

The child as the hostage of the Tik Tok challenges: A critical reading to the manifestations of fame and the transformations of the ego

Dr. Ait Kaci Dhehbiya ¹

¹ Department of Communication and Media Sciences- University of Laghouat (Algeria)
ait.sirdahbia@yahoo.com

Received: 10/2022

Published: 11/2022

Abstract:

This study aims at shedding light on a reality perceived by everyone, where they are actors and subjects, that is the dominance of the modern communication technology that surrounds us from all the angles through its outlets that include smart phones, tablets, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Tik Tok, email, online meetings, online trade...etc. Undeniably, this technology facilitates many life burdens though technology in our country is still not that developed as the other countries.

However, this paper looks to the issue from another perspective that the Australian computer scientist Margaret Bale called “the moral horror of communication technology”. In this context, she sees that the communication technology that causes the moral horror is subject to three rules that are: it changes our relation with time, space, and the others. The successive studies proved that this technology affected even the relation of the individual with his ego when he adopted “a digital ego”.

The speech about a moral horror in a Western environment differs from speaking about an environment that is bound with the rules of the group/tribe/patriarchy which shape the styles of thinking and behavior. This environment now finds itself in front of a technology that glorifies individualism and deepens the gap between the individual and his society, and the individual and his ego. In addition, it incites him to revolt against the societal established norms (Laayadi, 2015).

Based on what has been said, we find ourselves obliged to grapple with a paramount question that is: what shall we do if our children turned into a content that is shared via social

media (Tik Tok particularly), a way to make profits, or a tool to attract the advertisers? What shall we do if we gave our children to big international companies to sell them to the marketing and advertising companies?

In this line, this paper aims at understanding what Tik Tok and the other social media do to our children and shed light on the transformations of the ego.

Key words: Tik Tok, The child, The fame, Inspiration, Ego.

INTRODUCTION:

The human society, mainly the Arab, is witnessing currently developments and changes that affected all the life aspects including the lifestyle, the development of the economy, the openness on the other, the change of the roles and tasks of the socialization means, the appearance of new institutions that have new roles, the appearance of internet, and the resulting development in communication which had a big effect on shaping the character of the individual and the contemporary society.

However, The openness of the societies on each other that was imposed by the media outlets and then the social media changed the world into a cosmopolitan village, or in another words a small building, and caused the exchange of cultures and the change of the thinking styles in a way that does not suit the characteristics of the indigenous population and culture. This pushes us to think about creating defense mechanisms that protect people mainly the specificities of the vulnerable categories (child and adolescent) and make them able to select the good and reject the bad without enclosure on the self or bigotry.

Therefore, we chose to focus on the child and adolescent because:

- They are in the phase of character building. Today's child is tomorrow's man. Hence, it is important to install the values of his society in his mind and make him aware about their importance and his cultural specificities (religion, language, traditions, etc).
- They are easy to influence and acquire new behaviors through imitation. In this context, the media outlets mainly the modern provide coded contents that include symbols, allusions, messages, behaviors, different thoughts, etc.

Consequently, a problematic arises and can be stated as follows: How did the child/adolescent become a mere digital content shared via social media?

From this problematic, sub-question arise such as:

- What is the relation of the child/adolescent with internet and social media?

- What are the characteristics that distinguish Tik Tok from the other social media? And what is its working principle?
- How does the child/adolescent react to Tik Tok?
- How does Tik Tok affect the child/adolescent? Mainly the Arab.

1. The child from the TV to internet and its applications:

1.1 The child and the children programs:

The child is the most exposed to the media content mainly through the translated and subtitled cartoons. These are foreign contents that have foreign values. In 2001, an Algerian Imam warned from the cartoon “Pokémon”. Later, the cartoon was denounced in Egypt and Jordan because the names of its characters denigrate Islam. Later, the issue took a political dimension when the opponents of Pokémon were accused of being supporters of Mickey Mouse (Laayadi, 2004, p. 2013). Nevertheless, this does not deny the fact that Pokémon achieved a great success in Europe and USA mainly after occupying all the spaces the child goes to (school, house, gardens, etc) and was used in video games, books, etc. In addition, none of the versions of the game Monopoly was cut only after 700 children got epilepsy after watching 15 minutes of its episodes (Ibid, p. 216).

