
HOW IS TIKTOK #INTERRELIGIOUS? AN INDUCTIVE THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Aída Velasco Morla

Introduction

Social media platforms offer a creative and visual space to showcase diverse religious content or confront negative stereotypes associated with various faith communities. Although academic literature generally highlights that social media often functions primarily as spaces for self-representation and seeking content aligned with personal identity, it is especially relevant to explore all opportunities in a current context where religious discrimination persists, and the management of religious diversity remains a necessary and urgent topic.

The TikTok platform reflects users' interest in religion through popular hashtags such as #Christian, which accumulates approximately 62.6 billion views, and #Islam, with 207.5 billion. Collectively, hashtags like #Hinduism, #Judaism, #Buddhism, and #Sikhism make religion a topic of significant engagement on this platform. TikTok's algorithm is designed to show users content similar to what they have already shown interest in; that is, it makes recommendations based on what has been viewed or followed previously—such as hashtags. Following this logic, this would mean that if a user frequently interacts with content from a specific religion, the algorithm is likely to show more content related to that same religion. Consequently, the algorithm's design itself could be limiting exposure to religious diversity.

So, does this platform truly have the ability to go beyond the mere self-reinforcement of ideas and beliefs? In response to this limitation, this paper proposes the study of hashtags such as #interreligious and #interfaith, which accumulate 269.5 million views and which, I argue, can function as bridges that signal to the algorithm: “diversify.”

Religion is present on TikTok and *materializes* through the visualization of rituals, practices, conversations, sacred objects and personal online reflections on faith. Users share their beliefs and transform them into visible, accessible, and shareable content in a global digital environment. Creating TikToks on religious topics allows faith to take shape in an audiovisual sense, where not only images and sounds are shown but also the emotions, intentionality, and narrative that each creator infuses. This type of content turns abstract beliefs and values into tangible and experiential elements, reflecting in a relatively new and accessible way the user can relate with the Sacred. Thus, it could be said that each video becomes a “piece” of religious material culture, similar to the physical objects that traditionally accompany faith practices.

The initial aim of this paper is to contribute to the discussion on whether TikTok can genuinely foster interreligious understanding. I start from the hypothesis that on this platform, users can not only materialize their beliefs by reaffirming them but also open themselves to new perspectives, thereby promoting respect and understanding among different religious groups. To address this issue, the hashtags #interreligious and #interfaith were selected to analyze how creators from different contexts use these “bridge” hashtags. The central question of this study is: what type of content is found under these labels? Although we know that TikTok has the (technical) potential to connect people and foster dialogue, does it have real potential for interreligious encounter?

State of the Art

Social media platforms are spaces where people can construct and display their identity while connecting with others who share their values or beliefs. It has been theorized that these platforms function as stages where individuals present versions of themselves, reinforcing or

challenging social stereotypes.¹ Social media allows users to select and decide how they showcase their image, ideas, and beliefs, facilitating self-representation. In this context, religious identity is an aspect I consider fundamental, especially for those seeking to strengthen their connection with a faith community.

TikTok currently has 1.582 billion users (Statista, 2024),² who spend an average of 39 minutes daily on the app (Datareportal, 2024).³ Although its popularity spans various age groups, 68.8% of users, approximately 727.8 million people, are between 18 and 34 years old, with the 18 to 24 age group being the most representative, at 39.8% (Datareportal, 2024).⁴ The creative autonomy and virality of TikTok, along with the use of hashtags, foster a global community where users participate in trends and feel part of a shared culture.⁵ Its success is also explained by its algorithm, which personalizes content based on each user's behavior and interactions.⁶

TikTok currently has 1.582 billion users,⁷ who spend an average of 39 minutes per day on the app.⁸ Although its popularity spans various age groups, 68.8% of users—approximately 727.8 million people—fall between the ages of 18 and 34. Among them, the 18-to-24 age group is the largest, comprising 39.8% of the total user base.⁹ The creative autonomy and virality of TikTok, along with the use of hashtags, foster a global community where users participate in trends and feel part of

¹ Erin E. Hollenbaugh, "Self-Presentation in Social Media: Review and Research Opportunities," *Review of Communication Research* 9 (2021): 80–98.

