



Report



363.3K



68.4K



101.1K

TikTok


@bananalovesyoutoo



Making Cringe Content: The Performativity of Algorithms in Cultural Production

Ashley Mears
Boston University
Oxford OII
03.09.23

virality appears spontaneous



▶ 0:35

Star Wars kid Drunken Jedi

14M views

YouTube | 15yr



Watch The Hilarious Moment These Kids Crash Their Dad's Live ...

Copy link

MORE VIDEOS

INSIDE edition

0:12 / 1:26

CC Settings Full Screen

content farm

All Videos



THIS IS BAD PARENTING! 😡

3 days ago · 56.1M Views

👍👎👀 293K



The WORST Daughter EVER! 😡

4 days ago · 4M Views

👍👎👀 43K



She Thought Her Hair Was CUT! ✂️

4 days ago · 6.7M Views

👍👎👀 15K



She Thought His Tongue Was STUCK! 🍷❄️

6 days ago · 981.9K Views

👍👎👀 4.9K



Mom Left Her Baby On Top Of The Car! 🚗👶

6 days ago · 1.7M Views

👍👎👀 6.2K



She Thought The Door Was REAL! 😱

a week ago · 73.6M Views

👍👎👀 567K



When He Found Out He Was a DAD! 🤯

a week ago · 1.4M Views

👍👎👀 5.3K



Rude Guy At Movie Gets Big KARMA 🤯

a week ago · 8.9M Views

👍👎👀 25K



Bad Boss Gets INSTANT KARMA 🤯

a week ago · 56.5M Views

👍👎👀 184K

Digital and in-person immersive ethnography



- Immersive ethnography
 - digital and IRL
 - My own page
- 60 Interviews content creators
 - White, age 25 – 50
 - Entertainers / Artists: 47
 - Magicians: 22

Digital and in-person immersive ethnography





Ashley Valentine

Published by Ashley Mears · 18 hrs ·

Yes.



You and 26 others

16 Comments

Performance for Your Post

955 People Reached

43 Likes, Comments & Shares

43 Post Clicks

5	0	38
Photo Views	Link Clicks	Other Clicks

[View More Details](#)

NEGATIVE FEEDBACK

0	1
Hide All Posts	Hide Post
0	0
Report as Spam	Unlike Page

43 Likes, Comments & Shares

BRANDED CONTENT DISTRIBUTION

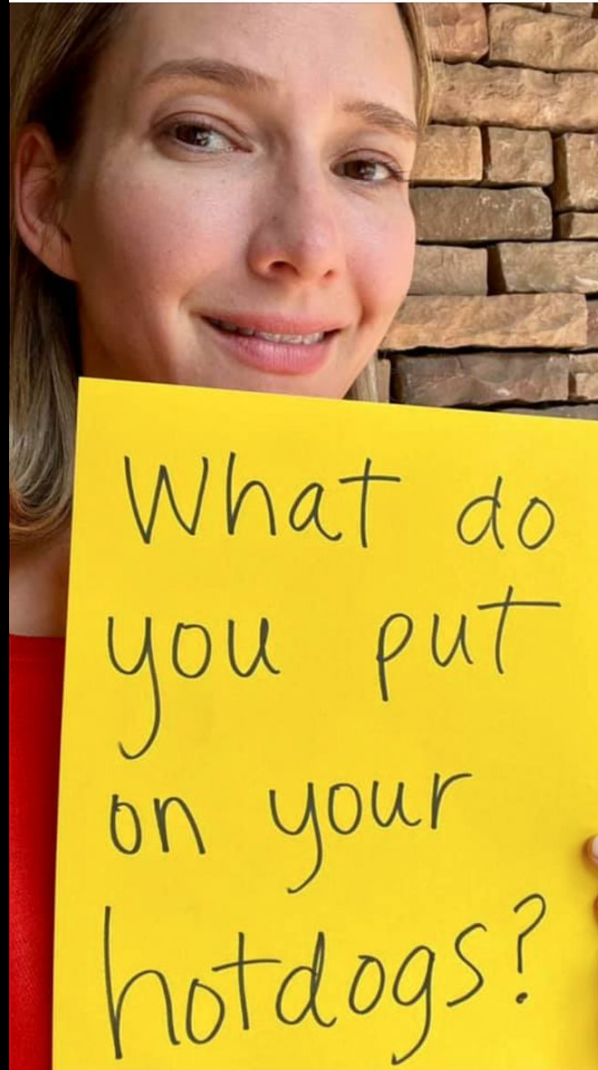
[View Breakdown](#)

955	955	0
Total Reach	Organic Reach	Paid Reach

955	955	0
Total Impressions	Organic Impressions	Paid Impressions

Published by Ashley Mears · August 29 ·

Only mustard and relish. NOT KETCHUP!



182

312 Comments 29 Shares

5682 People Reached

562 Likes, Comments & Shares

388 Post Clicks

25	0	363
Photo Views	Link Clicks	Other Clicks

[View More Details](#)

NEGATIVE FEEDBACK

8	25
Hide All Posts	Hide Post
0	0
Report as Spam	Unlike Page

562 Likes, Comments & Shares

BRANDED CONTENT DISTRIBUTION

[View Breakdown](#)

