



ISSN Print: 2394-7500
ISSN Online: 2394-5869
Impact Factor: 8.4
IJAR 2020; 6(10): 1073-1076
www.allresearchjournal.com
Received: 15-08-2020
Accepted: 25-09-2020

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Short video industry: A new form of popular culture

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Abstract

Short Video making app is a new social media trend amongst youngsters as it overtook the popular social media apps like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube. In India, Jio (Mukesh Ambani owned Indian Telecommunications Company) played an essential role in making the digital world more accessible by bringing cheaper data plans. India has about 450 million smartphone users, and 376 million people use social media in any form, as per statistics. Initially, the popularity of the internet led to an increase in social media platforms. Still, now these social media platforms are the reason behind expanding the internet user base in the country.

In this article, I have analyzed the popularity of these short video-making apps, focusing on the popular app TikTok. This paper also examines the user behavior of these quick video apps. This paper explores the motivation of user behavior as a participant in popular culture. The essential characteristic of this study will be to use an interdisciplinary approach. This study is primarily a Qualitative study and uses mixed methods to understand these apps and people's relationships. This study's primary strategies are the Case Study Method and Ethnographic Method (Offline/Online) and interview. In this study, research tools like in-depth interviews, Case Studies, Participant observation has been deployed.

Keywords: video industry, popular culture, new social media trend

1. Introduction

Short Video making apps is a new social media trend amongst youngsters as it overtook the popular social media apps like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Youtube. In India, Jio (Mukesh Ambani owned Indian Telecommunications company) played an essential role in making the digital world more accessible by bringing cheaper data plans. India has about 450 million smartphone users, and 376 million people use social media in any form, as per statistics. Initially, the popularity of the internet led to an increase in social media platforms. Still, now these social media platforms are the reason behind expanding the internet user base in the country.

A new industry of short video-making apps like TikTok, Likee, Helo, Vigo has become a popular culture among the people, particularly among youngsters. These apps have almost doubled the user base as compared to all other social media apps.

2. Research Methods

The essential characteristic of this study will be to use an interdisciplinary approach. This study is primarily qualitative and uses mixed methods to understand the popularity of short video platforms as popular culture. This study's primary strategies are the Case Study Method and Ethnographic Method (Offline/Online) and interview. In this study, research tools like in-depth interviews, case studies, participant observation have been deployed. This study was conducted in Delhi.

3. New Media

Web 2.0, the second phase in the Web's evolution, gave rise to new technologies. Cheap smartphones and participatory platforms came into existence. The second wave of the worldwide Web changed the meaning of the medium and communication. It led to the emergence of new media. New media features include social networking sites or social media sites (e.g., Facebook), blogs, wikis, folksonomies ("tagging" keywords on websites and links), video sharing sites (e.g., YouTube), hosted services, Web applications ("apps"), collaborative consumption platforms.

4. The emergence of the short video industry

Since 2106, the short video industry has been on the rise. The 'TikTok' app is a creative short musical video software that went live in September 2016. Short videos are generally the video which is made in seconds. The time duration of videos is from 15 sec to 1 min. These apps showcase self-made videos from anywhere and everything, from comedy to lip-syncs and cooking recipes to personal grooming tips that users create and share to gain likes and followers. These videos are full of entertainment that covers a wide range of content variations. Video creators get all types of tools and functions in these apps. There are options of lip-syncing music videos, and choosing soundtracks to accompany them, using different speed options (time-lapse, fast, normal, slow motion), adding a preset filter. Users are also strongly encouraged to engage with other users through 'response' videos or utilizing 'duets'-users can duplicate videos and add themselves alongside.

One can navigate through the video by just scrolling up and down like a feed, not tapping or swiping side to side. It's easy to make a video on these short video-making apps, not just because of the tools it gives to the users, but because one can select from an enormous range of sounds, from popular song clips to short moments from TV shows, YouTube videos or other apps users. One can join a dare-like challenge, or participate in a dance meme, or make a joke, or one can make fun of all of these things.

Why has it become so popular in such a short period

Short Videos: As mentioned above, TikTok is a short video-sharing app. I believe the short video apps are going to be the most popular social media platform. In the past, it was not easy for common people to make their video exposed in front of a general audience, but such a situation has been changing with the advent of TikTok.

Localization: I think localization is one of the advantages of TikTok. Come to think of it, Douyin and TikTok apps are different physically.

Usually, many global companies (American companies, in almost all cases) try to push through their own styles, even in foreign markets. As a matter of course, the so-called global company already achieved some success in its home country. Therefore, usually, these companies don't doubt their strategy and tactics at all. On the other hand, it seems that TikTok has adopted more localization than American companies. I heard its tactics in each market were considerably different.