² Statista, "Most popular social networks worldwide as of April 2024, by number of monthly active users," accessed May 1, 2024, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/>.

³ Datareportal, "Global Digital Insights," accessed April 5, 2024, <https://datareportal.com/>.

⁴ Datareportal, "Global Digital Insights."

⁵ Rebecca Fannin, "The Strategy Behind TikTok's Global Rise," *Harvard Business Review*, September 13, 2019, <https://hbr.org/2019/09/the-strategy-behind-tiktoks-global-rise>.

⁶ Zhengwei Zhao, "Analysis on the 'Douyin (TikTok) Mania Phenomenon Based on Recommendation Algorithms," *E3S Web of Conferences*, February 3, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1051/e3sconf/202123503029>.

⁷ Statista, "Most popular social networks worldwide."

⁸ Datareportal, "Global Digital Insights."

⁹ Ibid.

a shared culture.¹⁰ Its success is also explained by its algorithm, which personalizes content based on each user's behavior and interactions.¹¹

On TikTok, users can give visibility to their cultures, identities, and the objects that symbolize their religions.¹² Through the creation of narratives that imitate and reinterpret, they find a way to express themselves creatively and strengthen their connection with their digital community.¹³ In this context, religious content on TikTok is predominantly directed at and created by young users, who find in the platform a space to express their faith, help building their identity,¹⁴ create community, share religious material objects¹⁵ and even challenge stereotypes associated with their religious group.¹⁶ However, there are few academic studies on the relationship between religion and TikTok, and even fewer focused on interreligiosity.

On TikTok, this personal self-representation adopts an audiovisual format that allows for quick and accessible exposure of beliefs, values, and experiences. Through videos, users create identity narratives that could reinforce their belonging to a group (such as a religious community) or present aspects of their own faith that may be interesting to a broader audience, whether believers or not. This format invites individual expression but also interaction, allowing other users to comment, share, or respond with their own experiences.

¹⁰ Fannin, "The Strategy Behind TikTok's Global Rise."

¹¹ Zhengwei, "Analysis on the 'Douyin (TikTok) Mania Phenomenon.'"

¹² Crystal Abidin, "Mapping Internet Celebrity on TikTok: Exploring Attention Economies and Visibility Labours," *Cultural Science Journal* 12, no. 1 (2021): 77–103, <https://doi.org/10.5334/csci.140>; Chris Miller, "How Modern Witches Enchant TikTok: Intersections of Digital, Consumer, and Material Culture(s) on #WitchTok," *Religions* 13, no. 2 (2022): 118. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13020118>.

¹³ Hongying Zhao and Christian Wagner, "How TikTok leads users to flow experience: Investigating the effects of technology affordances with user experience level and video length as moderators," *Internet Research* 33, no. 2 (2022): 841, <https://doi.org/10.1108/INTR-08-2021-0595>.

¹⁴ Margaret Hamm, and Kate Hoeting, "#ChristianCheck: TikTok and the Construction of Generation Z Faith," *Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture* 12, no. 1 (2023): 5–29.

¹⁵ Miller, "How Modern Witches Enchant TikTok."

¹⁶ Sabina Civila, Mónica Bonilla-del-Río, and Ignacio Aguaded, "Social Media and Otherness: The Case of #Islamterrorism on TikTok," *Politics and Governance* 11, no. 2 (2023): 114–126, <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v11i2.6299>.

According to Morgan,¹⁷ religion, traditionally understood as a system of beliefs, can also be seen as a series of material practices that shape and sustain the social and spiritual life of its followers. Morgan defines the material culture of lived religion as the set of physical and tangible aspects of religion, including bodies, objects, places, and artifacts, which have symbolic value and connect the individual with the sacred through bodily experience. In this context, religious experience is lived through a “triangulation” between the individual, the group and the Sacred, where religious practices are shared and interpreted.

I argue here that these experiences, manifested in social interactions and material practices, can be transferred to the digital realm, but this raises questions about how Morgan’s triangulation (individual-group-Sacred) is configured in a global public space like TikTok. Some religious—and interreligious—practices were previously limited to specific local contexts, but now they become visible on a global scale. On TikTok, users show how they integrate their religious beliefs into daily life, allowing others to observe and learn from these practices, which suggests potential for peaceful interreligious mediation and encounter.