From another side, Pokémon and other Japanese cartoons were accused of spreading violence as they are based on the Japanese martial arts despite that these arts aim at education. To face the dominance of the Japanese cartoons on the international scene, the European countries and USA produced short local cartoons broadcast in the peak hour to protect the European and US children from the Japanese invasion.

In this context, we ask ourselves about the position of the Arab child within this equation in front of the increasing quantity and the decreasing quality of cartoons. According to an Arab TV channel, the Arab TV channels reached 1122 in 2018, of which 963 are private channels where 40 are for the children compared to 2 public ones (Annual report, 2018, p. 14). Most of these programs are imported from Japan and subtitled in English or the local language with no censorship on the content. Most of the time, these programs create doubts for the child about the religion and some behaviors. This is when we speak about the child and the TV; not to mention internet.

1.2 The child and Facebook:

1.2.1 General statistics:

According to Dalqamoni (2021), Al Jazeera Net posted some general statistics about the use of social media internationally showing that:

- 4.8 billion people around the world use internet until July 2021.
- More than half of the world population use social media.
- The ordinary person has accounts on more than 09 applications of social media and spends around 2.5 hours per day using them.
- 91% of the users of social media use them on the mobile devices.
- The most used sites are shown in order in the following table:

Table 01: Order of the social media according to their use

Social media	Number of users
Facebook	2.85 billion active users per month
YouTube	2.29 billion active users per month
Whatsapp	2.00 billion active users per month
Instagram	1.38 billion active users per month
Tik Tok	732 million active users per month
Snap Chat	514 million active users per month
Twitter	397 million active users per month

Source: Dalqamoni (2021)

1.2.2 Tik Tok:

More than 732 million active users per month until July 2021 to 01 billion active users per month have Tik Tok accounts. Just two years before, Tik Tok users did not exceed 30 million. As for the content, around 13 million videos are uploaded on a daily basis. The users spend 52 minutes in average using it. One must ask: what is Tik Tok? What are its characteristics? What is its relation with the child? What is its effect on the child mainly in the Arab region? And what are the defense mechanisms against its dangers?

1.2.3 The child and the internet:

Children and adolescents are the most users of internet, its high quality techniques, and multiple applications. They represent two thirds of the total users. According to UNICEF (2018), 175000 children surf on the internet daily, i.e. with a rate of a new child every half a second. Despite this matter has positive effects from one side like learning, the researches classify the dangers that menace children who use the internet into three: dangers of the content, communication, and behavior (Al Jazeera, 2022). These dangers make them subject to exploitation, sexual insult, cyber bullying, and haggling using their personal details. In this context, the director of the juvenile court in Kuwait declared that the average age of pornography watchers in Kuwait is less than 10 years. Cartoon characters are used to chase

children. In addition, some sites coercively show pornographic pictures without the will of the internet user (Sebti, 2021).

1.2.4 Statistics about the child and the social media:

A study showed that children under 6 years old spend much time watching comedian videos on YouTube and Tik Tok rather than the TV or the educational videos. In addition, they play violent bloody electronic games. This is all with the knowledge and will of the parents who are busy and, even in their break time, they use the internet to chat or browse social media pages. To get rid of the children, they give them internet with its applications.

1.2.5 What is Tik Tok and what is its working principle?

1.2.5.1 Definition of Tik Tok:

It is a digital platform for videos through mobile devices that has been developed by the Chinese company “Bytedance” in September 2016. After a year of its start, this company purchased “Musically” that used to distribute 13 million videos a day. With around 1 billion USD, its users reached 150 million active users a day within one year. In 2021, they increased to 732 million and, later in 2022, to 1 billion.

Tik Tok inspired its notion from observing the behaviors of the Chinese adolescents who are addicted to taking selfies and dancing on music. Hence, Tik Tok integrated taking selfies with dancing (Laayadi, 2019). Thus, the platform allows its users who are called influencers to express their selves in a videos of less than 60 seconds watched and evaluated by the fans. The more reactions and likes they get, the influencers become famous like Charli D’amilio from USA with 136 million fans. She is called the queen of Tik Tok followed by the Senegalese Khabi Lame with 132 million followers. One must ask here about the significance of the influencer, the liking scale, the fame criteria, and the nature of the competition mainly that they are based on risky adventures that attract children and adolescents.

