TikTok and Children

TikTok 'dogshows' and the amplification of online incivility among Gen Z influencers in the Philippines

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Abstract
Studies on digital platforms and online incivility have established that uses of humour can lean towards cyberbullying and hate speech. Focusing on TikTok's affordances and cultures of online incivility, this paper studies how TikTok influencers and their audiences manoeuvre legal-but-harmful humour. Specifically, we study how online incivility has become an accepted and negotiated practice in the Filipino context through the phenomenon of 'dogshows', where users throw jabs at individuals using derogatory humour and provocative memes. Through online observation and textual analysis of TikTok posts and their corresponding comment sections, we demonstrate how online incivility is subtly amplified through humour and play, and how Gen Z and young children became both objects and producers of these dogshows. We argue that while there is already peer surveillance at work on TikTok, there needs to be more deliberation between TikTok's policies and at-risk groups to make the platform a more civil space.

Keywords
TikTok, dogshow, online incivility, Gen Z, Philippines, social media

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Introduction

People make fun of public figures all the time. For example, celebrities have been put in the spotlight whenever they are revealed to have committed uncivil acts, verbally insulted a community, or even made problematic statements in interviews or on social media (Yang, 2020). They would often release a statement through a press conference or post on social media to clarify things or apologise for their faux pas. But what if the public figure is a young person? What are the implications of Gen Z and young children engaging in such acts? And what if this act is widespread? We aim to investigate this observable increase in incivility in digital spaces by using Gen Z (born 1997–2012; aged 11–26 at the time of writing) and the practice of 'dogshows' on TikTok as empirical entry points, given that a significant portion of their followers appear to be Gen Z and young children.

In the Philippines, one of the most popular TikTokers is Juxi Family – stylised as 'JuxiFam', and known as @jubiandxian online – which comprises mother Jubi or Mamiju, father Xian or Dadiju, and child Babyju. They boast over 6.9 million followers at the time of writing (AJ Marketing, n.d.). Aside from their popular dance videos on TikTok, Juxi Family has become renowned because of their two-year-old child Babyju, as followers witness how the baby has grown up online in daily TikToks. However, in some of the videos, the parents are seen making fun of their baby because of her cute actions or unexpected reactions to the parents. While some of these appear like innocent fun, such as teasing the baby when she mispronounces a word, others are in poor taste, such as when the parents tease the baby after she has fallen and is noticeably distraught. While a cursory survey of the comments seems to indicate that most followers find this teasing cute or adorable, a closer inspection reveals other comments from followers who invoke the concept of a dogshow. In comments such as 'the father dogshowed the child! Hahaha', followers appear amused and surprised that a father would publicly make fun of his child, even if it was out of endearment. This is primarily because the history and legacy of dogshows on TikTok have predominantly been in a very negative context, and their recent deployment to spotlight children on a public domain like TikTok indicates the mainstreaming of the phenomenon.

TikTok is one of the most used apps in the Philippines (Kemp, 2024). Using the Philippines as a case study, this paper contributes to the larger scholarship on humour and incivility in online spaces by examining the seeming legal-but-harmful humour (Matamoros-Fernández et al., 2023) brought by TikTok dogshows and how it can affect Gen Z and young children. By analysing this particular behaviour of Filipino TikTok users, this paper contributes to the growing literature on TikTok cultures from a Global South context (Dasent, 2023; Kaur-Gill, 2023; Sarwatay et al., 2023) by providing original conceptualisation and scaffolding work on how to understand a memetic phenomenon of highly localised origins. It is on this note that this paper seeks to explore the origins, phenomena, and implications of dogshows on TikTok, especially as they play out as forms of online incivility that are amplified by, and even applied to, Gen Z (11 to 26-years-old) and young children (under 10-years-old) on TikTok. We historicise and explore TikTok dogshows in the context of the Philippines, beginning with setting the local context, reviewing relevant scholarship on TikTok and online incivility, and

considering how our study contributes to age-based and culturally-specific developments of emergent TikTok cultures. We close with some insights on how platforms can be more proactive and reflexive in their content moderation.

'Dogshows', humour, and online incivility in Filipino digital cultures

One of the first mentions of the term 'dogshow' on social media appears to come from social media influencer Sassa Gurl, who in 2021 uploaded a TikTok to announce that their paid Facebook post and Tweet endorsing a shampoo brand was filled with comments making fun of the influencer. The post reads:

> Oh my God, you're dogshowing me. You people don't want to leave me alone to do my work. So, this gay has a gig with [name of brand] and was given an endorsement. Oh my God, a serious company and a serious endorsement, and when I saw the comments, I saw that you dogshowed me. (@itssassagurl, 2021; translation by authors)

The endorsement shows a picture of Sassa Gurl wearing a badly-crafted wig in the 'before' shot, and another picture of them wearing a better wig in the 'after' shot, presumably conveying the positive effects of using the shampoo being advertised. In the TikTok, Sassa Gurl (@itssassagurl, 2021) utilised TikTok's green screen feature to display their original post and the comments that made fun of them. Some of the comments compared Sassa Gurl's 'before' and 'after' pictures to cartoon characters, and even characters from Japanese horror films. As the mass virality of Sassa Gurl's TikTok video grew, the dogshow became a cross-platform trend across social media in the Philippines, where users began to make fun of public figures.

