

CHAPTER 30

**EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE
ON UNIVERSAL CULTURE:
TIKTOK LANGUAGE**

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Abstract

In modern world, where the effects of globalization are constantly discussed, mass communication tools have undergone change and transformation with the development of technology. In this process of transformation from one-way information flow to multi-directional information flow, the internet and social media are undoubtedly some of the most important factors that accelerate the ability of individuals to come together and form a community independent of the borders of the country where they are located on a global level. As a result of the democratization of the flow of information, the decrease in the dependence on certain races, social status, and economic privileges, and the developments in the field of human rights, many users today have a platform to make their voice heard. It is inevitable that the generations that grew up with this situation and were born into it will not be integrated into this system. The hashtags and sounds used in the application, which motivate its users not to miss new trends, are the clearest indicators of this situation. TikTok, one of the applications that emerged with globalization and played an active role in the formation of masses that can transcend the borders of nation-states, raises a generation within itself by creating TikTok concepts in English. At this point, although there are different applications offered for use within the framework of changing habits, the TikTok application seems worthy of research with the momentum it has gained in a short time. In this study, the most used hashtags in the TikTok application (fop, foryou, foryoupage, viral, TikTok, trending, duet, funny, comedy, trend) and which visual contents are created were examined and content analysis was conducted regarding the language used.

Keywords

Social media, TikTok, Universal Culture, Globalization, Hashtags

Introduction

The impact of technological developments on mass media and the emergence of new concepts and applications in this field has introduced new applications to our lives. These applications, which make users part of an alternative world by triggering the motives of staying connected and sharing, have managed to make the world more global than ever before with the widespread use of the internet and mobile devices that can access the internet in the 2000s. With the development of these devices with internet, communication has been undergoing significant changes and expanding in various directions. The discussion begins by identifying two phases in the evolution of communication. The first phase encompasses traditional media such as print, radio, television, cinema, analog audio/video recordings, posters, and other forms of advertising that can be explained as one way communication flow. In contrast, the current landscape includes both new media forms and a reevaluation of traditional ones within digital frameworks. This latter phase, postmedia, was coined by Félix Guattari to distinguish it theoretically from traditional media. A defining feature of the digital age is the capability for interactive collaboration among content creators in producing and distributing communication products across various platforms through multi-way interaction and self-expression (Szabo, 2021). Self-expression, one of the most basic human instincts in concept, has manifested itself in different ways throughout history according to human abilities. This motive, which manifested itself through cave art in prehistoric times, through many forms of art in the Renaissance, and through sharing on social media platforms in the 21st century, is essentially the adaptation of the same situation to changing conditions. In the development process of humanity, with the widespread use of the printing press, books, magazines, and newspapers, followed by the radio, television, and finally social media, the flow of information has become widespread, and the effects of this situation have led to important developments in their period. However, we can argue that there is a fundamental difference in the functioning of mass media and social media. As Onbaşıoğlu discussed, modern mass media has a one-way functioning structure, while social media is structured as a network based on mutuality (2022). For this reason, from its earliest and most primitive form, the mass media has been a tool monopolized by the producer of information and used to impose a certain idea, which seems to continue even today. At this point, the fact that social media creates a platform for users to present their ideas and does not bind the process of knowledge production to a certain capital group or social status can be interpreted as a step towards the democratization of the idea generation process. In the past, for ideas to spread, it was necessary to produce a work, to devote time and resources to this act, to use personal connections to get it published, and all the while to overcome obstacles based on racism and gender inequality. For example, many female authors in history such as George Eliot or Emily and Charlotte Brontë have used male pseudonyms to get their works published (Sanders, 2023). For this reason, “the others” who have not enjoyed the same privileges throughout history have been deprived of the process of producing and releasing their ideas and have not been able to gain representation. However, today there is a turning point in the process of knowledge production and dissemination as a result of the developments in the field of human rights and the space provided by social media to individuals regardless of their social privileges. This turning point is a phenomenon that is discussed to accelerate the globalization process and deserves its own studies withing globalization discussions. Within the framework of this space created by social media platforms, TikTok has managed to position itself in it by developing new methods. “TikTok’s participatory culture reveals the platform’s potential as a space for collective creativity and reinterpretation, shaped by interactions between creators and viewers” (Aşçı, 2023). With the rapid increase in the use of social media, it can be said that every element of daily life has changed shape, and these changes have brought new behavior patterns and new lifestyles. Cultural elements such as language, shopping, entertainment, kinship relations, tastes, lifestyles are evolving with the use of these tools. Therefore, this study will discuss globalization and its effects on language within the framework of the application TikTok. However, this study will not address every aspect of the contribution of TikTok and other social media platforms to the process of globalization but will present an analysis based on the example of English words that enter the daily lexicon.

