A Digital Ethnography of the Nation on TikTok: A Site of Banal Cosmopolitanism in the Context of Net Nationalism

By
Aida Zepcan

Submitted to Central European University
Nationalism Studies Program

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Supervisor: Professor András László Pap

Vienna, Austria
2023

ABSTRACT

Communication technologies have played a fundamental role in instilling and sustaining a sense of the nation long before the invention of the internet. Newer communication technologies have also failed to do away with nationalism, with hopes for a truly global, borderless platform to connect individuals from different nations across the world of nations, further out of reach. With powerful avenues for communication becoming increasingly embedded in daily life, nation-states are likewise adopting net nationalist regulatory strategies to protect digital sovereignty and maintain control over national narratives. With the rise of algorithmically powered and hyper-personalized digital platforms it is worth exploring their potential as sites of banal cosmopolitanism, or as theorized by Ulrich Beck (2006, pg.9), the everyday expression of loyalties to the nation and expanding cultural ties beyond nation-state borders and therefore systems of control. Employing digital ethnography as a method, this thesis explores from the bottom-up, the potential of TikTok to serve as a site of banal cosmopolitanism in the context of rising net nationalist legislation, namely the RESTRICT Act, intent on restricting and potentially banning the platform in the U.S. By isolating discussions and discourses of the nation on TikTok, this thesis found that TikTok democratizes the ability to broadcast, share and discuss individual experiences of the nation to other users across the world. This, however, is entirely dependent on the continuity and availability of free and global platforms of communication, alongside nation-state regulatory decisions. Ultimately TikTok, as a site of banal cosmopolitanism, cannot coexist alongside net nationalism.

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, Aida Zepcan, candidate for the MA degree in Nationalism Studies, declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that the views presented in this thesis are mine alone and do not represent the views of any institution. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

Aida Zepcan

Vienna, 9th June 2023.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I dedicate this thesis to my parents.

There will never be enough words or pages to contain the gratitude I have for you both. The fuel for all that I am is your unconditional and selfless love, hard-work, and sacrifice.

Thank you to my siblings for always inspiring me to do better and to set a good example.

To my partner, meri jaan, thank you for always believing in me, for constantly encouraging and never doubting my, at times, unorthodox ideas, for standing by me and for withstanding all of me throughout this time.

To my friends both near and far, thank you for taking care of me in ways I never knew I needed.

I would also like to give a special thank you to my supervisor, Professor András Pap, for his patience, support, guidance, and feedback throughout this process.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

Introduction

This thesis explores how the nation is spoken about and discussed on TikTok, and whether TikTok can constitute a site of everyday, "banal cosmopolitanism" (Beck, 2002, pg.28) despite rising "net nationalism" (Supak, 2021, pg.530). Ultimately this research aims to explore whether 1) the nation is rooted in banal cosmopolitanism as theorized by Kyriakidou (2009), and in turn, 2) if TikTok can be considered a site of banal cosmopolitanism within the context of net nationalism. Given cosmopolitanism is often framed through the nation and therefore, cannot be sharply juxtaposed to nationalism (Kyriakidou, 2009, pg.481), this research focuses on TikTok content with a national frame. Collected across a 6-month digital ethnographic period in 2021, data extrapolated will be explored on the basis of discourse and user interactions from various sources within the platform, to determine whether banal cosmopolitanism can be located within everyday discussions of the nation on TikTok. The implications of these findings will then be situated in the broader context of net nationalism as a regulatory response to TikTok.

The analysis of this thesis will be two-fold; empirically, I will explore the connective potential of TikTok as a digital space of banal cosmopolitanism within the context of rising net nationalism, via the exploration of relevant literature and theories. This will form the basis of the context chapter and literature review. The empirical findings will then be used to frame the 6-month digital ethnographic insights conducted on the platform, as outlined in the methods chapter, which includes quantitative data and qualitative analytical observations of how the nation is discussed on TikTok, along with content derived from the platform as made available by the various platform affordances outlined in the context chapter. The theories and existing literature on net nationalism and its effects on banal cosmopolitanism on TikTok, as identified in the literature review, will be evidenced within the analysis chapter, before highlighting the

broader implications of this study within the discussion section. Lastly, given the focus of this research is on TikTok as a medium of communication in the context of net nationalism, coupled with the relative paucity of existing literature available on the topic from leading academic and institutional databases, and unbiased news sources, relevant TikTok videos will be included as existing literature within the context and literature review chapters to supplement this gap where appropriate, and with respective references.

1. Context

This chapter aims to provide the reader with the relevant background and context of TikTok, including the broader political context relevant to understand the digital platform as a site of banal cosmopolitanism, alongside the nationalistic regulatory approaches that have dominated discussions around TikTok since its inception. Throughout this research, TikTok will *not* be referred to as a "social media platform", instead TikTok will be referred to as a "digital platform" given the latter term leaves room to consider TikTok outside the realm of traditional social media platforms. The reasons for this decision will likewise be outlined in the following chapter.

1.1   What is TikTok?

Although we know what social media are, it has been difficult to *articulate* "what they are and why they are" (Carr & Hayes, 2015) despite their near-universal use in the developed world. Understanding new platforms such as TikTok, is especially important given the age of hyperconnectivity we find ourselves in, where the whole of human culture has been transformed and converted into an endless stream of digital content fed through personalized algorithms (Brubaker, 2020, pg.772). Furthermore, during the COVID-19 pandemic, given physical distancing measures, border restrictions, and self-isolation recommendations, individuals were in pursuit of alternative ways to connect personally and socially, resulting in more than 1 billion people worldwide joining TikTok in 2021 alone (Head, 2021). Feldkamp (2021, pg.78) in her work exploring the rise of TikTok during the COVID-19 pandemic, posed three reasons for TikTok's meteoric success, namely the For You Page (FYP) algorithm, the platform being an "anti-social" one not based on followers or personal networks, and the increased use of TikTok during the pandemic.

While the platform was initially dominated by younger users under the age of 25, it has since become increasingly popular amongst adults. TikTok has become one of the most widely used and downloaded digital platforms across the world, with its largest user base coming from the United States (U.S) made up of over 150 million people using the platform (TikTok, 2023). TikTok and its popularity as a digital platform, has evidently rivalled its social media platform counterparts from the U.S, such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube. In 2021, TikTok became the first platform, not owned by Facebook (Meta), to reach three billion downloads. In 2022 it reached four billion downloads and made an estimated USD $9.4 billion in revenue with its largest user demographic now aged between 20 and 29 years of age (Curry, 2023). TikTok is owned by the Chinese company ByteDance. ByteDance was recently valued at more than USD $220 billion (Barinka & Carville, 2023) and bills itself primarily as an artificial intelligence company, not a creator of social platforms (Herrman, 2019). Kelly (Nan) Zhang, chief executive officer (CEO) of Douyin (TikTok's Chinese equivalent application), has ambitions to develop the platform into a "video encyclopedia for human civilization" using "video search as the gateway to finding answers" (Cong, Tong & Wei 2021). Given TikTok combines the ease of transnational communication and wide-ranging content creation affordances of social media platforms, with a powerful video search engine and algorithmic recommendation system, this thesis will refer to TikTok as "digital platform" rather than a "social media platform" given the new and varying functions outside the realm of traditional social networking platforms.

TikTok is a digital platform predominately used for the creation and sharing of mobile videos otherwise known as "short-form videos". Users aged 13 and above can create 5-second to 10-minute-long videos on TikTok using the platform's in-built features and tools. The platform combines three of the most powerful affordances of social media platforms in a unique way, that have never been combined into a single platform before (Guinaudeau, Munger &

Votta, 2022, pg.481). Firstly, TikTok serves as a televisual medium which, as evidenced by the popularity of platforms such as YouTube and Netflix, is a widely popular and powerful platform affordance. Secondly, the entire user experience on TikTok is dependent on, and powered by TikTok's algorithmic recommendation system, to a much greater degree than on any other platform. The centrality of the algorithm means that users can be presented with videos from the entire collection of TikTok videos, instead of just those that are shared by an account that the user follows or those who follow them, which is typical of platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. Lastly, TikTok adopts a mobile-only interface (even if the platform is opened on a desktop using a web-browser, the site mimics the mobile-interface experience) which takes full advantage of the ubiquity of smartphones and their front-facing cameras (Guinaudeau, Munger & Votta F, 2022, pp. 465-468).

TikTok is divided into two feeds, the "Following" feed where videos posted by users and their followers are displayed, alongside the most widely used, global "For You Page" (FYP). When using TikTok, users are first met with the FYP when opening the platform and which will be the focus of this research. The FYP functions by scrolling through the interface vertically to see videos posted by other TikTok users which are automatically posted to the global feed unless videos are made private. Again, given the platform is not dependent on following other users or being followed, most TikTok user's post videos to the global FYP instead of privately posting to a small group of followers. The hyper-accuracy of the TikTok FYP has both contributed to the popularity of the platform and raised data-privacy concerns. Given the hyper accuracy of the FYP requires a large amount and variety of personal data to function so effectively, some users have reported that TikTok "knows me better than I know myself" (Hanson, 2021). Essentially, this means that no two FYP's are the same as videos displayed on an individual's FYP are specifically curated to the likes and interests of independent users, powered by the algorithmic recommendation system. The FYP recommendation system, driven

by machine learning, considers a plethora of factors such as videos liked and shared, users followed, comments posted, content posted, hashtags, captions, sounds used in a video, and device and account settings such as language preferences, location, and device type (TikTok, 2020). The algorithm can also factor in whether or not a user has watched the entirety of a video or skipped to the end of it for example. Videos are then scored based on these and other various factors, and those with the highest score then appear on a TikTok users' FYP. Essentially the TikTok FYP and thus TikTok itself, is simply reinforcing past viewing habits (Schellewald, 2021, pg.1441), "marked by viewing new content that is dictated by [our] interests and [our] previous interactions with the app" (Boffone, 2022, pg.7) rather than interacting with other users on the platform.

Constant engagement with the self, or rather previous versions of the self as mediated through the FYP algorithmic recommendation system, has been described by theorists as "the algorithmized self", or an extension of "the networked self" which is typically understood as a "reflexive process of fluid associations with social circles" (Bhandari & Bimo, 2022, pp. 1-11). In fact, TikTok has eradicated the need for social networks, context, background, or biographic information on its users and has instead "perpetuated a cavalier attitude toward that knowledge" (Wagner, 2022, pg.10), which has been viewed as "an extension of the hyper-commodification of everyday discourse" (Wagner, 2022, pg.11). Although sharing everyday life experiences is very much present on other social media platforms, given TikTok content avoids fixation around the user creating the video as a distinct content creator, personality, or influencer; instead "their key is relatability", communicating banal, extraordinary, funny, or absurd moments against both common and new backgrounds like school, work, and in lockdown, among a plethora of other settings (Schellewald, 2021, pg.1445).

The diversity of this everyday content on TikTok is further accentuated through the shortness and ephemeral nature of the TikTok videos themselves, combined with the lack of

dependency on social networks within the platform. This is particularly important given every video is posted to and shown on the FYP, meaning every creator has an equal and greater chance – as compared to other platforms - to be recognized by a larger number of users in a shorter amount of time (Feldkamp, 2021, pg.79). Every user is guaranteed to get at least one view, even on their first TikTok. Unlike Twitter, a user may have to "tweet" multiple times before getting any "likes" due to the importance of "follower" networks in determining what other users see. The unique combination of these affordances on TikTok, has thus significantly lowered the barriers of entry, encouraging a higher number of viewers to become posters (Guinaudeau, Munger & Votta F, 2022, pg. 468), which has likewise changed the way we "create, consume, and interact with digital media" (Boffone, 2022, pg.18). For instance, while YouTube remains the most visited platform of U.S teens as of 2022, with 19 percent exclaiming they almost constantly use the platform, as compared to 16 percent of US teens constantly using TikTok (Vogels, Gelles-Watnick & Massarat, 2022), research has found that TikTok's unique affordances significantly lower the barrier for not only viewing a much broader range of videos, but also to produce videos as compared to other platforms such as YouTube (Guinaudeau, Munger & Votta 2022, pg.468).

The ease of creating diversified content on TikTok, coupled with the FYP algorithm which guarantees every video posted will be seen by someone else, has bolstered the digital platforms success. As highlighted by Guinaudeau, Munger & Votta's (2022, pg.481) research on the supply side of TikTok video creation, has found that a) TikTok videos get more views on average, b) that the viral potential on TikTok is much higher and c) that TikTok is much more successful at encouraging users to produce videos as compared to other platforms, which in turn has deepened and broadened this engaging behavior. Boffone, in his book titled *TikTok Cultures in the United States* (2022), also found that it is primarily the algorithmic personalization and the TikTok space itself which encourages and supports everyday, unfiltered,

authentic expressions of reality, from individuals across the world; all of which is quickly spilling into the analogue world as TikTok content goes viral (pg.7).

