing, and crowdfunding (TikTok Support, 2024; TikTok Creator Academy, 2024), many of these options remain inaccessible to creators in Latin America. For instance, the TikTok Creativity Program is only available in Brazil, excluding all Spanish-speaking countries in the region (Oladipo, 2024). As a result, creators must find alternative revenue streams such as brand collaborations and merchandise sales, further reinforcing economic disparities.

These geographic limitations are not just about economic exclusion —they also shape how creators strategize their platform presence. Many Latin American creators attempt to circumvent these barriers by registering their accounts in countries where TikTok's Creator Fund and similar programs are available, a tactic frequently discussed in Reddit creator forums (Reddit, 2022). However, this workaround comes at a cost, as it often requires them to abandon their existing accounts and engagement metrics, essentially forcing them to start over from scratch (Jaramillo-Dent & Divon, 2025).

Even for those who manage to navigate these restrictions, platform governance further shapes who gets monetized and how. Arriagada and Craig (2024) highlight structural disadvantages faced by Latin American influencers in the US, including lower ad revenue for Spanish-language content and decreased audience value outside US markets. These challenges reinforce economic precarity, making it harder for creators to sustain digital careers. Additionally, lack of transparency in monetization and eligibility criteria further restricts creators' ability to strategize and optimize their earnings.

Faced with these barriers, Latin American creators have developed alternative strategies to sustain visibility and income. Research on the influencer industry in Chile highlights the pressure to produce constant content to maintain relevance and secure brand deals (Arriagada & Ibáñez, 2020). Similarly, studies in Brazil examine how fashion influencers navigate platform affordances and labor conditions, shedding light on the structural precarity of digital labor (Karhawi, 2017, 2021).

But beyond the commercial influencer space, content creation is also a site of cultural resistance and advocacy. Indigenous TikTok creators have leveraged the platform to promote cultural visibility, illustrating how monetization intersects with identity and digital activism (Acuña & Tixicuro, 2021; Ojeda & Peredo, 2022). These cases underscore that monetization is not just an economic issue, but also a cultural and political one. For many creators, content creation is about more than financial survival —it is a means of resisting exclusionary platform structures while maintaining authentic digital identities.

Towards a Research Agenda
To unpack the complexities we've mapped out, our research agenda examines how inequalities manifest across *context*, *identity*, and *content* —three key dimensions that shape creators' experiences and presence in the platform economy.

(1) Within the *context* of platform governance, algorithmic visibility remains a major challenge. Platforms prioritize urban-based creators aligned with global digital aesthetics, leaving rural and Indigenous communities largely invisible. Similarly, TikTok favors Anglo-centric languages, limiting the reach of regional dialects, Indigenous languages, and culturally specific content.

(2) *Identities* also shape creators' experiences, as systemic inequities persist. Women and LGBTQ+ creators face biases, inconsistent moderation, and algorithmic discrimination, restricting their visibility and monetization. Indigenous creators experience cultural erasure and economic exclusion, struggling to build sustainable careers due to structural barriers and limited monetization avenues.

(3) *Content* dynamics further reinforce these divides. Political, activist, and resistance-oriented content is shadowbanned, deprioritized, or removed, limiting audience reach. Meanwhile, algorithmic biases favor high-production, globally mainstream content, disadvantaging grassroots creators with fewer resources.

Latin American creators navigate a platform economy shaped by structural inequalities, economic barriers, and algorithmic visibility struggles, all of which are deeply intertwined. Our agenda calls on scholars to tackle these challenges through a nuanced, region-specific lens that considers both platform governance and creator cultures. Instead of centering on individual trajectories, our framework highlights the broader systemic forces shaping creators' lived experiences, fostering more context-aware scholarship.

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PAPER 2
"CHILENAZO": CHILEAN CREATOR CULTURE, PLATFORM NATIONALISM, AND CULTURAL IMAGINARIES

David Craig
University of Southern California, USA

Arturo Arriagada
Universidad Adolfo Ibáñez, Chile

Matías Cifuentes
Cultura Social Media Lab, Chile

Introduction
In 2011, Chilean YouTuber Germán Garmendia secured millions of viewers, emerging in the first wave of successful global creators in the nascent global creator economy emerging off U.S. platforms. A decade later, Ignacia Antonia emerged as one of the most prominent beauty and lifestyle creators in the world, if also an inspiration for the next generation of Chilean creators. Not coincidentally, both Garmendia and Ignacia abandoned Chile to pursue careers in more mature and lucrative creator systems, whether the United States or Mexico. Today, despite underlying economic, technological, and linguistic advantages, Chile's creator industry struggles for viability. Chilean creators vie for sustainable careers, more often across the rapidly emerging, if under-funding commercial affordances, of Chinese platforms like TikTok, Shein, and Temu. For those few who have found success, the Chilean creator dream means departing for the Global North, only to return shortly crippled by the "chilenazo", a phenomenon that reflects the belief that Chilean creator culture is not capable or worthy of demanding a seat at the table of global creator culture.

