

From Interaction to Algorithmic Guidance: A Digital Ethnographic Study on the Reconfiguration of Communicative Action Among a Sample of TikTok Users in Algeria.

من التفاعل إلى التوجيه الخوارزمي: دراسة اثنوغرافية رقمية لإعادة تشكيل الفعل الاتصالي لدى عينة من مستخدمي التيك توك في الجزائر.

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الملخص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل كيفية إعادة تشكيل الفعل الاتصالي لدى مستخدمي منصة TikTok في الجزائر تحت تأثير التوجيه الخوارزمي، مع التركيز على استراتيجيات التفاعل، تمثيلات الهوية الرقمية، والتحويلات السوسيوثقافية الناتجة عن اقتصاد الانتباه، وقد اعتمدت الدراسة منهجاً كفيئاً قائماً على الإثنوغرافيا الرقمية من خلال الملاحظة بالمشاركة داخل الفضاء الرقمي، مما يسمح بفهم الممارسات الاتصالية في سياقها الطبيعي داخل المنصة، كما شمل مجتمع البحث مستخدمي TikTok في الجزائر باعتبارهم فاعلين رقميين ضمن بيئة خاضعة لمنطق الخوارزميات، وتكونت العينة من 12 ناشطاً رقمياً (صناع محتوى ومستخدمين فاعلين) تم اختيارهم قصدياً بناءً على معيار الإشباع المعلوماتي، كما اعتمدت الدراسة على 10 مقابلات شبه موجهة لاستكشاف أساليب التفاعل مع الخوارزمية وتمثيلات الهوية الرقمية، إضافة إلى تحليل محتوى 50 فيديو رقمياً كوحدة تحليل أساسية لرصد أنماط الإنتاج والتلقي، مع متابعة يومية لصفحة (FYP) "For You" لفهم آليات الانتقاء الخوارزمي، وعليه يتميز هذا البحث بتوظيف تكامل منهجي بين الملاحظة بالمشاركة، المقابلات وتحليل المحتوى لفهم ديناميكيات الفعل الاتصالي في بيئة رقمية خاضعة للتوجيه الخوارزمي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التوجيه الخوارزمي؛ الفعل الاتصالي الرقمي؛ الإثنوغرافيا الرقمية؛ الهوية الرقمية؛ اقتصاد الانتباه.

Abstract:

This study aims to analyze how communicative action among TikTok users in Algeria is being reshaped under algorithmic guidance, with a particular focus on interaction strategies, digital identity representations, and the socio-cultural transformations emerging from the attention economy. The research adopts a qualitative approach grounded in digital ethnography, relying on participant observation within the digital space. This approach

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enables an understanding of communicative practices in their natural context within the platform.

The research population comprises all TikTok users in Algeria, conceptualized as digital actors operating within an algorithmically structured environment. The human sample consists of 12 digital activists (content creators and active users) selected purposively according to the criterion of informational saturation. In addition, the study employs 10 semi-structured interviews to deepen the qualitative understanding of user interactions with algorithms and constructions of digital identity.

Furthermore, content analysis of 50 digital videos was conducted as a primary analytical unit to identify patterns of production and reception, alongside daily tracking of the “For You” Page (FYP) during the study period to examine mechanisms of algorithmic selection and recommendation. Accordingly, the study integrates participant observation, interviews, and content analysis in a methodological triangulation designed to capture the dynamics of communicative action within an algorithmically mediated digital environment.

KEYWORDS: Algorithmic guidance; Digital communicative action; Digital ethnography; Digital identity; Attention economy.

Introduction:

In the past decade, the digital sphere has undergone a qualitative transformation in the structure of communicative action. Communication is no longer solely based on direct human interaction or the free circulation of content; rather, it has become increasingly governed by the logic of algorithmic guidance adopted by major digital platforms, most notably TikTok. This emerging digital environment has produced hybrid communicative patterns in which the roles of producer and recipient are blurred, and in which the criteria of visibility, circulation, and influence are reconfigured through complex algorithmic mechanisms grounded in big data analytics and user behavior.

