



## TIKTOK AND IDENTITY NARRATIVES: Analysing the Forbes 2024 Awards

PATRICIA BARRÓN SAN BLAS <sup>1</sup>,

<sup>1</sup> Universidad del País Vasco/ Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea, España

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*TikTok*  
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### ABSTRACT

*This study examines the influence exerted by TikTokers featured in the Forbes 2024 list on the construction of both individual and collective identities within cyberspace. Employing a purposefully developed rubric, it qualitatively analyses the self-representation strategies and performative practices of the selected profiles (n = 34). The findings reveal how these practices shape discourse, generate trends, reinforce stereotypes, and construct aspirations that influence audiences. Furthermore, the study underscores the role of content creators in shaping digital narratives, highlighting the complex interplay between individual influence, social impact, and the development of personal brand.*

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## 1. Introduction

The year 2024 marks two decades since digital pioneers began shaping the virtual landscape by publishing content on social networks, giving rise to a now globally recognised profession: the influencer. This phenomenon invites reflection on the factors that account for the success of certain creators, revealing that fame is not solely dependent on digital platforms, but also on the ingenuity and creativity of those who use them as tools of influence. Although social networks continue to evolve, disappear, or be replaced, the connections and relationships established with audiences persist as a cultural, political, and economic phenomenon deeply embedded in the dynamics of digital identity (Jenkins et al., 2015; Márquez & Ardévol, 2018).

In this context, the present study employs both qualitative and quantitative methods to analyse how influencers have consolidated their discursive and symbolic strategies. To this end, a literature review was conducted to define the concept of the influencer and to explore its relationship with digital audiences, as well as the broader cultural impact of these practices.

The influencer industry, currently valued at \$250 billion, is undergoing rapid expansion and is projected to double in value to \$500 billion by 2027, according to Goldman Sachs (Bertoni, 2024). Within this ecosystem, TikTok has emerged as the epicentre of a new generation of creators and consumers. Far more than a mere entertainment platform, it serves as a space where creativity and emotional connection with audiences have fostered an unprecedented level of global influence (Santolaya Calvo, 2024). The platform currently hosts a global community of over 2.05 billion users, of whom 1.58 billion are active on a monthly basis, consolidating its position as one of the most influential social agents of the digital age (Singh, 2025).

Within this landscape, the TikTokers featured in the *Forbes Top Creators 2024* list serve as a significant example. With revenues approaching \$720 million in the past year and a combined audience of over 2.7 billion followers, they illustrate how digital content can act as a catalyst for economic and social change. These figures underscore their vast reach and their capacity to transform virtual communities into spaces of tangible impact.

Through a purpose-designed content analysis, the strategies employed and the effects these patterns generate in viewers have been identified. Each feature offered by the platform was listed, categorised, defined, and prioritised in that order. The objective was to assess the extent of each creator's capacity and the techniques they used, or possessed, to configure their account. These options were then grouped into hierarchically ordered categories in an effort to determine which elements have the greatest impact on the final presentation of a profile; in other words, which features are most significant.

In this regard, the research also provides a detailed glossary of the various ways in which users engage with the platform to attain this perceived success, which is understood as the maximisation of potential views. This taxonomy aims to reveal the underlying mechanisms supporting an account, which are essential to consider when addressing the potential (negative) consequences that such networks may provoke.

Beyond mere follower counts, TikTok creators are redefining the concept of the traditional influencer. What was once primarily based on accumulating followers is now evolving into multifaceted roles, whereby creators act as communicators, entrepreneurs, and catalysts for social change (Laso, 2022). Notable examples of this transformation include figures such as Charli D'Amelio, Khaby Lame, and Addison Rae, who have diversified their activities by developing personal brands across sectors such as fashion, music, and beauty products (Bertoni, 2024).

This study also explores the ethical and cultural implications of these dynamics by analysing how TikTok functions as an agent of intersubjective transformation. Drawing on a theoretical framework grounded in sociology, psychology, and communication studies, it considers the platform's impact across diverse generations, genders, and social strata. Furthermore, a taxonomy is presented that investigates how creators' strategies may produce both positive outcomes and adverse consequences, including phenomena such as self-exposure, social pressure, and emotional vulnerability.