In this work-in-progress creator industries study, we offer an account of the distinctiveness and evolution of Chilean creator culture. We draw upon the breadth of scholarship emerging within the subfield of studies described as creator and influencer studies. Over the past decade, scholars have examined how platform-based cultural producers leverage global-scaling platforms within multi-sided markets (Poell et al., 2021); how this emerging cultural industry differs from legacy media shaped by intellectual property and copyright frameworks (Cunningham and Craig , 2019); and how China's creator culture, technologically advanced yet, if arguably, more politically censored, and surveilled, introduced new competitive dynamics to the global industry (Craig, Lin, & Cunningham, 2021).

More recently, scholars have shifted focus to the regional, national, and market-specific dimensions of creator cultures, with growing attention to peripheral creator cultures (Bidav & Mehta, 2024) operating outside the more advanced, highly capitalized, and mature markets of Europe, North America, and China. This widening lens reflects the need to understand creator industries beyond dominant economies. In line with this, our

study contributes to a more global perspective by offering a localized analysis of the conditions and discourses shaping creator cultures, using key actors in the field as a case study.

Conceptual Framework

This research is framed by the concept of platform nationalism (Craig, Lin & Cunningham, 2021). The antecedent for the concept of platform nationalism resides in the classic essay by Charland (1986) who theorized technological nationalism as a rhetorical framework "which ascribes to technology the capacity to create a nation by enhancing communication" (p. 197). In this instance, Charland was referring to how Canada's broadcast media industries and policies conjure a "Canadian imagination", if also as a "defense against the power and seduction of American cultural industry" (p. 198). Indeed, for decades, scholars have shared Charland's anxieties over the global influence of Hollywood power, inclusive of music and print, film and television, to extend American influence globally. Across fields of communication and political science, scholars have advanced numerous theories about American cultural and media imperialism (Schiller, 1976) and conceptions of American soft power (Nye, 1990).

In the digital age, the politics of global media have been reaffirmed if also challenged by the rise of global-scaling ICTs, which further situates this concept of platform nationalism. The rise of digital platforms has been accompanied by more diverse assessments of media power and globalization that problematize U.S.-centric claims of media imperialism (Tomlinson, 1991; Kraidy, 2002). However, the dominance of the U.S.-owned platforms as the primary mode of access to the Internet has resurrected anxieties over American-dominated platform imperialism (Jin, 2013), platform capitalism (Srnicek, 2014), and data colonialism (Couldry & Mejias, 2018). In response to concerns over Silicon Valley power, scholars have described the "return of the state" by multiple powers engaging in media control through ownership and governance (Flew, et al., 2016), if also patterns of platform protectionism nurtured by reactionary politics. The rise of a global platform society (van Djick et al., 2018) has been accompanied by competing ideologies and contested actors vying over platform power.

Missing from these accounts, however, is the threat of Chinese platform imperialism or colonialism, particularly within peripheral markets and framed by creator practices and labor. For a decade, scholars recognized the accelerated internationalization and global influence of Chinese digital platforms (Jia & Winseck, 2018; Keane & Yu, 2019). In response, a backlash has ensued, starting with India banning hundreds of Chinese platforms and applications since 2019. In the U.S., Silicon Valley leaders have enjoined regulators to thwart Chinese platform power and advocated for U.S. platform protectionism. Both the Trump and Biden administrations have aligned around rising fears particularly of TikTok, dominating the attention spans of U.S. teenagers while exposing their data and privacy to Chinese surveillance. Russia offers competing, if poorly developed platforms while threatening to launch their own Internet. Platform nationalism specifically between the U.S. and China may expedite the conditions for the splinternet, further decoupling the structural and material benefits of globalization, hindering cultural diplomacy between either nation, while advancing geopolitical risks towards global and military conflagration. Creators around the world are now harnessing

platforms from both systems to secure cultural and commercial capital, placing these entrepreneurs precariously at the epicenter of these geopolitical battles.