It is important for the reader to understand how TikTok differs to other platforms before attempting to situate it within the literature on nationalism and cosmopolitanism later in this thesis. Illustrating how TikTok functions, is best described with an example: if a user is interested in street food (or whichever topic is of interest to that particular user), their FYP and therefore the underlying algorithmic recommendation system, will recommend videos of street food without the user needing to search for it. The FYP algorithm will draw on all TikTok videos depicting street food before presenting that user with videos about street food regardless of where those videos may originate from. While on other platforms such as YouTube for instance, a user would need to stipulate in the search bar "street food in Thailand" for example, on TikTok that same user would be recommended videos on their FYP of street food from all over the world, wherever street food is depicted or showcased, without having to specify or search for street food from a specific country or context. Given individual interests are personal, naturally dynamic, fluid, and often change, an individual TikTok user's FYP will look markedly different to all other TikTok user's, opening an infinitely unique amount of possible video recommendations and combinations.

Having said all this, to better understand TikTok and how the FYP functions and shapes the user experience, the reader is best served downloading TikTok and spending some time engaging and interacting with the FYP.

1.2   Why TikTok?

"A U.S ban on TikTok is a ban on the export of American culture and values to the billion-plus people who use our service worldwide. We're disappointed to see this rushed piece of

legislation move forward, despite its considerable negative impact on the free speech rights of millions of Americans who use and love TikTok." – TikTokComms, 2023.

Despite the popularity of TikTok and its growing embeddedness in daily life, the digital platform has received more backlash than any other platform entering the market. At face value this backlash is not primarily the result of financial competition as would be assumed given the high-value digital platform sector. Rather TikTok has, since its popularization, faced backlash at a national security level, most recently with the RESTRICT Act, or the "Restricting the Emergence of Security Threats that Risk Information and Communications Technology Act" (2023-2024) proposed as a bill in the U.S. Senate, of which the context for this thesis is framed. Aside from this, TikTok was previously banned in Pakistan because of concerns that the platform promotes immoral content, in India over concerns of privacy and security, and in Afghanistan over concerns that TikTok is misleading young people. In Australia, the United Kingdom, Denmark, France, Latvia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Taiwan, and as of March 2023 in the U.S, TikTok was banned from all government devices over concerns of privacy and security, particularly over potential Chinese government interference or access to national intelligence and a government's user information. The European Union, European Commission, and the European Council have followed suit and imposed bans on all staff devices (Chan, 2023).

Regarded as "one of the only bipartisan issues lawmakers seem to see eye to eye on" (Tangalakis-Lippert, 2023), the most recent attempted banning of TikTok in the U.S has sparked fiery debate, with overwhelming support from across the political spectrum to entirely ban the digital platform within the U.S, and alongside a ban, the introduction of the RESTRICT Act. As stated by Senator Susan Collins, who is part of bipartisan group of senators introducing the RESTRICT Act headed by Senator Mark Warner; "through hardware exports, malicious software, and other clandestine means, China has sought to steal information in an attempt to

gain a military and economic edge". Senator Collins claims that the RESTRICT Act, would not only "improve our national security as well as safeguard Americans' personal information and our nation's vital intellectual property", but also "defend against surveillance attempts by China and other adversaries" (Warner, 2023).

The RESTRICT Act would empower the Secretary of Commerce (rather than an elected body) as appointed by the President of the U.S, to "review and prohibit certain transactions between persons in the United States and foreign adversaries… and for other purposes" (S.686, II). "Foreign adversaries" within the Act are currently defined as "China, Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Russia and Venezuela" (Tangalakis-Lippert, 2023), but can be changed with time, and as defined by the Secretary of Commerce. The overly broad language used within the proposed bill, all without direct mention of TikTok or its parent company ByteDance, would do a lot more than just ban TikTok. It would 1) restrict or ban any digital products or hardware technology coming from listed "foreign adversaries", and 2) would empower the U.S government to monitor, restrict and prohibit any activities, internet-based communications and transactions of U.S citizens with foreigners, if there is possibility to contact or connect with "foreign adversaries" via a given technology, all without needing to notify U.S citizens of such monitoring. The technologies detailed in the Act include, but are not limited to, wireless, mobile and satellite networks, modems, routers, home-cameras, gaming applications, digital platforms, cloud-based storage services, machine learning services, and payment and e-commerce technologies among others (S.686, pp.17-20). Some of the technologies listed are also yet to exist. In other words, every kind of technology currently available or that could become available is covered within the proposed bill, all of which could be monitored, captured, and regulated by the Secretary of Commerce. Furthermore, the Act would subject all U.S citizens to both civil and criminal penalties of up to 20 years imprisonment and up to USD $1 million in fines, if found in violation of the restrictions issued under the Act (Tangalakis-Lippert, 2023).

That would make, for instance, attempting to circumvent restrictions by using a virtual private network (VPN) connection to access banned technologies or content deemed a threat, illegal.

In light of shared concerns and consensus across party lines, the CEO of TikTok, Shou Chew, was called to testify in a hearing before the U.S House Committee on Energy and Commerce (the Secretary of Commerce is proposing the RESTRICT Act as directed by Congress, rather than Congress itself proposing a ban of TikTok) on the 23rd of March 2023. Mr. Chew was welcomed to "the most bipartisan committee in Congress" by congressman Buddy Carter, and was thanked by congressman Dan Crenshaw for "bringing Republicans and Democrats together" (Clayton, 2023). During the over 5-hour questioning of Mr. Chew, questions and concerns were raised by members of the Committee over user privacy, safety, and practices of data-security, almost all of which were openly linked to suspected relationships between TikTok and the Chinese government and thus potential interference by the Chinese government over U.S users and data. Mr. Chew repeatedly denied claims that TikTok shares data, or has connections with the Chinese government, whilst also emphasizing and reiterating large-scale efforts made by TikTok to ensure the safety and security of the 150 million U.S users on the platform. For example, Mr. Chew spoke in detail on "Project Texas", a USD $1.5 billion project that TikTok embarked on, which would house all U.S user data within U.S. borders (Shepardson & Ayyub, 2023). When questioned on TikTok's use of user data, Mr. Chew replied: "With all due respect, American companies don't have a great track record with data … just look at Facebook and Cambridge Analytica" (Clayton, 2023) in an effort to draw attention to industry wide practices which U.S based companies are very much privy to, and which can be addressed with better safeguards and increased transparency sector-wide. Dr. Casey Fiesler, associate professor in technology ethics, internet law and policy, and online communities at the University of Colorado Boulder, raised similar concerns in a series of TikTok videos posted to her account (Fiesler, 2023). She reiterated that the issues raised during

the hearing were not unique to TikTok, and if comprehensive laws were passed to address the concerns raised in the hearing related to data privacy, online safety and security, U.S digital platform companies would also be significantly implicated and held accountable.

In his written testimony to the Committee, Mr. Chew stated that all the concerns raised by the Committee, "have solutions". He welcomed the opportunity to discuss TikTok's ongoing efforts to address the issues related to national security and encouraged conversations "around legislation to enshrine better industry standards". He likewise claimed that "this is not an issue of nationality" with respect to Chinese ownership of TikTok, stating that "we do not believe a ban that hurts American small businesses, damages the country's economy, silences the voices of over 150 million Americans, and reduces competition in an increasingly concentrated market is the solution to a solvable problem" (2023). TikTok likewise condemned a ban of its platform in the U.S in a statement which read:

> A U.S ban on TikTok is a ban on the export of American culture and values to the billion-plus people who use our service worldwide. We're disappointed to see this rushed piece of legislation move forward, despite its considerable negative impact on the free speech rights of millions of Americans who use and love TikTok. (TikTokComms, 2023).

Ultimately, Mr. Chew's responses and the actions taken by TikTok to ease data-privacy, safety, and national security concerns, did very little to alleviate the anxieties of the Committee and instead only heightened public concerns by specifically calling into question the First Amendment to the U.S Constitution which protects the right to freedom of speech, of religious expression, the press, assembly, and the right to petition the Government for a redress of grievances (The White House, n.d). Such overwhelming support towards a bill that would subject U.S citizens to widescale monitoring and restrict constitutional rights, has not been seen

since military actions, namely the Iraq War and respective policy, namely the PATRIOT Act, was enacted following the September 11 attacks in the U.S.

The PATRIOT Act, or the "Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act" was passed almost unanimously in 2001 and empowered the U.S government and law enforcement with wide ranging tools to "detect and prevent terrorism" (2001). The Act is infamously associated with early discussions of data protection and sovereignty, for it inadvertently and controversially enabled overreach by U.S law enforcement to access any data physically found within a server in the U.S regardless of where the information had originated (Nwachukwu, 2022, pg.9). This in turn lead to the mass surveillance of U.S citizens and collection of phone calls by the National Security Agency (NSA) (Greenwald, 2013). As revealed by former NSA employee and whistle-blower Edward Snowden, the PATRIOT Act clearly illustrated the failures of user privacy and data protection legislation in the U.S (Srinivasan, 2017, pg.23). Given the similarities, the RESTRICT Act was very quickly likened to the PATRIOT Act. Tulsi Gabbard, former congressional representative from Hawaii stated in a TikTok video on her official account, that the RESTRICT Act is an "affront to democracy" whereby the government is seeking to impose a "digital iron curtain over its citizens", calling it the "PATRIOT Act 2.0 of the internet" (Gabbard, 2023). Interestingly, key provisions of the PATRIOT Act also expired as of March 2020 (Bridge Initiative Team, 2021). Upon close inspection, the RESTRICT Act could be seen as extending and expanding on those parts of the PATRIOT Act which expired, by covering all existing, new, and emerging technologies. While the PATRIOT Act only facilitated mass-monitoring, the RESTRICT Act would arm "an appointed executive panel with unchecked power" (Hodge, 2023) to conduct unprecedented monitoring, it would also serve to censor, restrict, ban, and criminalize the use of technologies such as TikTok without question, at any given point.

13

At the time of writing, the RESTRICT Act has been introduced in the Senate and has yet to be voted on (Congress.gov, March 2023).

2. Literature Review

Since its popularization predominantly among youth and particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, TikTok has garnered significant attention from researchers across varying disciplines. TikTok has been explored by scholars of media, communications and cultural studies, political and social sciences, data-science, and artificial intelligence. Despite this, there is a relative paucity of interdisciplinary literature which focuses on both TikTok as a medium of communication and TikTok content from the bottom-up. Moreover, there is much less work on TikTok related to the study of nationalism, despite increasingly nationalist policies arising across geo-political and nation-state borders that have attempted to govern and in most recent instances, entirely ban the platforms use. Therefore, this chapter will focus on outlining the interwoven relationship between these disciplines through relevant theories and literature, all the while extending the literature on TikTok, and recognizing the complex role nation-states play in the governance and regulation of digital sovereignty and nationhood vis-à-vis new and emerging communicative technologies. The main theoretical advantage of this work is the combination of perspectives from varying and distinct disciplines, namely, nationalism, media, and communications studies. Ultimately, adopting such an interdisciplinary approach allows this research to trace the growing conflict between the forces of communicative technologies expansion and attempts by nation-states to protect its digital sovereignty in a time of rapid technological development and change.

2.1 Protecting digital sovereignty vis-à-vis regulatory responses

The irony of the TikTok debate in the U.S, is that alongside questions and concerns over Chinese government interference and proposed regulations that would limit free speech and

constitutional rights; attention is outwardly directed to the threat of TikTok, while the U.S government is inadvertently attempting to introduce legislation that closely resembles the protectionist stance China has taken towards strengthening its own digital sovereignty. The term "digital sovereignty" within this research, is derived from Nwachukwu's (2022, pg.9) conceptualization of "data sovereignty", or "the concept that a country has complete control over the entirety of personal data stored, created, or collected in that country". While this thesis also covers the control of user data, the term "digital sovereignty", is used instead, given the context, to encompass the citizens control of the *use* of digital technologies by "netizens" - "citizens of the internet" (Adams & Quadri, 2018, pg.119) - along with the data they generate. On the other hand, the policies and "digital barriers" (Nwachukwu, 2022, pg.1) erected alongside attempts to protect digital sovereignty at a national level, is what this study will refer to as "net nationalism", or "the idea of governments using the internet as a tool to promote nationalistic policies and goals; thus, prioritizing the goals of one's country over the goals of a globally connected world" (Supak, 2021, pg.530).

The most noticeable and criticized form of "net nationalism" is the Chinese ICT infrastructure projects of the mid-1990's, specifically the so-called "Great Firewall" erected alongside twelve other "Golden Projects". These projects reflected and continue to reflect China's centralized political system (Su & Tang, 2023, pg.61), used to establish and maintain its position as a modern and developed state (Plantin & De Seta, 2019, pg.264). To date, the "Great Firewall" functions by filtering all content coming in and out of China, whilst also banning other mainstream internet-based technologies, such as U.S owned social media platforms from operating in China. Researchers have pointed out, that the adoption of these nationalist policies could very likely be in response to U.S data colonialism and hegemony over technology companies (Daskal & Sherman, 2020, pg.3). Given that four of the six most used digital platforms across the world are owned by U.S companies (Statista, 2023) scholars have

deemed the ownership, and therefore control over the most common communication systems, by only a select few, as inherently anti-democratic (Gray, 2021, pg.8). In order to ensure that Chinese technological developments are mobilized to secure national interests and advantages within China (Plantin & De Seta, pg.263), Chinese internet users have since been funneled away from these dominant technologies towards Chinese owned platform alternatives such as Weibo, WeChat and as mentioned above, Douyin (the Chinese equivalent of TikTok), furthering the Chinese market's autonomy.