The research thus undertakes the rigorous task of understanding TikTok's internal mechanisms, the resources employed, and their impact on individuals across all ages, generations, genders, and social strata. Overall, this study seeks to demonstrate that, beyond superficial appearances, the platform functions as a double-edged tool capable of encompassing virtually all fields within the humanities and of transforming followers into engaged communities, as well as personal brands into sustainable

enterprises. Consequently, the analysis not only acknowledges the creators who are currently at the forefront but also provides valuable insights into the future evolution of influence within cyberspace.

## 2. Background and Context

With the exponential growth of the Internet and the proliferation of social networks, the first digital celebrities began to emerge (Ayala, 2014; Jacobson, 2020). These individuals succeeded in building large-scale communities on platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter) (Woolley, 2022; Zuccherino, 2021). These pioneering figures capitalised on the potential for direct interaction with their audiences (Arriagada & Bishop, 2021; Enke & Borchers, 2021), thereby transcending the boundaries of the digital sphere and redefining the limits of public visibility (Hania & Souad, 2024; Kim et al., 2024; Zuccherino, 2021).

As of early October 2024, it was estimated that 63.8% of the global population, equivalent to 5.22 billion people, were regular users of digital platforms, with an average daily usage of 2 hours and 31 minutes (Chaffey, 2023; Kepios, 2024). This sustained growth, evidenced by the addition of 256 million new users over the past year, and has solidified the phenomenon of 'virtual celebrities'. The evolution of this trend has culminated in the rise of influencers: public figures who, emerging from diverse social, cultural, and commercial spheres, have come to represent paradigmatic models (Brooks et al., 2021; Jacobson, 2020; Mateus et al., 2022).

Moreover, the digitalisation of fame and virtual influence has created new opportunities for social actors who, without the mediation of traditional media, have succeeded in establishing themselves as key figures across multiple fields (Kavada, 2020; Mera-Plaza et al., 2022; Pérez-Escoda et al., 2020). In this context, the figure of the influencer not only reflects a shift in the structures of visibility and prestige (Arriagada & Bishop, 2021; Enke & Borchers, 2021), but also embodies a phenomenon in constant flux, shaped by the technological dynamics of the time (Jacobson, 2020; Mardon et al., 2023).

### 2.1. Evolution of the Industry: From Virility to Professionalisation

The concept of the influencer emerged within a global context in which social networks were becoming established as essential tools for interaction and content dissemination (Brooks et al., 2021). In this initial phase, content creators primarily appeared as spontaneous individuals whose reach relied on virality, engaging, brief, and easily shareable content that resonated with wide audiences (Arriagada & Bishop, 2021; Enke & Borchers, 2021). This stage was marked by informal blogging and minimal strategic planning (Pedroni, 2023), as success was shaped more by chance and the collective response of digital communities than by any structured model (Vrontis et al., 2021).

However, as platforms evolved and their infrastructures grew increasingly complex, influencers began to adopt a more strategic and professionalised approach to their activities, often in collaboration with emerging specialised agencies within the sector (Arriagada & Ibáñez, 2020). This transition marked a significant milestone in the development of the industry, as influencers moved beyond the role of mere content creators to become key actors in the field of digital marketing (Sedda & Husson, 2023). The professionalisation of the role was evidenced by the implementation of advanced personal branding techniques, the construction of coherent narratives aligned with individual values, and the cultivation of stronger relationships with both brands and audiences (Arriagada & Ibáñez, 2020; Elorriaga Illera & Monge Benito, 2018). These developments were underpinned by enduring values such as trust, credibility, and authenticity, which are qualities increasingly vital in an oversaturated and highly competitive digital environment (Dueñas & Simancas-González, 2024). In doing so, influencers gained both economic and social relevance, shaping consumer decisions and contributing to the formation of contemporary cultural trends (Jacobson, 2020; Mateus et al., 2022).

The earliest social networks, such as MySpace and Facebook, were primarily designed to connect individuals and facilitate interaction through personal and shared content, thereby laying the groundwork for digital communication (Baym, 2015). Subsequently, platforms like YouTube and Twitter enabled users to become content creators in their own right, significantly expanding the reach of individual messages and giving rise to the first generation of influencers (Elorriaga Illera & Monge Benito, 2018). With the emergence of Instagram, a visual and aspirational model of communication was consolidated (Castañeda, 2019), while TikTok later revolutionised the digital landscape with its short, dynamic, and highly viral video format (Kulaga, 2024). This marked a new phase in hypermedia and the

professionalisation of influencer marketing (Torres-Toukoumidis et al., 2021). Furthermore, influencers increasingly assumed the role of cultural agents, promoting new values and behaviours, and thereby reinforcing their prominence as social and cultural referents (Mera-Plaza et al., 2022; Pérez-Escoda et al., 2020).