Finally, this research is framed by the regional phenomena of Latin-American cultural imaginaries that reflect on class, race, and nationality (Venegas, 2009; Catelli, 2018). In the context of the diasporic flows of creator talent operating across borders, Arriagada and Craig (2024) described the fraught conditions in which Latin-American creators have pursued their "Latin-American creator dream" in the U.S. A consequence of platform algorithms and poorly understood, if arguably, racist creator management, these creators have often discovered their creator dreams turned into nightmares.

Methods
This research features a multi-perspectival, multi-methodological, "ecological" approach for mapping creator industries with frameworks derived from political economy and cultural, production, and creator studies (Cunningham and Craig, 2019). Featuring secondary research and qualitative interviews, this model maps underlying economic, sociocultural, and technological market conditions, traces the patterns of platform ownership, the advent of both regional and national governance, the conditions of creator labor and managements, and sociocultural and political influence of national creators. Qualitative fieldwork was conducted in Chile and Argentina in November 2024 —including over two dozen interviews and two workshops with creators, creator agency executives, and scholars.

Preliminary Findings
While we are still refining the data and analysis, the following presents preliminary findings expected to evolve and deepen, offering a more nuanced and comprehensive picture by the time of the conference. One emerging trend is the experience of Chilean creators who, in pursuit of more lucrative careers, have emigrated to the Global North—only to engage in a pattern of reverse migration. This cycle is shaped by the "Chilenazo" phenomenon, a socio-cultural response to the more competitive creator and media cultures within the U.S. and Mexico that Chilean creators found difficult to navigate.

Within Chile, the creator economy has fragmented into two distinct groups: *cosmopolitan creators* who build audiences across Latin America through class-based appeals and are more successful in securing lucrative brand deals, and more *domestic-focused cultural creators*, who struggle for sustainability. The latter group operates within weaker market and industrial conditions, despite Chile's advanced technological infrastructure including the highest broadband speeds in Latin-America. Structural barriers include the late introduction of monetization tools like the TikTok Creator Fund and TikTok Shop, and the absence of regional platform programs, such as Mercado Libre's creator partnerships, which limits social commerce opportunities. Local creators' attitudes are further shaped by a paradoxical mix of national pride and the framing of Chile as a small and largely infertile country for creators, contributing to a form of cultural imposter syndrome.

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PAPER 3
APPROPRIATING TIKTOK: CONTENT CREATORS RESIGNIFYING PLATFORM AFFORDANCES AS POLITICAL TOOLS IN PERUVIAN PROTESTS

Melanie Lopez del Pozo

Chakakuna Lab, Peru

Between December 2022 and July 2023, Peru faced a political crisis following Pedro Castillo's removal and Dina Boluarte's rise to power. Mass protests, especially in Andean regions, demanded early elections and justice for state violence victims. Government crackdowns led to at least 49 deaths, with massacres in Ayacucho and Juliaca leaving many injured and detained. During the "Tomas de Lima,"[1] thousands marched to the capital, confronting police repression. As mainstream media fell short in capturing the protests' complexity, TikTok became a key space for grassroots resistance, amplifying creators' voices. Unlike platforms centered on interpersonal networks, TikTok prioritizes content circulation (Bhandari & Bimo, 2022). As a creator put it, "*On Facebook, my reflection barely got four likes, but on TikTok, it reached the world.*" This enabled protest narratives to bypass mainstream media's criminalizing portrayals (Amnistía Internacional, 2023), as creators developed strategies to challenge human rights violations.

Theoretical Framework
This study draws on Highfield's (2016) concept of *everyday politics* to analyze how TikTok users engaged in political participation through mundane digital practices. Unlike traditional media, which privileged centralist perspectives (Fowks, 2018), TikTok allowed creators to bypass limitations through its content-centered diffusion model (Bhandari & Bimo, 2022), turning the algorithm into a political affordance (Abidin, 2021). Drawing on Bucher and Helmond's (2018) relational approach to *affordances*, this research explores how creators strategically repurpose TikTok's features to contest dominant narratives and amplify protest discourse. While the platform is designed for entertainment, its affordances enable what Kaye et al. (2021) describe as circumscribed creativity, allowing users to transform playful and entertainment-driven tools into vehicles for political resistance and activist expression (Cervi & Divon, 2023).

Method
This study employs a mixed-methods approach examining how content creators negotiated platform affordances during the 2022-2023 protests. The triangulation combines: (1) a technical walkthrough analysis (Light et al., 2018) of TikTok's architecture; (2) content analysis of 286 videos from 23 creators; and (3) interviews with 8 creators who emerged as influential voices during the protests. The walkthrough demonstrated how TikTok's entertainment-driven architecture was strategically repurposed for political expression, while the content analysis uncovered adaptation strategies. Interviews further illuminated how these political practices were shaped by creators' personal experiences and regional identities. The illustrations used in the results are renderings of the original videos to protect the anonymity of creators.