Within the Algerian context, this transformation is particularly significant given the marked increase in the use of digital platforms among youth populations, and their evolution into a central space for self-expression, content creation, and social interaction. More importantly, these platforms have become sites for the reconfiguration of cultural and value-based perceptions within society. This situation underscores the need for a digital ethnographic approach capable of accessing users’ everyday practices, capturing their representations and lived experiences, and understanding how they interact with algorithmic structures that frame their digital presence and redirect their communicative behavior.

Furthermore, this study seeks to provide an in-depth analysis of the dialectical relationship between human agency and algorithmic guidance by exploring the ways in which TikTok users in Algeria reshape their communicative practices within this automated digital environment. It also aims to deconstruct the usage strategies employed by individuals to enhance visibility and achieve engagement, and to understand the impact of algorithms on the reproduction of patterns of digital expression and representation, including the construction of

digital identity and self-representation.

In addition, the study aims to analyze the socio-cultural dimensions of these transformations by examining the extent to which these practices contribute to the reproduction of dominant social values or, alternatively, foster emerging shifts in the cultural structure of Algerian society. The significance of this study lies in its integration of the theoretical framework of digital communication studies with a field-based ethnographic approach, thereby enabling the production of rigorous scientific knowledge that contributes to a deeper understanding of communicative transformations in Arab digital environments and enriches the international academic literature in this field.

Building on the above, the central research problem of this study is articulated through the following question:

How do TikTok algorithms reshape communicative action among users in Algeria within their socio-cultural context?

This main research question is further broken down into the following sub-questions:

- What strategies and tactics do Algerian users adopt to adapt to algorithmic logic and to maximize visibility and engagement within the platform?
- How do algorithmic guidance mechanisms influence the construction of digital identity and self-representations among users, particularly in the context of the tension between authentic expression and the requirements of virality and dissemination?
- To what extent do communicative practices on TikTok contribute to the reproduction of prevailing social values and norms within Algerian society, or alternatively, to the emergence of new cultural transformations?

Study Concepts :

Algorithmic guidance: refers to the system of computational rules and predictive mechanisms employed by digital platforms such as TikTok¹ to regulate, organize, and personalize content flows for users². This system is based on the analysis of behavioral data and interaction patterns³, ultimately reshaping visibility, circulation, and influence within the digital space⁴. In this study, algorithmic governance is operationalized through the following indicators: patterns of content appearance on the “For You” page (frequency, diversity, and duration of exposure), performance metrics (views, likes, comments, shares), the timing of publication and its relationship to reach levels, the use of hashtags and trending sounds and their impact on dissemination, and user practices aimed at “decoding” the algorithm (such as reposting, content modification, and testing different formats).

Digital Communicative Action : refers to the set of communicative practices performed by individuals⁵ within digital environments, where the human dimension intersects with

technological mediation⁶. It is manifested through content creation, dissemination⁷, and interaction within a context structured by algorithmic systems that influence standards of acceptance, visibility, and impact⁸. In this study, digital communicative action is measured through: analysis of content types (entertainment, educational, critical, satirical, etc.), identification of forms of interaction (comments, duets, sound reuse, sharing), measurement of interaction intensity (engagement rate per post), analysis of language and symbolic systems used (text, emojis, music), and tracking user roles (producer, consumer, influencer, follower).

Digital Ethnography : is a qualitative research methodology focused on studying cultural and social practices within digital environments through participant observation⁹, interaction tracking, and interpretation of meanings produced by actors within their natural digital contexts¹⁰. In this study, digital ethnography is applied through: participant observation within the platform (creation of a research account with limited interaction), tracking a purposive sample of Algerian users over a defined period, content analysis of selected videos, and the documentation of digital field notes to identify recurring patterns.

Digital Identity : refers to the representational structure through which users construct and present themselves within digital spaces¹¹. It is shaped by a combination of posted content, visual presentation, and interaction patterns, within a framework influenced by platform standards and algorithmic visibility mechanisms¹². In this study, digital identity is measured through: analysis of profile elements (profile picture, bio, links), examination of recurring content themes, identification of self-presentation styles (spontaneous, performative, or professional), analysis of audience interaction (responses and relationship-building), and comparison between declared identity and algorithm-driven strategies (adaptation versus authenticity).

