

Call for Papers:
Flow Volume 27 Special Issue: “TikTok as a Cultural Forum”

Over the past several months, social media platform TikTok has seen an enormous surge in users and popularity while simultaneously becoming the focus of concerns over national and digital security risks. While its users remain skewed to the teenage demographic, the app has disrupted a number of media industries and sparked cultural controversy. In the music industry, going viral on TikTok has become a prerequisite for singles hoping to chart on the Billboard Hot 100 and in television, the app has entered the streaming wars. Chinese parent company ByteDance named Kevin Mayer, formerly in charge of streaming at Disney, as CEO of TikTok in June, and Netflix recently refined its quarterly new subscribers forecast in part due to what [it perceives as](#) TikTok’s astounding growth. But TikTok is only the latest new media application to affect legacy media industries. TikTok’s rise is replicating changes ushered in to user-generated and professional video content by platforms like YouTube, Vine, and Snapchat. And as a social networking platform, TikTok offers a new avenue for grassroots activism, community formation, and builds seemingly overnight fame for its breakout stars. However, it also exists within a contested digital space, in which concerns have been raised over cultural appropriation, privacy, online toxicity, and racism.

This inaugural issue of *Flow*’s twenty-seventh volume, “TikTok as a Cultural Forum,” asks media scholars to consider the rise of TikTok from cultural, industrial, technological, digital, political, historical, and national lenses. This special issue raises the question of what makes TikTok unique in its rapid ascent to cultural ubiquity and aims to assess the cultural and industrial impacts of TikTok’s rise. How might the proliferation of TikTok force scholars to rethink the significance of digital identities through lenses of race, gender, and sexual orientation? In what ways does the white co-optation of choreography and language by Black creators find historical precedent in legacies of cultural appropriation, disputes over authorial credit, and discrepancies in how cultural production and audiences are valued within the media industries? How might we discuss the connections between teen and young adult mental health, TikTok community formation, and social distancing during a global health pandemic? What are the responsibilities and practices of platforms like TikTok to stand against being a host of online toxicity, white supremacy, and other extremist groups in online spaces? How is TikTok activism different from past forms of online advocacy and community organizing? How and to what extent are established media brands rethinking digital content strategies to incorporate or compete against TikTok? Possible topics include, but are by no means limited to:

- Trailblazing texts, sounds, dances, and figures on TikTok
- Digital identities, influencer branding, celebrity, and professionalization
- Authorship, “Sounds,” and Choreography

- TikTok Challenges and Trends
- Race, Gender, and LGBTQ constructs on TikTok
- Algorithms, Filters, and Technology
- TikTok activism, social change, and political communication
- The music industry, artist promotion, and viral singles
- Policy and discourses of digital security in global/national regulation of TikTok
- Terms of Service and Copyright on Platforms
- Generational divides
- TikTok and comedy
- Historical comparisons of Tiktok to other media forms

To be considered for this timely issue, please submit a completed short essay of 1200-1500 words, along with at least three images (.gif or .png) or embeddable video/audio links. We will be able to embed TikTok videos into the column, so please feel free to be creative! Send your column, media files or links, and a short bio, to Maggie Steinhauer and Nathan Rossi at flowjournaleditors@gmail.com by **Sunday, September 13th, 2020**. The Special Issue will be published at flowjournal.org on Tuesday, October 6, 2020.