Despite its virality, it was only a year later in 2022 that local Filipinos began to interrogate the concept of the dogshow more closely. On 19 May 2022, Filipino Twitter user JL Javier put out a tweet querying for others to explain the notion of the dogshow on TikTok to him. He claims that while he often laughs along to dogshows, he can only do so when relying on highly contextual cues, as he does not yet have a clear idea on the definition or boundaries of the phenomenon (@tltjavier, 2022). Strings of responses started streaming in, with many locals offering their take. One viral reply tweet that accumulated over 7000 likes offered an answer:

> Doesn't it come from '*gaguhan*' [lit. trans. 'fooling around'] – '*ululan*' [fig. trans. 'craziness'] – *ulol* [fig. trans. 'crazy'] – rabid dog – dogshow? Oh wow I just assumed an etymology! (@heyrow, 2022; translation by authors)

Another prominent response was offered by Sassa Gurl themselves, also known as @itssassagurl (2022) on Twitter, who defines dogshow as a term they use when people are 'toying' with them in the comments and make them into memes. Sassa Gurl's working definition ended up being so popular, that a news feature solidified their take on dogshows as canon. The article offered that in brief, dogshows refer to the way a social media comments section makes fun of a person, or more specifically,

that it is the act of a person being 'played' and 'turned into a meme' by an online horde (Roque, 2022). Shortly after, another news website defined dogshows as 'joking at the expense of another' (Dumaual, 2022).

At present, the scholarship surfaces just one brief mention of dogshows in the Philippines; in their study of the linguistic features of queer vernacular in the Filipino context, Ulla et al. (2024) offer the term 'dog show' is a recontextualisation of 'competition[s] in which dogs are exhibited and rated by a panel of judges', into the 'negative implication' of 'making fun of someone in a friendly and non-offensive way' (Ulla et al., 2024: 9). However, given the focus of their paper, there was no other discussion or contextualisation of the phenomenon of dogshows per se, which is our focus here. As such, we turn to vernacular wisdom as context.

On Urban Dictionary – the online user-generated dictionary of contemporary slang and vernacular – the definition of dogshows is corroborated as 'satirically mocking a celebrity or any other famous person through memes or jokes' (gloria's talking neck-brace, 2022). Furthermore, this entry stated that dogshows do not intend to cause actual harm to a person and are usually provoked by enthusiastic fan bases of celebrity figures. As such, while the literal meaning and translation of dogshows refer to events where people judge the overall performance of dogs according to a specific standard (Dictionary.com, 'dog show', n.d.), in the context of slang in the Philippines, dogshows on social media are when individuals are placed in the spotlight, evaluated through a mass of commentators who usually deploy derogatory humour and provocative memes in their discourse, thus inviting other spectators to join in to throw jabs at and tease the individual 'on display'. These commentators, who are mainly Gen Z and younger people including children, may engage in text-based conversations, or use social media pop cultures like reaction GIFs, emojis, and pictures in their jabs. Many of these commentators and videos would say that this is a 'Gen Z' type of humour as dogshows are commonly found among younger people's content, since they are often the ones participating in the dogshows or are the subject of the dogshows. We offer that the vernacular deployment of 'dogshow' differs from Ulla et al.'s (2024) brief definition, in that the *acceptable mores* of a dogshow should focus on celebrities, public figures, or other people with elevated status or visibility in society; the *acceptable culprits or participants* of a dogshow should be fans who still feel a form of endearment or affect towards the 'dog'; and the *acceptable understanding* among dogshow participants should be that the humour is corroborated, mutually approved, and shared.