5682	5682	0
Total Reach	Organic Reach	Paid Reach

5682	5682	0
Total Impressions	Organic Impressions	Paid Impressions

working with algorithms

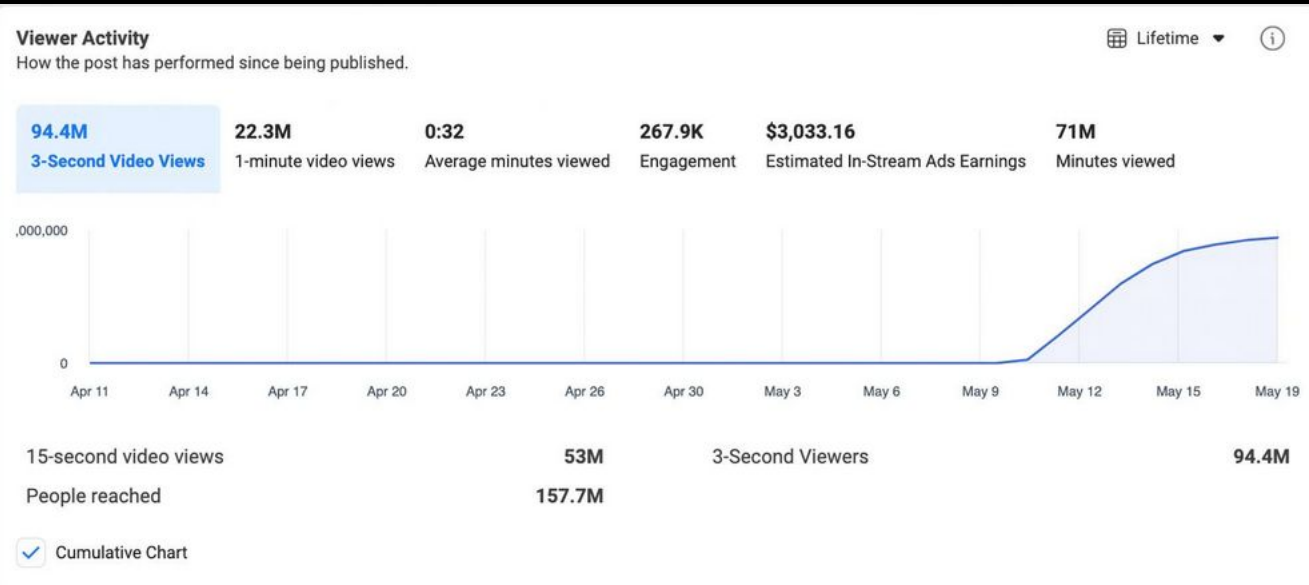
step-by-step codes for computers to act on data



recommender algorithms



content moderation algorithms



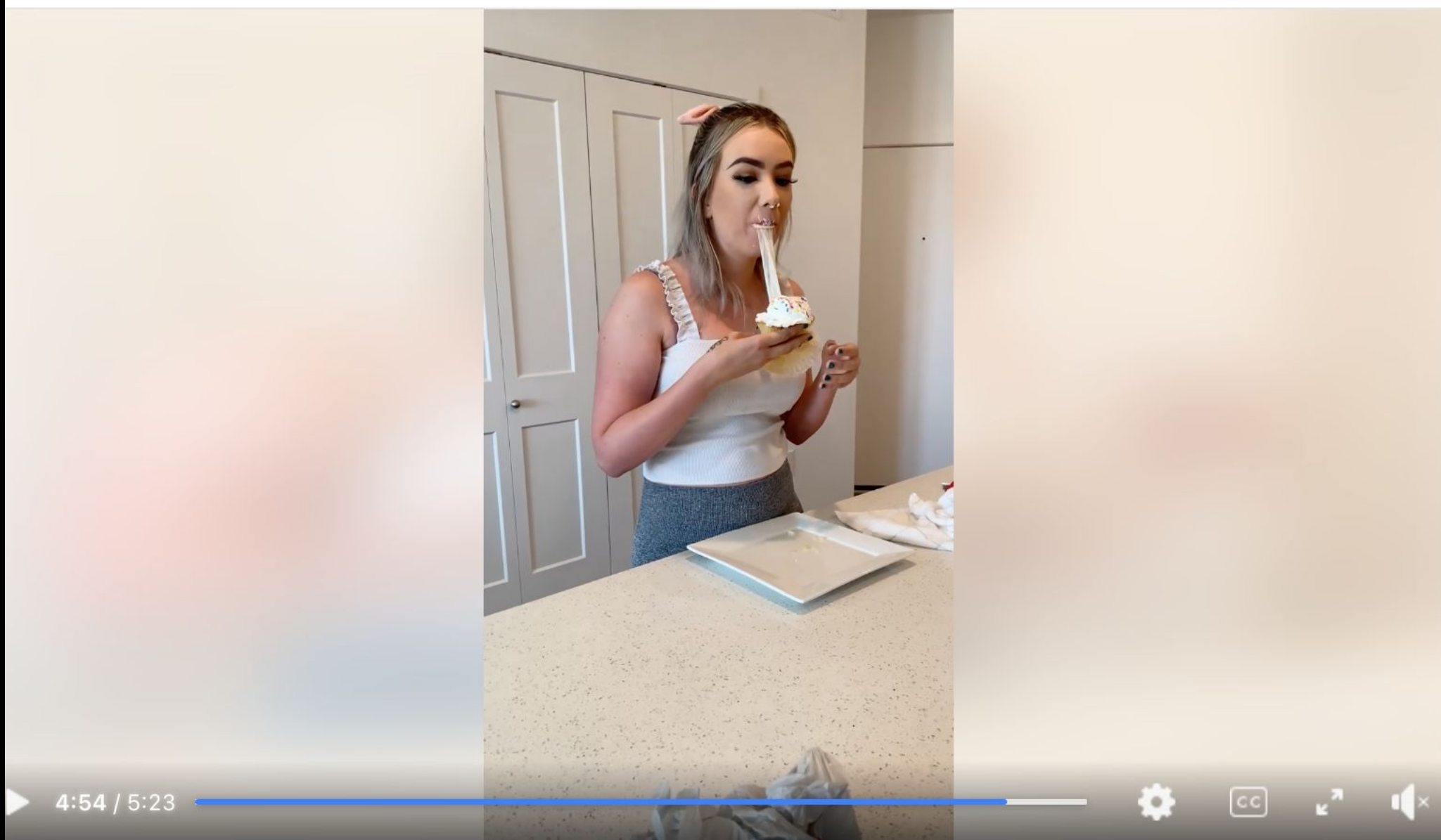
f Community Standards

- Introduction
- I. Violence and Criminal Behavior
- II. Safety
- III. Objectionable Content
- IV. Integrity and Authenticity
- V. Respecting Intellectual Property
- VI. Content-Related Requests and Decisions

the puzzle

"So cringe!"