In this work, interreligiosity is broadly understood as the process through which different religious traditions come into contact, interact, intertwine, or simply coexist, with varying degrees of depth. This concept encompasses both the individual’s connection with the sacred in their own religious tradition and the coexistence and interaction with the sacred of other traditions. This study examines the content described as interreligious on TikTok through the hashtags #interreligious and #interfaith, exploring how users present their vision of interreligiosity by using them. To do this, an inductive thematic analysis is used, allowing findings to emerge directly from the data. This exploratory approach seeks to understand the phenomenon in general and lay preliminary foundations for future research.

¹⁷ David Morgan, “The Material Culture of Lived Religions: Visuality and Embodiment,” originally published in *Mind and Matter: Selected Papers of Nordic Conference 2009. Studies in Art History*, vol. 41 (Helsinki: Society of Art History, 2010), republished in *The Jugaad Project*, July 7, 2019, <https://www.thejugaadproject.pub/home/the-material-culture-of-lived-religions-visibility-and-embodiment>.

Method

1. Thematic Analysis

This study uses the six-step thematic analysis method developed by Braun and Clarke.¹⁸ An inductive or “data-driven” approach was adopted to produce codes that specifically reflected the content derived from the data rather than any prior theory or conceptual framework.¹⁹ This approach was chosen for two reasons. Firstly, it allows for a richer description of the dataset as a whole instead of focusing on a particular aspect through a specific theoretical lens.²⁰ Additionally, it has the advantage that the data are not coded to fit into a predefined coding framework guided by prior theory but are “open-coded,” better representing the meaning expressed by the creators.²¹

Inductive coding allows themes to emerge directly from the data without imposing a pre-existing theoretical framework, which is consistent with the lack of prior research in this area and with the goal of reflecting the experiences and meanings of the phenomenon as expressed by the users of this social network. The thematic analysis, adapted to TikTok’s characteristics was multimodal, including audio, visual, textual and interactive elements, as well as how these modes combine to provide a more comprehensive view of the content.²²

The overarching question that guided the analysis process was: What themes emerge, and how are they represented in TikTok posts tagged with #interreligious and #interfaith, and what do these representations reveal about interfaith experiences in online and offline contexts? Ad-

¹⁸ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, “Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology,” *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3 (2006): 77–101, <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a>.

¹⁹ David Byrne, “A Worked Example of Braun and Clarke’s Approach to Reflexive Thematic Analysis,” *Quality & Quantity* 56 (2022): 1393, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-021-01182-y>.

²⁰ Braun and Clarke, “Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology.”

²¹ Byrne, “A Worked Example of Braun and Clarke’s Approach to Reflexive Thematic Analysis,” 1393.

²² Bella Dicks, “Multimodal Analysis,” in *Sage Research Methods Foundations*, edited by Paul Atkinson, Sara Delamont, Alexandru Cernat, Joseph W. Sakshaug, and Richard A. Williams (London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2019), <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526421036831970>; Civita et al., “Social Media and Otherness: The Case of #Islamterrorism on TikTok,” 114–115.

ditionally, the analysis steps were guided by other specific questions,²³ such as: What type of content do users share using these tags, and what is the frequency? Are there any patterns in the way creators post content under these tags?

Specific hashtags were selected to guide the analysis toward emerging themes on TikTok defined by these tags, allowing for a clear focus on the study's topic. Including both online and offline contexts in the research question acknowledges the interconnectedness between users' digital and "real" lives.²⁴ The specific selection of TikTok is explained by the importance of this platform and its wide reach (see above), which is relevant for understanding how TikTok's unique dynamics may influence interfaith representations and perceptions both online and offline.