To study the constitution of a dogshow instance, we build on meme scholar Limor Shifman's (2013) conceptualisation of 'founder-based memes', which are memes that start from a specific text, photo, or video, and 'egalitarian memes', which are memes that do not have a starting point. Shifman (2013) argues that a meme has different dimensions: (1) it usually starts with a piece of content going viral, and may comprise multiple versions; (2) its popularity varies depending on its initial iteration and the remixed versions; (3) users relate to 'founder-based' memes by finding resonance to a specific photo or video, and to 'egalitarian memes' by finding resonance to a genre of content; and (4) users may engage in meme culture by modifying and remixing the piece of content. Borrowing from Shifman's (2013) framework, we offer that TikTok dogshow memes unfold in a similar manner: in the first instance, TikTok dogshows usually

commence with *an instigation by someone*, usually an influencer who does so via a TikTok post, or a user or group of users who do so via the comments section. Subsequently, the *popularity of a TikTok dogshow grows* when the dogshow escalates, usually when more commentators join in and pile on the initial post or comment, through responding in laughter, repeating and spreading the content, or extending the boundaries of mockery and humour. Finally, when an identifiable mass of users is congregating on the dogshow or engaging with the content, the group collectively recognises that *a specific individual has become the designated 'dog'* in the dogshow, and they may even escalate to solidify their status as a perpetual 'dog' to be targeted in future dogshows.

On the surface, dogshows may appear like other forms of provocative humour. This may include 'parody' where text is remixed for humorous commentary, or 'satire' where sarcasm and mockery is deployed as 'artistic expression' (Condren et al., 2008). This may also include 'flaming', which refers to the 'often offensive, nonsensical, albeit passionate online response[s]' (Papacharissi, 2004: 269) which usually shapes an ongoing discourse negatively. Indeed, all three forms of humour may be inherent to dogshows, but within the context of the Philippines, humour is often deployed as an idiom for expressing social commentary about poverty and suffering in the country. Filipinos may use jokes to cope with their struggles, but also rely on it as a narrative device or shared culture to bridge together the poor and the rich (Cannell, 2001). It has also been noted that Philippine televisual media capitalises on suffering as a source of entertainment (Ong, 2015; Pertierra, 2018). Given the nuance of local Filipino humour, the humour of dogshows is not used to simply attack or satirise a target but reflects the 'communitas' or community of the culture (Ancheta, 2015). In other words, Filipino users who embrace the humour of dogshows are usually cognisant of the suffering that many of their fellow citizens live in and use dogshows critically and with self-awareness as a form of Filipino relationality.

As earlier mentioned, the use of dogshows is very popular among Gen Z commentators on TikTok, including many users who appear to be children. This occurs despite the age-gating efforts of TikTok policy that requires all users to be at least 13 years of age in order to create an account (TikTok, n.d.a). Additionally, TikTok requires users to be at least 16-years-old to use the Direct Messaging feature, and at least 18-years-old in order to create a TikTok live video. Yet, our cursory scan of the landscape already points to several groups of minors engaging in the online incivility of dogshows on TikTok. It is important to note that while the empirical focus of our paper is on adult influencers who provoke dogshows on TikTok, the larger landscape sees some of these adults in family influencer units ushering in very young minors who are vulnerable to being subject to dogshows, as well as minors in the Gen Z cohort who are actively watching this content, as indicated in the replies in the comments section. This inclusion of very young minors – like babies and toddlers – in TikTok contents is not new, and in fact is very common among TikTok influencers as they progress in their lifestage to become parents. However, the fault line is when these babies and toddlers start to become the subject of TikTok dogshows, and when the register of hilarity and humour seems to water down the severity of intentionally exposing minors as targets for online trolling. Condoning this early emergence of dogshows centred on or involving minors

presents a contentious slippery slope of future trends, as the feelings of sociality and heightened emotions that emerge among participants during dogshows displace the concern for minor safety.

Literature review

To guide our study of dogshows on TikTok, we draw on two fields of scholarship. In this section, we scope the scholarship on social media affordances specific to TikTok and consider online incivility through memes among young people to understand the backdrop against which dogshow TikToks flourish, especially in the Philippine context.

Social media affordances on TikTok

Social media platforms have different features and affordances that allow users to do many things (Davis, 2020). Affordances are the connection between objects or technology and the uses that either enable or constrain behaviour (Evans et al., 2017; Gibson, 2014) and is used as an analytical tool to analyse social media platforms (Bucher and Helmond, 2018). This paper focuses particularly on TikTok, a short-video platform that allows users to upload videos from 15 s to up to 10 min, consisting of user-generated content that allows people to form an entertainment community, and which attributes its success to catering to Gen Zs (Kaye et al., 2021; Zhang, 2021). Specifically, we highlight the affordances of audiencing and silosociality.

The first affordance we discuss is audiencing. Audiencing refers to 'the process by which a visual image has its meanings renegotiated, or even rejected, by particular audiences watching in specific circumstances' (Fiske, 1994 in Rose, 2016: 38). Through audiencing, TikTok creators and audiences can creatively produce content to reflect their opinions, interject in the mainstream discourse with resistance or criticism, or simply amplify the sentiment of the content by re-platforming it through the extended exposure afforded by duets, stitches, and parodies. Often, this involves rather niche, subcultural, age-based humour and social media vernacular that are generationally-specific, and thus more likely to appeal to, circulate among, and solicit attention and interest from fellow Gen Z and young children.