Attention Economy : refers to the conceptualization of user attention as a scarce resource within digital environments¹³, where platforms and content creators compete to capture and sustain it through algorithmic systems designed to maximize watch time and engagement¹⁴. In this study, the attention economy is measured through: video watch duration and completion rates, frequency of engagement with the same account or content type, use of attention-grabbing elements (hooks) in the first seconds of videos, analysis of trending content and its influence on attention direction, and observation of content creators' strategies for retention (suspense, storytelling, emotional stimulation).

Theoretical Framework

The present study adopts the "Algorithmic Governance" approach as its central theoretical framework, given its strong capacity to explain how algorithms reshape communicative action within digital platforms such as TikTok. This transformation occurs through the regulation of information flows, as well as the guidance of attention and interaction. This approach is closely associated with the work of Tarleton Gillespie¹⁵, one of the leading theorists in the study of algorithmic systems and their role in structuring digital

life, alongside other scholars in digital media and platform studies.

Algorithmic governance is grounded in the idea that algorithms are no longer neutral technical tools; rather, they function as structural actors exercising an “invisible form of power” within digital space. In this sense, algorithms¹⁶:

- Organize content ranking and determine what becomes visible and what is marginalized.
- Reshape interaction patterns by amplifying certain types of content based on engagement metrics.
- Create a guided communicative environment that redefines the criteria of visibility, acceptance, and virality.
- Rely on big data analytics to predict and steer user behavior.
- Influence the production of meaning and symbolic systems within digital culture.

Theoretical Assumptions of Algorithmic Governance

This approach is based on a set of core theoretical assumptions:

- ✓ Algorithms as non-neutral social actors: Algorithms embody embedded decisions, values, and priorities that shape user experiences, rather than functioning as purely technical instruments.
- ✓ Reconfiguration of communicative action: Digital interaction is no longer entirely free or spontaneous; instead, it is implicitly structured by algorithmic logics that define the conditions of visibility and influence.¹⁷
- ✓ Algorithmic power: A new form of power emerges through the control of information circulation and the distribution of attention within digital environments.
- ✓ User adaptability: Users are not passive recipients; rather, they actively develop strategies to adapt to algorithmic systems and exploit them to enhance visibility and engagement.
- ✓ Extended socio-cultural impact: The influence of algorithms extends beyond digital interaction, contributing to the reshaping of social values, norms, and cultural representations.¹⁸

Operational Integration with the Study Objectives

Based on the assumptions of algorithmic governance as articulated by Tarleton Gillespie, this framework can be methodologically aligned with the objectives of the present

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study in order to understand how TikTok algorithms reshape communicative action in the Algerian context.

The objective of analyzing the impact of algorithms on interaction patterns and content production aligns with the assumption that algorithms are non-neutral actors exercising regulatory power over content circulation, thereby determining what is seen, circulated, and amplified.

Similarly, the objective of identifying user adaptation strategies corresponds to the assumption that users negotiate algorithmic power by developing tactics to increase visibility and maximize engagement within platform constraints.

The objective of exploring digital identity construction reflects the assumption that algorithms participate in reshaping self-representation, as users oscillate between authentic expression and conformity to virality-driven norms.

Furthermore, the objective of examining the relationship between communicative practices and the reconfiguration of social values aligns with the assumption of the socio-cultural extension of algorithmic influence, whereby algorithms contribute either to the reproduction or transformation of social norms.

Finally, the objective of producing a comprehensive socio-cultural interpretation is grounded in the assumption that algorithmic governance does not operate in isolation, but interacts dynamically with specific cultural and social contexts. This allows for a complex interpretive reading that connects technical structures with communicative practices within Algerian society.

Research Methodology :

This study adopts a qualitative research design based on Digital Ethnography as the most appropriate methodological approach for analyzing the reconfiguration of communicative action within social media environments, particularly on the TikTok platform.