Naturally, nation-states will approach platform regulation differently, given divergences in ideology and market systems. Liberal-democratic governments for instance, have tended to adopt the "light touch" regulatory approach (Su & Tang, 2023, pg.61). Established by leading platforms coming out of Silicon Valley in the U.S, under this approach, initially a great deal of emphasis was placed on an open internet opposed to governmental controls, free market culture, and freedom of expression whereby platforms act as neutral bodies without filtering information. In reality however, "these discourses have proven difficult to implement" (Su & Tang, 2023, pp.59-61). Additionally, with the current discussions surrounding TikTok, nation-states which pioneered this approach seem to be increasingly following the direction China has taken to regulate digital technologies.

Infamously, U.S social media platforms have been blamed for sparking and encouraging nationalist sentiment during key political events worldwide, such as United Kingdom's EU referendum and the election of Donald Trump as President of the U.S" (Mihelj & Jiménez-Martínez, 2021, pg.332). As nation-states are seemingly not willing to abandon their sovereignty and thus a liberal utopia is still far out of reach, the U.S owned "leaders of the global platform economy" continue to inadvertently shape governmental policies through "outreach, lobbying and political participation" (Plantin & De Seta, pp.263-269). For example, in the case of TikTok, Meta (Facebook's parent company) was found to have been paying large

17

Republican consulting firms in the U.S to orchestrate nationwide, smear campaigns against TikTok. This included placing op-eds and letters to the editor in major news outlets to portray TikTok as a danger to American's, promoting falsified stories about supposedly harmful TikTok trends that were found to have actually originated on Facebook, and by calling on political reporters and local politicians into helping take down its biggest competitor (Lorenz & Harwell, 2022). Enabling U.S owned companies to flourish, whilst also working together with governments to take down foreign competitors, signals to other nations that digital sovereignty is the ultimate goal in the politics of platforms. When coupled with the lack of strong rationale presented for banning TikTok, along-side the proposed RESTRICT Act, the U.S is facing similar charges of plain protectionism (Bloomberg Opinion Editorial Board, 2023). It could also be argued that the U.S is attempting to control uncheck forms of nationalism with the banning of TikTok, or in other words, preventing other nations from infiltrating their digital space and marring the national image of the U.S. This again, would appear ironic given it can be viewed as being taken directly from the playbook of Chinese digital protectionism. The rhetoric and actions of the U.S towards TikTok also confirms theories which suggest that since the end of the Cold War, the U.S has been in pursuit of a hegemonic geopolitical strategy, informed by a territorialized, nation-state identity defined by its geographical isolation and capacity to undertake offshore balancing (Gray, 2021, pg.9). Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson, Wang Webin, also called out the U.S government's measures against TikTok as an act of "economic nationalism" and "violation of market economy rules" (Gray, 2021, pg.8). Certainly, combining the strategies of digital protectionism and digital sovereignty as modes of global governance, signals a sharp turn towards "net nationalism" - albeit in a different context.

What differs in China, is that Chinese nationalist-regulatory practices regarding communicative technologies are *openly* conducted alongside corporate interests and national modes of governance (Zhang 2021, pg.224). Existing research has documented the

entanglement of Chinese-owned and operated technologies such as Douyin and WeChat with the ambitions of the Chinese nation-state (Zhang, 2021). Researchers have found that local Chinese companies tend "to see more eye-to-eye" with regards to their nation-state's infrastructural ambitions, whereby Chinese authorities allow and support these ambitious companies to disrupt inefficient public sectors, provided they do not compromise socio-political stability and remain aligned with the net-nationalist pursuit of digital sovereignty (Plantin & De Seta, 2019, pp.267-268). While the U.S and China are both ultimately protecting the strategic value of their respective digital environments, the TikTok controversy seems to have fallen directly in between this broader contest (Gray, 2021, pg.3). Both U.S and Chinese regulatory approaches offer compelling evidence to support the wide variety of theories which find technology companies, and in particular digital platforms, are working in tandem with nation-states in various ways to protect and strengthen digital sovereignty. Although for western scholars, the Chinese, net-nationalist approach to regulating communication technologies may appear somewhat authoritarian, it is important to move beyond the analysis of the most noticeable forms of "net nationalism", to understand how they are related to the more banal ways in which digital technologies reproduce our sense of belonging to a world of nations (Mihelj & Jiménez-Martínez, 2020). The controversy surrounding TikTok thus offers a unique case study of the "politics of platforms" (Gray, 2021, pg.8) under contemporary conditions of net nationalism appearing in liberal democracies which were initially predicated on the free and open use of the internet, and principles of freedom of speech, information, and freedom from censorship.

2.2   The mediation of nationhood as a threat to the nation-state

In reference to, arguably the most cited nationalism theorist - Benedict Anderson - the concept of digital sovereignty in fact, pre-dates digital technologies, existing in a plethora of

forms since writing became a tool (Nwachukwu, 2022, pg.9). In his influential book *Imagined Communities*, first published in 1983, Anderson theorized the nation along with the following features: it is sovereign, limited and imagined. It is sovereign because the nation's existence is founded on the modern state and its institutions. It is limited given it finds itself in a world of other nations, and in turn, it is imagined, given "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them" (2006, pg.6) instead living in the minds of each other's imagination. Anderson viewed the power of mass literacy that came with the invention of the printing press as the primary agent for imagining the nation. While groups began to construct a shared national space and common past through the collective reading of print media, a basis was set for the "permanent traffic in ideas of peoplehood and selfhood" (Appadurai, 1996, pg.28). With this, the establishment of "imagined communities" of the nation were solidified. In turn, European hegemony was consequently challenged by this deepening of national-collective consciousness, giving rise to absolutist powers seeking to prevent the erosion of state control of information (Beck, 2002, pp.39-40) - or what could today be substituted for 'data'. In turn, this gave way to the rise of nationalism; the eventual project intent on making the nation-state congruent with the cultural unit, otherwise known as; the nation (Fox & Miller-Idriss, 2008, pg.536). "Net nationalism" can therefore be viewed as a modern-day extension of the nationalist project which came about following the invention of the print press.

Eliciting a sense of nationhood is however, just one part of the equation. Sustaining this new-found national consciousness, or "nationhood", was most notably theorized by Michael Billig, who coined the term "banal nationalism" to describe the mundane, everyday, often unconscious ways in which the nation is embedded in daily life, of which the national media plays a crucial role in reproducing the world as a world of nations (Billig, 1995, pp.12-88). For instance, a familiar face reading the news or a recognizable voice or song on the morning radio

program, all contributes to the "banal sense of being at home that sustains the national order of things (Skey, 2014, pg.11). While both Anderson and Billig's work focuses on the role of the media in inculcating and sustaining a sense of nationhood among the masses (Skey 2022, pg.841), critics have been quick to point out that little attention was paid to issues of agency or change in relation to how people use and consume media (Skey, 2014, pg.2). Reflecting on the role of private corporations and the nation-state in capturing and monopolizing ideas about the nation, Arjun Appadurai (1996, pp.33-39) referred to these new landscapes, or "disjunctures", as forming the building blocks of "imagined worlds" (as an extension of Anderson's work), given the greater number and variety of "historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe". Where national and international media is exploited by nation-states to "pacify separatists or even the potential fissiparousness of all ideas of difference" (Appadurai, 1996, pg.39), the growing mobility (now both physically and digitally) of human populations, challenges these national frameworks of meaning and practice further, calling into question, once again, traditional hierarchical structures, and thus the nation-state.

If nation-states derive and sustain power, or in this case, "digital sovereignty", from the control of discourses around the nation vis-à-vis the mediation of national narratives via communication technologies; what power, if any, is left with the audiences of these narratives? Is there room to challenge national frameworks, or to create alternate imaginations of the nation through the individualized use of communication technologies? It cannot be assumed that "the people in whose names nations are being made are… attuned to the national content of their self-appointed nationalist messengers" (Fox & Miller-Idriss, 2008, pg.537). Recognizing the use of new, and much farther-reaching communicative technologies by a growing number of individuals in an increasingly complex and interconnected world, sociologist Manuel Castell referred to the current global, "network society" (Castell, 2011, pg.773) - marked by the beginning of the information age – as a society formed on the basis of networks rather than

territories. Within this deterritorialized society, communication networks constitute the "fundamental networks of power making" (pg.785). When coupled with the rise of mass self-communication technologies, individuals in the networked society hold significant power to produce and disseminate their own messages, potentially challenging corporate control of communications, and shifting power dynamics in the communication sphere (pg.783). Drawing on the work of Fox & Miller-Idriss (2008, pg.537) this may be referred to as "talking the nation", or how the nation is discursively constructed through routine talk and interaction. This power, however, is highly, if not entirely dependent on the continuity and availability of free and global platforms of communication, alongside the decisions by governments to interfere with, regulate and restrict these technologies. Contrary to Castell's hopeful predictions, the rise of net nationalism makes evident that "neither the proliferation of supranational forms of governance… free market principles of global capitalism, nor expanding flows of transnational migration have unseated the nation state as the dominant form of political organization in the world today (Fox & Miller-Idriss, 2008, pg.536).

Other social media platforms have previously been analyzed from this perspective, however across the board, the salience of nations, national frameworks and nationalism has been found to routinely inform communication forms and content (Skey, 2022, pg.843). In a study conducted of Twitter, Shahin (2021, pg.1866) found that every day, on average, more than a million tweets were being posted that mentioned 'nation' or 'country' in a wide range of contexts. Everyday people from everywhere in the world, seemed to continuously construct the world as a "world of nations", through the banal reproduction of nationalism online. While Shahin encourages comparative studies that may shed light on differences in interface design and algorithmic affordances across platforms (pg.1867), if, as is the pending case with TikTok, a popular communication technology is banned, or if communication with other nations is severely monitored and controlled, as proposed in the RESTRICT Act, little room is left to

22

imagine oneself in a digital world of other nations. Engendering wide-spread production of counter identities that may likely challenge digital sovereignty and national frames of reference, is thus even more unlikely.

Alongside this, it is equally important to avoid "methodological nationalism" (Beck, 2002, pg.21) when attempting to understand the implications of new media and its everyday use by individuals. The base-line assumption that the nation-state holds ultimate power in containing and defining social processes, and that the 'nation' is the dominant way in which to imagine oneself in a world of nations, must therefore be scrutinized and continuously applied in the context of new communicative technologies which are redefining, reinventing, and reorganizing social interactions (Beck, 2002, pg.21). In his work on the significance of nationhood in everyday life, Michael Skey (2011, pp.7-32) speaks of the need to adopt both a macro and micro perspective to avoid such methodological nationalism. By better pinpointing and then analyzing moments where national frameworks are deployed and utilized to potentially destabilize and undermine established social orders, researchers are better equipped to ask what sort of response these shifts illicit, and how they may impact daily contexts through which people move (pg.32). There is thus an even greater need to propose a more coherent analytical framework for locating and making sense of nationhood in a hyperconnected world, without succumbing to methodological nationalism or reducing individual agency in this process. By acknowledging the wider structural changes taking place around communication technologies, specifically TikTok in this case, and later moving towards a more micro-level analysis of TikTok content, this thesis attempts to explore how the nation is discussed in a digital communicative environment which offers powerful new affordances to its users.

2.3 Banal nationalism vs. Banal cosmopolitanism

Globalization has evidently and profoundly impacted mass-communications, where it is now increasingly possible to imagine a more connected world as one entity, especially with the advent of interpersonal communicative technologies. With TikTok at the epicenter of intensifying, contemporary, digital-geopolitical tensions, and shifts in the liberal world order, the burgeoning importance of digital platforms and "their capacity to influence society, ideas [and] information – all shared across globally connected and diverse socio-technical systems" (Gray, 2021, pg.8) – is more evident than ever before. Typically, the advent and popularization of any new technology in the hands of many, most recently with social media platforms, has been met with claims of unifying potential to create, as McLuhan (1962; 1994) coined, a "global village". Despite initial excitement, theorists have been quick to point out that these hopes are short lived as often new technologies have failed to meet their liberating expectations of being either "global" or "cross cultural" platforms but are instead owned by corporations and maintained to serve private interests (Srinivasan, 2017, pg.1). As net nationalist governance strategies grow in popularity to protect digital sovereignty and maintain control over national frames of reference, the "not-so-long ago vision of a free, open and globally connected internet" (Daskal & Sherman, 2020, pg.3), is likewise further out of grasp. With this, scholars are pointing attention towards the "splinternet", a portmanteau of "split" and "internet" (Crews, 2002; Srinivasan, 2017, pg.3; Capri, 2020, pg.33; Supak, 2021, pg.558; Nwachukwu, 2022, pg.2; Su & Tang, 2023, pg.59). Coined as early as 2001, the "splinternet" has been used to describe the rising threat of the internet's status as a borderless, global, network. Instead, being replaced by separate, distinct networks with varying regulations and restrictions. With this, comes restrictive measures for digital platforms such as TikTok, which fundamentally contradicts the underlying democratic and decentralized ambitions of the global internet (Srinivasan, 2017, pg.3).