Another affordance of TikTok applicable to this study is silosociality, introduced by digital media scholars Tiidenberg et al. (2021) in their study on Tumblr, and adapted to TikTok by digital anthropologist Abidin (2021). Silosociality refers to when the 'intended visibility of content is intensely communal and localised' (Abidin, 2021: 3). In this context, users create content specifically for their targeted audience, and thus the framing is highly specific to a subculture and will often not be understood by those who are outside of the silo. Silosociality allows the phenomenon of dogshows to be cultivated by Gen Z and young children who adapt the practice in the vein of their vernacular registers and invite other users from their cohort to participate within their silos. Thus, if a minor or child enters the space, there is a very low likelihood of external intervention, the possibility of a voice of reason from outside the silo, or general moderation to guide or caution them against the more harmful values and consequences surrounding dogshows.

Online incivility through meme-making among young people

In order to examine dogshows as a phenomenon within TikTok, we look at online incivility through meme-making among young people. Communication scholar Gina M. Chen (2017: 4, 6) defined incivility as 'nasty, attacking remarks' that require at least one of three attributes: bearing 'insulting language or name-calling'; the use of 'profanity'; and constituting 'a larger category that encompasses stereotypes, and homophobic, racist, sexist, and xenophobic terms that may at times dip into hate speech'. On the other hand, communications scholar Zizi Papacharissi, defined incivility as a 'negative collective face; that is, disrespect for the collective traditions of democracy' (Papacharissi, 2004: 267). Further, we engage with digital media scholars Ariadna Matamoros-Fernández et al.'s (2023: 5) framing of 'legal but harmful humour', which refers to 'any humorous communication that targets historically marginalised individuals and groups in a way that undermines their assurance as to equal status in the community'. As such, meme-making can be a process of disparaging humour in order to mock people, especially those from marginalised groups (Shifman, 2013).

In studies of incivility on TikTok, we see how harmful videos manoeuvred around TikTok's community guidelines even though the app also consists of a large user base of Gen Z and young children. Digital media scholars Zeng and Abidin (2021) examined Gen Z's intergenerational politics through their analysis of #OkBoomer and its memefication and argued that #OkBoomer is used as a response to antagonism from Boomers used when the former's identities and lifestyles are being attacked. Tom Divon (2022) presented the darker side of TikTok in their analysis of playful publics on the Israel-Palestine memetic war, to illuminate how TikTok has also become an amplifier of hate through memetic violence. The framing of these papers agrees that TikTok (n.d. a) is a platform with many young children actively participating in various cultures and practices, despite the fact that the Terms of Service require users to be at least 13-years-old.

We also surveyed studies on trolling and online hate. Lewis (2018) argued that YouTube monetises influence even if the belief system of the influencers is harmful, and Phillips (2018: 3) has found that amplifying 'harmful, polluted, or false' information, increases the likelihood of harassment and risks normalising harmful views. Connecting the scholarship from Phillips (2018) to Matamoros-Fernández et al. (2023) reveals how TikTok similarly contributes to the normalisation of harmful views by allowing legal-but-harmful humour to circulate despite the community guidelines of the app. Phillips (2018) found that even the groups with the most vitriol have evidenced negotiation of the limits of permissibility, such as the boundaries of who can be doxxed and what information can be shared. In earlier work, digital media scholar Ryan Milner (2013) had established that the practice of trolling in the US contexts that he studied are attached to a standard repertoire of acceptance practices and an in-group logic for deciding on the subjects or topic of trolling.

Surveillance can be considered one solution to counter trolling and hate. Information studies scholar Anders Albrechtslund (2008) defined 'participatory surveillance' as surveillance that incorporates user empowerment and the understanding that online social networking is a sharing practice. Recent studies on influencer cultures have demonstrated that social media followers and commentators are among the first to call out the

problematic contents of and behaviours by influencers, which then constitutes an important turning point for public discourse and conversation to form around the governance of healthy online cultures (Mahy et al., 2022; Radics and Abidin, 2022). These can also invite responses from the market and industry (Xu et al., 2022), thus underscoring the importance of community and follower-led advocacy while platforms may still be slow to respond.

