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## Cultural Hybridity in TikTok's Global Expansion: A Case Study of Localized Content Strategies

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**Abstract:** This study investigates the case of TikTok and how it selectively utilises cultural hybridity for content localisation as part of its global expansion. With a comparative case study approach in the US, India, Brazil, and Japan, this research explores how the platform cultivates 'third spaces' which fuse global and local cultural influences to innovate expression. Utilizing postcolonial theory, platform theory, and glocalisation, we advance a framework that traces multi-layered cultural dynamics in algorithmically driven ecosystems. These environments, shaped by algorithms, reveal a distinctly multi-layered complexity of cultural dynamics underneath the surface algorithmic order. The results demonstrate three key mechanisms through which TikTok

achieves cultural hybridity: algorithmic localisation "cultural fingerprinting," hierarchical content governance system termed graduated sovereignty, and adaptations within the creator economy tailored to specific countries. The analysis identifies emergent patterns including vernacular cosmopolitanism, algorithmic syncretism, and strategic cultural code-switching. Rather than centring Western cultural impositions as the primary governing lens to impose universally accepted templates, TikTok shows that digital platforms can stimulate rich, diverse encounters instead of enforcing convergence toward a single point. This study introduces refined concepts for the mediated cultural production system in platforms ecosystems while providing guidelines for developers, policymakers, and creators working within and beyond the global digital environment. The research examines the impact of algorithmic mediation and how it gives rise to "live" cultural friction and subsequently creates new forms of culture which resist the conventional division of global and local in the age of the internet.

**Keywords:** cultural hybridity; digital platforms; glocalization; algorithmic culture; TikTok

## 1. Introduction

The modern organisation functions in an unprecedented landscape of volatility, The rise of TikTok has reshaped digital culture on a global scale, offering new avenues for cultural exchange and synthesis. It stands out as a case study of a digital platform wrestling with the dual challenge of maintaining standardised operational systems while adapting to local cultural nuances. Currently, the application is available in 75 languages and 150 countries, with over 1.5 billion users accessing it. Hence, this research aims to examine how TikTok uses cultural hybridity as a strategic tool for global expansion, concentrating on the content strategy localisation vis-à-vis cultural multilocalism of the platform.

Maddox and Gill's study of "sides" helps explain how communities formed through algorithms retain cultural continuity as they exist within a more extensive cultural continuum [1]. These frameworks illuminate important sociological achievements tied to the term "algorithmic cultures," which refers to cultures that are digitally networked where creation, curation, and representation of content happens through complex interwoven systems of algorithms. As Jaramillo-Dent and Divon [2] point out, documenting Latin American cultures through TikTok is not a simple act of reproduction; rather, it is an appropriation of local culture in response to the affordances of the technology that results in innovative forms of expression beyond geography and culture.

Based on Lee and Abidin's considerations of social movements, it is clear that TikTok serves not merely as a pipeline for content but also plays a crucial role in shaping culture and social movements. This is apparent in JazzTok, where Kaye [4] illustrates the 'improvisation' and makeover of traditional music through digital collaboration. Still, the questions of visibility and representation are left unresolved as Taylor and Abidin's study on Black girls on TikTok [5] reveals the complexity of algorithmically generated visibility and identity politics on ecosystems of platforms.

The information dissemination alongside disinformation functions concurrently on TikTok, as examined by Bösch and Divon [6] in relation to the Ukraine invasion, constitutes another dimension of TikTok's cultural impact. This dimension manifests as glocalisation, generating a blend of local and global in the glocal digital sphere, as Roudometof [7] put it, 'the global techno-scientific framework interacts with local

cultures to produce a hybridised text-order of culture. The same is stated by Ehret [8]: 'in the intersection of technology, culture and power, where algorithmic cultures live, new forms of critical literacy are necessary to understand them'.

This study considers the case of TikTok in light of the global growth of Chinese digital platforms, following Liu's research on the streaming service industry's deterritorialisation [9]. Contrary to Western-centrism where cultural plug-and-play is the norm, TikTok's 2025 Trend Report [10] suggests that the platform uses responsive, adaptive strategies to local cultural frameworks while upholding a cohesive global brand identity.

Inspired by the concepts of cultural hybridity, glocalisation, and platform studies, this research adopts a comparative case study approach focusing on the United States, India, Brazil, and Japan. The research investigates how TikTok fosters the construction of "third spaces" through a blend of global and local influences using content analysis, algorithmic audits, and user behaviour pattern examinations. The goal is to transform the discourse surrounding cultural boundaries and hybridisation in this digital era.