Method

In order to measure the frequency of the usage of English hashtags to promote videos, 50 videos were randomly selected. Since TikTok is an algorithm-based application which curates videos specifically to the user of the account according to their areas of interests, the application often collects data through likes and dislikes, comments, the number of times the user replayed a video. To prevent any alteration and to ensure that the data collection is not affected by the areas of interests of previous users, incognito mode on the web browser Safari was used, therefore the TikTok algorithm was not active in the display of the said videos. To imitate and experience the FYP (For You Page) of a random user who starts scrolling to watch videos without creating an account on the website or on the application, the first 50 videos that were scrolled in one sitting. Out of 50 videos that were shown on the For You Page, 30 of them had English hashtags to indicate the theme or the classification of the video. The most used English hashtags in the videos were #fyp, #viral #edit #football #foryou and #global in this order. Each of these hashtags indicate an act of attempt to become popular or viral content. The change in communication technologies also affects the methods used in the research (Posos Devrani & Kesici, 2020). In order to ensure reliability and validity in the research, videos were included in the research with a newly opened TikTok account within a certain time period. Otherwise, an active, in-use TikTok account was not used, as videos similar to the videos viewed by the user according to their interests would be included in the sample. In addition, what is particularly emphasized in this study is the necessity of conducting research with an account that does not belong to anyone as a method. Certainly, research can be conducted with a larger sample, cross-sectional research can be conducted instead of enlarging the sample, but this would mean conducting another study. The aim of this study is rather to point out the transformation in the use of language.

Globalization

In its simplest form, globalization can be defined as a phenomenon in which the world has become economically, politically, and culturally connected and dependent, transcending the borders of nation-states and, accordingly, integrating societies, states, and systems. The integration of the systems and societies is a natural result of a global imitation of fashionable institutions and policies which are implemented by the societies that are perceived as the role models by the societies eager to progress enthusiastically and voluntarily (Meyer, 2007). However, this process of integration in social and political level may be ignored by the analysts as the complexity of the phenomenon is often interpreted in its economic effects (Balli et al., 2018).