## ***2.2. TikTok As a Catalyst for the New Paradigm***

The emergence of TikTok brought about a radical transformation in the influencer landscape, fundamentally altering traditional dynamics of audiovisual content creation and dissemination. The platform introduced a disruptive model centred on short, dynamic videos, curated through a highly personalised algorithm that prioritises content quality and relevance over follower count (Jordan, 2024). In contrast to earlier platforms, where success typically depended on the gradual cultivation of follower communities, TikTok enabled any creator to attain significant visibility within a short period (Kułaga, 2024), thereby democratising access to large audiences.

This new model also redefined perceptions of authenticity within the sphere of digital influence. Whereas other platforms, such as Instagram, tended to promote more polished and carefully curated content, TikTok placed spontaneity, relatability, and emotional connection at the forefront (Kaye et al., 2022). Influencers on this platform distinguished themselves by employing formats such as ‘storytimes’ and participating in viral trends, thereby revealing a more human and intimate dimension of their lives, which in turn generated unprecedented levels of audience engagement (Faltese et al., 2023). In this context, creators were no longer viewed solely as aspirational figures, but rather as accessible individuals who resonated with the everyday experiences of their followers.

TikTok’s capacity to foster authentic connection is also evident in its economic ecosystem. Unlike other platforms, the Chinese social network has developed monetisation mechanisms that include brand partnerships, live events, subscriptions, and product promotion through interactive formats (Faltese et al., 2023; Santolaya Calvo, 2024). Over time, it has evolved from a space for viral video sharing into a catalyst for both social and commercial transformation (Laso, 2022). This shift has been pivotal in the metamorphosis of the influencer phenomenon, ushering in a new era characterised by greater sophistication, creativity, and emotional resonance within the digital sphere (Kułaga, 2024). Simultaneously, it has empowered creators to engage meaningfully with their communities, positioning TikTok as a platform for social impact that transcends the conventions of traditional marketing (Mera-Plaza et al., 2022).

## **3. Theoretical Framework**

This theoretical framework draws upon three fundamental theories to elucidate how TikTok influencers build and sustain their impact. Central to this analysis are self-figuring strategies and the dynamics of interaction with audiences. Visibility theory, for instance, explains how creators achieve presence not only by utilising digital platforms (Leonardi, 2014) but also through their capacity to forge emotional connections with followers (Jenkins et al., 2015). Complementing this, Goffman’s (1959) concept of self-representation provides a lens through which to understand the management of digital identity, while Butler’s (1990; 1993) principle of performativity is essential for analysing the interactive and discursive tactics employed by influencers. Together, these theories form the foundation for interpreting the observed phenomena.

### ***3.1. Visibility Theory***

The visibility approach posits that salience is constructed through various forms of participation and display, a concept applicable to activities on digital platforms (Jenkins et al., 2015). This theory suggests that mere presence, such as on social media, does not equate to projection (Cotter, 2019); rather, projection is achieved through consistent interaction, meaningful content, and the establishment of an identifiable persona (Tirocchi, 2024; Treem & Leonardi, 2013). To enhance their recognition, influencers employ strategies based on these principles, which are essential for consolidating a loyal follower base. Specifically, TikTokers utilise the following mechanisms:

- **Content:** The quality and relevance of posts play a crucial role in increasing views (Cheung et al., 2022), while relatable posts or personal narratives attract more followers and foster engagement by generating emotional bonds (Khan-Dobson, 2021).
- **Algorithms:** A thorough understanding of each social network's algorithms is vital for optimising posts to reach a broader audience (Fisher & Mehozay, 2019).
- **Partnerships:** Collaborations with other influential users or brands enable expanded reach and exposure (Felix et al., 2024). Moreover, strategic partnerships frequently introduce TikTokkers to new audiences, thereby strengthening their online presence (Haenlein et al., 2020).