Findings: Repurposing Platform Affordances as Tools for Political Dispute

(1) Disputing the official narrative

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[1] The term "Toma de Lima" refers to a large-scale mobilization of protesters from different regions who traveled to the capital of Peru to assert their political and social demands. It does not imply a military occupation but rather a symbolic and physical reclaiming of public space to challenge the government and make regional voices heard.

Creators contested dominant narratives by capturing firsthand protest experiences, humanizing demonstrators, and exposing state violence. They reframed official speeches, documented police misconduct, and used testimonials to construct collective memory, repurposing entertainment features as tools for political documentation.

Example 1: Reinterpreting Presidential Speeches.
Figure 1 showcases a creator utilizing TikTok's video overlay feature to contrast President Boluarte's statement, "*How many more deaths do you want?*", with their own reframing: "*What Boluarte is really saying is, 'How many more do I need to kill before you let me govern?'*" By leveraging visual editing tools, the creator unveils the implicit threats embedded within official rhetoric.

-Time Documentation of Police Violence.
s a female creator wearing a white helmet, gas mask, and Wiphala flag ms from the protests: "*We're at Óvalo Grau. Police surrounded us with th sides.*" Using TikTok's immediacy affordance and mobile recording capabilities, she documents protesters flashing peace signs amidst the gas, directly contradicting official narratives. As one creator explains the urgency of this practice: "*Traditional media records from behind the police… who shows what's really happening?*"

Figure 2.

Example 3: Everyday Resistance and Intimate Politics
Figure 3 features a creator intertwining his cat-rescue work with national politics, drawing a metaphor between an animal awakening from anesthesia and the rising political consciousness of the people: "*Our beautiful country is fighting, and the people are awakening too.*" This playful yet poignant narrative embeds the uprising within his personal, affective framework, illustrating how TikTok enables users to transform everyday moments into powerful political statements.

Figure 3.

(2) Disputing Imposed Truths

In response to official media narratives labeling protesters as "vandals" or "terrorists," creators took on roles as fact-checkers and citizen journalists. Utilizing TikTok's multimodal affordances, they verified, debunked misinformation, and constructed alternative narratives through video responses, challenging state-controlled discourse.

Example 1: Fact-checking misinformation

Using TikTok's green screen effect, a creator dissected a mainstream news broadcast that accused protesters of infiltration tactics. By critically reframing these claims, he debunked conspiratorial insinuations, recasting protesters' actions as self-defense against state repression. Through sarcasm and pointed critique, he exposed how the media attributed superhuman powers to protesters to justify repression, revealing the criminalizing rhetoric embedded within ostensibly objective news reporting (Figure 4).

Figure 4.

Example 2: Emotional Authenticity in Citizen Reporting

Blending journalism with personal experience, a creator livestreamed from the protest frontlines while selling flags, capturing police firing tear gas: "*They're gassing us—my face burns!*" (Figure 5). Unlike traditional reporters, he used selfie-mode recording and unfiltered narration to convey the physical and emotional toll of state repression. "*As soon as I could, I had to upload it to TikTok... there had to be a way for people to see what was really happening instead of believing the manipulated narrative*." This

emotionally charged, first-person reporting leveraged TikTok's immediacy to challenge official portrayals and expose on-the-ground realities.

Figure 5.

Example 3: Deconstructing state rhetoric
A creator titled her video "*Terrorism or Protest?*" to challenge the government's use of *terruco* (terrorist) as a tool to delegitimize Indigenous protesters (Figure 6). Through a systematic breakdown of official discourse, she exposed how the state manufactured an internal enemy to justify authoritarian measures. Her analysis highlighted the contradiction between government calls for dialogue and the systematic criminalization of dissent, revealing the structural racism embedded in state responses. By interweaving her commentary with videos and screenshots, she reinforced her critique with visual evidence, leveraging TikTok's multimodal affordances to dismantle state rhetoric.

Figure 6.

(3) Disputing protester representation
Creators actively challenged the stigmatizing portrayals of protesters, particularly those from Andean regions, by showcasing the diversity and legitimacy of mobilized actors. Through personal narratives and creative compositions, they leveraged TikTok's affordances alongside traditional protest symbols, forging hybrid forms of digital-political participation that countered mainstream misrepresentations.