2. Procedure

Using a new TikTok profile to eliminate potential algorithmic influences, the app's search engine was employed with the maximum time filter set to "last 6 months" and sorted by "relevance". The TikTok app was used on a mobile device specifically prepared to avoid data contamination. The device was formatted, with no prior usage history, and location services, contacts, and synchronization with other accounts were disabled to minimize the influence of prior data and maintain the integrity of the data collected in the research. In the study of hashtags on TikTok, it is important to note that users manipulate hashtags to bypass restrictions or increase views on their profile.²⁵ All posts tagged with #interfaith and #interreligious were selected. Unlike general posts about specific religions, these tags suggest that the creator has a particular interest in some form of interaction between different faith communities. 100% of the content tagged under one of these two hashtags (or both) during the period from January to June 2024 was viewed three times.

²³ Braun and Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology."

²⁴ Heidi A. Campbell, "Religion and the Internet: A Microcosm for Studying Internet Trends and Implications," *New Media & Society* 15, no. 5 (2013): 680–694, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444812462848>.

²⁵ Miller, "How Modern Witches Enchant TikTok," 3–4.

A total of 101 videos were obtained, 39 through the #interreligious tag and 62 through #interfaith. The use of English-language hashtags, such as #interfaith and #religion, significantly influenced the research, as it broadened the reach to an international audience and captured a diverse array of perspectives and expressions. This decision also aligned with TikTok's global nature, where English often serves as a bridge language, facilitating cross-cultural interactions and allowing the study to capture a more comprehensive range of interreligious content. This audiovisual data corpus was downloaded using the Tikget app, and a database was created that included the video's duration, description, number of likes, and number of comments. During the compilation in individual sessions where there was no interaction with the content, possible stimulation of the algorithm that drives personalized content was controlled (Marynak et al. 2022, 2).²⁶ This ensures that the sample represents the experience of a typical user exploring the #interfaith and #interreligious hashtags for the first time. Posts in languages other than English (n = 10) and those that were made private or deleted at some point before coding (n = 4) were excluded from the analysis, as well as illegible posts (n = 4) and duplicates (those that used both hashtags, n = 11), resulting in a final sample of 72 posts.

Once the initial collection was completed, each video was processed through the artificial intelligence application Otter.ai, which allowed the automatic transcription of videos containing voice audio. That way, the produced text was reviewed and corrected by cross-referencing with the original material. Videos that did not have voice audio typically contained embedded text and were accompanied by music. In these cases, the text was transcribed, and a description of the video was made, taking into account the entire audiovisual context. The transcriptions of these videos were processed using the software Saturate, a qualitative analysis tool for coding and data management developed by Dr. Sillito at the University of Calgary, Canada.²⁷

²⁶ Kristy L. Marynak, Meagan O. Robichaud, Tyler Puryear, Ryan D. Kennedy, and Meghan B. Moran, "#Nicotineaddiction on TikTok: A Quantitative Content Analysis of Top-Viewed Posts," *Tobacco Induced Diseases* 20, no. 69 (2022): 2, <https://doi.org/10.18332/tid/151868>.

²⁷ Saturate App. "Saturate App." 2024. Last accessed July 15, 2024. <http://www.saturateapp.com/>.

The coding was then carried out following the steps defined by Clarke and Braun,²⁸ as shown in Figure 1, employing a positivist approach to thematic analysis,²⁹ where themes were treated as objective reflections of the content rather than subjective constructs. Throughout the coding and reflection process, a detailed research diary was kept,³⁰ where important aspects considered by the researcher, perceptions, corrections, and definitions were recorded.

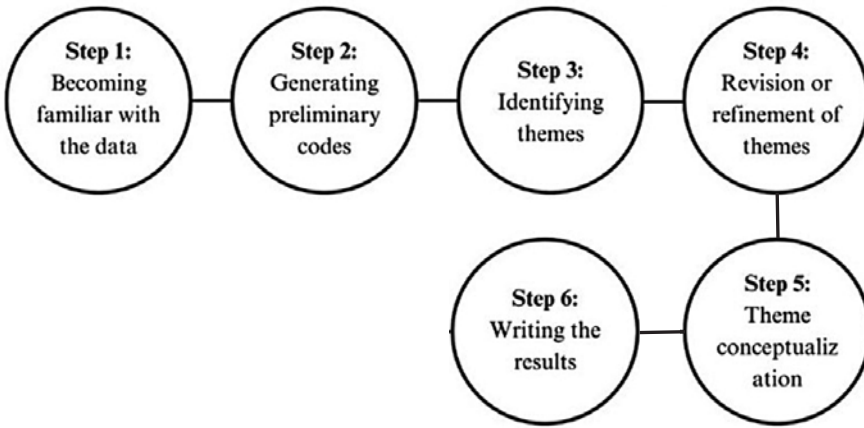


Figure 1. Steps of Thematic Analysis is by Braun and Clarke³¹

²⁸ Braun and Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology."