Globalization: One of the advantages TikTok has is that it can work in the Chinese market because it is a Chinese app originally. When it comes to global companies that reminds us of Google, Facebook, Twitter, and so on. As we know, these American companies don't work in the Chinese market now because of (mainly) political reasons. Even Amazon, which made a prior investment, decided to plan an exit from a Chinese market. These apps are not only famous in India but also in America and Europe. In today's time TikTok is doing well in not only the Indian market but also Western countries. It has literally conquered the world.

Unique algorithms: A unique delivery algorithm is one of TikTok's characteristics. Usually, the users on many social media platforms initially follow others on a voluntary basis. As a result of that, users can see the account's content that

they already followed before. When it comes to TikTok, users can decide which content to deliver to whom based on the unique algorithm.

John Hermann, a New York Times journalist, said: "Imagine a version of Facebook that was able to fill your feed before you'd friended a single person." That's a good one. I can say TikTok has a very unique algorithm, unlike other social media platforms. What does that mean? If your content is excellent, you can get the astonishing number of reaches in a moment. You can't do the same thing on existing platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter. It's no wonder that young creators choose TikTok over other social media platforms because they want to achieve their goals as soon as possible.

However, this algorithm has some risks. For example, if a person tries to deliver illegal content, like child pornography, they might be able to get hundreds of thousands of reaches as quick as a flash. TikTok says they are blocking such inappropriate content through both AI technology and human eyes, but it is extremely difficult to prevent such violators from doing ill without any fail. I guess that's the reason why local authority in India has banned the TikTok app in the past.

From the content creator's point of view it is easy to make a video in terms of uploading and creating. These platforms try to cultivate local creators in the market in their own way. Having more editing option, easy to perform, opportunity to get fame without discrimination, good platform to show talent, it is easy to be viral on these platforms.

From a consumer point of view it is a good source of entertainment. One gets a lot of content in a short period of time. In addition to this there is extensive variation in content, for example comic, motivational, inspirational content in addition to videos on fashion, art, current social issues.

5. Short Video Industry as pop culture

These platforms were initially popularised by the subalterns but later appropriated by the middle class. Users and content creators of these apps were seen as unsophisticated, crude and even disgusting sometimes. But today things have changed. Majority of celebrities are now on TikTok- a short video app and are regular content creators for this popular app. To give an analogy, Jeanswear were first popularised by the working classes in Europe. The reason being they last long owing to durable fabric and also do not require regular washing. However, later it became popular fashion among the middle classes especially among university students.

Most of the users of these short video apps are youth. The popularity is such that recently a popular TikTok user got a ticket in the assembly election by the ruling party in India. Of late, political parties have been using these apps to promote their campaign too. The film industry is dying to get the attention of the youth so that they can promote themselves and their upcoming movies. Almost every Bollywood celebrity is present on Facebook app Suite and now they are showing their attendance on these platforms too. The app's growth has been one reason and the company has been working hard to get top celebrities on its platform. This not only opens up doors for a new set of users but also gets brands looking at the platform with seriousness.

6. TikTok: A Case study

TikTok is a short video making app that trends amongst youngsters as it overtook Facebook as the most downloaded social networking application globally. It is owned by a Chinese company Byte Dance. Called Douyin in China it was first launched in 2016. In 2017 it merged with another short video making app musical.ly and launched worldwide outside China.

As of 2018, it is being used in over 150 countries and in 75 languages. In February 2019, TikTok, together with Douyin, hit one billion downloads globally, excluding Android installs in China in 2019. TikTok was declared the 7th most downloaded mobile app of the decade (2010-2019). It was also the most downloaded app on the App Store in 2018 and 2019.

In India alone, there has been a record download by about 466.8 million users. This quirky and funny app has hooked youngsters around the world.

Indian scenario

According to App Annie Report, India represented 44%, or 323 million of 2019's absolute TikTok application downloads, a 27% expansion from 2018. Facebook was also the second most installed social media app worldwide after TikTok, with more than 50.5 million installs out of which 23 per cent were recorded from India.

As per one of the recent reports by Indian express, Karnataka government is using TikTok to fight the war against the COVID-19 pandemic by spreading awareness and cutting down the panic among people through humour and sarcasm. All other social networking apps like Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram are largely urban. But TikTok's seepage has reached even to the remotest parts of the country.

TikTok is also enabling entrepreneurs in small-town India to popularize their initiatives to a wider audience. Famous faces on TikTok have also become influencers and companies are now wooing them for marketing campaigns.

In terms of revenue TikTok is taking on Facebook but it is not going to happen anytime soon-TikTok's ₹25cr revenue is still marginal compared to Facebook. According to the report, the Chinese video app earned revenue of ₹23-25 crore in the last quarter, which ended on December 31, 2019.