The selection of this methodology is theoretically and empirically justified by its capacity to examine communicative practices in their natural digital context through participant observation and the tracking of users' everyday interactions. This approach enables a deeper understanding of the meanings produced by social actors in their relationship with algorithmic structures¹⁹. Digital ethnography is defined as a qualitative research approach that involves immersive engagement within digital environments through observational research accounts, systematic tracking of user behavior and interactions, and content analysis of online posts as socially and culturally embedded practices rich in meaning²⁰.

The relevance of this methodology to the present study lies in its ability to unpack the dialectical relationship between communicative action and algorithmic governance. It allows

for the systematic observation of how Algerian users adapt to platform logic, and how they reconstruct interaction patterns and manage digital identities within an algorithmically structured environment.

Moreover, this approach enables the integration of direct observation of digital behavior with qualitative data analysis (including content, comments, and interactions), thereby offering an in-depth understanding of the socio-cultural transformations associated with everyday use of digital platforms. Accordingly, digital ethnography does not merely describe digital phenomena; rather, it extends to their interpretation within their broader social and cultural contexts. This makes it particularly suitable for achieving the objectives of the study and for understanding the dynamics of interaction between users and algorithms within the Algerian digital environment.

Research Population

The research population of this study is defined as the totality of TikTok users in Algeria, conceptualized as digital actors who engage in diverse communicative practices within an algorithmically governed environment. This population includes all active users who produce or interact with content through posting, commenting, or interactive viewing behaviors.

Operationally, the research population is defined as the digital human space composed of Algerian individuals who use TikTok regularly during the study period, whether as content creators, followers, or active participants. These users directly contribute to the production of interactive data that is subsequently organized and guided by platform algorithms.

The delineation of this population is scientifically justified by the nature of the research problem, which concerns the reconfiguration of communicative action under algorithmic influence. This necessitates studying actors within their actual digital environment rather than in abstract or external settings, in accordance with the principles of digital ethnography, which emphasizes everyday practices in their natural context.

Moreover, the large-scale adoption of the platform in Algeria, along with the diversity of usage patterns (including entertainment, cultural, social, and commercial uses), requires that users be considered a heterogeneous research population in terms of communicative roles, while simultaneously being unified by their exposure to the same algorithmic infrastructure that structures interaction and visibility.

Accordingly, this definition enables an analysis of the interactive relationship between users and algorithms within a real socio-cultural context, while ensuring an accurate representation of the phenomenon in terms of its density, diversity, and communicative dynamics.

Research Sample :

The research sample in this study is defined in accordance with the methodological logic of digital ethnography, specifically as a purposive sample, supported by principles of theoretical sampling. This choice is grounded in the nature of the research problem, which

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seeks to understand the in-depth mechanisms through which communicative action is reconfigured under algorithmic governance on TikTok within the Algerian context, rather than aiming for statistical generalization.

Operationally, the sample refers to a selected group of active Algerian TikTok users, chosen according to precise criteria including intensity of platform use, diversity of communicative roles (content creators, active interactors, and followers), level of engagement with digital content, and the ability to consistently produce or interact with content during the study period, which extends from September 2025 to April 2026 (approximately eight months).

The human sample consists of 12 Algerian digital actors (content creators and active users), selected purposively based on the criterion of information saturation. In addition, 10 semi-structured interviews were conducted with these participants in order to deepen the qualitative understanding of algorithmic interaction strategies and digital identity constructions. Furthermore, a content analysis of 50 digital videos was carried out as a primary analytical unit for examining patterns of production and reception within the platform.

The study also includes systematic daily tracking of the “For You” Page (FYP) throughout the research period in order to observe mechanisms of algorithmic selection, visibility criteria, and content recommendation dynamics, given that this space represents the central environment where communicative action is indirectly reshaped.

The selection of this sample is scientifically justified by the complex and contextual nature of the phenomenon under study, which requires focusing on information-rich cases capable of providing in-depth insights into strategies of algorithmic adaptation, processes of digital identity construction, and interaction patterns within an algorithmically curated environment.