As outlined above, communication technologies can present lived realities which otherwise would be unreachable, which can in turn can reshape the limits of national imagination. Although a plethora of research confirms the salience of nations and nationalism, others have attempted to consider alternate effects of these engagements. With an increased openness towards others, at the expense of national allegiances, it has been argued that new forms of "cosmopolitanism" have the potential to replace nationalism (Skey, 2011, pg.32). "Cosmopolitanism" as described by Ulrich Beck (2006, pg.9), speaks to the expansion of cultural ties, loyalties to the nation and national identities, as moving beyond nation-state borders and therefore systems of control. This can be evidenced by the growing number of individuals using communication technologies to inhabit different worlds (Beck, 2006, pp.2-7). Beck (2002, pg.28) went further to describe "banal cosmopolitanism" as displacing Billig's theory of banal nationalism, given what appears as "national" is becoming increasingly transnational, and thus cosmopolitan.

Although banal cosmopolitanism has the potential to challenge and erode national spaces, nationalism, and the nation as the nodal point around which nationalist discourse is structured (Adriani, 2019, pg.4), seems to be ever present in both offline and online spaces. If, as mentioned, the nation remains the "primary locus of emotional identification and sense of belonging" (Kyriakidou, 2009, pg. 493), what of the idea of cosmopolitanism, or the existence of banal cosmopolitanism? In this instance, Kyriakidou (2009, pg.490) posits that nationalism and cosmopolitanism go hand in hand, co-existing as frameworks and employed alternatively to define and redefine an individual's sense of identity and their relation to the 'other'. Just as the global internet and social media platforms of the past failed on their promise to democratize communication and access to information, cosmopolitanism may not have emerged as the borderless, utopian expression of universal values given the existence and continued presence of nationalism. Recognizing this dilemma, cosmopolitanism can in turn be viewed as "a set of

increasingly available cultural outlooks that individuals selectively deploy to deal with new social conditions" (pg.493). Thus, if cosmopolitanism does not automatically do away with national loyalties and attachments, but is instead rooted in the nation, can banal cosmopolitanism be located within everyday discussions of the nation? Can "the ways in which ordinary people talk *about* and *with* the nation in ways that matter to them" (Fox & Miller-Idriss, 2008, pg.539), be considered both banal and cosmopolitan in nature? What does this look like within a new, detteritorialized communication medium on the brink of being banned? And what are the broader implications of this?

This thesis ultimately aims to explore these questions further, through the content and discourses of the nation on TikTok, to determine 1) if the nation is rooted in banal cosmopolitanism on TikTok, and then if 2) TikTok can be considered a site of banal cosmopolitanism despite net nationalism. TikTok has been chosen as the focus of this study given the platform's powerful new affordances available to users, which are markedly different to other social media platforms. Moreover, the rhetoric around TikTok has been considerably shaped by the net nationalist responses nation-states have taken towards the platform, greatly inhibiting the potential of TikTok to be viewed and studied as a transnational, connective communication medium. Given the context of rising net nationalist policies and sentiment towards the Chinese owned platform, it would be pertinent and only fair to analyze to what extent TikTok can be considered a site of banal cosmopolitanism, just as platforms of the past have been.

TikTok's affordances have yet to be explored in this context. Therefore, this thesis examines the potential of a popular platform to afford its users with global connectivity, whilst exploring what that connectivity looks like, under the broader theory of 'banal cosmopolitanism' as a lens to view new communicative technologies such as TikTok. It is imperative that TikTok's potential as a site of banal cosmopolitanism be understood further, particularly with ongoing

debate in the U.S which could greatly limit TikTok's largest user base from using and accessing the affordances of the platform in the future. Research has yet to consider the transnational, banal cosmopolitan communicative potential of TikTok, and as the net nationalist debate around its availability in the US is ongoing, the significance of this research is considerable and timely. Without duly considering TikTok's potential as a site of banal cosmopolitanism, it cannot be concluded that the net nationalist policies proposed, namely the RESTRICT Act, are aligned with the 150 million-plus constituents using the platform in the U.S. To research this potential, given the nation is rooted in cosmopolitanism (Kyriakidou, 2009), this paper utilizes digital ethnography as a method to dive deep into TikTok user content, interactions, and discourse around the nation from the bottom-up, by isolating videos with a national frame.

3. Analysis

The analysis chapter is divided accordingly into section 3.1) a description of the methods used, 3.2) a description of the digital ethnography and data gathered, 3.3) the broader quantitative findings, 3.4) the qualitative observations of the video content 3.5) the qualitative observations derived from discussions alongside videos, as taken from the top comments of the videos.

3.1   Methods

Shaped by increased digitalization, ethnographic research of online practices and communications has become increasingly popular in recent years "with the growing influence and presence of the internet in people's everyday lives" (Varis, 2014, pg.2). However traditional ethnographic methods have also been adapted to capture the negotiation between imagined lives within deterritorialized worlds (Appadurai, 1996, pg.52). Researchers of everyday nationalism have likewise called for more bottom-up ethnographic work in the area of net nationalism, given it often privileges an institutional or infrastructural analysis (Mihelj & Jimenez-Martinez, 2019, pg.342). Attempting to avoid an emphasis on the top-down aspects of TikTok that have dominated discussions of the platform, namely data-privacy and national security concerns, this thesis adopts the method of digital ethnography in an attempt to analyze, from the bottom-up, the broad variety of ways in which TikTok's unique affordances are being used on a daily basis. In the case of TikTok, the unit of analysis is not necessarily the individual as a representative of a wider group or nation, but rather the possible range of views associated with a particular subject in reference to the nation (Skey, 2013 pg. 242).

Digital ethnography essentially involves a degree of etic observation whereby the researcher observes the interactions on a particular platform to gain a fuller understanding of universal

patterns and explanations across cultures (Ward, 1999, pg100). Drawing from the broader work of Andreotta et al (2019) who proposed to analyze social media data by combining computational and qualitative analysis, the digital ethnography deployed for this thesis blends basic data-science techniques to overcome the challenges of the vast amounts of TikTok data available, and in-turn automating some of the aspects of ethnographic analysis. This is done to help prepare a manageable volume of data to synthesize, visualize and then interpret (pg.1767) in the qualitative component of this research. By adopting this method towards the analysis of TikTok, this thesis also breaks away from nationalism's "methodological comfort zones" (Goode, 2020, pg.373) dominated by standard ethnographies and discourse analysis and allows for the application of the foundational nationalism theories outlined above, to flourish in the digital world.

3.2   Digital ethnography and data description

Approximately 45 minutes a day was spent on the TikTok FYP during the 6-month ethnographic period, beginning in June 2021 and ending in November of 2021. Within this 6-month period, 236 videos with a national frame were collected. Videos with a national frame were considered firstly, as videos which either made direct reference to a nation or country, or multiple nations. Secondly, videos which discussed complimentary aspects of national identity such as region, religion, ethnicity, language or culture alongside a particular nation or multiple nations, and lastly, videos which discussed single, or multiple regions, religions, ethnicities, languages, or cultures, without making any reference to a nation or country. The last category was important to distinguish between videos on TikTok which may discuss aspects of nationhood with respect to a nation, between those which may not choose a national frame of reference to discuss other aspects of nationhood or national identity. Ultimately, the analysis sought to answer if 1) the nation is rooted in cosmopolitanism, and 2) if TikTok can be considered a site of banal cosmopolitanism despite net nationalism.

During the ethnographic component of this study, an Excel spreadsheet was used to maintain the collection of videos appearing on the FYP discussing the nation, along with relevant observations of each video. This spreadsheet ultimately provided this study with the aggregate data necessary to provide basic quantitative frequency analysis, and to visualize these findings before exploring the qualitative observations made about each video in more depth. When a video appeared on the FYP which referred to either a particular nation, country, ethnicity, or culture it was noted and categorized along the horizontal axis to determine which lens the nation is being framed, be it a national lens or otherwise. Each video was likewise categorized topically based on the content of the video, to determine whether, within discussions of the nation on TikTok, banal cosmopolitanism can be located. Observations regarding the content of each video was noted, along with the top comments on each video at the time. Given the comments section of any digital platform provides a wealth of naturally occurring discourse between users, the top comments in each video collected during the digital ethnography were noted for further analysis. Between 3 to 10 of the top comments on each video were noted. "Top comments" were determined based on the number of likes a particular comment received. Depending on the views and reach of the particular video, the top comments could receive anywhere between a few hundred to more than 10,000 likes. The TikTok comments section also automatically places comments with the most likes at the top of the comments section. Other information was also noted in the spreadsheet, such as any relevant biographic details of the creator as derived from TikTok's limited space for biographic information, along with hashtags, captions and audios used.

As mentioned within the context of this thesis, one of TikTok's unique affordances is its search engine powered by the FYP algorithmic recommendation system. Hashtags on TikTok are used alongside user-written captions among a plethora of other factors, to supplement categorization and organize videos topically for effective recommendation. For instance, some

videos can have a caption but no hashtags, and vice versa. Other videos can opt for neither a caption nor hashtags given the TikTok algorithmic recommendation system does not heavily, nor exclusively rely on the use of captions or hashtags to rank and then recommend videos. Likewise, the most common hashtags used on TikTok are known to be those related to the FYP. For instance, #fyp, #FYP, #foryou, and #foryoupage among other variations of the same, are frequently used on TikTok in an attempt for a user's video to reach and stay on the many instantiations of the FYP feed globally and thus, for that video to have greater reach, visibility, and engagement. For these reasons, this research, does not include a hashtag analysis.

In order to capture naturally occurring content and discourses of the nation on the platform, it was important to routinely engage with the TikTok FYP to essentially direct the algorithmic recommendation system towards presenting more content with a national frame on the FYP. Prior to the study, a new TikTok account was made. It was important to avoid informing the account created with any preferences regarding which content was of interest, to avoid contaminating the study with any systematic bias that will typically arise with a pre-set, preference based, algorithmic recommendation system. Moreover, at no point during the study were videos or topics manually searched for, so to best measure the natural reach and spread of the TikTok FYP algorithm. Once the digital ethnography began, only videos with a national frame were engaged with. Engaging with a video meant liking the particular video, opening and reading through the comments section and by saving the video. This was done to train the algorithm into recommending further videos with a national frame, to ultimately collect as many videos as possible during the 6-month period. The below analysis of the digital ethnography attempts to trace the breadth and depth of videos with a national frame on TikTok derived from the FYP, to determine its potential as a site of banal cosmopolitanism in the context of net nationalism.

3.3 Broader quantitative findings

Of the 236 videos with a national frame which were collected, 93 unique nations were discussed. In alphabetical order, the countries discussed were:

Afghanistan, Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cameroon, Canada, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Czechia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Denmark, Ecuador, Egypt, Eritrea, Finland, France, Ghana, Germany, Greece, Greenland, Guatemala, Guinea, Guyana, Haiti, Hong Kong, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Ireland, Isle of Man, Israel, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Liechtenstein, Malawi, Malaysia, Mauritania, Mexico, Moldova, Mongolia, Morocco, Nepal, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, North Korea, Norway, Pakistan, Palestine, Paraguay, Philippines, Portugal, Rwanda, Scotland, Singapore, Somalia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, Syria, Russia, Tanzania, Thailand, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkey, Uganda, the United Kingdom, Ukraine, the United Arab Emirates, the United States, Vietnam, Venezuela, Yemen, and Zambia.

To clarify, each video was not limited to talking about one nation or country. Some videos discussed multiple nations. The above list is thus the total amount of unique nations discussed across the 236 videos with a national frame. Of the 236 videos with a national frame, 32 videos did not make refence to any particular nation or country. Rather these videos were framed around either a particular region, religion, ethnicity, language or culture. Certainly, some videos which referenced a particular nation or multiple nations, also made reference to a region, religion, ethnicity, language or culture, however for the purposes of this thesis, it is important to emphasize that of the 236 videos collected with a national frame, 204 directly referenced a nation or country, while only 32 made no reference to a particular nation or country whilst still

discussing other aspects of nationhood and national markers of identity. Of the above nations discussed, it is also worth noting that across the 236 videos all geographic regions were covered. As defined by the United Nations, these regions are namely, Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, North America, and Oceania (United Nations, 2023).
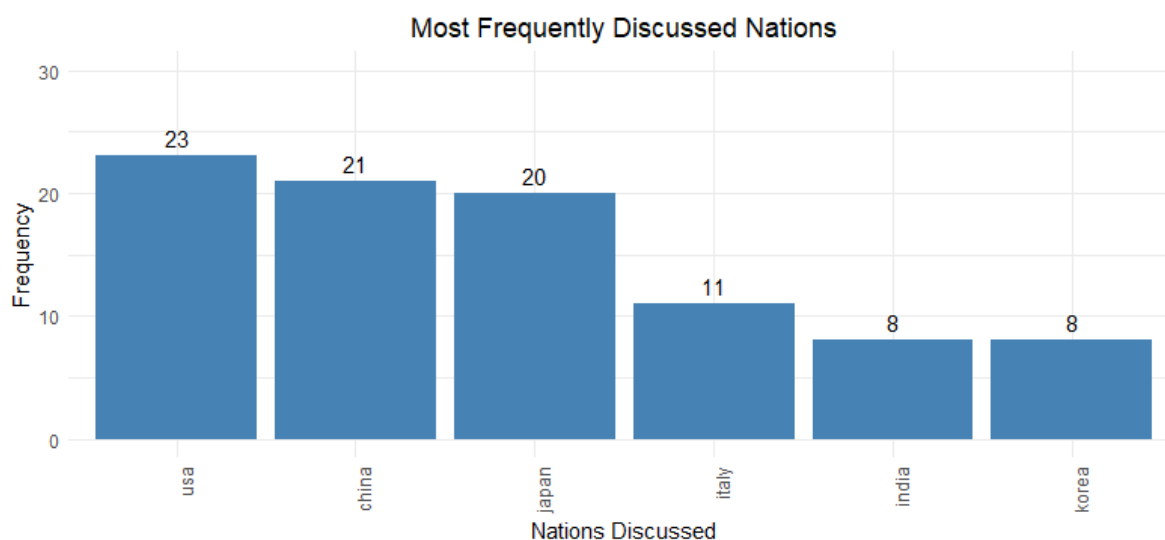

Figure 1: Frequency of nations discussed; data from TikTok videos collected from June to November 2021.