Example 1: Indigenous Women's Agency
A creator documented Aymara women at the forefront of protests, chanting, "Who are we? We are Aymaras heading to Lima to fight!" By leveraging TikTok's subtitle affordances and hashtags (Figure 7), she amplified indigenous leadership, challenging mainstream narratives, depicting indigenous communities as passive or manipulated.

Figure 7.

Example 2: Performative Political Pronouncements
A creator and his friend incorporated protest into TikTok's dance culture, performing a choreographed routine before abruptly shouting, "Fuera mostra que se vaya!"—a chant calling for Boluarte's resignation (Figure 8). By adapting political demands into festive, participatory expressions using TikTok's dance templates, they engaged audiences in playful activism. As one creator explained, "Dancing videos with political messages help me connect with audiences who might tune out traditional political discourse."

Figure 8.

Example 3: Subverting Official Symbols
A creator mimicked the structure of a presidential address, positioning herself behind a desk with the Peruvian flag as a backdrop (Figure 9). Addressing Boluarte directly, she declared, "You disgraceful murderer, stop killing our Puno brothers and sisters!" By appropriating the aesthetics of official state broadcasts, she subverted state symbolism while asserting moral authority. This strategic use of recognizable formats enhanced her message's visibility, leveraging TikTok's algorithm, favoring familiar audiovisual patterns.

Figure 9.

Discussion

This nuanced analysis of how creators repurpose platform affordances through everyday politics (Highfield, 2016) as a means of dispute demonstrates that TikTok's features are not merely adapted but resignified from entertainment into instruments of resistance. Amid repression, creators strategically leveraged the platform's logics: using immediacy to document state abuses and virality to fracture official narratives. Their tactics not only exposed violence and challenged imposed truths but also reclaimed representation, illustrating how political agency emerges from playful digital practices (Cervi & Divon, 2023). In Peru's protests, TikTok was a contested space where dominant narratives were disrupted, and digital participation became an act of grassroots political resistance.

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PAPER 4
LOCKED IN LOVE: TIKTOK'S PRISON WIVES AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE #MULHERDEPRESO SUBCULTURE

Adriana da Rosa Amaral
Universidad Federal Fluminense, Brazil

Rafaela Tabasnik
Universidade do Vale dos Sinos, Brazil

Introduction
This paper examines a unique subculture on TikTok by analyzing content produced under the hashtag #mulherdepreso, which translates to "Prisoner's Wife." This digital subculture consists of women —whether wives or girlfriends— who share their experiences of being in relationships with incarcerated men. The hashtag encompasses a diverse range of content, from deeply personal narratives and emotional reflections to practical guidance on navigating the Brazilian prison system. These videos often incorporate romantic symbolism, such as heart emojis and footage of prison visits, while also serving as informal resources. Many creators, for instance, share step-by-step tutorials on assembling a jumbo —a care package of food, hygiene products, and cleaning supplies that families must provide for detainees— offering insights rarely found in mainstream media coverage of prisons.

This study aims to explore the key narratives shaping the everyday relationships between women and their incarcerated partners and how these narratives foster a sense of community within Brazilian culture. Using a grounded theory approach, we apply Extended Narrative Analysis (Webb & Mallon, 2007; Wiesche et al., 2017) to examine both audiovisual content and user interactions in the comments. From our data collection, two central research questions emerge: (1) How does the hashtag #mulherdepreso connect women to an online subculture of TikTok creators? (2) What are the most significant narratives about their relationships that contribute to a broader sense of community within Brazilian culture?

Incarceration and Inequality: Race, Class, and the Brazilian Prison Crisis
Scholars across disciplines, including activism, sociology, anthropology, and law, have extensively examined the root causes of Brazil's severe prison overpopulation. Batista (1990) identified overcrowding as one of the most urgent issues within the country's

legal and correctional systems, exacerbating broader social problems. Brazil's prison system holds 667,551 inmates (Infopen, 2020), with Latin American penitentiary models mirroring Western systems while neglecting local socioeconomic realities. Silveira (2020) argues that these disparities are deeply rooted in Brazil's colonial legacy, where power remained concentrated among elites while racial and economic inequalities persisted. This historical trajectory continues to shape the prison system, disproportionately targeting Black and low-income communities. Activists have long condemned the conditions inside Brazilian prisons, denouncing overcrowding, inadequate access to necessities, and systemic human rights violations that reflect deeper social inequities.