Moreover, the determination of sample size is guided by the principle of theoretical saturation, whereby sampling is concluded when additional data no longer yield new analytically significant insights, whether in interviews, content analysis, or direct observation of the “For You” feed.

Accordingly, the selected sample—comprising human participants (12 users), analytical units (50 videos), tracking data (FYP observation), and interpretive material (10 interviews)—does not aim at quantitative representativeness. Rather, it seeks to deepen qualitative understanding of communicative action dynamics within a socio-digital context governed by algorithmic guidance, thereby enabling a comprehensive ethnographic interpretation of the relationship between users and algorithms in the Algerian setting.

Data Collection Instruments :

The nature of this study necessitates the use of an integrated set of qualitative data collection instruments that are consistent with the principles of digital ethnography. Within this framework, digital participant observation is considered the central and primary instrument.

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Digital participant observation is defined as the researcher's immersion within the platform's digital environment through a dedicated research account, enabling the tracking of user behavior in its natural context. This includes observing interaction patterns, content production mechanisms, and strategies of adaptation to algorithmic logic, without interfering in ongoing interactions. All observations are systematically recorded in the form of digital field notes.

The selection of this instrument is scientifically justified by the fact that the phenomenon under investigation—the reconfiguration of communicative action under algorithmic governance—cannot be accurately captured through conventional quantitative tools. This is because it requires a deep contextual understanding of digital practices as they are actually performed within virtual social environments, rather than as they are merely reported.

This primary instrument is complemented by a supporting tool, namely digital content analysis, which is employed to examine videos, comments, hashtags, and interaction patterns as semantic data reflecting the communicative structures reshaped by platform algorithms. In addition, semi-structured interviews are conducted with a sample of Algerian users to explore their subjective perceptions of algorithmic systems and their strategies for interacting with them.

Accordingly, the data collection framework in this study is not based on a single isolated instrument, but rather on an integrated system of qualitative tools led by digital participant observation, and supported by content analysis and interviews. This methodological triangulation enables a rigorous ethnographic understanding of the interactive relationship between users and algorithms within a complex socio-cultural context.

Applied Aspect of the Study:

Table 01 : Analysis of the Participant Observation Grid:

Dimension	Indicators	Procedural Description	Field Notes
Publishing Context	Publishing time, account type	Active Algerian accounts (18–30 years), posts in the evening between 18:00–23:00	Most videos are posted during peak evening hours, reflecting an implicit awareness of the algorithm's timing.
Content Type	Entertainment / Social / Educational	Sample of 30 videos	70% entertainment content, 20% social, 10% educational.
Algorithmic Interaction	Views, Likes	Average of 5K–200K views	Significant variation between accounts, with clear amplification of some videos without direct behavioral explanation.

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Appearance on "For You"	Frequency of appearance	Daily monitoring for 10 days	Trending content appears even from small accounts, confirming algorithmic intervention.
User Strategies	Trends, Hashtags	Extensive use of trends	Users replicate the same formats to achieve virality.
Interaction Patterns	Comments, Duets	High engagement with short content	Comments are often brief and emotional (laughter, support, quick criticism).
Self-Representation	Self-presentation style	Individual / Performative	Clear tendency towards "performing the self" theatrically.
Cultural Indicators	Values, Symbols	Algerian social references	Strong presence of local dialect and popular cultural symbols.

Source : Prepared by the researcher, based on the Digital Participant Observation Grid Notebook.

The qualitative reading, based on participant observation, reveals that communicative action within TikTok in the Algerian context is undergoing a structural shift. It has transformed from spontaneous, free expression into a practice implicitly organized by an invisible algorithmic logic, which reshapes both the conditions of content production and reception. This shift is not only apparent in the nature of the content but also in the "user's awareness" of how the platform functions. Gradually, what can be termed as an "algorithmic intuition" is developing, i.e., the users' ability to internalize unwritten rules governing visibility—such as posting times, video length, attention-grabbing structures in the first few seconds, and the use of trending hashtags and sounds. This intuition is not acquired through direct teaching but through daily interaction with the algorithmic system, making the user a participant who learns from the platform as much as they are directed by it.