Of the 95 unique nations discussed, the nation which was most frequently discussed was the U.S, followed by China, Japan, Italy, and India and Korea with the same frequency, as showcased in the graph above. While these results may well reflect the fact that the U.S has the largest user base of TikTok, given TikTok is not available in China (rather China has an equivalent application Douyin which is only available for users in China) it is interesting to point out that China is discussed the most, second to the U.S. The remaining countries that are not showcased in the above figure were low in count and therefore not displayed, however they will be further discussed in the qualitative analysis section that follows.

Videos collected during the digital ethnography were also categorized topically for later analysis of the banal quality of communication regarding the nation on TikTok, and thus whether TikTok can be considered a site of banal cosmopolitanism. In total, there were 20

primary topics discussed. These were, in no particular order: education, food, travel, beauty, economics, music, fashion, language, events, politics, history, architecture, nature, cultural practices, struggle, stereotypes, technology, religion, sport, and film. These topics were defined and synthesized throughout the digital ethnography period. As videos with a national frame were collected, the topics those videos covered were noted down and then reduced to the above 20 primary topics.
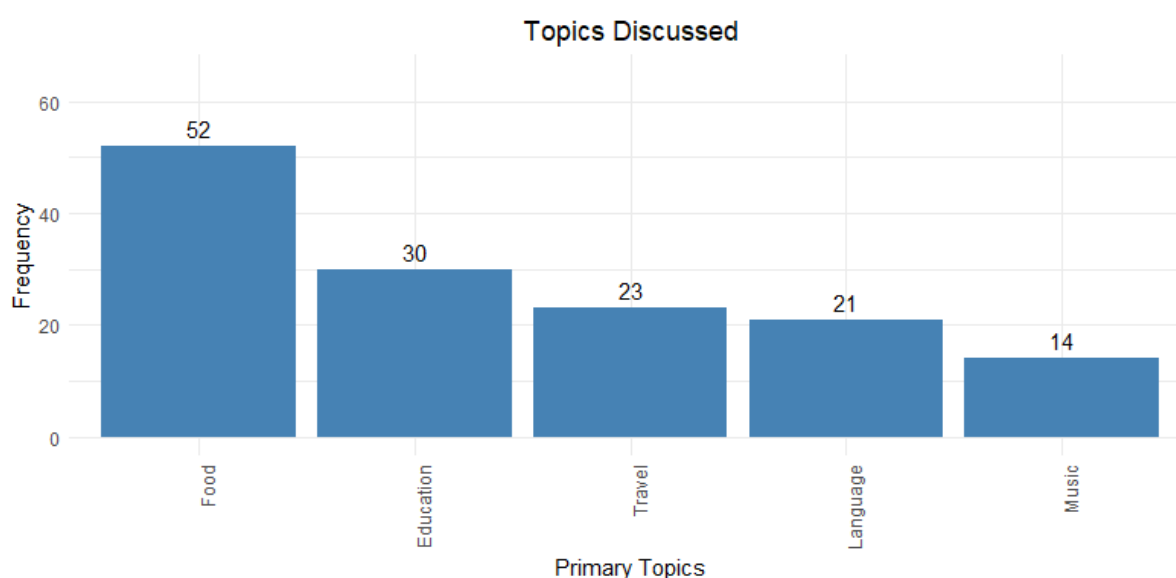

Figure 2: Frequency of topics discussed; data from TikTok videos collected from June to November 2021.

Of the 236 videos collected with a national frame, the above graph details the most frequently discussed topics. Some videos naturally discussed multiple topics. Although the data was coded to capture all the topics discussed, for ease of analysis and presentation, the topics were further divided into primary topics and secondary topics. Primary topics covered the main subject matter of the video, while secondary topics spoken about in the videos, were considered to supplement the primary topic of the video. For instance, videos under the topic of 'Language' were commonly framed as educational videos teaching TikTok users about a particular language. They were not however listed as primary topics under the 'Education' category. Instead, they were considered under the primary topic of 'Language' given the high number of

videos which discussed language in reference to the nation. The implications of the topics identified will likewise be further discussed in the qualitative analysis section that follows.

3.4   Qualitative observations of video content

To best unpack the implications of the above quantitative findings coupled with the detailed qualitative observations of the videos collected, this sub-section is divided into two parts. The first part will cover the qualitative observations and examples of video content in reference to how the nation is discussed on TikTok, and as this relates to the specific nations identified. The second part will provide further detail and examples of how the nation is discussed according to the primary topics identified.

3.4.1 Nations discussed

As mentioned above, more than 80 percent of the videos collected with a national frame, referred to a specific nation or country. Within the limits of this analysis unfortunately not all the nations discussed can be explored in equal detail, however it is worth emphasizing that across 236 videos collected, 93 nations were discussed. To reiterate, none of the videos or nations presented during the digital ethnography were searched for or sought out after, rather the underlying algorithm recommended these videos covering nations from all over the world, within the 6-month time period.

While the U.S was the nation mentioned most across the sample, it is important to explore *how* the U.S was discussed within a national framework. Interestingly, of the videos collected which specifically discuss the U.S, many of them discussed other nations alongside the U.S, of which several were referencing migration or experiences within the U.S that were derived from a secondary nation. For example, user @svetlanastrader, who now lives and works in the U.S but grew up in Ukraine, shares a "food hack" she learnt. On her way to work she recognizes a

familiar tree she remembers from her childhood in Ukraine which was called 'lypa' in Ukrainian, however she forgot the name in English. She proceeds to show a leaf of the tree covered in crystallized sugar and explains that as children she used to eat these leaves, as she films herself biting into one. The comments section was quick to name the tree in English as a Linden tree and share other facts about the tree and recipes for tea which can be made from its leaves. Another creator, @jayroymakokis, discussed the U.S alongside both Ukraine, and Native American culture. He shares a story he learnt from a Native American Elder to explain why indigenous people in the U.S wear Ukrainian scarfs, also known as Kukom scarfs, and why these two groups seemingly get along so well in the U.S. He recalls the Elder telling him of how Ukrainian people and Native Americans were treated poorly and as outsiders during the period where settlers were travelling "out West", which in turn led Ukrainians and Native Americans to trade together, including with scarfs which since then, indigenous Elder women have adopted. Other videos which discussed the U.S, also did so alongside other cultures within the U.S. For instance, several videos differentiated Hawaiian culture from the U.S (@kuakamahao), while others depicted and shared what life is like for specific communities within the U.S such as the Amish/Mennonite community (@bwolfe97).

Other nations, such as India and Pakistan were grouped together in videos and discussed with reference to broader regions. For example, user @notchaitea speaks of colorism in South Asia, or "desi" culture as a shared experience by showcasing to viewers a television commercial which aired in India and Pakistan. The advertisement depicted a woman "9 shades lighter" after using a particular skin whitening cream. While this beauty standard may not be common in all parts of the world, it was interesting to note how the user depicted skin whitening as a shared experience between Indian's and Pakistani's. Nordic countries were likewise grouped together. For instance, user, @kellylouisekilljoy uses comedy to explore the language differences between individually specified nations, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Iceland, and Finland,

whilst also explicitly naming the respective audio of the video "How the Nordic countries say Dragon". More randomized grouping of nations in a single video occurred typically to show an arbitrarily selected group of nations. For instance, the official account of "The People's Friendship University in Moscow Russia", @rudn_universtiy, posted a video of international students at a university fair introducing themselves in their native language, dressed in their country's traditional clothing. Another user, @davidprofits, simply showed pictures from different countries to share with viewers images "that might give someone culture shock".

Videos which did not refer to a particular nation or country whilst still making reference to other markers of nationhood or national identity such as culture, ethnicity or religion were few among the sample. It is nonetheless interesting to explore how these videos which lacked a national frame of reference were depicted and presented to viewers. User @katjaravdna for example, shows herself preparing and putting on a traditional "ivgu gátki". She mentions it is clothing worn by the Sámi people. The creator also notes that she is upset in the video as it was filmed on the 17th of May which, she mentions, is a day the Sámi people get harassed a lot. Even when looking at other markers of information on the video such as the caption, hashtag or audio used, the creator makes no mention to a particular nation or country, only mentioning indigeneity within the hashtags. This may have been done to avoid further conflating the stories of indigenous people with the history of colonialism, and to enlighten viewers about other aspects of the Sámi people's culture that may not otherwise be widely discussed.

Given it is not possible to discuss all the videos which exclusively focused on one nation or country (which was most common among the videos collected), the content of some of these videos will be further explored in the following subsection, with reference to primary topics discussed alongside individual nations.

3.4.2 Primary topics discussed

Starting with the most common topic of food, videos typically showcased food from a particular country, how certain foods are eaten in different countries, along with instructional recipe videos among a plethora of other discussions related to food. For example, @passtheflamingo showed viewers how to make a 'Greek Submarine', a mastic flavored drink. The creator explains that the mastic which is used is like a thick sugary gum/paste that is put in a glass of cold water on the end of a spoon, and hence why it's called a "ypovrichio" meaning "Greek submarine". Another creator, @trinicookingwithnatasha_, shows viewers how to make 'Doubles', a popular street food in Trinidad & Tobago. Other users linked food with traditions and cultural practices. For instance, @yourteaguy explains how in China, the practice of drinking tea is very meticulous and introduces viewers to "tea pets". The creator shows the little ceramic animals and explains that in Chinese Gong Fu tea tradition, the first steep of tea is always poured out and over the tea pets, to allow the leaves to fully open in flavour and fragrance. As he proceeds to make his tea, he pours the first steep over the tea pets. A wooden tray sits underneath the tea pets where the tea is caught after being poured.

The second topic, 'Education', refers to videos which were primarily about teaching or educating viewers about a particular aspect of a nation or country. For instance, some educational videos focused on explaining to viewers what life is like in a particular country. User @arabicmclovin uses humor and irony to show viewers "cool things" about living in Jordan. He starts off by explaining that there is no continuous supply of running water available since Jordan is a desert and water is scarce, before going on to explain how the system functions on a daily basis in Jordan. He explains that the city will turn on the water about 1-2 times a week to allow people to fill up water tanks located on the roofs of houses. He also humorously adds that there is "no need to worry if you run out of water as you can just call a delivery truck", which he shows in the video, "that'll fill your water tank for about 15 Jordanian dollars which

38

is about USD $20". Another video by @goddesscomplexpod is exploring and in turn educating views on how beauty standards differ in Mauritania. Other users directly discuss educational practices in different parts of the world, such as @miss_emily who is a schoolteacher in Australia, showing viewers how she teaches her classroom children about the long history of First Nations people prior to the colonization of "the country" by Europeans, through creative visualizations on the walls of her classroom.

Videos within the topic of 'Travel' were primarily filmed from the perspectives of a traveler, either to their home country, or unique experiences they had travelling in other countries. User @grace_africa for instance, filmed herself walking in Accra, Ghana. She goes on to shows her outfit and what she bought for lunch; a meat pie and juice, before going on to offer some tips for others thinking about visiting Accra. She offers a suggestion to viewers who might be interested in visiting Accra, that they must wear a strong anti-perspirant given the intense heat and mentions at the end of the video that this is a "pro-tip" that cannot be found on a YouTube video. After moving from Canada to Sweden, user @madelineraeaway describes the culture shocks she experienced when she moved to Sweden. One of the experiences she describes is suggesting to a friend to buy some candy. The Swedish friend responds, "But it's not Saturday?", "Swedes only eat candy on Saturdays". Another user shared a video they took while visiting North Korea, showing what driving in North Korea is like, passing by buildings, a temple, other cars, people, and buses (@derpierreder). Some videos also simply discussed travelling, without depicting any travel. For instance, @snatched_asthmatic filmed herself packing for a visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina. She explains that she grew up in the U.S but is ethnically Bosnian. She relates to others of the Balkan diaspora who when visiting Bosnia, cannot dress like they would in the U.S. She explains that her usual clothing in the U.S would be embarrassing in Bosnia and is stressed about what to pack for her upcoming trip. Interestingly her video is captioned "Balkan content for Bosnians who grew up in the U.S....

Super niche I know. Hopefully someone relates", acknowledging how "niche" and specific the content may be. However, within the top comments, many other users can relate with other users commenting from Norway, another from Croatia, Serbia, Poland and Bosnia too.

