

pages for several months without posting anything themselves. This was done with the goal of identifying specific patterns in the use of hashtags and, more generally, recipes for success (Kaye, Zeng, and Wikström 2022, 62–63). There is also a widespread assumption among TikTok users that any form of interaction on the platform can help increase one's visibility. This means, for example, that users are constantly engaged in liking, commenting, and sharing content, and that content creators encourage other users to not only passively watch their videos but also actively respond to them using the available features (comments, etc.). Such hypotheses are also discussed in journalistic discourse. For example, there is an assumption that new videos are initially only recommended to a small group of users and, if they trigger lively interactions from users, are then further disseminated and displayed to more and more users on their For You pages (Kaye, Zeng, and Wikström 2022, 77). Other hypotheses posit that posting videos at certain times may lead to higher viewership. In an empirical study, Klug et al. compare such assumptions made by TikTok users with corresponding data on trending videos that TikTok makes available via an API (Klug et al. 2021). Among other things, they show that users believe that a large number of comments can contribute to the success of videos, which is reflected in the number of likes, shares, and views. The available data shows that such correlations do indeed exist, and that posting videos at certain times of day also seems to have a positive effect, while on the other hand no correlation can be established between the use of certain hashtags and the success of TikTok videos. However, it remains unclear whether, for example, a video has become successful because of the comments or whether many users comment on it because it was already popular beforehand (Klug et al. 2021, 89–91). Although users cannot be sure about the algorithmic logic, it is clear that hypotheses about what platform algorithms *might possibly* do can develop a power that should not be underestimated – after all, the behavior of TikTok users is to some extent guided by these algorithmic imaginaries.

## 4.5 Platform Affordances and Vernaculars

Due to the features of the platform that promote various actions (duet, etc.) and the core role played by the platform algorithm, TikTok strongly elicits specific user behaviors. As the cited empirical studies show, the platform's affordances have a strong impact on users, often leading to platform-specific behavior. This can in turn lead to the development of platform-specific norms of content pro-

duction, i.e., make the creation of relatively homogeneous content more likely. Zeng and Abidin call this process *circumscribed creativity*: “Circumscribed creativities are creative potentials that are afforded, as well as restrained, by the features and logics of platforms. In the context of TikTok, the platform offers a technological infrastructure that celebrates and encourages memetic content” (Zeng and Abidin 2021, 2462). Examples of such mimetic content include the lip-synching and dance challenge videos described above, where it is not necessary for users to create original content – the challenge is rather to respond creatively to content that already exists on the platform. Thus, TikTok enables and provokes certain creative practices of imitation, while other practices that focus on the production of original content are initially less likely, at least in the context of lip-synching and dance challenge videos. It is also likely that the content of particularly high-reach content creators will appear on the For You pages of many TikTok users. When these videos are subsequently used by many users as the basis for new videos, the result is the production of countless videos with similar audiovisual content (Abidin and Kaye 2021, 59–60). One possible result of the platform logic described above is the production of large amounts of “aesthetically similar content” (Kaye, Zeng, and Wikström 2022, 79). It is therefore not surprising that some “platform-centric genres” (Southerton 2021, 3260) – such as the aforementioned lip-synching and duet videos – that have emerged on TikTok are also generally comparatively easy to identify as TikTok videos and would be unusual in their specific form on other platforms. Overall, it can be seen that TikTok promotes the development of specific platform vernaculars to a greater extent than other platforms due to the functional logics described above.

## 4.6 Niches on TikTok

While in many ways content production is driven by the logic of the platform – at least to some extent – and therefore may seem limited to certain types of content, TikTok also offers a wide range of topics. The platform may be best known for silly content by and for young people, but the content is diverse and there are various thematic niches on TikTok with specialized communities sometimes forming around niche topics. These are often related to education or science communication. For example, Southerton shows that videos created by medical professionals providing medical-related content are extremely popular on the platform. An investigation in March 2021 showed that videos tagged