2. Social media and Tik Tok: classical concepts with new connotations:

2.1 Tik Tok the producer of the influencers:

In the field of self development, the influencer is the one who has the ability to influence the others through touching their feelings, simulating their ideas, and making them develop themselves. Thus, they take him as a role model (How to be influent, 2020). Generally, the term was linked with political leaders, scientists, researchers, reformers, revolutionists, etc. However, currently the influencer is the one who makes funny pranks and strange dances on music with moving his lips or making dangerous challenges that may harm him. This obliges us to rethink the special, psychological, and economic background of these technico-human phenomena.

Influence in the era of Tik Tok is linked to the ability to gain as many likes as possible on dancing, pranks, winning challenges, etc regardless the ethical or social values that are being violated. Consequently, we see that this is a revolution against the indigenous values making the society overloaded with digital content and subject to the principle of speed, selfishness, and superficiality mainly that we live in the era of self mass media.

2.2 Tik Tok and the pursuit of fame:

In the late 1960s, Andy Warhor, a US painter, predicted the appearance of a media milieu that makes the ordinary individual famous rapidly and that everybody would be able to be famous in no more than 15 minutes (Sameh, 2020). There were no social media and as much development as now in the 1960s. Before accusing social media of changing the concept of fame, we must refer back to the concept and know that the famous person has been long linked with TV such as cinema stars, artists, political characters, and even ordinary people who would be famous if they appeared on the TV. Back to art, much criticism was attributed to the TV because it spreads a superficial culture, creates superficial characters, and falsifies the reality and the public taste after it had been a tool based on the watching rate (Laayadi, p. 81). In this context, the spread of reality shows and games programs changed the concept of fame, gave it more superficial dimension, and made the intimate life content for entertainment.

In 2001, many protestors broke into the headquarters of the French channel M6 and put rubbish in its door to express that its TV programs are bad despite the high watchability. The winner in the TV programs is the one who can support humiliation (Laayadi, 2004, pp. 18-25), is bold enough to tell the details of his life and secrets to the millions of watchers, and face risky or fabricated situations that contradict with the human nature and downgrade him to the level of animals just for fame and money.

At the present time, social media attributed fame to the influencers and content creators they made. Their fame is measured with their followers, fans, and watchers of their posts in which they show their lives using their phones or tablets. In addition, they even practice their daily routines in front of the phone cameras with millions watching them.

2.3 Tik Tok and the question of the ego:

The desire of the individual for fame that social media provides is part of the hierarchy of needs of Maslow. The human needs to satisfy a set of needs and physiological desires, then security, social, self-esteem, respect, and trust respectively. Later, the human looks for excellence and distinctiveness and become self centered which justifies the pursuit of fame by

these people. According to some psychologists, the desire of the people to be famous hides acute depression and psychological troubles. In addition, it is an escape of reality, loneliness, and exclusion.

Therefore, the individual is in front of two selves, the real self and desired self. Thus, the influencer shows the self he wants to be for the audience and never his real one. Consequently, his real self gets satisfied with the desired self that was liked by the audience. This creates a digital ego and a real one. As a result, man lives his real life with the digital ego and desired self which make him experience a schizophrenia between a virtual world we live by and a real world we live in, in addition to an escape of the real world because he does not have the necessary tools and knows.

We should not forget that existence on social media and marketing our desired selves created egoism and narcissism (Sameh, 2020) reflected by selfies. This leads us to the premise of Elsa Godart in her book “I take a selfie, then I exist” that revolves around the transformations of the ego in the digital era. She considers the selfie as a topic to mediate and a tool to communicate and share. In addition, it is a new iconic language and a manifestation of the ego in its reactions with the universe and the self. Moreover, it is a form of the ego inflation and excessive self centeredness. In this context, narcissism is a main part of the formation of ego leading the human to be in front of a digital ego and a real one as previously mentioned. In this line, Elsa linked the selfie with proving the existence believing that the reform of the internal identity is linked to the confirmation of the external image made by the others through their admiration and views. In this context, existing means being watched, loved, and admired. This is what social media help achieve (Jonathan, 2022).