Alex, live streamer



 **CUPCAKE SURPRISE PRANK** 

 Like

Comment

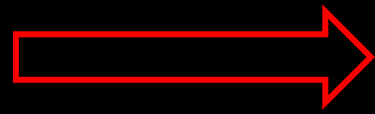
 Share

  2.6K · 129 Comments · 694M Views

Q: How do creators interact with algorithms?

Labor Process

- Datafication
- Alienation
- Simplification
- Replication
- Gamification
- Fusion



Creative Decisions

- the anticipation of algorithmic values
- the reproduction of algorithmic values
- the performativity of algorithms

1. datafication

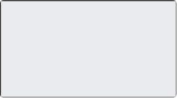
Check Our Release Notes to See What's New

As we continue to improve Creator Studio, we'll detail all of our major updates for you. Head over to Creator Studio's Education Center to read our release notes and stay up to date.

[Read Release Notes](#) [Dismiss](#)

Recent Posts

Last 7 Days [Posts](#)

 **HE WAS NOT EXPECTING TH...**
Yesterday 9:05 PM
Ashley Valentine

+117.9x **35K** **239**
Distribution Views Engagement

Insights


Last 7 Days

Performance

90,216 3-Second Video Views ▼ 63.4%	10,439 1-Minute Video Views ▼ 61.1%
42,446 Minutes Viewed ▼ 62.5%	0:09 Average Minutes Viewed ▼ 11.9%


[Go to Insights](#)

Discover the best performing content for Facebook by testing different versions of your video posts against each other.


[Try It Now](#) [Dismiss](#) 

Recent Posts

Last 7 Days [Posts](#)

 **Losing your memory. And you...**
Yesterday 9:30 PM
Ashley Valentine

+2.2x **--** **181**
Distribution Views Engagement

 **HIS PHONE FLOATS 🤖 (Fo...**
Yesterday 4:36 PM
Ashley Valentine

+74.9x **33.1K** **105**
Distribution Views Engagement

Insights

Last 7 Days

Performance

236,970 3-Second Video Views ▲ 25.3%	46,062 1-Minute Video Views ▲ 115%
155,939 Minutes Viewed ▲ 76.5%	0:16 Average Minutes Viewed ▲ 48%

[Go to Insights](#)

Creator Studio

Create New

Home

Notifications

Pre-Published

Published

Content Library

Insights

Inbox+

Creative Tools

Settings

Resources

KRISPY KRE...
08/20/2021 7:4...
Ashley Va

Weirdo ruins...
08/20/2021 3:1...
Ashley Va

OMG she trie...
08/19/2021 6:4...
Ashley Va

Only mustar...
08/19/2021 3:4...
Ashley Va

SHE DID THAT TO HERSELF?...
08/18/2021 7:38 PM
Ashley Valentine

+44.2x higher than your other posts within 5 days of publishing.

- ↑ 84.9x more 1-Minute Views
- ↑ 1.1x more Average View Time
- ↑ 2.6x more Reactions

Understand Your Distribution

1-Minute Video Views is the metric that's likely having the biggest effect on the distribution of this post.

[See 1-Minute Views](#)

Metrics shown are representative of overall distribution, compared to your previous videos. [Learn More](#)

153% Viewed
16.9%

Go To Insights

Posts Last 28 Days

- 0 scheduled posts
- 0 drafts
- 0 expiring posts

Go To Published Tab

Compare Page Categories

Page Category: All (Default)

33,834 Excellent 3-Second Video Views	4,057 Excellent 1-Minute Video Views	0:11 Moderate Average Minutes Viewed	29 Fair Comments	12 Fair Shares
---	--	--	----------------------------	--------------------------

92 **Fair**
Reactions

Performance Comparison

Results are based on your 14-day average for 3-Second Video Views compared to that of other Pages with similar watch time for the selected category.

Excellent When compared to videos from Pages in your selected category that currently have similar watch times, your Page's videos are outperforming. You're currently in the top 25%.

Your Page	33,834
Upper	9,093
Median	3,826
Lower	1,223

Live Broadcast Summary

How your 6:37 live broadcast performed.

23 Peak Live Viewers

6 Reactions 9 Comments 0 Shares

3-Second Video Views	95
1-Minute Video Views	19
Average Minutes Viewed	0:26
Minutes Viewed	01:03:09

"What we do for these silly little videos is very scientific. We don't post just random videos."

"following a formula."

"mathematical."

2. alienation (from taste)



Cringe

Silly

Mindless

Shitainment

If people wanted the avante garde, we'd give it to them. But they want dumb ass shit.

- Will, filmmaker

2. alienation (from body)



She did WHAT to her BRA and PANTIES? 🤩👿

10 weeks ago · 8.5M Views

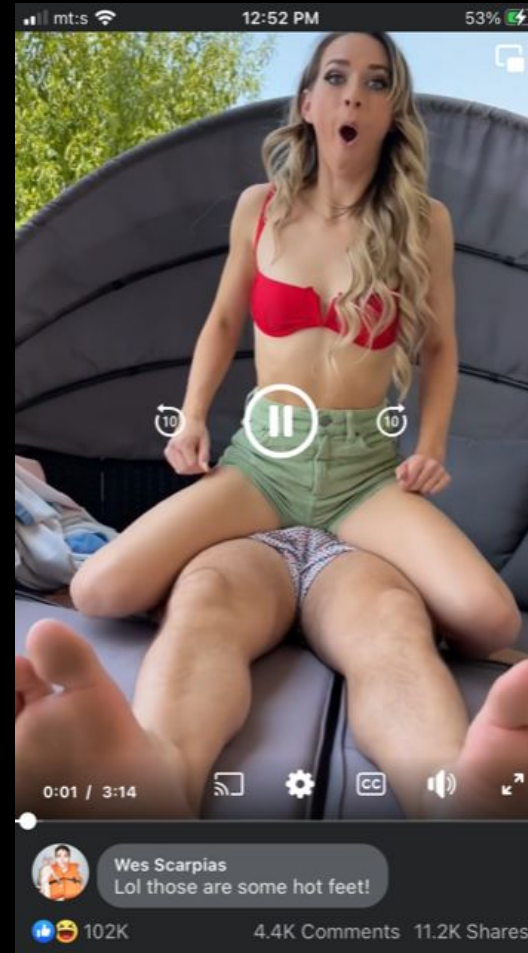


Adley posted an episode of The Adley Show (Favorites).