With regards to the topic of 'Language' videos which took on a national frame spoke of language as "coming from" a certain country. For instance, one creator explains in a video the etymology of the term "Ghetto". He explains that the word originates from the island of Ghetto in Venice, Italy before moving on to explain the Jewish history behind the word (@jewbelong). Some creators even spoke of the ways in which digital languages, such as emojis, are interpreted and used differently depending on the context of where they are used. For instance, user @midiforreal share in a video which emojis to use "when chatting with your Chinese friends". She explains the different meaning of the pill emoji in China whereby it is used to say "Are you mad? Take some medication!", and how the drumstick means "You are awesome" or "I clap for you". In another video talking about the creative names people from the Philippines give their children, @polyglotparadise confirms "this is no joke" as he knows of a child named Queen Elizabeth and another named after a particular type of fruit. Using humor to discuss language differences, @liv_iathan asks viewers to share the perceived strangest phrase they learnt in another language. She goes on to explain that in Hungary, Hungarians don't say "enough is enough", they say "even a horse's penis has an end".

The fifth most popular topic discussed was 'Music' whereby users shared traditional and/or popular songs from a particular country. For example, one creator shared a traditional "Waulking song" from the Outer Hebrides Islands in Scotland. She explains that the song is typically sung by women during the last step of textile work. The creator includes live captions in the video as she describes that "Waulking" or "fulling" was a process for cleaning and softening tweed and tartan cloth. The creator shows a video of the same and ends the video with a question, "Do you have examples from your own community? Tell us!", encouraging other

users to share their own experiences (@intersellar_isabellar). In some cases, creators spoke of music from specific ethnicities and cultures without referencing a nation, whilst also explaining the history of a particular type of music. For example, user @ancestralbrew shared a clip from a video of a Roma woman dancing, describing Roma as "people in Europe who have been misunderstood by all of humanity", typically known as Gypsys or Cigani derived from the Greek word for 'outsider'. He explains with videos, that music and dance have played a wide role in the ethno-identity of the Romani with those in Spain and France responsible for the creation of the Flamenco and Manoush jazz styles. In another example, creator @manalmet responds to a trending song called Wawa by Hafia Wahbe. The creator explains to viewers that the song is in fact Coptic language, the last version of the ancient Egyptian language which was previously used in Ancient Egypt. She explains that the language is still spoken in the Coptic Orthodox church and in Egyptian/Arabic dialect, whilst adding that when Egyptian's have children, a lot of words used to talk to babies are actually Coptic words such as the word 'wawa' in the song which means booboo/injury in the Egyptian used today, while in Coptic it is an expression of pain.

Across the 20 primary topics identified, almost all videos were of a banal quality, and although no video explicitly spoke about nationalism, some videos which spoke about the topics of struggle or stereotyping, spoke on issues such as racism, colonialism, and apartheid which are potentially emblematic of respective nations. For example, one creator, @chelvis24, spoke of the struggles she experienced on her "Birthright" trip to Israel. She begins by saying that in Jerusalem she begged her guide to allow her to visit the Muslim quarter, however she was not allowed. She also recalled how she was brought to tears at the Western Wall when she heard the Islamic call to prayer, while others in the group, including the guide, were talking about how loud, annoying, and obnoxious it was before the group was rushed to leave the site. Another creator talks of her experience being stereotyped by a customer as a black woman in a retail

store. A customer points out and makes a comment a white lady in the store without the customer knowing that in fact that woman is the creator's mother and that she is half Italian and half Trinidadian herself (@preepree17).

3.5 Qualitative observations of discussions

Of the top comments collected, an overwhelming number of them were comparative in nature. Among a majority of the videos collected the top comments were dominated by other users sharing their experiences as related to that particular video and comparing their own, or other nations. For instance, in a video, user @msba3 shared a recipe from Algeria for almond biscuits and explains that they are typically made for the Islamic holiday Eid or for weddings in Algeria. One of the top comments read "We have something similar in Germany called Vanille and Kipferl". Another simply wrote "Ghriba; in Morocco" while a third user commented seemingly surprised, "Hey! We make something super similar in the Balkans!". In another video user @thebeyerlebunch shows viewers what it is like to get their hair done in Zambia. The user films the whole process before revealing the total cost is the equivalent of USD $11. Users in the comments section were shocked when comparing the prices to the U.S. One user commented "this would cost "like $200??", with another user sharing their experience, "when I went to Ghana I got my box braids and paid about $20 with a tip and beads added. So worth it!". In one video shared by user @nifty, the creator explains what a Japanese "furoshiki" is and the many ways they can be used, to wrap gifts, lunch and help pack for a trip for instance. The top comments included "I'm not Japanese but in my country in the past they had the same thing", "We also use this in Turkish culture it's called 'bohca'", and "that's cool...we do / used to do this in Morocco too...we call it rezma".

Other comments on videos were filled with curiosity and questions by other users. In one video for example, user @kacierose4 shows viewers what a typical Italian menu looks like and

explains that meals usually begin with 'Antipasti' or appetizers, before a 'primo piatto', the first course, which is typically a smaller portion of pasta, before having a 'secondo piatto' or second course which usually consists of heavier, meat dishes. Viewers in the comments were intrigued to learn more about how Italian meals are actually eaten in Italy, with some mentioning "Pasta is [a] light meal because [its] a little portion not like in USA when they give you 3 kg of spaghetti". Others asked, "is vegetarian food common? this is my main fear if I visit one day", "Random question but do most restaurants offer gluten free pasta" and "what meat options do Italian restaurants usually have? I'm studying abroad next year and don't like veal which I know is common". Another video by user @wenmei_i_go_eat_dinner is showing her "Guzheng" or Chinese Zither instrument. Using 4 nails taped to her fingers the player plucks the strings. She explains that it is set in a pentatonic scale and shows how to play it. The comments are inquisitive, asking "how did you learn this instrument?", "do you have an instructor or does someone in your family play?, and "what's the difference between a guzheng and a guqin?".

In other videos, users are thankful in the comments to learn about other countries and nations, or for recognizing unique aspects of their own cultures. In one video showcasing Roma women dancing (@ancestralbrew), users in the comments glad to see their own culture being represented. One user commented "I am Romani! This is the best video I've ever seen on the Romani people. Thank you for this!". Even in instances where negative comments are made, other users are quick to add to the discourse and provide a counter argument or perspective. For example, in the same video on Romani culture, one user commented "If they wouldn't litter my entire city and steal everything… I would have a more positive image/wouldn't misunderstand them". Below this was another counter comment attempting to provide an alternate argument, "they don't realise in what kind of position the Romani people have been put in for centuries". Another user simply wanted to point out that there is "a lot of hate in these comments… doesn't feel good to see.". In another video by user @rugbypass, depicting a group of schoolboys

performing the Haka before a rugby game in New Zealand, negative comments were likewise made. However, it was interesting to note that the comments with the most likes, almost always superseded negative comments, one writing for example, "for the ignorant people in the comment section. we don't segregate our culture and selves from others. Instead we educate and appreciate together". Another wrote, "Why is everyone shitting on this? This is literally a gigantic part of their culture, look it up if u don't know what [you're] talking about". Other top comments included "American here... visited New Zealand and fell in love! the HAKA is otherworldly. the passion and pride with which it is performed is incomparable" and "As an American… I find this beautiful and captivating. I am jealous of the unity.".

Interestingly, the videos which spoke about specific ethnic groups or various cultures within a particular nation were flooded with nuanced discussions about ethnicity and culture in the top comments. In one video the creator, @theladyizdihar, encourages viewers not to broad statements about Russian geography and ethnicity, before explaining that over 180 ethnic groups live in Russia, showing a map of different divisions of federal subjects and explaining that each are very different. The comments in this video delved deeper into national identity, for instance one user wrote "I am Russian. Not the Slavic kind but the ethnic minority type. My mom is from Buryatia and it is infuriating to see how uneducated [people] are [about] Russia". Another user was thankful for the video showcasing the complexities of Russian ethnicity, writing "[Thanks], my nationality is Russian (according to my passport) but ethnically I'm kinda mixed, [because] I have German, Jewish, and Chuvash ancestors", with another user confirming the same, writing "Russia is so diverse and people don't know that. They think that everyone there is white, orthodox Christian, and lives in Moscow (not true)". Other comments were sad to learn of this information only now, writing "The US portrays Russia so poorly that I didn't even know there were so many different cultures and demographics there". Another

user agreed, saying "Sadly American schools barely teach us about Russia. We're only taught (in a very biased way) the Soviet /Cold war era of Russia".

Across the 236 videos, many top comments were similar, whereby users were shocked at how much they have learnt on TikTok, and thankful to the users creating the videos for teaching others about their own countries, nations, cultures, ethnicities, and religions among a plethora of other topics. These comments ranged from "TikTok legit teaches more than school", "I would never have found out [about] this, thank you for sharing", "I recently heard about this! How come nobody talks about this!!!", "Thank you for informing the world!", "Can I repost this for awareness please?", "THIS IS SO IMPORTANT FOR CHILDREN TO LEARN ABOUT", "Thank you for showing your culture", "You are inspiring. Thank you for sharing your story", "Never heard of this before but this is super interesting", and "I think this was amongst the most informative TikTok's I've ever seen".

4. Discussion

This thesis ultimately aimed to explore the content and discourses of the nation on TikTok to firstly determine if the nation is rooted in banal cosmopolitanism on the digital platform, and secondly, if TikTok can be considered a site of banal cosmopolitanism despite rising net nationalism intent on banning the platform. The following discussion will attempt to situate the implications of the above analysis and results from the digital ethnography conducted of the platform, within the broader context of net nationalism surrounding TikTok.

From the above analysis, the presence of banal cosmopolitanism is very much evident on TikTok. By exclusively observing how TikTok users talk about, and with the nation, it is evident that the nation is still the most common frame of reference for individuals on the platform, with over 80 percent of the videos collected making reference to a specific nation or country. Regarding the prevalence of cosmopolitan content and interactions, of the videos analyzed there was a high level of diversity and transnational interactions, with videos originating from across all major regions of the world. Although the most common videos discussed the U.S and China, there were over 90 other unique countries discussed within the relatively small sample of videos collected during the ethnographic period. This goes to show that although TikTok and its underlying recommendation system typically recommends videos to users based on their personal topics of interest, TikTok draws on content and then recommends these videos, from essentially all over the world. Along with the content, each video was accompanied with multifaceted and diverse discussions between individuals expressing a wide range of national identities, all interacting and communicating with one another via the comments section of the platform. Given that throughout these cosmopolitan interactions, most videos were still framed with a national lens, it can therefore be concluded

that the nation is in-fact rooted in cosmopolitanism on TikTok, as per Kyriakidou's (2009) theorization.

With regard to the banal quality of the content and discourses around nationhood on TikTok, there was likewise an overwhelming presence of everyday, banal videos discussing the nation. Of the most frequently discussed topics regarding the nation, most users seemed to discuss the nation in a mundane, everyday sense. Many shared their day-to-day experiences within a national frame, while others drew on recipes, fashion, and music among other topics to discuss the nation. It must also be noted that there was no explicit or direct reference to nationalism throughout the digital ethnography. While this may conventionally be interpreted as banal nationalism as theorized by Billig (1995), the evident widespread expansion of multiple loyalties to the nation and national identities, rapidly moving across nation-state borders via transnational interactions on TikTok, signals a move away from banal nationalism towards banal cosmopolitanism as described by Ulrick Beck (2006) in *The Cosmopolitan Vision.* The results of this study therefore suggest that TikTok can serve as a site of banal cosmopolitanism, and that perhaps banal cosmopolitanism is doing away with banal nationalism on TikTok. While social media platforms of the past have also given individuals from across the world the ability to engage with one another in a "world of nations", the new and unique affordances TikTok offers its users seem to have extended this ability significantly. Especially when looking at the reach and breadth of the FYP algorithmic recommendation system, and the lack of dependency on networks or following behavior, it can be concluded that TikTok provides users with a greater ability to speak about the nation, and be listened to by individuals from across the world.

While this study ultimately aimed to train the algorithm into recommending videos with a national frame to stretch and measure the breadth and depth of banal cosmopolitan content and interactions on the platform, it must be acknowledged that the average TikTok user does not

use the platform like this. Each TikTok user has a unique and hyper-personalized FYP, given the algorithm recommends videos to users based on their individual interests and content preferences. Therefore, while the average TikTok user may not ever see such a wide variety of videos from such a high degree of countries, it still warrants reiterating, and as this study has evidenced, that TikTok recommends videos and draws on content for recommendation from nations, all across the world of nations. What this study ultimately aimed to showcase was that while on other platforms, individuals may very well only see content from people they follow or know, or in other words, come to know and mingle with only a small subset of their nation within an imagined community (Anderson, 1983), TikTok will recommend videos to users based on their interests, regardless of where these videos originated from within the "world of nations". For example, if an individual is interested in knowing more about how coffee is made on a video-based platform like YouTube, that user will need to firstly search for "how coffee is made". If the user is interested in knowing how coffee is made in a particular country, they would then have to stipulate in their search "how is coffee made in Singapore" for instance. On TikTok however, if a user is interested in coffee making, their FYP will recommend videos showing how to make coffee without the user needing to search for it. By drawing on all videos which talk about coffee and how it is made, that user will be presented with videos about how coffee is made regardless of where the video was created or by whom. In other words, while on other platform's users must search for videos from specific places, on TikTok, users are automatically presented with videos based on their interests, without having to pre-select where the videos come from, or from which context they are filmed. Thus, although not for everyone, TikTok can very likely serve as a site of banal cosmopolitanism, but only provided that the platform is not heavily regulated or banned.