2.4 Tik Tok and imagination:

The British journalist Sofia Smith Galer sees that what happens on Tik Tok is a creation of a state of imagination because the person determines a goal for himself and imagines having achieved the action. Instead of saying I want to be a famous singer, he says I am a famous singer. Sofia sees that this is due to the new thought philosophy which is a religious philosophy that emerged in the USA in the mid 19th century. Its supporters believe that the human mind is characterized with excellence in all the situations and material circumstances. They insist on the power of the constructive thinking (the new thought, n.d).

The concept of imagination is based on the theoretical philosophy of “the law of attraction” that says that the positive or negative thoughts can bring positive or negative events to the person because the believer in this theory trusts his ability to create his own reality in the suitable way.

2.5 The child in the trap of the fame and money:

All what we spoke about previously can be projected on the child that is in the phase of psychological and physiological development and acquisition of the socio-cultural cognitive balance from the socialization means that contribute to a great extent to the formation of his future character. How can the child with his specific socio-cultural characteristics live in a virtual world that targets him with his media and applications? How can the child satisfy his needs from the internet and take advantage of its characteristics? How does he perceive fame? Do he and his family know that he is just a number in the world of trade and profits?

3. Characteristics of Tik Tok and its dangers on the child and adolescent:

3.1 Challenges on Tik Tok:

The adolescents launch many challenges and risky adventures that may harm them. For instance, the 10 years old Italian girl Antonila harmed herself in a challenge of passing out when she filmed herself wrapping her neck with her scarf to stop breathing. In addition, there was the Covid-19 challenge where adolescents lick the surfaces and things in public spaces. These videos got 3.1 billion views just in one year. Moreover, another challenge was crane destruction where two children kick the feet of another child when he jumps in order to fall down. This caused severe injuries. In addition, there are other risky adventures and challenges that can only be described as stupid and nonsense. A doctor interpreted this saying that the desire to gain more followers and likes pushes the adolescents to make these challenges even if they are a danger for their lives. He confirms that the adolescents generally want to prove themselves in front of the others regardless the consequences. This pushes them to invent these challenges and compete in doing them (Thabet, 2022).

3.2 Tik Tok a platform for everybody:

Tik Tok requires its users to be more than 13 years old. However, the reality proves that U-13 children use it and watch and react to these videos. Thus, the child may be exposed to inappropriate content and read vulgar comments despite that the administration of Tik Tok confirms that it has the necessary digital equipments to control all what is being shared; in addition to the employment of more than 1000 employees. Nevertheless, these measures are not enough in front of the high number of the users that exceeded 1 billion.

Moreover, Tik Tok is not safe from spying software and the use of the personal information of the users to haggle them sexually by the adults who have psychological troubles. In this line, some right movements in America used Tik Tok to spread their racist ideology through commenting on the videos and their makers.

3.3 The principle of exclusion/racism/imitation/overcoming the social values:

Tik Tok has the same philosophy with the TV shows in the point that in order to win you must exclude the other and destroy him. They share the common principle that says that there is no way for the collaborative work. The champion must be alone on the top which increases individualism and narcissism. The individual must have a strange boldness to get rid of shyness and ethics and revolt against the social norms. In addition, he must imitate the others and adopt their behaviors (strange movements, dances, clothes, hair dress, make up, way of speaking, vision to life...). Here, the selves become subject to the image of the influent selves.

We must shed light on the bullying which children and adolescents get through the bad comments that criticize their bodies, shapes, and details (fat or thin, nose, skin color, eyes...etc) using bad terms which affect their vision and self-esteem in the phase of character building. These racist judgments affect them. From another side, the adolescents and children performance of dangerous actions may end their lives because they do not take life seriously as they live a digital desired ego. This affects the shape of their future social and psychological characters (Laayadi, 2019).

3.4 The dominance of the economic logic:

The rapid and irrational development of social media expresses a severe competition to maintain the users and dominate the market mainly that they adopt the principles of the attention economy which means getting the attention of the user the longest possible through the development of the applications (liking icon, chat application, news icon, commercial offers, sending beautiful and funny pictures, GPS service...) or the containment of the other applications like what Facebook did when it bought Whatsapp, Instagram, and others in order to monopolize the digital world and social media, and collect personal details and sell them to big marketing companies (Laayadi, 2019). Facebook allows the advertisers to target people in tangible dimensions that are the age, type, interests, inclinations, and address (Laayadi, 2019).