These techniques demonstrate that visibility is not a static achievement, particularly on such a competitive platform, but rather a dynamic process that requires consistency, adaptability, and a strategic approach (Perdana & Bharathi, 2023). Consequently, mastering these practices is essential to maintaining a sustained presence in the spotlight.

### ***3.2. Self-Representation Theory***

The Self-Projection Theory centres on how individuals manage and project their identities (Goffman, 1959), recognising that in social interactions each person performs a role shaped by their environment and the expectations of others. On TikTok, creators engage in deliberate actions to control their public image, often constructing an idealised version of themselves (Dorofeeva & Öze, 2023), which enables effective connection with their audience. Through this process of self-representation, they aim to be perceived as both positive and authentic (Taylor, 2022), thereby fostering stronger emotional bonds (Andonopoulos, 2021). Key elements include:

- **Content selection:** Creators carefully curate topics and the manner in which they present their lives or opinions to build an image that resonates with their audience (Taylor, 2022). In doing so, they construct a personal narrative that highlights facets of their personality, values, and interests that align with their community (Andonopoulos, 2021).
- **Authenticity:** On TikTok, both naturalness and visual polish are prized (Maares et al., 2021), leading influencers to balance these qualities by sharing vulnerable moments alongside refined content, thereby cultivating a genuine and approachable persona.

Thus, this theoretical principle views digital identity as an active, ongoing construction designed to impress, maintain coherence, and nurture emotional connections with the audience (Perdana & Bharathi, 2023), all of which are vital in such a dynamic medium.

### ***3.3. Theory of Performativity***

The concept of performativity refers to the idea that subjectivities are not merely represented but actively 'performed' through actions and behaviours within social contexts (Butler, 1990; 1993). In other words, individuals function like actors playing roles, with their identities shifting according to the environment (Goffman, 1959). For content creators, this tendency manifests in the ways they reveal and interpret aspects of their lives or personalities to construct their digital personas. This concept can be observed in several practices:

- **Performances:** Creators use videos to display, exaggerate, interpret, or dramatise facets of their lives, such as dances, imitations, challenges, or reactions, that reinforce their sense of self and identity (Stein, 2024).
- **Role-creation:** Many influencers adopt particular stereotypes or archetypes to connect with specific audiences (Wang & Carlson, 2024). These roles constitute performative acts aimed at eliciting emotional responses or fostering connections with targeted groups.
- **Interaction:** Engagement with audiences allows creators to present dynamic and adaptable personas (Arriagada & Ibáñez, 2020). The ongoing process of 'acting' and 'reacting' with followers contributes to the perception of their personalities as fluid and continually evolving (Cotter, 2019).



Through this lens, the Theory of Performativity helps us understand that identities are not simply displayed but actively constructed and negotiated via digital performances, in which TikTok creators craft and project their personas to strengthen both their presence and connection with audiences.

#### 4. Objectives

This study focuses on analysing the content produced by the TikTok creators listed in Forbes during the period from 1 January to 30 September 2024. Within this timeframe, a corpus comprising 11,031 videos generated by the 34 creators on the list was compiled. The primary objective is to explore the discursive, performative, and symbolic dynamics present in the content of these influencers, who, owing to their prominence, play a significant role in shaping narratives and identities within cyberspace. Building on this overarching aim, the following specific objectives guide the research:

01. Analytically examine the self-representation strategies employed by TikTokers.
02. Analyse the performative dynamics and evaluate their impact on public perception and the consolidation of digital personas.
03. To study how the works of these creators influence the construction of collective identities.

These objectives enable a comprehensive and reflective examination of the multifaceted cultural, social, and symbolic implications inherent in the rhetorical practices of these influencers. Through this approach, the study seeks to understand their impact on individual identity construction while also elucidating their role in shaping collective identity processes.

#### 5. Methodology

To understand how TikTok content creators articulate their narratives and build influential empires, it is essential to adopt a research approach that accounts for both the visible content and the cultural and social contexts in which these creators operate (Iturregui-Motiloa, 2020). In alignment with the study's objectives (01, 02, and 03), a methodology has been devised that combines systematic content analysis with discursive and semiotic frameworks. This integrated approach facilitates an in-depth investigation of self-representation strategies, performative dynamics, and the processes underlying the construction of collective identities on the platform.