In this context, it is evident that communicative action is no longer merely individual expression; it has become a pre-designed practice according to both algorithmic expectations and audience behavior. This reflects a shift from "communication as expression" to "communication as a strategy of visibility." This transformation is directly related to the dominance of the attention economy, where the intrinsic value of content is tied more to its ability to attract attention and extend viewing time, rather than its cognitive depth or social

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significance. Therefore, it is observed that the narrative structure of content is leaning towards speed, conciseness, and instant gratification, reinforcing a communicative pattern based on time segmentation and short attention spans. On the other hand, observation reveals that digital identity within the platform is evolving towards what can be described as "performative identity" or "self-performance." The digital self is no longer a direct reflection of the real self, but a continually reshaped construct that adapts to the demands of visibility and virality. The user does not present their authentic self but rather curates an image that is consumable both visually and interactively. This makes identity an ongoing project of "algorithmic optimization" of the self. This performance is not without internal tension, as the desire for authentic expression is at odds with the pressure to comply with invisible algorithmic rules that determine what is visible. Social acceptance, therefore, becomes contingent upon how well the content aligns with the logic of virality.

Moreover, the data suggests that this shift extends beyond the individual dimension to the socio-cultural structure. It leads to the reproduction of values and norms that tend towards entertainment, speed, and symbolic consumption, at the expense of depth and reflection. In this sense, the algorithm does not merely act as a technical mediator; it is a governing force that reshapes communicative action itself, redefining what constitutes "good" or "viewable" content. Ultimately, this leads to a redefinition of users' relationship with time, attention, self, and the other within the digital space.

Table 02 : Content Type

Content Type	Frequency	Percentage
Entertainment	36	72%
Social	9	18%
Educational	5	10%
Total	50	100%

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on the outputs of SPSS v25.

The results indicate that entertainment content dominates, comprising 72% of the total, clearly reflecting the dominance of the attention economy logic within TikTok, where content capable of attracting quick views and instant interactions is prioritized. In contrast, social content accounts for only 18%, while educational content comprises just 10%, suggesting a decline in the cognitive function of digital content in favor of its entertainment value. Qualitatively, this distribution reveals a reorganization of communicative action, shifting towards rapid consumption rather than knowledge production. This directly reflects the algorithmic selection's influence in promoting high-engagement content and reducing the presence of deeper content.

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Table 03 : Narrative Structure

Narrative Structure	Frequency	Percentage
Performative	30	60%
Storytelling	15	30%
Live Broadcast	5	10%
Total	50	100%

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on the outputs of SPSS v25

The results show that the performative structure leads with 60%, indicating that users significantly rely on self-performance within the digital space. Meanwhile, storytelling accounts for 30%, and live broadcasting makes up only 10%. This distribution reflects a shift in communicative action towards "performative action," where content is designed to be more visually presentable than a direct communicative discourse. Qualitatively, this indicates that digital identity is being reformed through representation and performance, not through natural narration or direct interaction, aligning with the algorithmic platform's preference for visually intensive content.

Table04 : Hook & Engagement Devices

Engagement Devices	Frequency	Percentage
Hook in the first 3 seconds	42	84%
Trending Music	38	76%
Fast Editing	35	70%
Visual Effects	28	56%
Total (Repeated per element)	—	—

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on the outputs of SPSS v25.

The data reveals that 84% of videos rely on a strong hook in the first few seconds, reflecting the dominance of an algorithmic logic that prioritizes the retention rate. Additionally, the use of trending music (76%) and fast editing (70%) reflects a clear strategy to enhance content virality within the algorithmic system. Qualitatively, this reveals a significant shift in communicative action towards "designing attention" rather than producing meaning. The primary goal becomes keeping users within the video for as long as possible, rather than conveying cognitive or communicative content in the traditional sense.

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Table 05 : Hashtags & Algorithmic Signals

Hashtags Used	Frequency	Percentage
#fyp / #viral	25	50%
Local Trending Hashtags	15	30%
Personal Hashtags	10	20%
Total	50	100%

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on the outputs of SPSS v25.