This becomes more dangerous when the information of the child or adolescent are marketed and exploited by the advertising companies who want to increase the number of their consumers in a way that may lead the child to be sexually abused. This indictment follows Tik Tok because it violates the privacy of children and turns them into a marketing tool. In addition, Ti Tok does not abide by its contract with the federal trade commission about the protection of the children who use its platform despite its pledge to get the permission of the child parents before taking his personal information and that it would get rid

of any videos shared by U-13 years old children or any videos shared by people whose ages are unknown. However, the critics say that Tik Tok does not keep its pledges (Brown, 2020).

We must point here that violating the privacy of children and exposing it to the public in order to collect likes is not made only by the platform. Rather, even some parents do that and even make, or oblige, them to make certain behaviors to get reactions and comments from the followers who are free to download the content and share it with the other. This limits the freedom of children and makes them fake their behaviors and interactions with the others, and deprives them of their spontaneous behaving, moving, and speaking.

3.5 The effect of Tik Tok on the attention and concentration of children:

Al Arabia (2022) wrote that children who watch short and quick videos lack concentration and attention and face difficulty in following the activities that do not provide immediate and continuous satisfaction of their needs. Getting used to continuous changes in the videos makes the mind of the child face difficulties in adapting with a non digital content whose speed does not amount up to that of the Tik Tok videos; without forgetting that the child watches strange movements and listens vulgar and inappropriate terms.

4. The Arab child and Tik Tok in the light of scientific studies:

There are limited Arab studies that tackled the issue of the Arab child and Tik Tok. All these studies agreed that the platform is the most modern compared to the other social media and that it has a solid public ground among the children and adolescents. The extensive exposure to its contents makes them subject to bullying, cyber harassment, and the academic low performance. For instance, the study of Nahla Abdul Karim tackled the effect of the extensive exposure to the programs of Tik Tok on some psychological and behavioral aspects of the child, his values and orientations, and the reflections in the deviations of the children behaviors and thinking. The study used the survey on a sample chosen on purpose that included 200 Egyptian parents of children aged between 04 and 15 years old. Main findings showed that most of the informants noticed changes in the behaviors of their children due to the use of Tik Tok with a high rate that exceeds 80%. These behaviors were negative with a rate that exceeds 80%. The main behavior was loneliness. Moreover, the social loneliness is the most dangerous real risk the parents fear, followed by narcissism, and then the waste of time and energy. In addition, these programs are a source of blackmailing.

Another study by Jaoud (2020) discussed the use of children in Tik Tok in Algeria. It analyzed the contents of 95 Algerian videos to shed light on the exploitation of children to gain fame and the highest number of followers of social media. It found out that there is a big exploitation for children and that most of the videos of the Algerian Tik Tok are musical

videos with comedian scenes that rely on acting and integration of voice and picture. In addition, there is a big number of children (from baby to 14 years old) whose videos are being shared with non beneficial exploitation. Besides, most of the musical videos include Rai music which is a non familial musical genre that does not suit the nature of the child's character due to the words, allusions, and behaviors that are not appropriate and that affect his values and behaviors and violate his innocence. Furthermore, the Algerian child on Tik Tok is characterized with movement, dancing, acting, hysterical laughter, modern outfits, and strange haircuts. In addition, the child appears as a participating member in inappropriate videos with one of his relatives in a way that is an exploitation to gain fame. To add, little and adolescent girls appear with indecent outfits that describe their private parts and makeup as if they were goods exposed for inappropriate compliments and symbolic harassment through the platform. Besides, the female appearance is more than the male because the videos of the girls are more attractive to the followers. Thus, it is a flagrant violation of the sex via the videos of Tik Tok. Finally, it found out that there is no beneficial content that uses children such as awareness raising about the use of internet without parental control or the use of internet for studies.