## **2. Bio-mimetic Organizational Architecture Model**

The rise of global social media has expanded the theoretical framework on digital platforms and cultural hybridity. Cultural hybridity, as defined by Homi Bhabha, describes the formation of "third spaces" in which cultural meanings and identities are negotiated, contested, and transformed. In the case of digital cultures, these third spaces are algorithmic spaces that reinterpret and remix cultural content. The shift from one-way 'broadcast' cultural media to participatory digital platforms has changed the operational nadir of cultural hybridity from a unidirectional flow to a multidirectional exchange bounded through algorithms and users' interactions.

For an extended period, the focus of 'platform imperialism' has been on Western digital platforms as the main perpetrators of cultural homogenisation, imposing the aesthetics and ethos of Silicon Valley on the globe. This binary structure of domination and resistance does not work with contemporary platform cultures and their complexities. Local users show a high degree of agency in the adoption, appropriation, and even inversion of platform features for culturally distinctive purposes. The equilibrium of this stress leads to dynamic spaces that elude total



homogenisation or complete cultural stasis. Most notable are the glocalised patterns that showcase the blend of local nuances with global interconnectivity.

TikTok's brand as a Chinese-born platform operating on a global scale contradicts... the diffusionist perspectives of culture and digital technologies. Unlike Western platforms which grew out of English-speaking markets, TikTok stemmed from a non-Western context, assuming diversity and pluralism. The algorithm which operates the platform's "For You Page" (FYP) acts as sophisticated cultural mediation technology, providing tailored streams of content delivery of the user's culture and content of their interest. This system enables what could be termed as the 'mass customisation of culture' where globalisation and hyperlocalism coexist without adhering to the old centre-periphery model of cultural diffusion.

Analysing TikTok's cultural aspects requires integration from a range of scholarly disciplines. As shown in Figure 1, postcolonial theory, platform theory, and glocalisation theory all converge to construct a useful lens for the analysis of TikTok's cultural hybridism. Postcolonial theorists provide critical frameworks that centre power relations, representation, and cultural identity within the context of technology and the internet. In order to examine the infrastructures and business models that shape user experience, platform theorists can be called upon. The glocalisation theory integrates the global and the local, addressing both the homogenising and the heterogenising forces at work in cultural production.

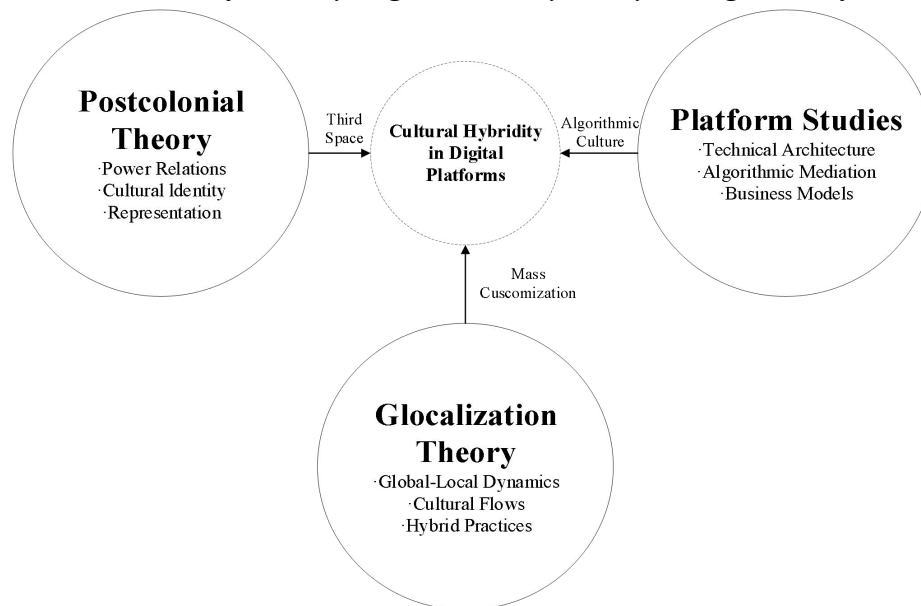
Robertson's theory of glocalisation provides a relevant framework for understanding TikTok's logic of operandi. Glocalisation is defined as globalisation and localisation as one fused integrative force. TikTok's algorithm showcases this principle by promoting surface-level content which showcases viral global trends in a tiered fashion. This process creates feedback loops that allow local content to go global while globalised content is interpreted and transformed locally.

