

## **Section A – How would Adorno look at TikTok?**

TikTok is a unique platform that has been growing rapidly in popularity in recent years. It is a platform that has allowed people to create and share short videos, often of humorous or creative content. With its ability to reach a wide audience in a short period of time and its potential for creative expression, it has become a popular outlet for both expression and entertainment. Adorno was a critical theorist who developed the concept of the culture industry. He believed that the culture industry was responsible for the commodification of culture, reducing it to a product to be consumed by the masses. He argued that the culture industry created a false sense of social and cultural unity, by creating a homogenous and unified culture. Theorists such as Theodor Adorno, who wrote extensively about the effects of mass media on society, would likely have a lot to say about the effects of TikTok on our culture (Suprunova, 2019).

Adorno would likely be critical of the way that TikTok encourages its users to create content for the sole purpose of getting views and engagement. He would likely argue that this encourages a kind of commoditization of art, in which people are creating content simply to make money or become famous (Jung, 2021). This commoditization of art, he would argue, leads to a devaluation of the art itself, and a focus on superficial aspects of the art instead of the art itself as it encourages users to produce content tailored to popular trends, in order to gain views and followers. He would consider it a form of mass production, where creativity is sacrificed in order to achieve success. Adorno also argued that the culture industry perpetuates an illusion of freedom, as users are given the illusion of choice, when in reality their choices are predetermined (Adorno, 1989). This is evident on platforms such as TikTok, where users are presented with a range of options, but all of them are predetermined by the platform. Users are presented with options that are predetermined by the algorithm, so they are not making any autonomous choices. The algorithm is designed to present what will be popular, so users are not actually choosing any of the options presented. This ties in with Adorno's argument that users experience a false sense of freedom when engaging with the culture industry. Furthermore, TikTok encourages users to be entertaining, and this is a form of self-commodification. They are not actually making a conscious decision (Durham et al., 2009; Ahmed, 2008).

Adorno would also likely be critical of the way that TikTok encourages its users to compare themselves to others. By making it easy to compare the number of views, likes, and comments, it creates an environment where users are constantly judging themselves against others – all superficiality (Adorno, 2020; Bolano, 2015). This is something Adorno would likely argue is damaging to the individual, as it creates a sense of inferiority and worthlessness in those who are not as successful as others, damaging the individual and society as a whole. Therefore, from Adorno's perspective, TikTok is ultimately a negative influence on creativity and art. Adorno would also be critical of the way in which TikTok creates a false sense of community (Baugh, 1990). Despite its claims of creating a “community”, the platform's algorithm is designed to promote content that gets the most views, rather than content that allows for meaningful conversations or dialogue. This creates a false sense of community, where people are encouraged to follow popular trends and engage in superficial conversations rather than having meaningful conversations. In addition, Adorno would be critical of the way in which the platform encourages

users to present themselves in a certain way. The platform encourages users to present themselves in an idealized way, where they are expected to have perfect hair, makeup, and clothes (Wiggins, 2014).

Overall, Adorno would say that TikTok is a distraction from more meaningful pursuits, and that it is an example of a culture industry that commodifies art and culture in a way that is detrimental to society. He would also point to the fact that TikTok is used to manipulate users into engaging in certain behaviors and patterns of consumption, which is a form of control and domination. In addition, Adorno would argue that using TikTok can lead to a sense of alienation, where people feel isolated and unable to connect with others in a meaningful way. For example, he would likely point to the focus on superficiality, such as the “like” button, beauty standards, and the emphasis on being “trendy”. Overall, Adorno would look at TikTok as a way of subjugating individuals to the whims of the capitalist market. It encourages a focus on individualism and self-promotion, which ultimately furthers the power of corporate interests. At the same time, Adorno would recognize that this platform has allowed for certain forms of collective expression, such as through memes, which may have the potential to challenge the dominant forces of the capitalist system.