5. Solutions:

The best solution is the advice provided by a French journalist for the modern technology users when he was told about the hesitation of the parents regarding the invasion of new media to their lives. He recommended the parents that:

1. They should sit with children and train them to use internet and the various social media. Indeed, this requires a good command of the digital tools.
2. It is necessary to develop the critical abilities of children and increase their skepticism and carefulness about what they see on social media because not all what is being shared is appropriate and correct.
3. Children must be taught how to use social media in the correct way to make them platforms of showing abilities and talents, and to turn them from consumers into producers.
4. Children must be aware about the tricks used in social media to turn them into digital data that have mere commercial aims.
5. Parents must join the groups their children are members in (Laayadi, 2017).

CONCLUSION:

To protect children from the consequences of internet addiction and avoid them the negative effects on their values and behaviors, the socialization means including the family mainly the mother, the school, the mosque, and others must play their roles in teaching the child how to avoid all what constitutes a risk for his values and life. In addition, they must show him how to filter all what he sees in modern social media in order to accept what is beneficial and that increases his scientific and valuable balance, and refuse all what endangers his socio-cultural requisites. In addition, the control mechanisms on the digital communications of the child must be developed far from spying.

Bibliography:

Al Arabia (2022), why do children addict to Tik Tok: this is what it makes to the brain, URL: <https://www.alarabiya.net/science/>.

Al Jazeera Institute for Media (n.d), children make up almost one third of the internet users, URL: <https://learning.aljazeera.net/ar/node/21693>, accessed on 09/09/2022.

Sameh, Aouda (2020), famous but empty: did social media make us more narcissistic?, al Jazeera Net, URL: <https://www.aljazeera.net/midan/intellect/sociology/2020/6/25>.

Brown, Abraham (2020), Tik Tok isn't keeping its promises to better protect kids critic groups say, URL: <https://www.forbesmiddleeast.com/ar/innovation/technology/tiktok-isnt-keeping-its-promises-to-better-protect-kids-critic-groups-say-1>.

Dalqamoni, Rimah (2021), social media: facts and numbers, URL: <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/scienceandtechnology>, accessed on: 12/12/2022.

Jaoud, Samah (2020), the use of children in Tik Tok: an analytical study on a sample of videos of the application, the Arab Democratic Centre, Berlin, No°. 11, pp.445-454.

Jonathan, Doudi (2022), the selfie to unveil the ego: between the reality and the digital – a dialogue with Elsa Godart, URL: <https://bluenoqta.com/2020/05/29> accessed on: 07/09/2022.

Helmi, Abdul Karim Nahla (2021), the effect of much exposure to Tik Tok content on some psychological and behavioural characteristics of children, Media Researches Journal, Al Azhar University, Information Science Faculty, No. 571, pp. 345-379.

How to be influent (2020), self-development, URL: https://molhem.com/@Masar_Amal

Laayadi, Nacer Dine (2004), media and the society: lights and shadows, the University Book House, Al Ain, p. 213.

Laayadi, Nacer Dine (2015), communication technology between shock and moral horror, El Khabar newspaper, URL: [Http: www.elkhabar.com/ar/autres/makal/442614.html](http://www.elkhabar.com/ar/autres/makal/442614.html)

Laayadi, Nacer Dine (2017), what should we do if children abandon the TV? The Magazine of the Gulf Radio and TV, No. 108.

Laayadi, Nacer Dine (2019), Laayadi blog, URL: <https://nlayadi.com/>

Laayadi, Nacer Dine (2019), social media: competition with copying, URL: <https://nlayadi.com/2019/09/16/>

Laayadi, Nacer Dine (2019), Tik Tok a platform of challenges, URL: <https://nlayadi.com/2019/09/16>

Laayadi, Nacer Dine (2019), what if we nationalized Facebook, URL: <https://nlayadi.com/2019/09/16/>

Sebti, Abbas (2021), presenting and analyzing the results of studies about the dangers of internet in the Arab world, URL: : <https://www.alukah.net/culture/0/149017>, accessed on 09/09/2022.

Thabet, Wail (2022), the challenges of Tik Tok menace the adolescents: dangerous actions and practices to attract the followers, URL: <https://m.akhbarelyom.com/news/newdetails>.

The annual report of the Arab radio channels union, p. 14.

The new thinking, URL: <https://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki>.

UNICEF (2018), 175000 child use internet everyday for the 1st time, URL: <https://www.unicef.org/ar> , accessed on 09/09/2022.