TikTok has come up with new ad formats to churn more ad revenue this year as brands, especially FMCG brands, have been very excited about these ad formats as compared to traditional ad formats. TikTok provides multiple ad formats for brands, including in-feed videos, branded effects such as AR filters and branded lens, hashtag challenges, etc. Branded effects and Hashtag Challenge have been the most effective ad formats on the platform so far according to the report. Popular FMCG brands, including Pepsi, Lay's Britannia and Oreo, have leveraged the platform to reach out to consumers, according to a report in the Financial Express. Apart from FMCG brands, OYO, Paytm, Snapdeal and Club Factory are also leveraging Tiktok's unique ad formats, as per the report by Entrackr.

6.1 Users as popular culture producers

UGC (user generated content) mode represented by the TikTok platform has changed the traditional production mode of popular culture. Every user can produce content as a production unit of independent cultural value. In 2018, the

total number of videos released by TikTok users in China reached 250 million, which includes foods, cosmetics, funnies, cute pets, and Internet celebrities etc. Among these users, based on the difference of production form and production goal, they are divided into three categories: one is ordinary persons; the other is the opinion leaders dominated by internet celebrities and famous stars; and the third is the business organizations. Platform for the ordinary users, they find an outlet for their display of desire. Daniel Bell pointed out that the characteristic of popular culture is "to continuously express and rebuild oneself in order to achieve self-realization and self-satisfaction". The mode of UGC on TikTok platform is that the platform empowers each ordinary user to produce content to meet the psychological needs of their self-presentation. For the internet celebrities, in order to realize the commercial value, they precisely divide their fan groups, and carry out professional content planning, so as to get attention on TikTok platform, and gain network traffic monetizing. For example, the stars use TikTok platform to publicize film and television works, sell endorsement products and realize fan economy, which is an extension of star manufacturing in the whole field of popular culture. Fans chase idols to the new media platform and bring more users to TikTok. TikTok is also regarded as stars' other production platform by relevant stakeholders. Some business organizations have also become the main users of TikTok. They produce content on TikTok platform to close the gap with young users, based on the consideration of the younger users of TikTok.

6.2 Users as Popular Culture Disseminators

Based on the transmission mode of TikTok, users will consciously or unconsciously become the disseminators of popular culture. There are two ways for users to disseminate: first, when users have a desire to share a video, they can share it directly on social media through TikTok's one-click forwarding function, which is the way users consciously disseminate. Secondly, TikTok has a unique traffic algorithm for video recommendation. Traffic distribution is mainly about neighborhood and attention. Users have participated in the dissemination of popular culture when they hit the like button or make comments on videos. TikTok users have three characteristics in content dissemination as communicators: Firstly, TikTok users are not necessarily directly involved in content production for content dissemination, but TikTok platform will guide users to carry out cultural dissemination according to recommendation algorithms. Secondly, users can obtain information without restriction, but based on the limitation of TikTok, users can only disseminate the information provided by the platform. Thirdly, due to the scarcity of attention, information disseminated by users may be commercialized.

6.3 Users as popular culture consumers

Popular culture has commercial characteristics, and TikTok has also created a short video platform with commercial value. Users buy video promotion function "shake +" at their own expense to enable video traffic, in order to get more attention. Secondly, users can purchase advertisements embedded in videos by watching videos, which is similar to the consumption behavior of advertisements in popular cultural phenomena. Third, users pay for their favorite live

broadcasters. Such consumption behavior can be understood as "fans' consumption".

7. Criticism

Most of the short video apps are from China and it is often accused of infringing users' data privacy and country's security. It has been accused of sending data to Chinese government. It was also banned in many countries for a short period of time. In India, it was banned by the Supreme Court of India for a short duration for its porn content. According to a report by The Intercept, TikTok has been accused of suppressing the videos of 'ugly', poor, fat, disabled and LGBTQ community to attract new users.

8. Conclusion

From telegram to print to radio to TV to digital media to social media and now short video apps like TikTok, mediums of communication have changed across the time period. Users produce, share, comment and consume content through TikTok, and become participants in popular culture. This kind of participation is not only a special expression of culture, but also an important reflection of the current user's likes, dislikes and aesthetics. The reason behind such popularity of TikTok is that it has a variety of effective marketing strategies, precise algorithm technology and it meets the needs of users. Many big established companies like Facebook, Youtube, Instagram are feeling insecure and are working to start new innovation technology on the same line. They have started launching short video apps or adding features into the existing apps. For example, Facebook has launched Facebook Lasso which is currently available only in the USA and Latin America. Similarly, Instagram has launched Instagram Reels which is only available in Brazil. Youtube is also planning to add a similar technological feature to its app in future. So we can say that in the coming times new Media is going to see further change and one can foresee the advent of another such popular culture product which is going to catch the imagination of people across the world.

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