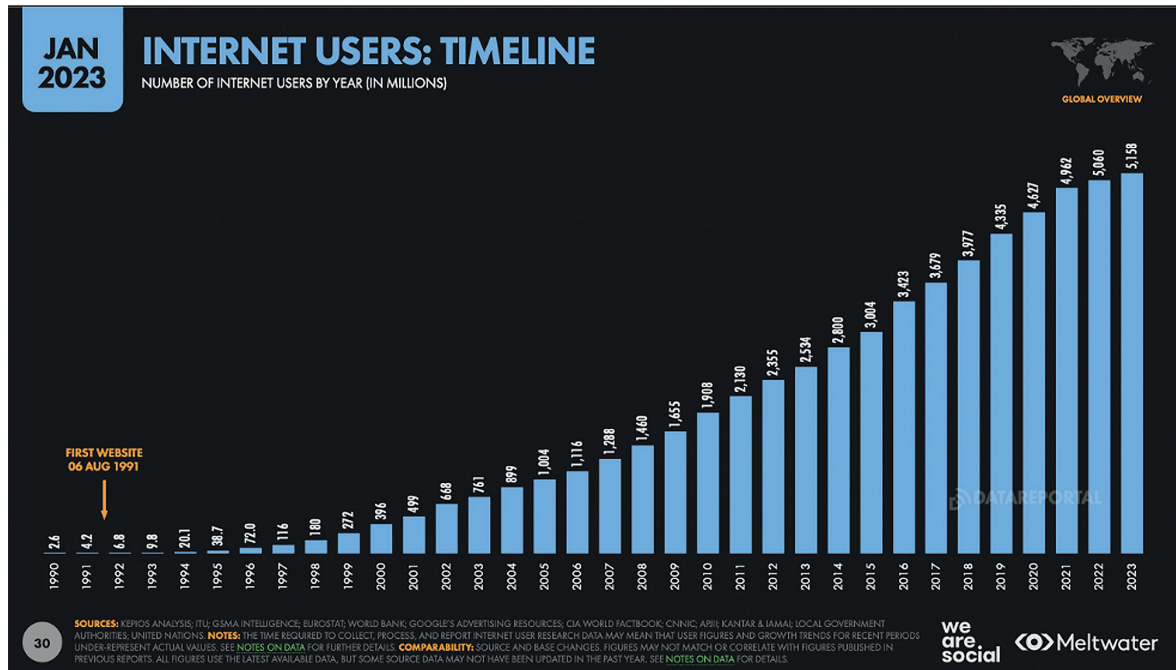
The concept of globalization, however, refers to much more than the spread of social relations and activities across regions and borders. It refers to the increasing magnitude or intensity of global flows, such that states and societies are increasingly involved in worldwide systems and networks of interaction. As a result, distant events and developments can have significant local effects, while local events can have important global repercussions. In other words, globalization represents a significant shift in the spatial reach of social relations and organization towards an interregional or intercontinental scale. (Held & McGrew, 2003)

Globalization is a multifaceted and controversial field; it is a phenomenon that cannot be reduced to a single definition. However, in the light of Held and McGrew's definition, it is possible to examine the mass media, which is one of the triggers of the gradual growth of the local impact of a distant event, and to make an analysis in this direction. Mass communication tools have undergone a transformation with the developing technology, and each mass communication tool has created its own demographic, leading to communalization specific to the tool and evolving into a two-way communication in which the tool and the user shape each other in the process. Being one of the modern mass media tools, the Internet, and more specifically social media, has become an integral part of daily life for the generation born during the period of its development and rise, causing the popularity of newspapers, radio, and television, which were available to previous generations, to be of much less importance to this demographic.

Globalization and Social Media

As many activities that form the basis of daily life, such as dialogue, shopping, socializing, work, meetings, and cultural events, can be done over the Internet, the number of users integrated into the system increases every year compared to the previous one (URL 1, 2023).

Figure 1
Number of Internet Users Over Time (URL 1, 2023)



With the increase in the number of users, the social media applications offered for use are also diversifying and being offered to users' tastes. "In contrast to traditional media, social media offers millions of people the opportunity to express and realize themselves on various platforms and issues due to the fact that social media consists of many platforms that everyone can easily reach and use" (Konuk, 2019). Owing to the instant communication model they offer; social media applications transcend the boundaries of the nation-state in the traditional sense and offer users the opportunity to interact with people from different geographies. While it is possible that local cultures, which is one of the points of the globalization debate, may melt into the global culture, it may also enable local cultures to reach a wider audience as it encourages intercultural dialogue. In this way, users can have the opportunity to encounter ideas, movements, and cultures that they have not encountered locally. Within that process, like-minded people can come together across nation-state borders and acquire a super-identity, and become part of a global community, regardless of their religion, nationality, and social status. Over time, these super-identities can become much more valuable to individuals than the identities they acquired before globalization. Another point where the internet and social media transcend the local compared to previous mass media is the language barrier. Although the Internet is a multilingual medium and therefore encourages people from different cultures to communicate, it also accelerates the process of idea generation and sharing by accepting English as the lingua franca of the world. MySpace, MSN, Facebook, X (Twitter), Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, Twitch, Reddit, and Tumblr, which are among the architects of this whole process, have been instrumental in the creation of many global communities based on the meta-identities, be it music and other hobbies, diet, religion and belief, sexual orientation, and gender identities.