²⁹ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "One Size Fits All? What Counts as Quality Practice in (Reflexive) Thematic Analysis?," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 18, no. 3 (2020): 328–352, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2020.1769238>, 339–340.

³⁰ Ibid, 345–346.

³¹ Braun and Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology."

Thematic analysis followed these six steps outlined by Braun and Clarke,³² which were adapted to align with the aims and data of this study as explained in Annex 1: it began with familiarization, which included multiple viewings of each TikTok, transcription, and recording of initial ideas and key metrics (such as “likes,” “shares,” and “comments”) in a database. Initial coding followed, systematically segmenting the data into elements perceived as relevant and creating a list of codes. Next, the codes were organized into preliminary thematic structures, identifying subthemes for distinct categories. Themes were reviewed and refined through multiple iterations to ensure internal consistency, using representative data examples to validate each theme, primarily through repetition and a “trial-and-error” approach. Finally, significant data excerpts were selected for the perceived themes of inter-religious content in the report, aligning the analysis with the research questions and existing literature.

3. Ethical Considerations

Social media content that has been published and is publicly accessible can be considered part of the public domain.³³ On TikTok, users can set their accounts as public or private, control the public availability of their content, and restrict access through privacy settings. In this study, only publicly accessible posts were analyzed. To protect the identity of the creators, no identifying information was included. Following precedents from other studies, it was not necessary to obtain the creators’ consent.³⁴ However, the methodology used was based on the ethical guidelines of Internet Research 3.0.³⁵

³² Ibid.

³³ Gunther Eysenbach, and James E. Till, “Ethical Issues in Qualitative Research on Internet Communities,” *BMJ: British Medical Journal* 323 (2001): 1104–1105; Miller, “How Modern Witches Enchant TikTok,” 4; Civila et al., “Social Media and Otherness,” 118.

³⁴ Miller, “How Modern Witches Enchant TikTok”; Civila et al., “Social Media and Otherness.”

³⁵ Franzke, Aline Shakti, Anja Bechmann, Michael Zimmer, Charles Ess, and the Association of Internet Researchers. *Internet Research: Ethical Guidelines 3.0*. 2020. Accessed May 5, 2024. <https://aoir.org/reports/ethics3.pdf>

Results and Discussion

This analysis sought to understand and explore content related to interreligiosity on TikTok created under the hashtags #interreligious and #interfaith, which together account for over 269.5 million views. Videos of varying lengths (mean = 56.45 seconds, standard deviation = 92.04) posted from January to July 2024 were examined. From these data, three main themes were developed (two of which included sub-themes), as shown in Figure 2. While all the posts analyzed were tagged with the hashtags #interreligious or #interfaith, it is acknowledged that not all of them addressed the topic with the same intensity or from the same level of personal engagement.

1. Interreligious Sentimental Relationships

The most recurrent type of content in the sample, interreligious sentimental relationships, predominated in 67.9% of the sample ($n = 53$ posts). The theme “Interreligious Sentimental Relationships” was developed, where generally ($n = 24$ posts) both members of the interreligious couple are presented. Creators perceived as women ($n = 19$ posts) produce more content than men ($n = 4$ posts) about their relationship. The subthemes developed are: (a) Perceived Discrimination, (b) Relationship Visibility, and (c) Interreligious Flexibility. The Perceived Discrimination subtheme is more clearly distinguished from the others. However, between Relationship Visibility and Interreligious Flexibility, the lines of separation may seem blurred. Both subthemes address the coexistence of two shared religions that are made visible on TikTok. The main difference is that in Interreligious Flexibility, creators actively adapt to the religion of the other, while Relationship Visibility focuses on showing scenes of coexistence without necessarily requiring changes in the participants’ traditions or customs.