July 26, 2021 · 🌐

She went FLYING!! 🤩 IG: @adley

A bride covers herself in oil and jumps off a swingset to try to fit into her wedding dress.



Wes Scarpas
Lol those are some hot feet!

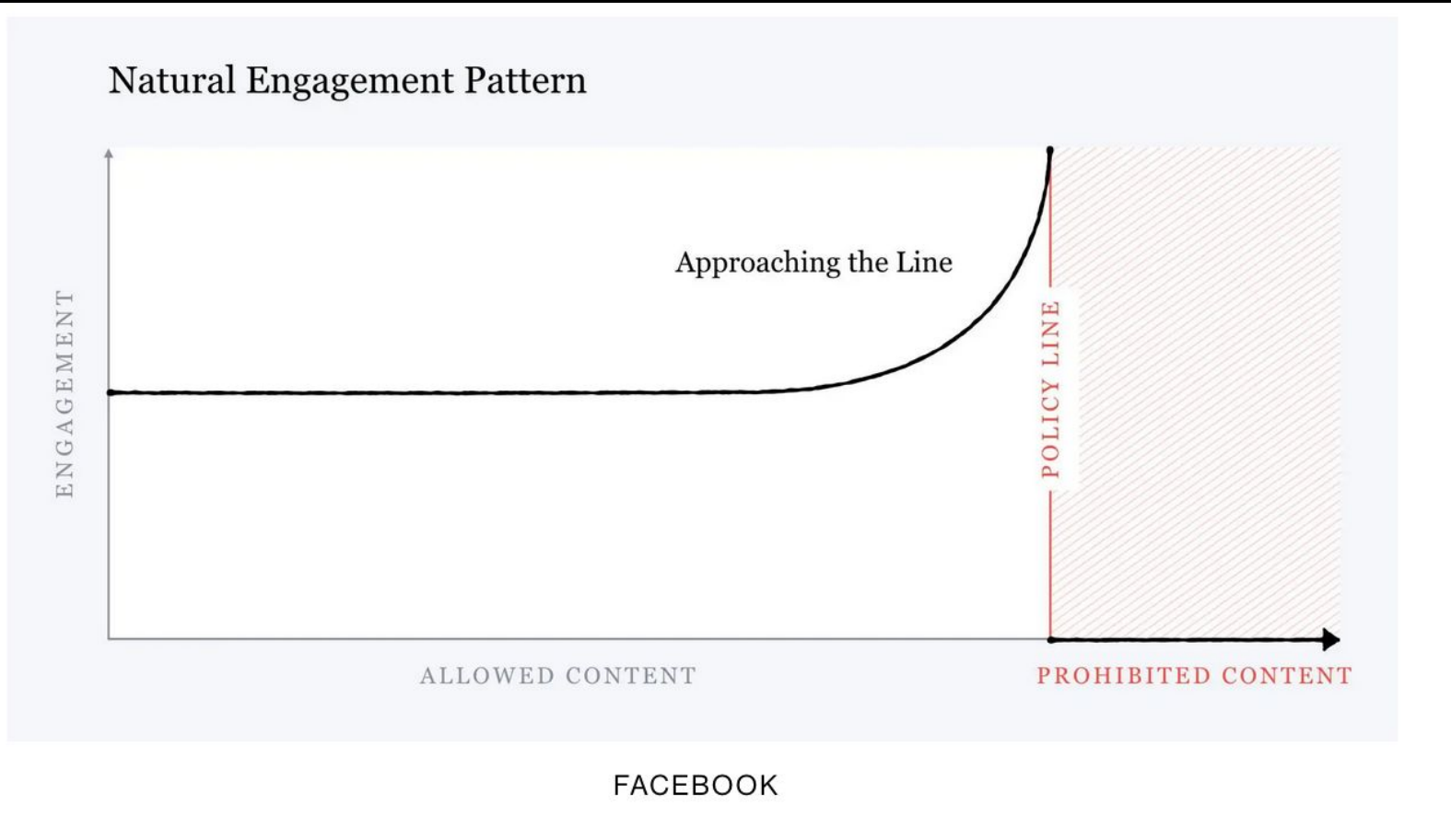
👍🤩 102K

4.4K Comments 11.2K Shares



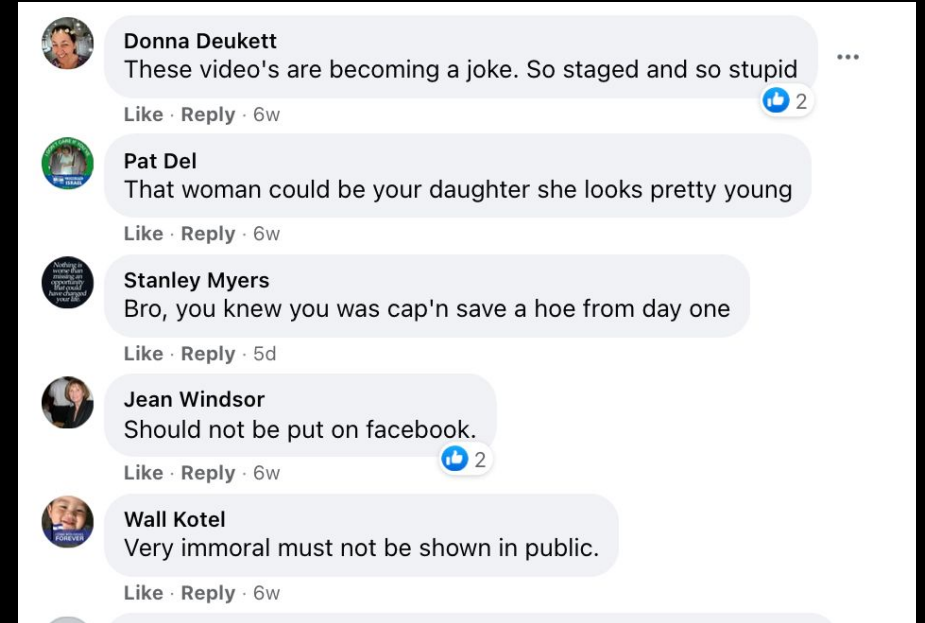
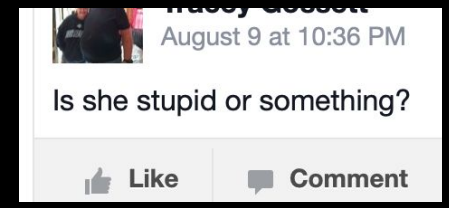
I think that works: her face, her ass. Face, ass. People will watch that.
- On set with Will, filmmaker