TikTok

TikTok, which was first launched by the China-based ByteDance company in 2017, has managed to receive financial and technological investments by showing rapid growth (Wang & Chen, 2021). Although social media platforms founded by American entrepreneurs such as Mark Zuckerberg who founded Facebook in 2004 and later acquired Instagram and WhatsApp under the umbrella company META, have dominated social media habits of the users for many years, the rise of Chinese social media app TikTok has become the focus of discussions as China's soft power with its increasing user base and the impact it has created (Göksun & Samuk, 2023).

With the diversification of social media applications, it can be observed that there is also a diversification in the methods through which individuals express themselves on social media. Each social media application opens up new spaces for users with its methods of expression and contributes to the formation of trends. While YouTube provides space for users with relatively longer videos, Instagram focuses on sharing photos and shorter videos from the personal lives of the users. TikTok, which consists of videos that can be shot using the trending sounds within the application, has managed to stand out from other applications in terms of the way of sharing and has rapidly increased its popularity. "Compared to Instagram, one of the popular social media platforms, TikTok focuses more on short-duration videos compared to Instagram's static (normal sharing, etc.) and dynamic (story sharing, etc.) sharing" (Uğurhan & Yaşar, 2021). In this respect, TikTok continues to keep its users within the application by constantly renewing the content consumed without going beyond the focus periods of its users. In addition to TikTok's dynamism in keeping its users' focus alive, the features offered within the application allow users to diversify the ways of interaction during the content production process. Through live broadcasts, duets created by quoting another user's uploaded video, and a wide variety of sounds that can be added behind the videos, TikTok encourages its users to spend time within the application and collaborate with other users by the vibrant nature and the interactive algorithm of the app.

Tolentino (2019) describes TikTok as "a social network that has nothing to do with one's social network". TikTok is primarily algorithm-based, which sets it apart from other social media applications that are modeled around followers and followers. A TikTok video from a user with no followers can quickly gain an audience as it appears in other users' feeds. (Çiçeklioğlu & Ünal, 2021)

Additionally, hashtags, which are used by many social media platforms to group content with similar themes together, are also used on TikTok to group videos and recommend videos to users on themes that match their interests. Hashtags also influence the process of turning a video into viral content. "In this framework, users tend to listen more to the voice of the audience, refer to the opinions of fans, and consciously produce video content that suits their preferences in order to get more platform recommendations and therefore likes from the audience" (Yarar Koçer, 2021). Although the demographics of TikTok cannot be determined with precise statistics, users between the ages of 18 and 34 make up 71% of total users according to the report by We Are Social and Meltwater (2023). However, since there has not been a more reliable statistic, it can still be included in this research to give an approximate insight. In the light of this information, the foundations of the analysis to be presented on the TikTok user base and its effects on globalization can be much more solid.

TikTok and Türkiye

The global popularity of TikTok is mirrored in its widespread adoption in Türkiye, where social media penetration stands at 66.8% of the population, surpassing the global average. Recent advertising-based research indicates that TikTok's user base in Türkiye has reached 31.1 million (we are social, 2024). Although the platform's presence in Türkiye predates its official establishment, TikTok formally started its operations in the country in 2021 through the establishment of a local entity and the appointment of a country representative (Bilişim Hukuk Derneği, 2021). The platform's rapid popularization in Türkiye coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent period. In 2023, TikTok achieved prominence as the most downloaded mobile application in Türkiye, amassing 37.88 million downloads, and concurrently emerged as the non-gaming application with the highest in-app spending, totaling 17.7 million dollars (Statista, 2024). These metrics suggest that despite its relatively late market entry compared to other social media platforms, TikTok has experienced expeditious user adoption and engagement within the Turkish digital ecosystem.