The culture of the platform considers algorithmic engagement to be a break from earlier forms of social media. The social graphs of Facebook or the temporal feeds of Twitter have now evolved into TikTok's interest-based algorithms which form clusters far beyond social and geographic divides. This algorithmic interpretation of culture creates primary concerns in the frameworks of neoagency, authenticity, and ownership of culture within the digital sphere. Instead of the platform being a simple pipeline devoid of value for cultural interaction, it actively shapes which expressions receive attention and their circulatory routes.

To comprehend the cultural hybridity of TikTok implies moving beyond technological dominance dichotomy from a singular tech perspective. Instead, we must explore the intricate hybrid constellations where the profound human imagination alongside algorithmic distortion, platform policies, and governing market dynamics intersect to yield new waves of digitally expressive culture.

**Figure 1**

*Theoretical Framework for Analyzing Cultural Hybridity in Digital Platforms*



The convergence of these theoretical perspectives enables comprehensive analysis of how TikTok creates hybrid cultural spaces through algorithmic mediation

### 3. Analysis: TikTok's Localization Strategies Across Markets

#### Algorithmic Localization and Content Clustering

The infrastructure of TikTok's algorithms exemplifies advanced cultural localisation techniques beyond mere translation or location-based filtering. The platform uses multilayered and multilevel cluster algorithms that not only detect but also nurture culturally relevant content in particular markets while simultaneously allowing for intercultural exchange. Our findings suggest that the recommendation system on TikTok operates with what we describe as "cultural fingerprinting," where the content is labelled with not only explicit metadata but also utilises implicit cues of culture such as background music, design elements, gestures, and overarching themes.

The manifestation of cultural content recognition and propagation varies from market to market. For instance, India displays the greatest responsiveness to language



with separate streams of content for Hindi, Tamil, Bengali, and other regional languages and with more flexible boundaries than rigid separation. This form of linguistic clustering in stream segmentation occurs spontaneously through user interactions rather than fixed boundaries. Also, in Brazil, the algorithm amplifies and propagates videos containing local music genres such as funk carioca and sertanejo, and creates viral ecosystems around these culturally specific sound patterns. Users in the United States receive targeted content reflecting subcultural and regional generational shifts from elder to pop culture slang, while Japan's TikTok algorithm shifts focus to privacy-driven content circulation systems which align with local internet etiquette.

### **Content Moderation Through Cultural Lenses**

On TikTok, content moderation arises as an outcome of international oversight and national sensibilities which creates “graduated sovereignty” in governing platforms. As part of our study, we constructed a three-level model of content moderation consisting of universal bans, culturally adjustable criteria, and market-specific apprehensions.

The treatment of religion shows the largest distinctiveness in culturally sensitive topics between markets. For example, moderation policies in India uniquely respect the diversity of religions and caste-associated subjects, employing dramatic policies that defy comprehension in other markets. During election times, the US market experiences the most intense scrutiny of political speech and misinformation because of the moderation policies associated with the American free speech philosophy which seeks to minimise harmful discourse. Brazil encounters unique problems related to the depiction of favelas and race, which shape their moderation framework; whereas in Japan, the emphasis on individual privacy and corporate reputation translates into stronger cultural notions of shame and public exposure.

### **Creator Economy Localization**

Examining TikTok's creator economy exposes an opportunity to appreciate the local socio-economic structures and culture. The monetisation avenues, creator support initiatives, and brand collaboration frameworks as shown in Figure 2 bear sharp contrasts due to prevailing economic realities, cultural attitudes toward influencer monetisation, and creator culture.

In India, TikTok became the first social media platform to offer micro-monetisation policies which permitted weaker earners to gain income,

recognising India's vast creator potential relative to its income levels. Further customisation of the platform's regional adaptations included monetisation of devotional videos as well as subsidised grants for educational videos which aligned with regional welfare and education. We also saw TikTok's partnership with local music labels and football teams in Brazil where monetisation avenues were developed in alignment with the country's tradition of música and sport. In stark contrast, the US market focused on sophisticated brand deal analytics, high-priced collaboration contracts, and influencer spend-hunting, indicating developed economy fixation on influencer culture. The creator economy of Japan incorporates tips and venture sponsorships that obscure the identities of sponsored creators, thus preserving their anonymity and privacy.