Narrating subculture: how TikTok shapes digital communities
The rise of short-form video content propelled TikTok to the forefront of digital platforms. Surpassing competitors like Instagram and Snapchat, TikTok became the most downloaded app globally by early 2020, with Brazil ranking among the top countries for installs during this period (Williams, 2020). This rapid adoption coincided with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which led prisons and detention centers to suspend in-person visits, replacing them with brief five-minute video calls. In this context, TikTok emerged as a crucial space for emotional expression, particularly among those experiencing separation and longing. Families of incarcerated individuals turned to the platform to document prison visits, and seek community-forming among members of a unique digital subculture often overlooked by mainstream media (Zhang et al., 2014; Neves, 2021).

Scholars have explored subcultures on digital media since the early 2000s, with researchers exploring how different groups creatively engage with platforms like LiveJournal, Tumblr, and Last.fm (Amaral, 2007; Bennett & Hodkinson, 2012; Hodkinson, 2003;). These studies frequently emphasize how gender, race, and age influence subcultural participation and digital visibility. More recently, O'Connor et al., (2020) explored how prisoners in the Netherlands use TikTok videos, illustrating the platform's role in shaping subcultural belonging.

In Brazil, a similar phenomenon is unfolding, as TikTok has become a key site for marginalized communities to assert visibility and forge connections. Scholars (Amaral, Barbosa & Polivanov, 2015; Gelain, 2017;) have examined how Brazilian subcultures appropriate digital platforms. TikTok, however, has taken an active role in framing subcultures as central to its platform logics, declaring that "subcultures are the new demographic" (TikTok Blog, 2021). As its influence in Brazil grows, TikTok is not just accommodating existing subcultures but actively shaping new ones, becoming a crucial site for digital identity formation and community building.

This framing aligns with TikTok's broader business model, which approaches subcultures not only as organic communities but as strategic market segments. Schouten and McAlexander's (1995) study on Harley-Davidson motorcycle owners introduced the concept of "subcultures of consumption," offering an analytical framework for understanding how consumers organize their identities and social interactions around brands. In contrast, cultural studies perspectives focus on ideological tactics, political participation, and resistance. TikTok, therefore, operates at

the intersection of both—leveraging subcultures for commercial gain while simultaneously serving as a space for digital cultural expression and negotiation.

Video Practices in the #MulherDePreso Subculture
Our initial coding of 10 selected TikTok videos—chosen for their high engagement in comments and shares—revealed recurring patterns in content and style, with videos featuring similar themes and often produced by the same creators. Three key practices emerged: the hashtag #mulherdepreso (#prisonerswife) serves as a hub for sharing daily life experiences, prison visits, and the emotional toll of waiting at home; Funk Carioca songs, a Brazilian music genre known for its raw lyrics and connection to marginalized communities, with tracks that are frequently repurposed as audio memes (Abidin, 2020); and slang, double meanings, and coded language —embedded in captions, emojis, and hashtags. These practices help direct content toward this specific community, reinforcing information-sharing and strengthening networks among these women (Dias, 2021).

In our second round of coding, we identified three overarching thematic categories that structure the narratives within TikTok content shared under #mulherdepreso: (1) temporality, (2) visit day, and (3) emotional/physical aspects. Further refinement in the final coding round revealed 15 key themes shaping how women in relationships with incarcerated partners communicate their experiences, build community, and share information. These include saudade (longing/missing), pleas for freedom directed at authorities, depictions of prison realities, calls for justice, expressions of emotions and feelings, regrets over past actions, behavioral changes and rehabilitation, the importance of family support and forgiveness, anticipation of a partner's release, comfort found in religion and faith, beliefs in true love, intimate visits, relationship status, dress codes for prison visits, and practical tips for navigating visitation processes.

Our fourth round of coding revealed four main ways in which the #mulherdepreso fosters an online subculture among these women. First, it cultivates a *sense of belonging and community*, reflected in shared slang such as referring to fellow creators as "cunhadas" (sisters-in-law). Second, it facilitates *the exchange of niche information*, covering topics like dress codes that maintain a specific aesthetic, food preparation for visits, and strategies for navigating prison queues. Third, the hashtag provides a space for *emotional and sentimental expression*, allowing women to share personal experiences and emotions. Lastly, it enables the *discussion of freedom and the legal system* in an informal and accessible manner, making complex legal topics relatable within the community.