TikTok and Globalization

Each social media platform has its own communication language and demographics. Social media strategists, politicians, and brand representatives who are aware of this situation try to take the right step by producing application-based discourse instead of creating a single social media language. Among these applications, TikTok, which can be perceived as relatively new compared to the other social media platforms, has managed to become one of the most downloaded social media platforms of recent years and has become a platform that needs to be analyzed in the context of globalization debates. TikTok is essentially a social media platform where short videos are made using both original and popular music and sound recordings. Unlike other apps, the focus is on videos, not photos and text. It also has a for you page that encourages people to watch new videos which is based on a calculated algorithm that allows for endless scrolling without any chronology or pattern. Hashtags can provide us an insight to understand the difference between TikTok and its closest competitor, Instagram. While the most used hashtags of all time shared on Instagram are: #love, #instagood, #fashion, #photooftheday, #instagram, #art, #beautiful, #nature, and #picoftheday, the most used hashtags of all time on the TikTok application are #fyp, #foryou, #foryoupage, #viral, #tiktok, #trending, #duet, #funny, #comedy, and #trend (We Are Social & Meltwater, n.d). Each of the hashtags indicate a different purpose. The hashtags #fyp, #foryou, #foryoupage refer to the same section of the TikTok app where videos are collected and curated according to the areas of interests of the users. For this reason, For You Page changes from user to user, making it a unique and specifically curated personal area. The use of the variations of For You Page hashtags can show the uploaded content in the for you pages of the users, which eventually can turn the uploaded content into a viral content. Another group of hashtags, #viral, #trending, and #trend refer to the popularity of the content. A content can be viral or trend in different paces and through different methods. One of the most efficient and easy ways of achieving popularity is using such hashtags to help the content appear in more for you pages. The implication of this situation can be that the content uploaded to TikTok is an attempt to keep up with the ever-changing trends. Unlike other social media applications, the agenda and trends change much faster on TikTok, which makes users want to be constantly on the lookout for new trends. Instead of motivating the user to share videos based on the context of the content, TikTok motivates to appear on somebody else's for you page with the use of trends and sounds. While platforms such as Instagram or X/Twitter were initially rooted in the concept of the followers being the creator's main target audience, they have since then allowed ways for algorithm to show the user random or trend-based content mimicking the TikTok tactic. In this sense, it can be interpreted that TikTok created a new path regarding the algorithm and the feed page and managed to influence other social media platforms to adapt their style.

Because most of the videos shot on the application are created by adding videos to already existing sounds; even the background sound, which is one of the basic elements that make up a TikTok video, is a viral sound. Koçer Yarar highlights how TikTok original sounds and music by artists foster individual expression within the TikTok community, reinforcing the notion that the platform's approach is distinct from that of Instagram or Twitter, which at first prioritized following as the primary audience for content providers. "Music and sounds add a new dimension to the expression and creativity of the TikTok community. The creative effects offered within the application offer users new, unique, and entertaining possibilities for storytelling, and are supported by real-time and interactive music processing technologies" (Yarar Koçer, 2021).

A change can be observed in the process between the time it takes for a trend to form and become widespread in the pre-social media periods and for it to transcend the borders of nation-states, and the time it takes to go viral and become widespread on TikTok. For this reason, TikTok popularizes its own concepts with English words over time, and an in-app language is formed through the concepts that go viral on TikTok. The fact that users unite under the identity of "TikTokers" regardless of their locations and all the social privileges and disadvantages it brings with it and communicate through English hashtags and viral sounds shows the signs of a new user behavior in social media in terms of the effects of globalization.

TikTok's effect on users' mother tongues is another important point in the discussions on the effects of TikTok on globalization. The internet and technology have played a major role in the process of English becoming a global language. Martin Mares (2016) suggests that the hegemony of the English

language helps to create international community of English-speaking individuals all around the world. It contributes to exchange information and communicate with people who share common interests, though there are negative outcomes as well. In this process, whether non-English-speaking nation-states see English as a threat is a topic that continues to be analyzed through the localization of terms that have passed from English. According to the view that classifies it as *lingua franca*, English has become a culturally neutral language, regardless of whether it is the native language of its speakers or not. Dailey-O’Cain (2017) argues that English is no longer a foreign language belonging to a particular culture or country but belongs to everyone equally and suggests that nation-states should not see English as a threat. Nevertheless, with the development of technology and the internet, nation-states have made localization efforts as English terms in these fields have become dominant in their native languages.