In the Philippine context, there is some scholarship on harmful humour online, most focusing on trolling. TikTok is an important object of inquiry especially as it is a youth-oriented platform and has become a battleground in seeding political messages for the youth (Ong et al., 2022). Media scholars Ong and Cabañes (2018) investigated the architecture of networked disinformation wherein paid trolls rationalise their behaviour as an important source of income. Communication scholars Tandoc et al. (2021) investigated how women journalists experienced online harassment on social media via an army of trolls and the general public, through memes 'under the guise of humour' (Tandoc et al., 2021: 1204). This process is what communication and sociology scholars Ong et al. (2022) call 'influence operations' or the strategic communication of hacking attention and mobilising audiences, using various means such as hate speech and memes, to sway political discourses in favour of certain politicians and political camps and ultimately influence electoral outcomes. It is therefore understood that trolling is used as a code of honour, and that trolling is not entirely uncivil, especially in the Philippine context. Yet, in studying 'legal-but-harmful' humour in the Philippine context, the angle on Gen Z and young children is less explored. Given this, we ask the following research questions:

RQ 1: How do TikTok influencers use dogshows to negotiate and capitalise on incivility for online fame?

RQ 2: How do Gen Z and young child audiences respond to TikTok influencers who engage in such dogshows?

Methodology

This paper adopts purposive sampling, online observation, and case study analysis to understand the phenomenon of dogshows on TikTok. To identify a suitable corpus of TikTok accounts, hashtags, and audio memes for study, we first turned to marketing analytics websites Meltwater (Amurthalingam, 2023) and AJ Marketing (n.d.) to assemble a list of the most popular Filipino TikTokers by follower count. These two databases were selected as they are considered credible resources for brands in the Philippines.

As dogshows on TikTok are predominantly popular among young people and young influencers from the humour and lifestyle genres, we narrowed the list by selecting only those in these genres. Although dogshows are also popular among Gen Z and young children, in honouring TikTok's age-gating policy (13-years-old and above) and keeping to academic best practice (18-years-old and above), in this paper we exclude the mention of Gen Z TikTokers who were younger than 18-years-old but instead focus our case studies on families on TikTok where the adult TikTokers were responsible for bringing in minors

– usually their children or younger relatives like nieces and nephews – into the arena of dogshows. In addition, we included only TikTokers with at least 10,000 followers as the threshold for who constitutes a public figure (c.f. Marwick, 2015) and confirmed that the TikTokers in our list have indeed intentionally sought publicity by actively engaging in practices to increase their visibility (c.f. Abidin, 2020a). Our final corpus comprises 10 TikTokers (see Table 1).

Following our purposive sampling, we searched for the users on TikTok and began a period of observation from January to June 2023. We noted whether the term 'dogshow' is mentioned by the influencer in the video, or by followers in the comments sections. We included variations of the word 'dogshow' such as 'dinogshow' ['dogshowed'], 'laro' [trans. to 'play'], and 'nilaro' [trans. 'they played']. We also noted if there were related insults mentioned in the comments sections. We only focused on videos in the English, Filipino, and Tagalog languages, and not videos in other Filipino languages and videos by non-Filipinos.

Throughout our period of online observation, the TikTok algorithm also helpfully recommended several viral dogshow posts on our 'For You Page' (FYP). In recognition that the TikTok platform is designed to prioritise 'post-based virality' over 'persona-based fame' (Abidin, 2020a: 79), these viral videos (i.e., averaging between 100k and 1 M views) were also included for study, even if the creators themselves did not surface as among the most-followed TikTokers from our initial survey. This eventuated in a corpus of 220 TikTok posts in the dogshow genre.

We studied this original corpus closely, detailing observations in our fieldnotes that focused on the content of the influencers, the way the influencers connect and communicate with audiences, and how both influencers and audiences engage with the TikTok platform and its various features. Operationally, our fieldnotes included details of the dogshow post by the TikToker (e.g., video contents, discursive contents, paratext including layover text and captions, audio meme used, etc.); screenshots of the top comments under each post (as automatically sorted by TikTok's interface), focusing especially on exchanges between the TikToker and their followers via text and video replies; and

Table 1. List of selected Filipino TikTok influencers aged 18 and above, and who have at least 10,000 followers.

Influencers Pseudonym	Followers as of August 21, 2023
Becky	7.6M
Patrick	6.7M
Miggy and Bea	6.8M
Tricia	2.9M
Allison	1.9M
Steve	15.0M
Francine	2.5M
Regine	503.0k
Walter	4.9M
David	3.4M

engagement metrics such the number of 'likes', 'comments', 'saves', and 'shares' on the video. The data collected was primarily in the English, Filipino, and Tagalog.

Following communication scholar Annette Markham's (2012) proposition of the use of 'fabrication' as an ethical practice, in this paper we do not quote any comments from the comments section ad verbatim but translate or narrate them in the discussions. We also use pseudonyms for each influencer to minimise the possibility of traceability. Aside from excluding screenshots of comment sections, we also exclude any screenshots of the videos in order not to reproduce the potential harms in the uncivil discourse. Videos and comments in the Filipino or Tagalog languages were translated and narrated in English by the first author. To analyse our corpus, we adopt inductive analysis guided by grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014) and use thematic coding to identify the overarching patterns across the dogshow TikToks in both the posts themselves and in the way TikTokers and commenters engage with each other. As we systematically reviewed the comments section of each post, we paid attention to local parlance and vernacular that is usually popular among young children and Gen Z, in recognition that children and teenagers regularly experience and participate in peer culture – including shared language – on social media (Lim, 2022; Livingstone, 2014). Table 2 shows a sample corpus of the dogshow content that we studied.