Discussion
Our preliminary findings suggest that these videos serve both as expressions of emotional bonds and as tools for community-building. Women within this subculture creatively share essential information about incarcerated men —details often overlooked by public policies and mainstream media. Their content demystifies prison visits and the legal system, offering a crucial support network for those in similar circumstances. As our research progresses, we will further examine how this subculture not only fosters solidarity but also reflects broader platform dynamics, where digital communities form around shared experiences and practices. Like other tight-knit online

groups, these creators forge identity through rituals, symbols, and narratives. On TikTok, this process is shaped by organic interactions and platform logics that amplify specific forms of digital consumption (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). Analyzing these dynamics advances understanding of creator subcultures shaped by regional contexts and social needs, highlighting how platform communities respond to localized challenges.

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PAPER 5
"OLD BUT GOLD": THE REDISCOVERY OF MUSIC HITS AND THE PERCEPTION OF NOSTALGIA BY BRAZILIAN USERS ON TIKTOK

Vanessa Valiati
Universidade Feevale, Brazil

Camila Ferrareli
Universidade Feevale, Brazil

Maria Perendentseva
University of Salford, UK

Sandra Montardo
Universidade Feevale, Brazil

Introduction
This paper examines affective nostalgia in the reworking of old pop hits by young
Brazilian TikTok users, particularly through localized adaptations of international songs.
We argue that this phenomenon differs from retromania —the obsessive recycling of
past cultural trends (Reynolds, 2011) —by fostering new, contextually distinct forms of

musical engagement rather than merely reviving the past. The nostalgia surrounding 2000s retro culture is often interpreted as a symptom of the postmodern end of history (Fukuyama, 2006), amplified by the ever-expanding digital archive of cultural content.

However, the rise of platformization and the short-video turn on social media (Kaye et al., 2022) has introduced new dynamics, enabling the resurgence of old hits not just among their original audiences but also among younger listeners who encounter these tracks through social media and television, transforming them into viral sensations. A well-known example is Kate Bush's Running Up That Hill (1985), which was rediscovered by Gen Z viewers through Stranger Things, sparking cross-generational engagement and fostering a renewal of communal fandom practices alongside a reflective engagement with the cyclic nature of music cultures (Zaborowski & Bennett, 2025). Beyond this global trend, Brazil has witnessed a surge in localized adaptations of international hits. A recent example is Lovezin (2023), a reworking of Nelly Furtado's Say It Right (2006) with new rhythms and Portuguese lyrics, allowing the song to resonate with young Brazilian audiences in a way that extends beyond nostalgia.

This paper examines how TikTok's algorithmic culture and platform affordances shape music consumption in Brazil, particularly among younger users. Given that imitation and resampling are key drivers of virality on the platform, we explore how TikTok's interface aesthetics may be shaped by a distinct Brazilian approach to nostalgia, blending global pop influences with local reinterpretations. In this context, nostalgia functions not just as a sentiment but as a digitally mediated experience, where old songs are transformed through remixes, sped-up or slowed-down versions, and localized adaptations—often integrated into dance trends. In Brazil, these adaptations frequently incorporate elements reflecting how Brazilian digital culture reshapes musical memory.

Grounded in discussions on nostalgia (Jones, 2023), platformization (Nieborg & Poell, 2018), and cultural subjectivity, this study explores how young Brazilians engage with older songs through intermedial musical adaptations, linking these practices to algorithmic curation and local identity formation. By analyzing adaptations released between 2021 and 2024, we aim to understand how these reinterpretations contribute to a uniquely Brazilian form of nostalgia. Ultimately, this research contributes to broader debates on how digital platforms mediate cultural memory and reshape music consumption in the age of streaming and algorithmic recommendation, acknowledging the role of TikTok in encouraging fan engagement (Zaborowski & Bennett, 2025).

Method
To analyze how Brazilian TikTok users engage with nostalgic reinterpretations of global hits, we conduct a content analysis focusing on individual perceptions and emotional reactions to algorithmically recommended videos. Billboard charts and Spotify playlists were consulted to identify trending songs across platforms, ensuring that selections reflected both mainstream success and platform-driven virality. We chose one song per year starting in 2021, capturing how these reinterpretations evolved in different social contexts, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The selected songs—each a Brazilian adaptation of an international hit—are: Coração Cachorro (2021) by Avine Vinny and Matheus Fernandes, based on James Blunt's Same Mistake; Lovezin (2022) by Treyce, a version of Nelly Furtado's Say It Right; and Gol Bolinha,

Gol Quadrado 2 (2023) by MC Pedrinho, adapted from Flo Rida's Low. These tracks were identified through Spotify's yearly hit playlists in Brazil.