The core of this research is grounded in the development of an analytical framework adhering to the principles of systematicity and objectivity as proposed by Andréu Abela (2002). Accordingly, a bespoke instrument was designed to classify and organise the study corpus, which comprises a total of  $n = 11,031$  videos produced by 34 creators, all of whom feature on the prestigious Forbes list. Notably, engagement metrics, including levels of interaction, connection, and overall engagement, were sourced from Spainmedia and its panels, conducted in collaboration with Forbes. This combined dataset enables the identification of key trends and high-impact behavioural patterns.

The coding scheme comprises a set of variables and categories that have been iteratively refined throughout the analytical process, thereby ensuring the robustness and validity of the employed coding system (Andréu Abela, 2002). Furthermore, the comprehensive nature of this approach has facilitated the identification of recurrent narrative and thematic patterns in the practices of these TikTok creators. With these considerations in mind, several illustrative examples are presented below [Table 1], which permits the recording of multiple identifications and may serve as a reference point for future research.

**Table 1.** Examples of entries in the analytical rubric.

Forbes Category	TikToker	Followed (M)	Engag. (%)	No. of videos	Presentation	Performativity	Collective identities
Entertainment	Carliyo	1.2	9.79	305	Spontaneity Humour Travel	Aspirations Fun Virality	Shared identity Personal link
Dissemination	Lawtips	2.5	3.97	641	Advice Didactics Professionalism	Education Instructiveness Legality	Knowledge sharing Judicial lessons
<i>Food</i>	Peldanyos	3	11.84	691	Hedonist Humour Naturalness	Tasting of new products Creations Culinary exploration	Culinary community Gastronomic interest
<i>Lifestyle</i>	Marina Rivers	7.6	11.58	414	Authenticity Overcoming Work	<i>Dances/trends</i> Everyday stories Routine	Youth culture Social identification

Source: Author's elaboration, 2024.

As illustrated in the table, from a discursive and semiotic perspective, the analysis seeks to explore how visual, auditory, and textual elements generate meanings that foster emotional connections with audiences. Drawing on the frameworks of Karam (2011) and Greimas (1970), this approach emphasises the relationships between signs and the ways they produce meaning within the context of self-representation and performativity strategies. Additionally, it evaluates how the narratives employed either reinforce or challenge dominant platform discourses, as well as their potential to perpetuate stereotypes or instigate new cultural trends.

Moreover, the integration of quantitative and qualitative methodologies enables a comprehensive examination of the phenomenon, combining systematic analysis with interpretative insights into the audiovisual content. This dual approach facilitates a nuanced understanding of the distinctive practices of each creator and their broader impact on the cultural and social landscape.

## 6. Results

From the analysis of the more than eleven thousand videos studied, key patterns and procedures have been detected in the dynamics of self-representation, scenic manifestation, and configuration of collective identities. In this section, the findings are structured according to the main categories established from the theoretical framework. Specifically, they are developed in the sections: 6.1) Strategies of Self-Representation, 6.2) Dynamics of Performativity and 6.3) Impact on Collective Identities.

### 6.1. Strategies of Self-Representation

In accordance with Goffman's (1959) theory of self-representation, authenticity emerges as a central element in the strategies employed by creators, particularly within the lifestyle, entertainment, and beauty categories, which together account for 23 of the 34 profiles analysed. This attribute aims not only to establish an emotional connection with the audience but also to consolidate a public image that is coherent and relatable. A salient example of this is evident in the lifestyle category, where figures such as Marina Rivers (7.6 million followers) and Lucía Bellido (10.1 million followers) frequently share their daily routines and moments of vulnerability, thereby projecting a natural image closely associated with the process of self-improvement. As Maares et al. (2021) argue, the perception of naturalness among content creators has become a crucial component in fostering loyalty and sustaining a strong, engaged follower base.

This phenomenon reflects a strategic adaptation to the expectations of an increasingly discerning public, for whom authenticity is prioritised over the artificial constructions prevalent in many other digital spaces. Consequently, naturalness emerges both as a distinguishing feature and as a mechanism

of legitimisation within a cyberspace frequently characterised by simulation and the illusion of flawless identities. TikTok creators thus become icons whose authority hinges on their capacity to curate and project an image that is perceived as accessible and relatable. In this regard, genuineness transcends a mere superficial attribute to become a form of symbolic capital instrumental in the construction of their public persona.