Similar efforts have been made for Turkish. English concepts that have circulated through social media and technology have been translated into Turkish. One of the words that can be an example of this situation is the word selfie, which has been translated into Turkish as özçekim (Türk Dil Kurumu Sözlükleri, n.d.). However, it can be said that the process of the introduction and spread of popular culture elements shaped by the developments in technology have become swifter. As a result of this acceleration, foreign language words that come into use are integrated in several different ways.

Androutsopoulos (2015, pp. 189-90) gives the example of “copy-paste language”, where participants in a social media environment such as Facebook can take language fragments from song lyrics or aphorisms from the web and paste them into online writing spaces. This is of interest in a digitally mediated environment because the linguistic resources offered by such environments increase the potential for different kinds of transidiomatic practices, going beyond the codes that the same participants might use in a non-networked environment. (Dailey-O’Cain, 2017)

Androutsopoulos’ analysis of the Facebook posts of Greek and German youth can be interpreted and it can shed light to the current discussion on TikTok and globalism. Social media consists of diverse platforms and formats varying from audios, photos and videos. Regardless of the social medium, there are similarities in the interaction practices of the globalizing world. While concepts in English are incorporated into the native language, they are put into use without being subject to the grammar rules of the target language. Words such as “ghosting”, “gatekeeping”, “love-bomb”, “girlboss”, “gaslight”, “red flag” and “rizz”, which was chosen as the word of the year by Oxford Languages (2024) after being popularized by Generation Z on TikTok, can be given as examples of this situation. It is not possible for these rapidly produced and consumed concepts to be included in the process of Turkishization due to the speed of the process that a concept becomes viral. When local languages may not compete with the quickly emerging words defining certain concepts, the number of foreign words in a language may increase. As *lingua franca*, English globally became the medium that connects the masses through traditional and social media and incorporated into local languages. For this reason, it can be said that TikTok influences the use of these words in English.

Conclusion

In modern world, where the effects of globalization are constantly discussed, mass communication tools have undergone change and transformation significantly with the development of technology. In this process of transformation from one-way information flow to multi-directional information flow, the internet and social media are undoubtedly some of the most important factors that accelerate the ability of individuals to come together and form a community exceeding the borders of the country where they are located on a global level. As a result of the democratization of the flow of information, the decrease in the dependence on certain races, social status, and economic privileges, and the developments in the field of human rights, many users today have a platform to make their voice heard. It is inevitable that the generations that grew up with this situation and were born into it will not be integrated into this system. The system in question, in this case the age of social media and the complexities and the privileges it brings to the everyday life, is a phenomenon that affects the view of certain demographics on various topics diversifying from politics to popular culture, and from the approach to language

to social justice. The agents of this system, social media apps such as Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, Twitch, Reddit and Tumblr have successfully created their own demographics. Among all the apps, TikTok has proved its difference by attracting the attention of Gen-Z. The application offered various features to keep its users active and interacted within the app. The hashtags and sounds used in the application, which motivate its users not to miss new trends, are the clearest indicators of this situation. In order to highlight that there is link between the hashtags and the effects of globalism, 50 videos were scrolled in one sitting to simulate a random user's TikTok experience without creating an account. 30 videos out of 50 having English hashtags such as #fyp, #viral #edit #football #foryou and #global shows that users tend to use English hashtags on the app to be relevant and popular. TikTok, one of the applications that emerged as a result of the developments of globalization, played an active role in the formation of masses that can transcend the borders of nation-states, and have been raising a generation within itself by creating TikTok concepts in English. In summary, this study examines the cultural extensions of TikTok, newly emerging social media platform. As a cultural indicator, language is transformed by being influenced by both traditional and new media. TikTok, which has a global impact on language evolution, is perceived as a tool of this evolution, as it highlights certain hashtags with the rapid spread of short videos. The systematic analysis of TikTok videos analyzed over a defined period in this study also demonstrates this. It can be concluded that new research on different social events and concepts can be conducted using the methodology employed in this research. Although there are different applications offered for use within the framework of changing habits, the TikTok application seems worthy of research with the momentum it has gained in a short time. For this reason, this study aims to promote further interests on the intersection of TikTok and globalization.

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