After selecting these songs, we examined their TikTok presence through a systematic process: (1) searching for the song title within TikTok's search bar; (2) observing the first six videos surfaced by the algorithm; (3) conducting a visual analysis of video content, captions, and hashtags; (4) analyzing the comments to assess audience engagement—reading all comments if under 100, or sampling from larger datasets; and (5) identifying recurring themes across videos to trace patterns of nostalgic engagement. This approach allows us to map how Brazilian reframe past musical trends through TikTok's affordances, blending regional aesthetics with trends to shape a distinct form of digital nostalgia.

Preliminary results and next steps
We compiled a ranked list of the top six videos for each track and established a fixed order to facilitate the manual analysis of video comments, following the methodology outlined in the previous section. Additional variables, including captions and content details, are presented in the table below.

Table 1 - overview of the videos analyzed

Search date	Ranking	Song	Comments	Text about nostalgia	Hashtags w/ nostalgia	Video content
12/01/2025	1	Coração Cachorro	21.400	No	No	Original artist
12/01/2025	2	Coração Cachorro	503	No	No	Videoclip short
12/01/2025	3	Coração Cachorro	146	No	No	Choreografy
12/01/2025	4	Coração Cachorro	6.858	No	No	Choreografy
12/01/2025	5	Coração Cachorro	6.858	No	No	Choreografy
12/01/2025	6	Coração Cachorro	1.091	No	No	Choreografy
12/01/2025	1	Lovezin	404	No	No	Choreografy
12/01/2025	2	Lovezin	6.874	No	No	Choreografy/duet
12/01/2025	3	Lovezin	12.300	No	No	Choreografy
12/01/2025	4	Lovezin	617	No	No	Choreografy
12/01/2025	5	Lovezin	8.739	No	No	Choreografy/edit
12/01/2025	6	Lovezin	7.948	No	No	Choreografy
12/01/2025	1	Gol Bolinha	765	No	No	Original artist
12/01/2025	2	Gol Bolinha	201	No	No	Choreografy
12/01/2025	3	Gol Bolinha	1.577	No	No	Choreografy
12/01/2025	4	Gol Bolinha	69	No	No	Choreografy
12/01/2025	5	Gol Bolinha	1.319	No	No	Original artist
12/01/2025	6	Gol Bolinha	241	No	No	Choreografy
12/01/2025	1	Coração Partido	147	No	No	Lyrics video edit
12/01/2025	2	Coração Partido	2.120	No	No	Original artist
12/01/2025	3	Coração Partido	139	No	No	No relation
12/01/2025	4	Coração Partido	1.806	No	No	Original artist video edit
12/01/2025	5	Coração Partido	3.878	No	No	Original artist video edit
12/01/2025	6	Coração Partido	1.633	Yes	Yes	Original song

Our initial analysis of framing and metadata suggests that explicit expressions of nostalgia are infrequent in the selected TikTok videos. Instead, most content focuses on dance performances, with hashtags and captions serving as promotional tools rather than reflective engagements with the songs themselves. The only exception is Coração

Partido, the oldest song analyzed, where nostalgia is directly linked to the original version, even though the Brazilian adaptation was released later.

However, a closer look at the comment sections tells a different story. Across all videos, users frequently express feelings of nostalgia and longing, with comments such as "*this song makes me nostalgic for something*" and "*I miss that time.*" In Coração Partido videos, nostalgia appears deeply personal, often tied to memories of past relationships. Yet beyond individual recollections, the repeated use of nostalgic expressions suggests a broader cultural connection —where emotions are shared and reinforced by others in the community. In Brazil, the remixing and adaptation of music have long been central to its vibrant musical culture, allowing these versions to do more than just revive old songs— they generate new collective meanings that resonate across generations and languages. This is particularly evident in this case, as the song was originally in Spanish, yet finds renewed significance through Brazilian reinterpretation.

Interestingly, while many users describe their feelings as nostalgia, they may not always be referring to a longing for a specific past. Instead, the term might be used as a way to participate in a larger cultural conversation —signaling an emotional connection to the song and the memories it evokes, even if those memories are not directly tied to the song's original era. This reflects a pattern in Brazilian music culture, where reinterpretation and adaptation serve as affective cultural bonds, enabling songs to acquire new meanings shaped by their social and historical context.

Building on this, the next stage of our research will further explore the Brazilian remix subculture on TikTok, examining both creators and commenters to investigate whether a disconnect exists between a song's primary use —often as a catchy, danceable track— and the emotional responses it elicits from audiences. This will help us better understand how these reworked hits go beyond simple musical revival and instead become part of a shared cultural voice. In doing so, they reflect both Brazil's long-standing tradition of musical reinvention and the way TikTok's algorithmic structures mediate cultural connection, memory, and emotional engagement.

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