2. objectified body limits : cat-and-mouse "attention games"



"People will think they're gonna see up her skirt... but don't actually show her cooter." On set with Addie and Elsa

2. alienation (from audience)



You're not doing it right until the mean comments come in.

– Jude, magician

My little comment has been like, "it turns out my dignity online has a price, and the price of my dignity, monthly, is \$80,000. I'm a hundred percent good with that price." – Madison, singer

(not relational work, Bayme 2016)

2. alienation leads to inauthentic content

Viral: situational authenticity



"normal people," "fake" videos

Influencers: personal authenticity



"real passion" for plant-based food
#fishgate (Christin 2021)

3. simplification



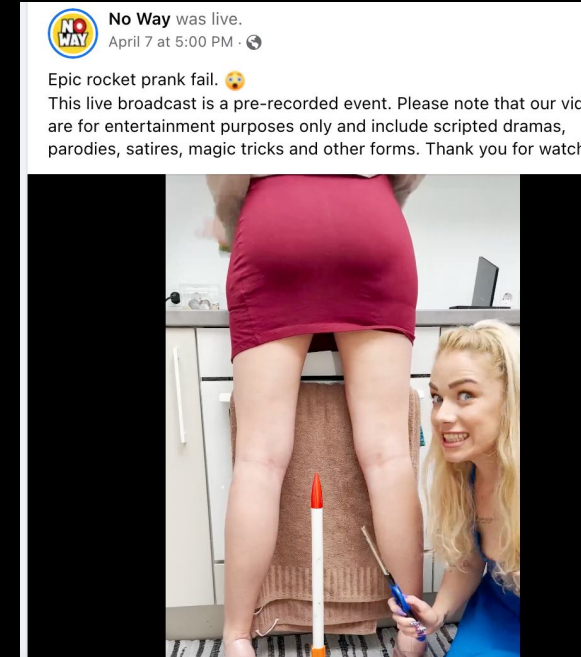
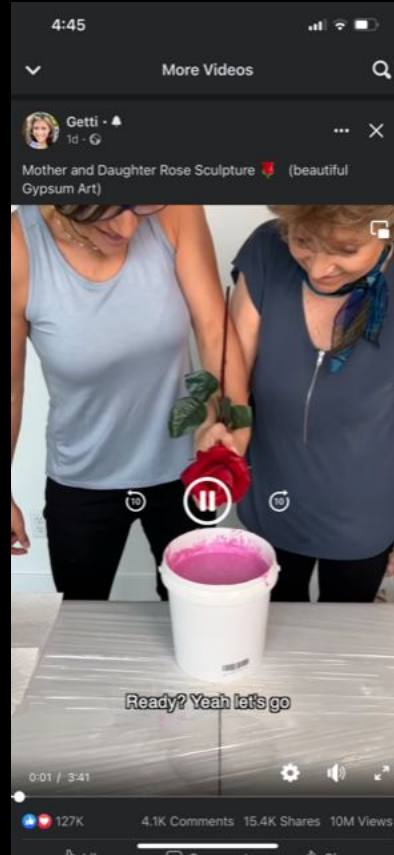
he lied about being in a wheelchair they scared him! (Scripted Dramatic Scene)

12 weeks ago · 49.2M views

We lean heavily into *all* the stereotypes. We've been halfway through a video before where it was a criminal and a cop and Henry walks out and goes, "Why is the cop black? And the criminal white? Swap the characters." ... Like, if it's a black person as a criminal, everyone's gonna feel a certain type of way about it. - Gil, actor

(metrics simplify value landscape, Nguyen 2021)