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## **Section B – Discuss the differences between ethnography and autoethnography.**

Ethnography and autoethnography are two distinct approaches to the study of culture, each with their own advantages and disadvantages. Ethnography is a qualitative approach that focuses on the study of a single cultural group, often through participant observation and in-depth interviews (Stokes, 2002; Anon, 2000). Researchers examine the beliefs, values, customs, language, and behavior of the group to gain a deeper understanding of the culture. Autoethnography, on the other hand, is a form of self-reflection that combines elements of personal narrative, autobiography, and ethnography. Autoethnography focuses on one's own personal story and experiences, and how they shape their understanding of culture (Salmons, 2020). The primary difference between ethnography and autoethnography is the focus of the research. Ethnography focuses on the culture and customs of a single group, while autoethnography focuses on the individual's experience of that culture (Anon, 2000). Ethnography is typically conducted by an outside observer, while autoethnography is conducted by a participant in the culture. Ethnography is more objective and focused on the researcher's observations of the target population, while autoethnography is more subjective and relies on the researcher's own experience and reflections (Purcell, 2009).

Ethnography is useful for gathering a comprehensive understanding of a culture. It helps researchers to understand the beliefs, values, customs, language, and behavior of the group. It is also useful for understanding how cultural practices are shaped by the environment and historical context of the group (Manning and Adams, 2015). Autoethnography is useful for exploring the individual's experience of a culture. It allows for a more nuanced and in-depth exploration of the individual's feelings, experiences, and beliefs. It is particularly valuable for exploring the ways in which individuals both conform to and deviate from the norms of their cultures. Autoethnography can also help researchers to understand how individuals are shaped by their culture and how they choose to engage with it. This can provide insight into how individuals develop their own

identities, how they choose to express themselves, and how they interact with the world around them (Tyner-Munnings et al., 2022).

While both ethnography and autoethnography can be useful in understanding a culture, it is important to note that no single method of research can provide a full and thorough understanding of a culture. It is often necessary to combine multiple methods of research, including interviews, focus groups, surveys, and more. Combining these methods can allow for a more holistic understanding of the culture, which can help to uncover valuable insights that may be hidden from view with just one method alone (Brewer, 2000). Additionally, the use of multiple methods can help to validate results by looking for patterns and similarities across different sources of data. To truly understand a culture, it is important to take a multi-faceted approach. This may include a combination of traditional ethnographic methods, such as participant observation and interviews, as well as autoethnography. Additionally, it can be beneficial to look at existing data sources, such as census records or historical documents, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the culture. By taking a holistic approach to understanding a culture, it can provide insights and perspectives that may not be available through just one method alone (Ellis, 2011).

To summarize, ethnography and autoethnography are both valuable tools for understanding cultures and individuals. Ethnography provides a comprehensive view of a culture whereas autoethnography takes a more individualized approach. Although these methods have their differences, they can also be used together to gain a more holistic understanding of a culture and its members. Moreover, by using a combination of autoethnography and ethnography, researchers can explore how individuals both conform to and deviate from the norms of their culture, providing valuable insight into the development of identities and how individuals interact with the world. In addition to helping researchers gain a better understanding of culture and individuals, autoethnography and ethnography can also be used in educational contexts. For example, teachers can use these methods to create more culturally responsive learning environments by exploring how their students interact with the world around them. By using ethnography and autoethnography, teachers can gain insight into their students' ideas, beliefs, and experiences, helping them to create learning environments that are tailored to their specific needs. Furthermore, these methods can also be used to help students become more aware of the cultural dynamics in their communities and learn how to navigate them successfully.

Ultimately, autoethnography and ethnography can be powerful tools for teachers, researchers, and students alike. By using these methods, teachers can create more culturally responsive learning environments that are tailored to the needs of their students. Researchers can use autoethnography and ethnography to gain insight into how individuals interact with culture, as well as how cultural norms shape individual identities. And students can use these methods to learn more about their own culture and the cultures of their peers.

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