Influencers using dogshows for fame

We observed that in instances where influencers appear to be victims or the 'dogs' in dogshows, their participation and position can be productive. As prominent social media users who are constantly courting the limelight, being a 'dog' allows influencers to maintain a level of online fame among viewers. It has been noted that given the saturation of the influencer industry, many of them have pivoted to engaging entirely in negative publicity – such as provoking fellow influencers, engaging in influencer wars, or even intentionally subjecting themselves to online hate – as attention strategies to maintain their relevance among audience (Abidin, 2020b). Over the years, this practice has even emerged as its own genre, such as in the case of the 'drama' genre on YouTube, where creators often monitor the latest gossip and scandal to inform their content production, and attract audiences to view their videos (Christin and Lewis, 2021). There are also cultural mores at play when courting 'bad attention', such as in the case of Korean influencers who navigate *yingyeo* culture or practices of abrasiveness towards each other to be provocative (Lee and Abidin, 2021). Thus, it is evident that some influencers aim to maximise all possible engagements on their content – views, likes, reactions, comments, follower or subscriber count, and similar – at all costs, even if it entails risks or subjecting themselves to being the target of bad publicity. Through inductive analysis we identified two types of dogshows: (1) egging on dogshows and (2) self-inflicting dogshows. We discuss the two types below and examine how influencers use them to acquire and sustain fame online.

Egging on dogshows

The first type is 'egging on dogshows'. This type of dogshow refers to the influencer performing or provoking the dogshow and it can present as dogshowing a fellow influencer

Table 2. Sample dataset of dogshows as of 21 August 2023.

Influencer's Pseudonym	Date	Views	Reactions	Comments	Type of dogshow	Snippet of quote or narration of video, translated into English	Snippet of comment, translated into English
Miggy and Bea	9-Apr-23	3.1M	339.1k	666	Egging on Dogshow show	'Guys, are seeing what I'm seeing? It's swollen!'	'Her pout is on the upper lip!'
Steve	5-Jun-23	15.2M	1.8M	18.8k	Self-inflicting dogshow	Aesthetic shots of playing beach volleyball and posing on camera. Based on another TikToker Jeo Ong	'Jeo Ong ⊠ King Kong ☑'
Francine	9-Feb-23	18.8M	1.4M	8462	Self-inflicting dogshow	'At least I'm still a Barbie, but only Barbecue'	'Barbie-ik' (a play on bilk or piglet
Walter	28-Apr-23	3.5M	478.1k	1657	Self-inflicting dogshow	'I don't know if the filter is already on. It's like it's on Beautify' (Shrek filter)	'TikTok only added color'
David	20-Jan-23	833.5k	82.3k	1554	Egging on dogshow	'This is for shoes!!...you're all so dumb!'	'Does it have wings (note: sanitary pad joke)?'

or others in their TikTok posts, or dogshowing their target through direct replies or video-replies in linked in the comments section. Take for example Gen Z TikToker Allison who has 2 million followers. Some of their viral videos showcase them parodying other content creators. Parodies can be considered a form of dogshow in the Philippine digital culture context, but it is also considered legal-but-harmful humour as in the case of racist parodies on YouTube where the humour attacks historically marginalised groups; this gives power to the performer of the parody over the parodied individual, and shifts the dynamic of the relations (Matamoros-Fernández et al., 2023: 21). In one example, Allison roleplayed as a teen girl who was drinking with her friends, when one of the boys in the group moved the handheld fan towards another girl, implying that the teen girl was not the boy's love interest. The teen girl responded to the act by shouting curse words at both parties through dubbing the lyrics of a rap song. This is a dogshow because she copied the appearance of the teenager in a mocking manner, by intentionally using a botched grey foundation on their face with lipstick smeared over their mouth.

As the incident unfolded, commenters piled on more and more criticism in the comments section, such as dogshowing Allison for allegedly using cement as foundation for the botched face makeup, or intensely picking apart the appearance of the teenager in the original video. For these TikTok users, making fun of other people by egging on dog-shows gives visibility to their username and account, in the hopes of possibly 'going viral' on the platform (Abidin, 2020a). This example reflects age-based humour and social media vernacular being used and amplified through audiencing (Rose, 2016). Despite being legal-but-harmful humour that is permitted by the platform (Matamoros-Fernández et al., 2023), the subject of the dogshow is still a young teenager. In our corpus of comments on Allison's dogshow TikTok, we were surprised not to encounter any commentators calling out this behaviour as bullying, or any comments coming to the defence of the teenager. This is concerning as studies have shown that bullying on social media has impacts on mental health of young children and teenagers, who are already at-risk groups likely to experience distress from cyberbullying (Giumetti and Kowalski, 2022; Parris et al., 2022).