a) Perceived Disapproval

The creators ($n = 11$ posts) provided information about the disapproval and criticism their interreligious couples face in both digital and offline environments. A woman who identified as Muslim and her part-

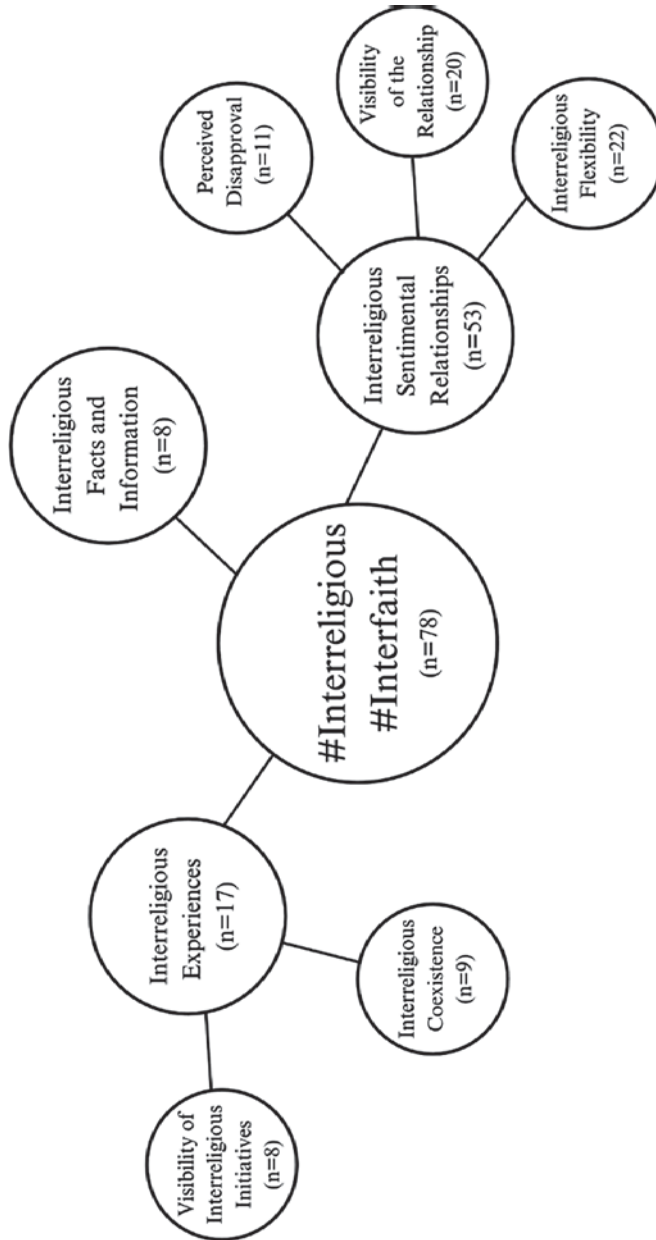


Figure 2. Representation of Themes and Subthemes.

ner as Christian shared the following: “(...) when I say that [I am in an interreligious relationship] people come with hate, and I haven’t deleted any of the comments of the hate that I got, because I want others to actually see just how horrible people can be when you talk about like having an interfaith relationship and there’s actually been a few comments of people going through those comments on those videos being like, I hate the comments on these videos.”

This subtheme includes testimonies of a lack of family or social support, personal experiences of discrimination, or negative responses received by users associated with being part of an interreligious couple. A format used by several creators (27% in this subtheme) to express perceived disapproval involved presenting the initial problem—the lack of social support—through embedded text in the video. Examples of these texts in the sample included: “How did you convince your Muslim husband’s parents to let him marry a Christian girl?” or “How did you convince your family to let you marry into a non-Muslim family?” The creators would then respond to these messages by performing a trending song whose lyrics say: “Don’t ask me how I did it, I just did it, it was hard.” By replicating popular content, in this case, a song, it becomes easier for many users to reproduce the same format to express the same sentiment. By repeating trendy creative structures to express a common problem, creators can develop a sense of community³⁶ and a mechanism to denounce discrimination.