In particular, the ability to integrate diverse cultural and emotional elements into her content, as exemplified by Mar Lucas (15.1M followers), illustrates this process of authenticity. Through music and dance, she not only showcases artistic talent but also constructs a narrative that resonates deeply with the values and aspirations of a predominantly young audience. This approach fosters affective connections and solidifies her standing within a youth subculture seeking relatable role models. Similarly, within the comedy category, creators such as Lalachus (2.9M followers) employ self-referential humour and personal experiences as means to dismantle barriers between themselves and their viewers, cultivating a sense of closeness through the naturalisation of the bodies presented on screen.

Another key aspect of building digital authenticity lies in influencers' ability to craft personalised narratives that resonate with the shared experiences and values of their followers. A prime example of this strategy is Carliyo (1.2M followers), who employs personal stories and humour to forge intimate connections with her audience. This approach bolsters the construction of a collective identity, reinforcing a sense of belonging among her followers. As Taylor (2022) notes, the capacity to generate empathy through storytelling is one of the most effective tools for fostering loyalty and sustained engagement within a follower base. In this context, transparency becomes a powerful instrument for cultivating virtual communities united by common interests, emotions, and experiences.

Similarly, Javier Santaolalla (4.8M followers) combines a didactic style with entertaining elements, enabling him to convey knowledge accessibly while simultaneously igniting and nurturing his viewers' intellectual curiosity. Inés Hernand (1.6M followers), meanwhile, employs a humorous yet reflective tone to discuss current affairs, appealing to an audience that values critical perspectives on social and political issues. In both cases, the consistent perception of integrity, whether expressed through humour, education, or social critique, strengthens their bond with their audience and consolidates their status as trusted and authoritative figures within their respective fields of influence.

## **6.2. Dynamics of Performativity**

Drawing on Butler's (1990; 1993) Theory of Performativity, it is evident that content creators actively construct and represent their personal brands through repetitive practices involving visual performances and discursive strategies. For instance, in the entertainment category, Jorge Cyrus (2.2M followers) employs irony and parody to reinforce his comedic persona while simultaneously fostering a relational bond with his audience. Similarly, Erolajons (2.9M followers), known for his theatrical performances and provocative humour, exemplifies how performative expression can articulate picaresque narratives. Many creators adopt distinct roles that enable them to connect with specific audiences.

Within the fashion category, Bryan Boy (4.3M followers) embodies this approach by presenting himself as a model and artist who blends elegance with luxury, cultivating a community interested in high-end trends. Raúl Álvarez, better known as AuronPlay (3.2M followers), establishes his persona through a spontaneous style that resonates strongly with his followers. His improvisational skills and ongoing interaction with his audience position him as a central figure in digital entertainment, where proximity and authenticity, previously highlighted as crucial, serve to strengthen his fan base. These examples demonstrate how creators strategically employ distinctive elements to craft narratives appealing to targeted audiences, revealing shared patterns across diverse content spheres.

Similarly, streamer Lluna Clark stands out for her ability to sustain a dynamic dialogue during live broadcasts, which reinforces her digital presence and fosters a sense of active participation among her followers. This observation aligns with Cotter's (2019) emphasis on re-enactment as a crucial mechanism for maintaining relevance. Moreover, it highlights that the construction of a digital footprint is not merely reactive to audience expectations but is actively shaped by interaction dynamics, ensuring a continuous and tailored flow of engagement.

Collectively, these practices illustrate how influencers strategically craft their digital personas to maximise cultural and emotional resonance with their target audiences. This approach resonates with



Wang and Carlson's (2024) insights into the use of stereotypes for constructing digital identities that effectively connect with specific groups, echoing traditional marketing strategies aimed at creating direct and meaningful audience engagement (Mera-Plaza et al., 2022).

### **6.3. Impact on Collective Identities**

One of the most significant contributions of the TikTokers analysed is their ability to build digital communities that transcend geographical and cultural boundaries. For instance, in the food category, Peldanyos (3M followers) employs culinary exploration combined with humour to foster a sense of collectivity, connecting followers through shared gastronomic interests. As the Visibility Theory suggests (Jenkins et al., 2015), content that engages specific topics through comedy tends to spread more effectively, since humour encourages engagement and sharing, thereby amplifying the visibility of their messages within the food community.