Self-inflicting dogshow

The second type of dogshow is 'self-inflicting dogshow'. This refers to when the influencer willingly places themselves as the victim or 'dog' in the dogshow and invites others to pile on. Often, this involves them using derogatory terms or engaging in self-deprecation, as a strategy to appear more relatable to their followers (Kanai, 2019). Similar to the above, the primary aim is to artificially boost the views, reactions, and comments on one's TikTok posts through the intentional solicitation of negative publicity. Self-inflicting dogshows can be considered negative publicity, but as we underscore above, the increased engagement – even if it is from haters, trolls, or other dogshow audiences – can helpfully trigger the platform's algorithm into registering the content as organically high-performing and encourage TikTok's recommender systems to disseminate the post even further and wider.

One example of this practice at work is a dogshow by TikToker Francine who has over 2.6 million followers. As a plus-sized creator, this action of calling herself a pig was meant to reflect some of her self-awareness while also inviting others to add to the deprecation. In the same vein, another TikTok features Francine using a trendy TikTok randomiser filter 'What kind of Barbie you are'. When Francine was offered the response 'oversized Barbie', she sarcastically thanks TikTok, releases a string of curse words, then comforts herself by exclaiming that 'at least she was still a Barbie', albeit a 'Barbie-cue' [a homonym for 'barbecue']. Gen Z and young children TikTokers will often add to these self-inflicting dogshows, as evidenced from our corpus of comments where underaged TikTokers were chiming in with more pig-related puns, such as 'Barbie-ik' [a homonym for '*biik*' or 'piglet']. While strategic in this case, this form of humour focused on body image can be harmful to children and teenagers (Pryde and Prichard, 2022).

However, when Gen Z and young children start inflicting dogshows on themselves, it makes them more prone to the legal-but-harmful humour (Matamoros-Fernández et al., 2023) from users on the platform, and they may become subject to more dogshows where commentators add to the flaming indiscriminately. They might become targets for different types of jokes that can be harmful to them, especially if they do not have the resilience or maturity to handle the sarcastic humour. This is all the more important as dogshows are considered as 'playtime' in the Filipino digital landscape (Tuazon, 2022), and once a user is on the platform, everyone is 'fair game' to be considered as potential 'dogs'. The practice is exacerbated considering TikTok's affordances and norms that invite users to be creative meme-makers, through exposure to various dogshow threads in the For You Pages, and the easy remix of audio-visual memes (Divon and Ebbrecht-Hartmann, 2022). As such, the behaviours are structurally supported – and perhaps even tacitly endorsed – even though minors (including those who have bypassed TikTok's age-gating) are actively present in the scene. We also observed that in the comments section, some influencers would scold younger commentators, chiding them to not watch the video because it contains curse words.

Engaging with dogshows

We observe that Gen Z and young children generally engage with influencers and dogshows by egging on the practice or cautioning users to stop the act. When adding fuel to fire, Gen Z and young children have been observed to insult the 'dogs' in the dogshows like others do, but in their interventions to halt dogshows, their comments have underscored the age of the 'dog' if the victim appears to be a minor. While the latter demonstrates some sensibility and empathy from these young TikTokers, we also observe that the call outs by Gen Z and young children often deploy humour to soften the blow or to appear more palatable. Below, we illustrate how minor users engage with dogshows through the case study of Gen Z TikToker Walter. We close this section by reflecting on the policy implications to help protect Gen Z and young children.

Walter is a Filipino Gen Z TikToker in his 20s with over 5 million followers. His TikTok account consists of makeup transformations, mini vlogs, and pranks, and the comments sections reveal a high incidence of commentators making fun of his

content. For example, one of his videos that gained over 1.8 million views is a makeup transformation using a snippet of the song Kill Bill by Sza, as it was one of the trending audio memes at that time. The video shows Walter wearing eyeglasses while stabbing a person – assumed to be his 'ex' in the roleplay – with a fork. Upon pulling out the fork, the video cuts to a new image of Walter with his hair styled, with a full face of emo-inspired makeup while donning gothic-inspired silver necklaces, suggesting that he has been crying after stabbing his 'ex'. As a red substance is seen dripping down the fork that has been used as a weapon, the audio meme crescendos with the lyrics 'Uh, I just killed my ex'.