4. replication



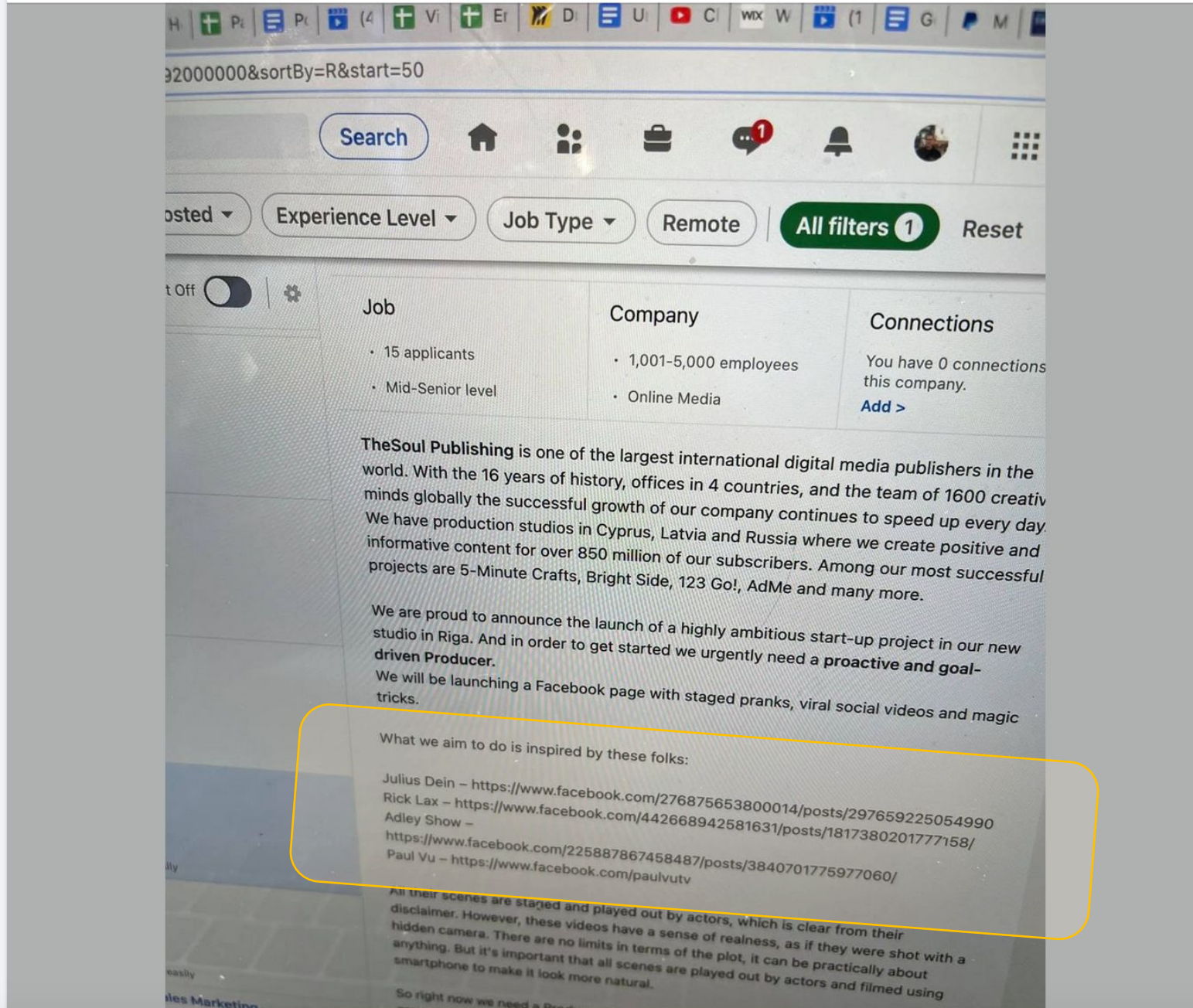
Do people replicate, mimic, and copy us? 100%. We copy them and they copy us. And we don't care. If anything that's a compliment to us and to them ... If you're trying to go viral, you copy what works.

- Jules, magician

4. replication

June 6, 2021 · 🌐

AN ACTUAL JOB LISTING FROM SOULPUBLISHING 🤖🤖 (5 min crafts etc)



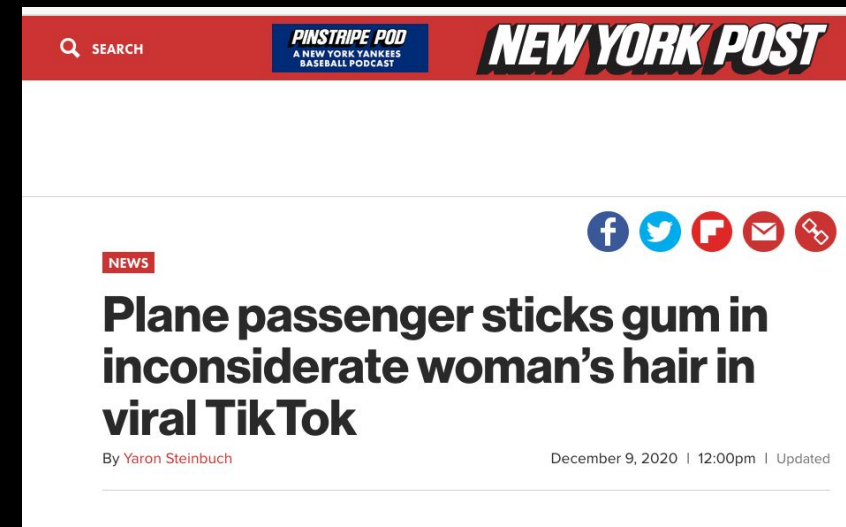
(side note: one outcome is "fake news")