Despite the rise of net nationalism, TikTok has successfully created a transnational, cosmopolitan digital space, of everyday, global interactions otherwise not possible on

traditional social media platforms. This is particularly significant given TikTok is on the verge of being banned in the U.S, which would ultimately cut-off it's userbase of 150 million people from engaging with content and interacting with the millions of other users outside the U.S. Not only will this have significant implications for the fundamental rights and freedoms of speech, expression and access to information in the U.S, a ban would greatly diminish the ability for TikTok to continue serving as a site of banal cosmopolitanism by essentially removing a large number of possible counterpoints to how the nation is discussed from the communicative space. With nation-states increasingly in pursuit of securing and protecting digital sovereignty, it is becoming increasingly difficult to control how the nation is framed and perceived via mainstream and traditional communication mediums. If TikTok can thus serve as a site of banal cosmopolitanism, whereby users can promote, discuss, and establish alternate conceptions of their nation as compared to other nations, essentially democratizing individual broadcasting about the nation, it is not surprising that nation-states are intent on banning the platform. While literature and studies on the relationship between nationalism and communication platforms are aplenty, this study is the first of its kind to trace how the nation is discussed on TikTok, and to determine its potential as a site of banal cosmopolitanism, whilst placing the study in the context of rising net nationalism. Ultimately, this study has clearly highlighted, that net nationalism and banal cosmopolitanism *cannot* co-exist.

This study, however, is not without its limitations. Firstly, with greater resources and perhaps with the application of more advanced machine learning techniques, future studies on TikTok can surely benefit from a larger sample size of content. Videos covering TikTok content and discussions over a longer period of time can also prove fruitful for future studies. It would be prudent to perform further mixed methods research of TikTok, to incorporate more quantitative studies using natural language processing (NLP) and topic modelling along with qualitative insights from the bottom-up. Furthermore, given the ethnographic component of this

research was conducted in 2021, research could benefit from studying more recent content and interactions on TikTok. Users on TikTok have significantly increased since 2021. While young people initially dominated the platform, the average user age has since increased. It would therefore be interesting for research to explore more recent TikTok content and discussions to determine if the banal cosmopolitanism evidenced within this study is still present on the platform, amongst a constantly evolving userbase which is increasingly embedding TikTok into everyday life. Furthermore, given the recently sparked debate around TikTok and heightened concerns by users over its potential ban, it would be very interesting to trace TikTok user sentiment, specifically regarding the TikTok ban, in future studies.

Conclusion

This thesis aimed to explore whether the nation is rooted in banal cosmopolitanism on TikTok, and thus if TikTok can be considered a site of banal cosmopolitanism in the context of net nationalism. This thesis first empirically traced the connective potential of TikTok as a digital space of banal cosmopolitanism despite rising net nationalism, via the exploration of relevant literature and theories. While research on social media platforms of the past has mapped their potential connective power, literature has also widely acknowledged that they have failed to fulfill on their unifying promises of connecting the world, as was first anticipated from the onset of the internet. Research has also rarely considered the transnational communicative potential of TikTok to do the same despite the different and varying affordances offered to users. Additionally, given the context of net nationalism, it was important to determine the potential of TikTok to serve a site of banal cosmopolitanism while debates are ongoing in the U.S, and respective policies are being introduced which could greatly limit, or entirely ban TikTok's largest user base from using and accessing the affordances of the platform in the future. It was therefore pertinent and only fair to analyze, to what extent TikTok be considered a site of banal cosmopolitanism, just as platforms of the past have been.

This research expanded the literature and knowledge around TikTok to better grasp the salience of nations and nationalism within a contemporary communicative environment which is increasingly becoming embedded within everyday life. The empirical findings were then used to frame the 6-month digital ethnography conducted of the platform, which included analytically both quantitative data and qualitative observations of how the nation is discussed on TikTok, along with content and discourses derived from the platform as made available by new and unique affordances. Ultimately, it was found that although the nation is still the predominant frame of reference for many individuals within a "world of nations", on TikTok

the nation is doused in banal cosmopolitanism. Given the concept of banal cosmopolitanism is derived from the well-known conceptualization of banal nationalism, naturally the results of the digital ethnographic analysis could from the top-down, be viewed as expressions of the latter. However, when taking a bottom-up approach to analyzing TikTok, coupled with the knowledge and understanding of the unique affordances and context of the platform as outlined in this thesis, it is difficult to ignore the cosmopolitan shift that can be observed within the above analysis. This thesis also went on to explore implications of this newfound site of banal cosmopolitanism alongside heightened global tensions, specifically its threat to digital sovereignty and the attempted regulation of TikTok via net nationalist governance strategies.

It was found that the content produced on TikTok which discusses the nation, is overwhelmingly transnational, diverse and banal in character, with videos coming from all over the world and covering a plethora of everyday topics in relation to the nation. The discussions which accompanied these videos in the comments section, are also diverse and cosmopolitan in nature with users from all across the world utilizing TikTok to express what they have learnt from videos depicting other nations or by comparing their own nation to others. From Austria to Zambia and every region in between, TikTok democratizes the ability to broadcast and share individual experiences of the nation to users all over the world. The digital platform facilitates transnational engagement by encouraging users to share their perspectives, all whilst learning about their personal interests from people all over the globe on a scale not seen before from other social media platforms. While TikTok may well be considered a site of banal cosmopolitanism it, sadly, *cannot* coexist alongside net nationalism.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adams, IA., Quadri, MO 2018. Nexus Between Social media and Democratization: Evidence From 2015 General Elections in Nigeria. *Intellectual Discourse*, vol.26, no.1, pp.111-132.

Adriani, R 2019. Nationalism, Populism and Global Social Media. *Glocalism: Journal of culture, politics and innovation*, Issue 2, DOI: 10.12893/gjcpi.2019.2.2

Ancestral [@ancestralbrew]. 2021, June 23. *Who are the Romani. Full video on YouTube now! #romani #roma #anthropology*. [Video]. TikTok. https://www.tiktok.com/@ancestralbrew/video/6977041568016502018

Anderson, B 2006. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Rev. ed. Verso, London.

Andreotta, M 2019. Analyzing social media data: A mixed-methods framework combining computational and qualitative text analysis, *Behavior Research Methods*, vol.51, no.4, pp.1766-1781.

Andrew [@passtheflmaingo]. 2021, May 25. *#foodhistory #food #history #recipe #iraqifood #mesopotamia #ancienthistory #ancient #cooking #fish #foryoupage #foryou #cookingvideo #learnontiktok*. [Video]. TikTok. https://www.tiktok.com/@passtheflamingo/video/6965995982517439750

Appadurai, A 1996, *Modernity at large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. University of Minnesota Press.

ArabicMcLovin [@arabicmclovin]. 2021, June 3. *Cool things about living in the Middle East #fyp #xyzbca #learnontiktok*. [Video]. TikTok. https://www.tiktok.com/@arabicmclovin/video/6969645372771781894

Barinka, A., Carville, O 2023. TikTok Considers Splitting From ByteDance If Deal With US Fails. *Bloomberg*. https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-03-14/tiktok-considers-divesting-from-bytedance-if-deal-with-us-fails#xj4y7vzkg

Becca [@bwolfe97]. 2021, Mat 2. *Another Mennonite/Amish market shopping haul! #groceryshopping #groceryhaul #amish #amishtiktok #deals #pennsylvaniacheck#lancaster.* [Video]. TikTok. https://www.tiktok.com/@bwolfe97/video/6957720373282475270

Beck, U 2002. The Cosmopolitan Society and its Enemies. *Culture & Society*, vol.19, pp.17-44.

Beck, U 2006. *The Cosmopolitan Vision*. Polity Press, UK.

Bhandari, A., Bimo, S 2022. Why's Everyone on TikTok Now? The Algorithmized Self and the Future of Self-Making on Social Media. *Social Media + Society*, pp.1-11.

Billig, M 1995. *Banal Nationalism*. SAGE Publications Ltd.

Bloomberg Opinion Editorial Board, 2023. Banning TikTok Won't Do Much Good. *Bloomberg*. https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2023-01-30/tiktok-ban-in-us-would-do-more-harm-than-good#xj4y7vzkg

BNIN [@msba3]. 2021, May 12. *Reply to @bintihumaira TCHEREK RECIPE #tcherek #cookies #almond #algerian #northafrican #eid2021 #musttry*. [Video]. TikTok. https://www.tiktok.com/@mediterranean_flavor/video/6961456396701289734

Boffone, T 2022. *TikTok Cultures in the United States*. Routledge. NY.

Bridge Initiative Team, 2021. Factsheet: The PATRIOT Act. *Bridge: A Georgetown University Initiative*. https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/the-patriot-act/

Brubaker, R 2020. Digital hyperconnectivity and the self. *Theory and Society*, vol.49, pp.771-801.

Capri, A 2020. Techno-nationalism and corporate governance. *Hinrich Foundation*. https://www.hinrichfoundation.com/research/wp/tech/techno-nationalism-and-corporate-governance/

Carr, C., Hayes, R 2015. Social Media: Defining, developing, and divining. *Atlantic Journal of Communication*, vol.23, no.1, pp.46-65.

Castells, M 2011. A Network Theory of Power. *International Journal of Communication*, pp.773-787.

Chan, K 2023. Here are the countries that have bans on TikTok. *AP News*. https://apnews.com/article/tiktok-ban-privacy-cybersecurity-bytedance-china-2dce297f0aed056efe53309bbcd44a04

Chelvis [@chelvis24]. 2021, May 21. *#greenscreen #palestine #israel #freepalestine #gazaunderattack #revolution #israeloccupation #endtheoccupation #rightofreturn #birthrightisrael*. [Video]. TikTok. https://www.tiktok.com/@chelvis24/video/6964558086363303173

Clayton, J 2023. TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew's Congress showdown: Five takeaways. *BBC*. https://www.bbc.com/news/65047087

Cong, G., Tong, Q., Wei, H 2021. The clash of China's social media titans. *Nikkei Asia*. https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Caixin/The-clash-of-China-s-social-media-tita

Curry, D 2023. TikTok App Report 2023. *Business of Apps*. https://www.businessofapps.com/data/tiktok-report/

Crews, CW 2001. On My Mind. *Forbes*. https://www.forbes.com/forbes/2001/0402/036.html?sh=78f338965ea3

Daskal, J., Sherman, J 2020. Data Nationalism on the Rise: The global push for state control of data. *Data Catalyst Institute*. https://datacatalyst.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Data-Nationalism-on-the-Rise.pdf

David [@davidprofits]. 2021, July 21. *Pictures that might give you culture shock #fyp.*
     [Video]. TikTok.
     https://www.tiktok.com/@davidprofits/video/6989697924103965958?_r=1&_t=8WH
     hjXQHjda&is_from_webapp=v1&item_id=6989697924103965958

Derpierreder [@derpierreder]. 2021, June 30. *Sorry I had to blur out something which is not
     allowed to show from North Korea in the middle #northkorea #dprk #travel.* [Video].
     TikTok. https://www.tiktok.com/@derpierreder/video/6979578806247984390

Feldkamp, J 2021. Chapter 6: The Rise of TikTok: The Evolution of a Social Media Platform
     During COVID-19, in *Digital Responses to COVID-19*, pp.73-85.

Fiesler, C [@professorcasey]. 2023, March 23. *TikTok hearing thoughts. It went exactly as
     expected. #tiktokhearing #tiktokban #dontbantiktok #dataprivacy #contentmoderation*
     [Video]. TikTok.
     https://www.tiktok.com/@professorcasey/video/7213871622749490474?_r=1&_t=8a
     uYaUwbl2I

Fox, JE., Miller-Idriss, C 2008. Everyday nationhood. *Ethnicities*, vol.8, no.4, pp.536-563.

Gabbard, T [@tulsigabbard]. 2023, April 13. *The Restrict Act is nothing short of a betrayal of
     our democracy, as it seeks to impose a digital Iron Curtain.* [Video]. TikTok.
     https://www.tiktok.com/@tulsigabbard/video/7221498523357842734?_r=1&_t=8caF
     vrkZ6zx

Goddess Complex [@goddesscomplexpod]. 2021, May 19. *Beauty Standards Around The
     World: Mauritania. #storytime #beautystandard #womenoftheworld #herstory.*
     [Video]. TikTok.
     https://www.tiktok.com/@goddesscomplexpod/video/6964084859568639238

Goode, PJ 2020. Artificial intelligence and the future of nationalism. *Nations and
     Nationalism*, vol.27, no.2, pp.363-376.

Grace Africa [@grace_africa]. 2021, April 2023. *The heat in Ghana is built different.* [Video].
     TikTok. https://www.tiktok.com/@grace_africa/video/6954299039768775942

Gray, JE 2021. The geopolitics of 'platforms': the TikTok challenge. *Internet Policy Review*,
     vol.10, no.2.