Some of the users we observed in the comments dogshowed Walter's video implying that ketchup was 'substandard' or an 'inferior' version of blood as the fork was an 'inefficient' or 'unrealistic' weapon compared to a knife. As throngs of comments teased him about the quality of his parody, a subset of commentators pivoted the conversation to praise Walter for his very creative and enjoyable use of makeup and fashion. This was one of the few instances in our corpus where there was some pushback against dogshows in the comments section, by way of deflecting or redirecting attention to another conversation or topic. There were also a subset of comments calling to stop the dogshow albeit ending the comment with laughter ('hahaha') indicating that a shared understanding that this dogshow was not severe, so even the way they interject to stop the act is less serious and more casual. Similar to the previous cases, some of these commentators revealed their profile photos and had public TikTok videos featuring themselves, enabling us to conclude that a large cohort of them obviously appeared to be young teenagers and young children.

As Gen Z and young children are both participants and objects of dogshows, it is important to reflect on how they can participate on the app. While it can sometimes appear as though all dogshow participants are ruthless and uncaring about the victims of the dogshow, the above example of Walter and the questioning pushback in the opening example of JuxiFam suggest that TikTok dogshow silos may at times exhibit an internal logic of values and norms. We reiterate here the studies of troll groups and their inherent ethics or code of conduct, that not all trolling is uncivil in social media (Milner, 2013; Ong and Cabañes, 2018).

Our data demonstrates the beginnings of such in-group policing among dogshow participants, in the absence of the TikTok platform performing any formal governance in this space. As earlier illustrated, dogshow commentators had expressed surprise when Dadiju dogshowed Babyju and questioned this practice as the object of the dogshow was a young child; dogshow commentators had also attempted to redirect the conversation around Walter's parody to applaud his creative efforts rather than nitpick a minor detail of his performance. These are instances of 'peer surveillance' (Jacobs, 2020) or 'participatory surveillance' (Albrechtslund, 2008), which are forms of lateral surveillance where users mutually police each other (Andrejevic, 2005). Tying this back to the Philippine context, this communal policing that operates on the TikTok platform is resonant of a digital *bayanihan* [idiom, trans. 'helping each other in times of crisis'] where users may collectively come together to provide aid, such as intervening to protect or rescue the 'dog' of a dogshow (Soriano et al., 2021).

As of the time of writing, TikTok (n.d.b) has some clear guidelines and initiatives to protect its user base, including Gen Z and young children. This includes only collecting

limited information such as birthdays and usernames (TikTok, n.d.b); the claim that children's videos will not be collected by the app and user information cannot be viewed by other users (TikTok, n.d.b); and that parents and guardians can file requests to the platform to know about, access, or delete the information collected from their child (TikTok, n.d.b). In the US, TikTok has offered a Kids Mode policy where they aim to protect the privacy of the children by collecting limited information from the child, providing contextualised content, and providing the parents access to the child's information (TikTok, n.d.b). Elsewhere, TikTok launched the TikTok Asia Pacific Safety Advisory Council where part of their tasks is to convene and discuss online safety and child safety (Bettadapur, 2020). However, there are still limitations to these policies given that they only cover specific countries and can overlook specific cultural contexts – as in the case of the forms of troll-like and derogatory practices in Filipino dogshow TikTokers that may pass off as mere humour to outsiders.

Conclusion

In this paper, we explored the phenomenon of dogshows on TikTok and how the various types are used, we reviewed the relevant scholarship on TikTok and online incivility, and analysed dogshow content on TikTok, taking stock the concern of the age of TikTok's users in our discussion. We investigated how dogshows are afforded by the platform using audiencing and silosociality as key concepts, and how Gen Z and young children can be provocateurs, participants, or victims of dogshows. In general, there is an amplification of online incivility both as intended and unintended consequences of engaging with dogshows, either by participating in dogshows or attempting to police the dogshow behaviours within the TikTok posts. The intended consequence is that we observed influencers leveraging on dogshows – however harmful – to retain visibility and popularity on TikTok. But an unintended consequence is the amplification of what appears to be hate speech on TikTok, despite being shrouded in the register of highly cultural and localised humour. Because of this amplification of online incivility through dogshows, there is a need for an additional layer of protection especially for Gen Z and young children.

We conclude this paper by suggesting that TikTok should explore more conversations and deliberations with different community groups, especially if they hail from at-risk or marginalised demographics. These stakeholders can be solicited for their highly localised but important knowledge on the positionality and discursive contexts in specific markets where TikTok is flourishing among younger populations, in a bid to assist the platform to identify and mitigate the legal-but-harmful humour proliferated by Gen Z and young children (Matamoros-Fernández et al., 2023), to bring more specific sensibilities and reflexivity in content moderation strategies.

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