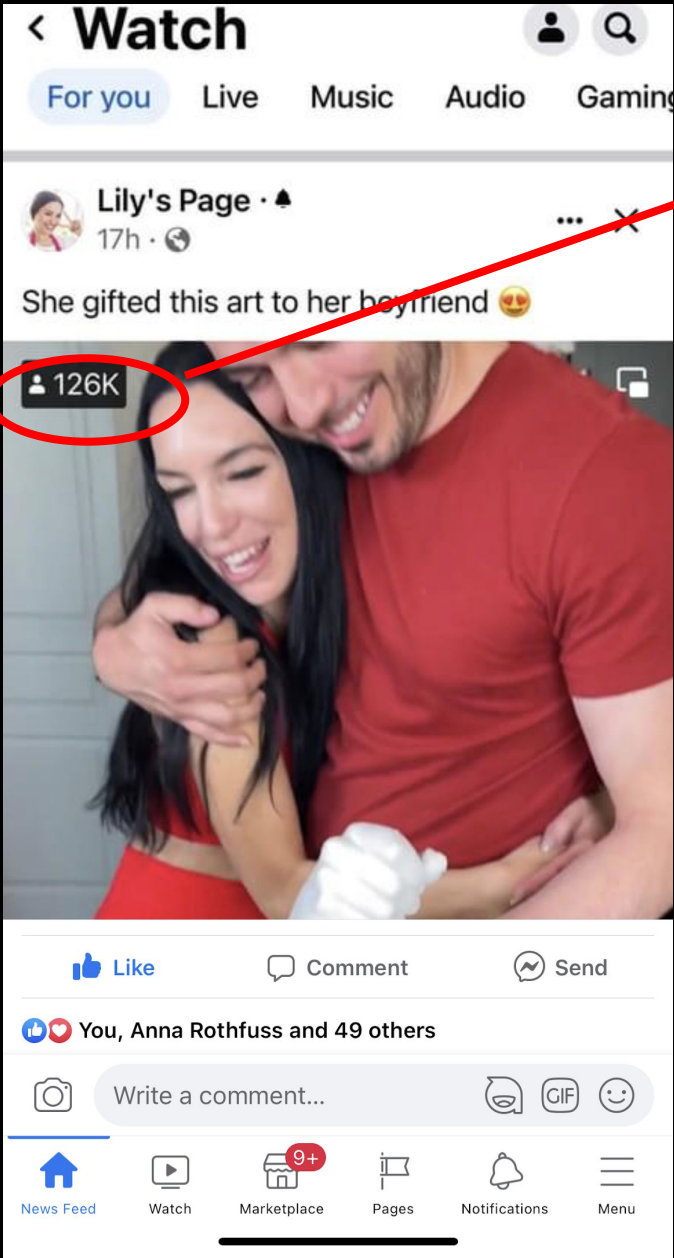
situational authenticity
+ theft



fake news



5. gamification



Live Views
"I've used this analogy before. It's like a stadium... Like holy shit, how many views does the Superbowl get?
I just can't fathom it."
– Alex, live streamer

Addiction / Drugs / Dopamine
It's a dopamine addiction.
That's what social media is, so you get addicted to the dopamine, that's why people check their phones... **When you watch live viewers go from 4,000 to 8,000 to 10,000 to 20,000 and then you go, Oh it's going back down and then BOOM! 32,000!** It feels like, it feels like a drug. There's no there's, no other word. And that's why people do so well with this. – Tom, magician

5. Gamification

It is like a casino, because the numbers don't always go up. You don't know if they're gonna go up or down. Every set of bad numbers is a new problem for me to solve: how do I get those numbers to go from red to green? It's compelling like a game.

-- Rick, founder

(primacy of play, Schull 2012)

6. fusion

I've gone from thinking that we're making shitty videos to going, now we're making *great* entertainment and people *love* it. And that's, it's a disturbing thing for elitists and for people who like high art, because yeah, we are—we are creating shit. And people love it.

- Jude, magician

conclusions: the logic of cringe

Algorithms are never wrong.

Algorithms are infallible rules.

From the perspective of viral content creators, algorithms are accurate arbiters

(e.g., algorithms are an “camera,” not an engine, MacKenzie 2006; Espeland and Sauder 2007)

Creative laborers enact what they expect will be algorithmically-valued choices.



Report

TikTok

@bananalovesyoutoo



scaling up to theory

the influencer and the \$5,000 handbag



Follow

Hotel drama
@chanelofficial ❤️ @adriannina
@wburghotel #HandbagCHANEL19

13w

+

narcotic_v... ите, а
что это за чулки на вас?

13w

amaluuna льный
образ для дома Шанель!
Габриэль радуется вероятно там

13w

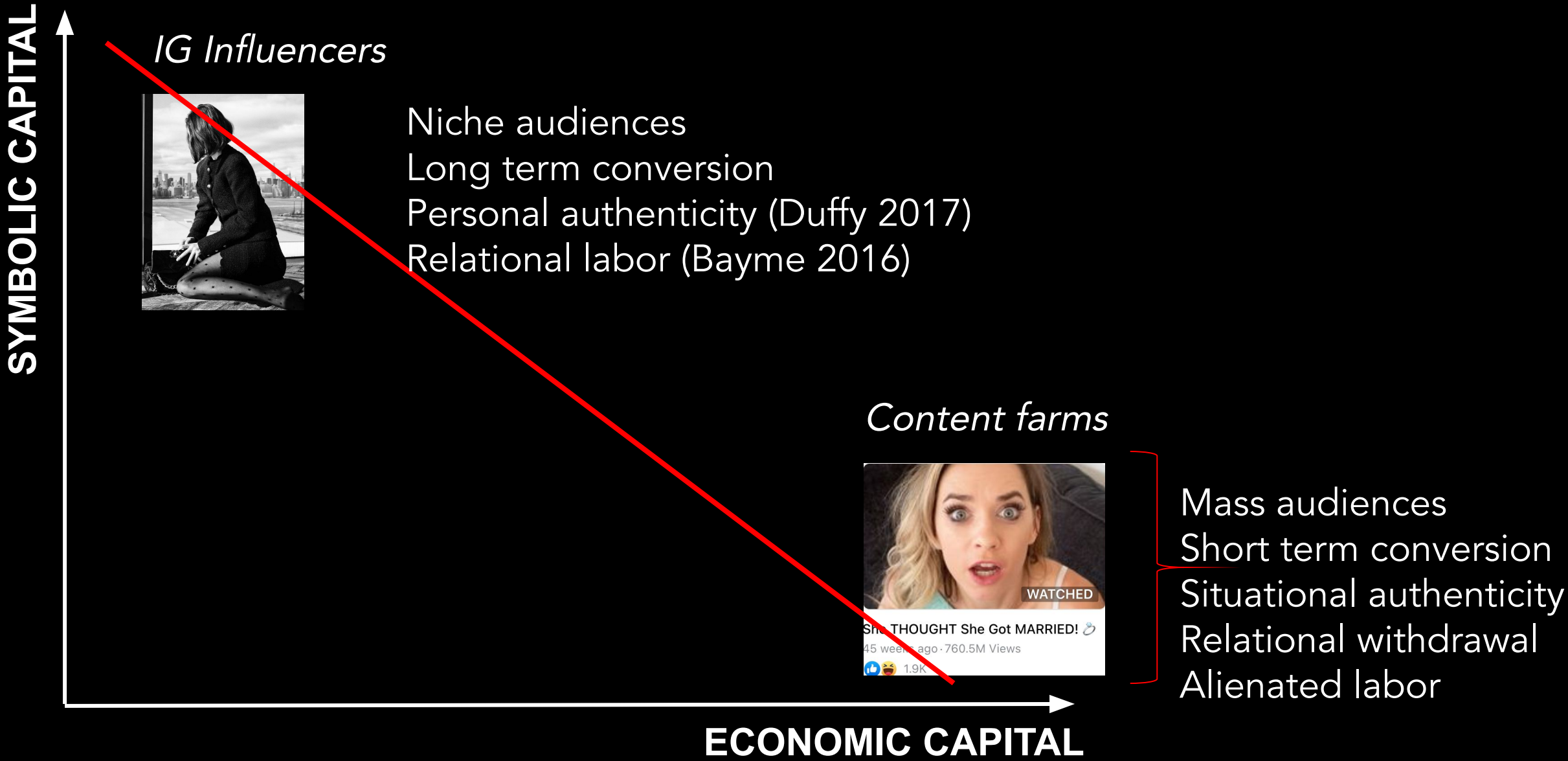
5,674 likes

JANUARY 11

Comments on this post have been limited.