The results indicate that general hashtags related to virality (#fyp, #viral) make up 50% of usage, reflecting a widespread awareness of their role in enhancing visibility within TikTok's algorithms. In contrast, local trending hashtags account for 30%, and personal hashtags make up only 20%. Qualitatively, this suggests that users are not only producing content but are also embedding intentional "algorithmic signals" designed to indirectly manipulate the selection logic. This reflects the emergence of a "practical algorithmic awareness" among users.

Table 06: Identity Representation

Identity Type	Frequency	Percentage
Individual/Performative	40	80%
Cultural/Collective	8	16%
Symbolic/Abstract	2	4%
Total	50	100%

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on the outputs of SPSS v25.

The results indicate that individual performative representation dominates with 80%, reflecting the transformation of digital identity into a "self-presentation" project, directed toward both the audience and the algorithm simultaneously. Meanwhile, cultural and collective representations remain limited (16%), and symbolic representations are marginal (4%). Qualitatively, this suggests that identity within the platform is no longer primarily a collective social expression but has become a "digital performance identity" that is continually reshaped according to the criteria of visibility and shareability. This reflects the direct influence of the algorithmic structure on shaping digital selves.

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Table 07 : Values & Norms

Value Type	Frequency	Percentage
Entertainment/Consumer	30	60%
Social	15	30%
Educational/Cognitive	5	10%
Total	50	100%

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on the outputs of SPSS v25.

The results highlight the dominance of entertainment and consumer values, comprising 60% of the content, compared to 30% for social values and only 10% for educational or cognitive values. This distribution reflects a shift in the value system within the digital space, orienting it more towards entertainment and consumption, which aligns with the logic of the attention economy. Qualitatively, this indicates that communicative action within the platform does not merely reproduce social values but also reorganizes their priorities, with the most visually engaging and interactive values becoming the most widespread and influential.

Analysis of Semi-Structured Interviews:

First Axis: Interaction with Algorithms

The responses from the interviewees indicated that the experience of using TikTok is directly linked to the ability to reach an audience. The platform is perceived as a space governed by an “invisible dissemination mechanism” that determines who is visible and who remains marginalized. Most participants noted that the type of content (entertainment, short, engaging, or trend-related) clearly affects visibility, with fast and visually attractive content being rewarded with higher views. Users understand the algorithm in a more experimental than precise manner, often simplifying it to the belief that the algorithm “favors trending content” or “relies on initial engagement to boost reach.” This reflects a more practical perception of how the algorithm works, rather than a scientific understanding.

Second Axis: Adaptation and Dissemination Strategies

The data reveals that users employ various strategies to increase interaction, the most prominent of which are using trending hashtags, replicating trending content, and focusing on attention-grabbing elements in the first few seconds of the video. Hashtags are purposefully used as technical tools to improve visibility within the algorithm, rather than merely as descriptive elements. Respondents also confirmed that they gradually adjust their content to align with what gains more visibility, whether in terms of form, topic, or presentation style. This demonstrates a relative submission to the platform's logic in shaping symbolic production.

Third Axis: Digital Identity and Self-Representation

The responses indicated a noticeable gap between users' real-life identities and their identities presented within the platform. Users tend to present a “modified” or “performative” version of themselves that aligns with the expectations of both the audience and the algorithm. Most participants admitted to altering their style of expression or appearance in order to increase their visibility, reflecting the presence of performance logic in shaping digital identity. Additionally, the feedback from followers plays a significant role in reshaping the self-image, as likes and comments directly influence the continuity or adjustment of their posting style.

Fourth Axis: Social Values and Norms

The data shows a divergence in the assessment of how well the content reflects Algerian social values. While some respondents believe that the content mirrors aspects of local culture (language, humor, daily life), others feel it presents a simplified or filtered version. It was also observed that the platform has contributed to changing certain behaviors, particularly among youth, by promoting a culture of instant visibility and rapid interaction. In general, participants considered that TikTok simultaneously contributes to the reproduction of traditional values while introducing new behavioral patterns related to digitalization and the rapid consumption of content.