In the entrepreneur category, Maria Speaks English (1M followers) utilises Anglo-Saxon slang and shares English cultural tidbits to inspire her audience to learn the language. This fosters an active, engaged group where members exchange experiences and learn collaboratively. This strategy exemplifies Goffman's (1959) Theory of Self-Representation, demonstrating how the construction of a coherent and authentic identity enables followers to connect emotionally with the creator's content, thereby strengthening the community's collective identity. As noted by Perdana and Bharathi (2023), such digital communities not only reinforce shared identity but also facilitate cultural exchange. Additionally, several creators use their platforms to challenge prevailing cultural narratives by promoting values of inclusion and diversity.

Lucía de la Puerta (3.1M followers), in the entertainment category, stands out for her activism on LGTBQ+ issues, contributing to the construction of shared identities that celebrate diversity and acceptance. This aligns with Butler's (1990) Theory of Performativity, as her performances actively 'perform' activism through repeated actions and behaviours. This performative reiteration not only reinforces her values but also conveys them powerfully to her audience. Through the constant repetition of gestures and attitudes, she shapes her public image, challenges social norms, and promotes cultural change, demonstrating how digital activism can serve as a potent vehicle for creating alternative, more inclusive realities.

Creators like María Riballo (1.9M followers) use their platforms to address themes of self-improvement, positively influencing the perception of these values within their communities. Similarly, Iker Ruíz (7.2M followers) focuses on football and sports empowerment, establishing himself as an influential voice in sports conversations and highlighting the transformative power of discipline, teamwork, and resilience for his followers. Together, these examples illustrate how the platform under discussion has democratised digital influence and reshaped traditional dynamics of audience engagement (Jordan, 2024).

## **7. Conclusions**

The results of this study reveal that the dynamics of TikTok not only mirror socio-cultural patterns but also serve as catalysts for profound transformations in how individuals understand and project their identities in the digital age. This phenomenon extends beyond individual creators' strategies, highlighting structural shifts in the logic of social platforms, which function as spaces of continuous negotiation between truthfulness, performativity, and community.

Firstly, TikTok emerges as a mediating agent in redefining authenticity as a fluid cultural construct, responding to demands for emotional closeness and acting as a resource to challenge and renegotiate traditional hierarchies of influence. This insight directly addresses the first research objective (O1), demonstrating how creators' self-representation strategies cultivate new forms of perceived authenticity, ultimately contributing to the consolidation of symbolic and cultural capital.

Secondly, the iterative and performative nature of these practices highlights that digital identity should not be viewed merely as an extension of the offline self, but rather as a dynamic, adaptive, and at times disruptive construction. This insight reinforces the study's second objective (O2) by demonstrating how performative dynamics shape public perception of creators and the consolidation of their image, while simultaneously broadening the expressive possibilities for their audiences. This perspective challenges longstanding paradigms of representation and opens new avenues for exploring

how performative expression can both articulate individual identities and reconfigure collective narratives.

Thirdly, digital communities exemplify how technological platforms foster novel forms of social cohesion rooted in shared interests, emotional narratives, and common values. This dimension addresses the third objective (O3), revealing how the discursive and symbolic practices of the creators examined contribute to the shaping of collective identities, enabling spaces of resistance and promoting inclusion against dominant hegemonic discourses. These communities not only amplify historically marginalised voices but also serve as vital arenas where the values and tensions of a globalised society are continuously renegotiated.

Beyond the specific patterns identified in this analysis, this study raises important questions regarding the ethical and cultural implications of these practices. On one hand, creators' increasing reliance on perceived authenticity introduces risks related to self-exposure and emotional vulnerability. On the other hand, the central role of platforms as mediators of social dynamics calls for critical scrutiny of how algorithms, moderation policies, and economic incentives influence these practices and their broader consequences.

Ultimately, this milestone invites us to reconsider social networks as vital spaces of cultural transformation. It confirms that the objectives of this study are not only relevant but essential for understanding how the rhetorical and symbolic practices of content creators shape both individual and collective identities. Far from being mere instruments of entertainment, TikTok and similar platforms function as arenas where the values, aspirations, and tensions of a globalised society are continuously renegotiated. Consequently, the intersection of technology, culture, and identity emerges as a crucial domain for analysing contemporary social dynamics and anticipating the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

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