Abidin 2015; Bayme 2018; Christin 2020; Duffy 2018

towards a theory of the value of attention online (Bourdieu 1993; 1996)



end

resistance, the exception that proves the rule

I've always worked for my own pleasure. I've always worked because I want to change and inspire people.

If I can be the number one magician in the world, that's going to be awesome.

We are making a lot of money, that's, the synonym of success, but it's bad because money's always altering the relations.

Why do you do it? If you give me a good reason that is fulfilling for your life ...but don't do it just for the money, because you're going to be disappointed.

-- Xavier , 40, magician

MAGIC EXTRAORDINAIRE · 37

Magical, whimsical, enter the world of Xa



Super Human Shopping 🤯😂

a year ago · 187.7M views

👍😂😱 Baptiste Molard, Seth Leach and 943

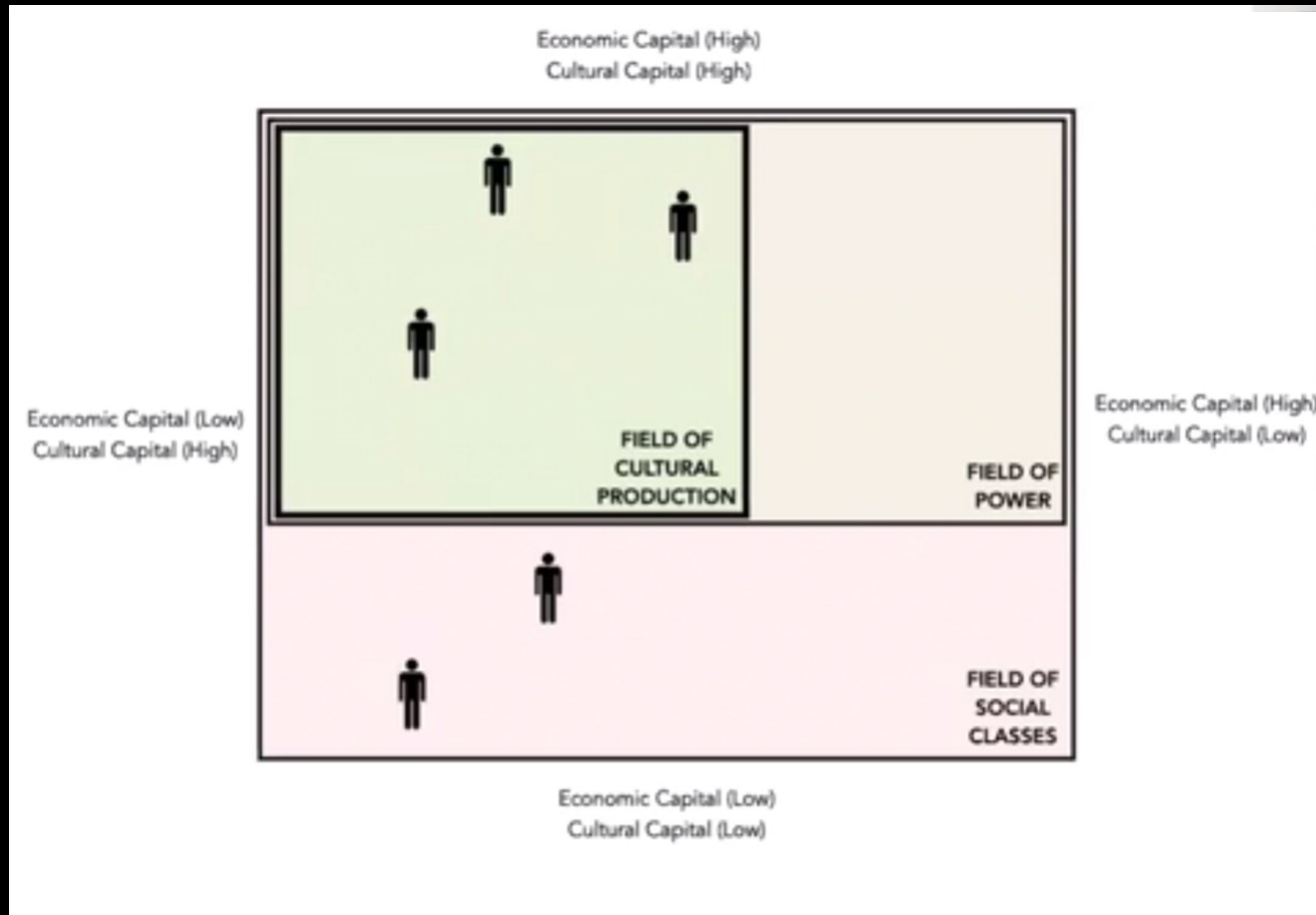


She THOUGHT She Got MARRIED! 💍

45 weeks ago · 760.5M Views

👍😂 1.9K

Theory: Attention capital in the field of online cultural production



Attention is a valuable and finite resource for which digital laborers compete ("attention economy," Marwick 2013)

Attention capital

Different strategies for gaining, mobilizing, and profiting from attention capital, depending on where one is located in the space of online cultural production.

1. Authenticity
2. Audience imaginaries
3. Definitions of quality
4. Time horizons

towards a theory of the value of attention online