Greenwald, G 2013. NSA collecting phone records of millions of Verizon customers daily.
     The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/06/nsa-phone-records-
     verizon-court-order

Guinaudeau, B., Munger, K., Votta, F., 2022. Fifteen Seconds of Fame: TikTok and the
     Supply Side of Social Video. *Computational Communication Research*, Vol.4, No.2,
     pp.463-485. Amsterdam University Press.

Hanson, L 2021. Asking for a friend: What if the TikTok algorithm knows me better than I
     know myself? *GQ*. https://www.gq.com.au/success/opinions/asking-for-a-friend-what-

if-the-tiktok-algorithm-knows-me-better-than-i-know-myself/news-story/4eea6d6f23f9ead544c2f773c9a13921

Head, N 2021. The Rise of TikTok During Covid-19, *Tug Agency*. https://www.tugagency.com/blog/2021/07/27/the-rise-of-tiktok-during-covid-19/

Herrman, J 2019. How TikTok Is Rewriting the World, *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/10/style/what-is-tik-tok.html

Hodge, R 2023. "Patriot Act on steroids": Left and right unite against "fear-mongering" TikTok ban. *Salon*. https://www.salon.com/2023/04/02/patriot-act-on-steroids-left-and-right-unite-against-fear-mongering-tiktok-ban/

Jesses Teahouse [@yourteaguy]. 2021, May 24. *Answer to @peckerwrecker 69, 3 tips for good tea! #tea #teatok #jesseteahouse #chinese #asian #traditional #culture #realax #chill #gonfutea #gongfucha.* [Video]. TikTok. https://www.tiktok.com/@yourteaguy/video/6965932647398837510

JewBelong [@jewbelong]. 2021, September 3. *Let's learn a little bit about where the word ghetto comes from with clips from inside an actual ghetto in Venice #venice #italy #jewish #history.* [Video]. TikTok. https://www.tiktok.com/@jewbelong/video/7003734404593945861

Kamil [@notchaitea]. 2021, March 17. *I get reminded of this nightmare every so often #fyp #colorism #desi #indian #pakistani #yikes.* [Video]. TikTok. https://www.tiktok.com/@notchaitea/video/6951970768356003077

Kawelu, K [@kuakamahao]. 2021, May 5. *#greenscreenvideo #foryou #fyp #native #indigenous #languages #education #hawaii #pasifika #polynesia #melenesia #micronesia.* [Video]. TikTok. https://www.tiktok.com/@kuakamahao/video/6958897437310274821

Killjoy, KL [@kellylouisekilljoy]. 2021, June 1. *Why Finland? #tiktoklær #denmark #sweden #norway #iceland #finland.* [Video]. TikTok. https://www.tiktok.com/@kellylouisekilljoy/video/6968578040368598277

Kyriakidou, M 2009. Imagining Ourselves Beyond the Nation? Exploring Cosmopolitanism in Relation to Media Coverage of Distant Suffering. *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, Vol. 9, No. 3.

Lady Izdihar [@theladyizdihar]. 2021, July 3. *#russia #russian #russiantiktok #easterneuropean #slavic #history #geography #ethnography #criticalthinking #russophobia #historybuff #europe.* [Video]. TikTok. https://www.tiktok.com/@theladyizdihar/video/6980779230451748102

LIVI [@liv_iathan]. 2021, November 8. *ready for the stitches #fyp #foryou #language.* [Video]. TikTok. https://www.tiktok.com/@liv_iathan/video/7039417691404487982

Lorenz, T., Harwell, D 2022. Facebook paid GOP firm to malign TikTok. *The Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/03/30/facebook-tiktok-targeted-victory/

Makokis, J [@jayroymakokis]. 2021, July 23. *Reply to @germanlinda #indigenoustiktok.* [Video]. TikTok. https://www.tiktok.com/@jayroymakokis/video/6977069605877468421

Madeline [@madelineraeaway]. 2021, June 3. *"I have laundry time booked" is a perfectly good excuse to cancel plans in Sweden #cultureshock #cultureshockchallenge #livingabroad #sverige.* [Video]. TikTok. https://www.tiktok.com/@madelineraeaway/video/6969591046728633606

Manal [@manalmet]. 2021, June 15. *Do you use these Coptic words in your country? #egypt #egyptian #african #northafrican #coptic #arabtiktok #egyptiantiktok #arabicmusic #fyp.* [Video]. TikTok. https://www.tiktok.com/@manalmet/video/6973857464135453957

McLuhan, M 1962. *The Gutenberg galaxy: the making of typographic man*. University of Toronto Press, Canada.

McLuhan, M 1994. *Understanding Media: The extensions of man.* MIT Press.

Midi [@midiforreal]. 2021, August 20. *Try these with ur friends from China! #china #emoji.* [Video]. TikTok. https://www.tiktok.com/@midiforreal/video/7009877790677814530

Mihelj, S., Jimenez-Martinez, C 2019. Digital nationalism: Understanding the role of digital media in the rise of 'new' nationalism. *Nations and Nationalism*, vol.27, pp.331-346.

Miss Emily [@.miss_emily]. 2020, November 19. *First activity of NAIDOC week! Definetly gives some perspective #naidoc #naidocweek #alwayswaslawaywillbe.* [Video]. TikTok. https://www.tiktok.com/@.miss_emily/video/6893037594293062913

Natasha [@trinicookingwithnatasha_]. 2021, July 24. *Doubles - Trinidad & Tobago's Number 1 Street Food #doubles#cheapeats#yum #streetfood #easy#trinicookingwithnatasha.* [Video]. TikTok. https://www.tiktok.com/@trinicookingwithnatasha_/video/6977474246473764101

Nic The Polyglot [@polyglotparadise]. 2021, August, 21. *#stitch with @polyglotparadise #filipino.* [Video]. TikTok. https://www.tiktok.com/@polyglotparadise/video/7010228163074641158?_r=1&_t=8WHiifliWKw&is_from_webapp=v1

Nifty [@nifty]. 2021, June 4. *how to wrap a furoshiki #furoshiki #furoshikiwrapping #lifehacks.* [Video]. TikTok. https://www.tiktok.com/@nifty/video/6970013214230809861

Nwachukwu, OT 2022. The Balkanisation of the Internet: Data Nationalism in the European Union and its Effects on the Development of Technology. *Tilburg Institute for Law, Technology, and Society*, Tilburg University

Plantin, JC., De Seta, G 2019. WeChat as infrastructure: the techno-nationalist shaping of Chinese digital platforms. *Chinese Journal of Communication*, vol.12, no.3, pp.257-273.

PREE pree [@preepree17]. 2021, May 20. *#stitch with @sweetpotajokes good times #stitch #fyp #foryou.* [Video]. TikTok. https://www.tiktok.com/@preepree17/video/6964486147875638534

Rávdná, K [@katjaravdna]. 2021, July 10. *My most traditional #gákti #ivgugákti #indiginous #fyp #sápmi #sámi #gákti.* [Video]. TikTok. https://www.tiktok.com/@katjaravdna/video/6972107732304416006

RESTRICT Act, S.686, 118th Cong. (2023-2024). https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/senate-bill/686

Rose, K [@kacierose4]. 2021, April 11. *Name of the restaurant at the end - it was amazing!! #americansinitaly #florenceitaly #italianfood #italianmenu #traveltips.* [Video]. TikTok. https://www.tiktok.com/@kacierose4/video/6975501391020297478

RugbyPass [@rugbypass]. 2021, July 10. *New Zealand rugby #rugby#haka.* [Video]. TikTok. https://www.tiktok.com/@rugbypass/video/6983246905652399362

Segalovich, I [@interstellar_isabellar]. 2021, May 15. *I didn't do a voiceover so you can enjoy the music and so the sound available! #scotland #scottish #gaelic #craft #culture #community #textile.* [Video]. TikTok. https://www.tiktok.com/@interstellar_isabellar/video/6962522274977123590

Shahin, S 2021. User-generated nationalism: interactions with religion, race, and partisanship in everyday talk online. *Information, Communication & Society*, vol.21, no.13, pp.1854-1869.

Schellewald, A 2021. Communicative Forms on TikTok: Perspectives From Digital Ethnography. *International Journal of Communication*, pp.1437-1457.

Shepardson, D., Ayyub, R 2023. TikTok congressional hearing: CEO Shou Zi Shew grilled by US lawmakers. *Reuters*. https://www.reuters.com/technology/tiktok-ceo-face-tough-questions-support-us-ban-grows-2023-03-23/

Skey, M 2011. *National Belonging and Everyday Life: The Significance of Nationhood in an Uncertain World*. Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Skey, M 2014. 'What nationality he is doesn't matter a damn!' International football, mediated identities and conditional cosmopolitanism. *National Identities*, vol.17, no.3, pp.271-287.

Skey, M 2022. Nationalism and Media. *Nationalities Papers*, vol.50, no.5, pp.839-849.

Snatched_asthmatic [@snatched_asthmatic]. 2021, July 28. *Balkan content for Bosnians who grew up in the U.S.... Super niche I know. Hopefully someone relates #balkan*

#bosnian #easterneurope #slavicgirl #slav. [Video]. TikTok.
https://www.tiktok.com/@snatched_asthmatic/video/6990083194175425798?_r=1&_t
=8WHgB2B5ZpJ&is_from_webapp=v1&item_id=6990083194175425798

Srinivasan, R 2017. *Whose Global Village?: Rethinking How Technology Shapes Our World*,
New York University press, New York.

Strader, S [@svetlanastrader]. 2021, May 29. *Would I make it in Survivor by eating leaves?*
Orphanage food 101 #survivorfood #orphanagefood. [Video]. TikTok.
https://www.tiktok.com/@svetlanastrader/video/6967500816215330054

Su, C., Tang, W 2023. Data sovereignty and platform neutrality – A comparative study on
TikTok's data policy. *Global Media and China*. vol.8, no.1, pp.57-71.

Supak, G 2021. Political Posturing or a Move Towards "Net Nationalism?": The Legality of a
TikTok ban and why foreign tech companies should be paying attention. *North*
Carolina Journal of Law & Technology, vol.22, no.3.

Tangalakis-Lippert, K 2023. RESTRICT Act explained: proposed TikTok ban is 'a PATRIOT
Act for the digital age,' some lawmakers say. *Insider*.
https://www.businessinsider.com/what-is-restrict-act-explained-tiktok-ban-summary-
2023-4

Testimony Before the U.S. House Committee on Energy and Commerce, 118th Cong. (2023)
(testimony of Shou Chew).
https://docs.house.gov/meetings/IF/IF00/20230323/115519/HHRG-118-IF00-Wstate-
ChewS-20230323.pdf

The Beyerle Bunch [@thebeyerlebunch]. 2021, June 1. *I hope this helps explain a little bit of*
the process and pricing. #4c #braid #naturalhair #braiding #blackgirlmagic #zambia
#africa #african #fy. [Video]. TikTok.
https://www.tiktok.com/@thebeyerlebunch/video/6968592261391174918

The People's Friendship University in Moscow Russia [@rudn_university]. 2021, May 16.
#international #rudn_university. [Video]. TikTok.
https://www.tiktok.com/@rudn_university/video/6962898544147647746

The White House, n.d. The Constitution. WhiteHouse.Gov.
https://www.whitehouse.gov/about-the-white-house/our-
government/the%20constitution/#:~:text=The%20First%20Amendment%20provides
%20that,the%20right%20to%20bear%20arms

TikTokComms [@TikTokComms]. (2023, March 1) [Tweet]. Twitter.
https://twitter.com/TikTokComms/status/1630976639948423178/photo/1

TikTok, 2020. How TikTok recommends videos #ForYou. https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-
us/how-tiktok-recommends-videos-for-you/

TikTok, 2023. Celebrating our thriving community of 150 million Americans.
https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/150-m-us-users

Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism (USA PATRIOT Act), Pub. L, No.107-56, 115 Stat. 272. (2001). https://www.congress.gov/107/plaws/publ56/PLAW-107publ56.htm

Varis, P 2014. Digital ethnography. *Tilburg Papers in Culture Studies*, no.104.

Volgels, EM., Gelles-Watnick, R., Massarat, N 2022. Teens, Social media and Technology 2022. *Pew Research Centre*. https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2022/08/10/teens-social-media-and-technology-2022/

Wagner, KB 2022. TikTok and its mediatic split: the promotion of ecumenical user-generated content alongside Sinocentric media globalization. *Media, Culture & Society*, pp.1-15.

Ward, KJ 1999. Cyber-ethnography and the emergence of the virtually new community. *Journal of Information and Technology*, Issue.14, pp.95-105.

Warner, MR 2023. Senators Introduce Bipartisan Bill to Tackle National Security Threats from Foreign Tech [press release]. https://www.warner.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2023/3/senators-introduce-bipartisan-bill-to-tackle-national-security-threats-from-foreign-tech

Wenmei [@wenmei_i_go_eat_dinner]. 2021, June 22. *One more instrument for y'all to know #guzheng #chineseinstrument #music #pentatonic*. [Video]. TikTok. https://www.tiktok.com/@wenmei_i_go_eat_dinner/video/6976673623843310854?_r=1&_t=8WHdjAzolQw&is_from_webapp=v1

Zhang, Z 2021. Infrastructuralization of Tik Tok: transformation, power relationships, and platformization of video entertainment in China. *Media, Culture & Society*, vol.43, no.2, pp.219-236.