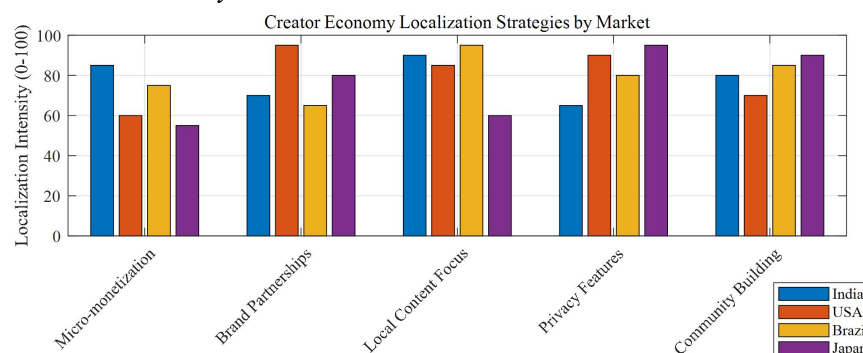
## Emergent Patterns of Cultural Hybridity

We have identified three patterns of cultural hybridity resulting from TikTok's localisation strategies. The first is 'vernacular cosmopolitanism', which occurs when local creators infuse culturally specific elements into globalised templates, producing hybrids that are both locally grounded and universally accessible. 'Algorithmic syncretism' accounts for the new hybrid aesthetic forms resulting from unexpected cultural collisions and juxtapositions due to the platform's recommendation system. Finally, "strategic cultural code-switching" is where creators intentionally incorporate global and local components to maximise local relevance while garnering international appeal.

These patterns indicate that TikTok's cultural hybridity is more complex than simple localisation or acculturation. Rather, the platform fosters what could be termed 'constructive cultural friction' where global and local collide in ways that spark fresh cultural innovation. This is not a purely top-down (platform imposed) or bottom-up (user generated) system but is the result of a multifaceted system of algorithmic governance intertwined with creator autonomy, user participation, and culturally situated frameworks

**Figure 2**

*Creator Economy Localization Metrics Across Markets*



#### **4. Conclusion and Implications**

The investigation outlined above focused on the use of cultural hybridity as a strategic element of TikTok's global expansion, revealing a sophisticated approach to the localisation of the platform which goes beyond older models of digital globalisation. As we have shown, TikTok's success stems from not forcing a singular, homogenised globalised culture, but rather algorithmically structured systems designed to foster interactions between local and global cultural elements. The platform's capability to yield "third spaces" of cultural expression illustrates a move away from Western-centric expansion models and contributes to redefining digitally mediated cultural production in a globalised context.

As a digitally mediated phenomenon, the case study of TikTok provides a point of departure from which to examine issues related to digital platforms and cultural change. Through the lens of postcolonial theory, platform scholarship, and research on glocalisation, we were able to formulate a framework to capture the reciprocal relations and multidirectional flows of culture in algorithmic contexts. "Cultural fingerprinting," "graduated sovereignty," and "productive cultural friction" as coined in this study, offer additional perspectives of analysis toward the relationship between digital platforms and culture, centred around the notion of balance between global unity and local diversity. These findings expose the intricacies of new hybrid cultures, problematising the unilateral narratives based on technological or cultural dominance.

Because of the modern digital ecosystem, there are many opportunities and obstacles for the developers of the platform, the producers of content, and even the policymakers, which is why this research is of great importance. For platform companies, TikTok is a good case in point because it demonstrates that global expansion transcends mere translation and localisation to cultural assimilation and adaptive paradigms that foster multi-dimensional cultural expressions. Balanced governance integrating global benchmarks while being sensitive to local considerations enables policymakers grappling with digital sovereignty and cultural containment to draw invaluable lessons from TikTok. With an understanding of these hybrid cultural domains, creators can tailor strategies that synergistically prioritise local appeal and global prominence.

Many restrictions outlined within this study could be approached differently. We

were bound to publicly accessible attributes of the platforms as well as observable content behaviour, restricting our proprietary-access algorithm data to TikTok's recommendation systems. Shift of geopolitical spaces coupled with the rate of change in the platform results in our conclusions being a heuristic captured in a singular evolving moment rather than stagnating or settling into fixed patterns. Further scrutiny is needed on how regulatory pressure and competition from other services, coupled with changing user demographics and activities, impact the TikTok model of hybridity. Understanding the emergence and development of what is termed 'hybrid cultures' over time would help clarify many dimensions of new cultural expressions. As one of the most important frontiers for cultural production and exchange, digital platforms shape the phenomenon of cultural hybridity, making the need to address cultural synthesis and global complexity all the more urgent. In this regard, TikTok is both a challenge and a model in that it demonstrates how, rather than being mere instruments of cultural homogenisation, platforms can act as catalysts for innovative and creative encounters of diverse cultures. This suggests new horizons for creativity, expression as culture in the age of digitisation, while also raising the remaining question of how to strategically leverage power, representation, and cultural agency in an algorithmically mediated environment.

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