Fifth Axis: Socio-Cultural Dimension of Digital Transformation

The interviewees reported that the platform has influenced daily communication, making interactions more connected to digital content and increasingly influenced by trending topics. Several participants expressed that TikTok is no longer merely a means of entertainment, but has begun to affect patterns of thinking, particularly in terms of the speed of interaction and the adoption of brief and visual expression styles. Consequently, the platform is viewed as a space that transcends entertainment, contributing to a partial reshaping of social behaviors and thinking patterns.

Study Results:

- ✓ The results demonstrate that algorithms on TikTok reshape communication practices within the Algerian context by transforming communication from an expression-based and meaningful act into one directed by the logic of algorithmic dissemination. Content is no longer produced solely based on social or cultural motives, but according to the expectations of the algorithmic system, which rewards attractiveness, speed, and interaction intensity. As a result, communication becomes implicitly organized according to algorithmic criteria (viewer retention, interaction, and dissemination), governed by the logic of attention economy, and linked to the reshaping of identity, values, and communicative behaviors. This means that the

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algorithm evolves into an invisible agent that re-engineers the conditions for producing and receiving digital discourse within the Algerian socio-cultural context.

- ✓ The results indicate that users rely on a variety of informal adaptive strategies, most notably: using trending hashtags (#fyp / #viral) as algorithmic direction signals, imitating successful content formats (trends, challenges, popular audio), focusing on the "hook" in the first few seconds to ensure viewer retention, intensifying posting during evening peak hours, and adopting rapid editing and visual effects to boost attractiveness. These practices signal the formation of a "practical algorithmic awareness" that transforms users into active agents who adapt to unwritten platform rules to maximize visibility.
- ✓ The results show that algorithmic guidance leads to a reshaping of digital identity towards a performative identity. The self is no longer presented as a direct extension of reality but as a "performative identity" designed for visibility. This is reflected in: presenting oneself in an ostentatious, visually designed manner, reshaping identity based on what generates interaction rather than authenticity, and the tension between genuine self-expression and algorithmic requirements. Consequently, digital identity becomes a dynamic project of managing visibility within an algorithmic space, rather than being a static representation of the self.
- ✓ The results indicate that communication practices on the platform lead to two parallel pathways: first, the reproduction of values such as the continued presence of local social values (language, solidarity, cultural symbols) and the recycling of Algerian popular culture in a digital format; and second, cultural shifts such as the dominance of entertainment and consumer values at the expense of cognitive values, the rise of "digital visibility" as a new social value, the redefinition of fame and success according to the logic of algorithmic dissemination, and the reinforcement of expressive individualism over collective reference points. In this way, the platform not only reproduces culture but also rearranges its priorities and transforms its symbolic structure within the Algerian context.
- ✓ The results converge on the idea that communication on TikTok in Algeria is undergoing a profound structural transformation, characterized by: submission to an invisible algorithmic logic that directs production and interaction; the reshaping of identity into a measurable and disseminable performative identity; the transformation of culture from a social production into a filtered algorithmic production; the emergence of users as strategic agents negotiating with the algorithm. Thus, the algorithm becomes not just a technical intermediary but a socio-communicative structure that produces action and meaning within the contemporary digital space.

Conclusion:

This digital ethnographic study concludes that the communicative act of TikTok users in the Algerian context has undergone a structural transformation from a logic of social interaction based on expression and spontaneous communication to a logic of algorithmic guidance that reshapes production and reception conditions within the digital space.

The findings revealed that algorithms do not function as neutral technical intermediaries but as invisible organizing forces that recalibrate posting patterns, interaction methods, and digital identity construction according to the criteria of attention economy and visibility.

The study also indicated that users adopt adaptive strategies that reflect a practical understanding of the algorithmic logic, leading to a shift in communication from a meaningful communicative act to a strategy aimed at visibility.

Conversely, this dynamic contributes to the reshaping of digital identity as a performative and mutable identity and the rearrangement of cultural and social values within the digital space towards entertainment, speed, and symbolic consumption.

Thus, the study confirms that the algorithm has become a central socio-technical actor that reproduces communicative acts and redefines their conditions within the contemporary Algerian socio-cultural context.

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