b) Visibility of the Relationship

The creators (n = 20 posts) document personal experiences about the everyday life of their interreligious relationship in the subtheme Relationship Visibility. This subtheme contains examples of daily life cohabitation. One TikTok (Figure 3) shows the embedded text “his and hers” on the screen, along with a sequence of images of a couple holding religious and non-religious objects that represent each person’s identity and preferences. The woman displays her U.S. passport, her Bible, her watercolor paints, and her perfume. The man, on the other

³⁶ Zhao and Wagner, “How TikTok leads users to flow experience,” 841.

hand, shows his Moroccan passport, his Quran, his video game controller, and his watch. At the end of the video, they hold hands.

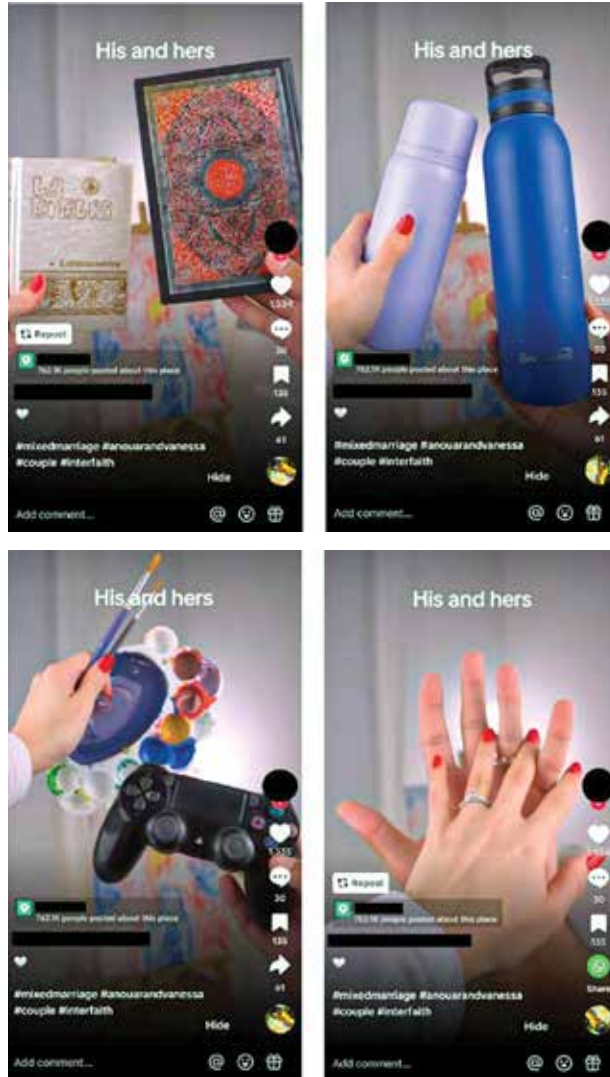


Figure 3. Example of Relationship Visibility.

Users employed religious and cultural objects to make their identity visible, highlighting the importance of visibility and corporeality in each person's lived religious practice.³⁷ In this context, material culture delineated distinct and well-defined identities. At the same time, both realities were shared in common spaces: physical and digital. This offers a tangible representation of interreligious coexistence and its public visibility through social media, where differences are recognized and presented together.

Another creator who self-identified as Christian (Figure 4) posted a TikTok where she explained that she had decided to surprise her husband with a special dinner for Ramadan. In the video, the woman is seen bringing dishes and tea to the table, where the man is waiting, seated. Afterwards, she asks him how it was, and he gives it a 10. The video ends with images of him cleaning the kitchen.

The video challenges gender stereotypes by showing the division of tasks. In addition to normalizing the coexistence of a religious practice (Ramadan), it presents a scene based on equality, questioning traditional notions. The video successfully conveys these messages without directly confronting prejudices, thereby avoiding the reinforcement of existing negative narratives.³⁸ Instead, it focuses on a positive, everyday interaction that communicates through example.

The creators used TikTok to make both their own religion and practice visible, as well as the religion and practice of others, specifically that of their partners. This highlights the previously documented capability of the TikTok platform to express personal and material aspects of religion.³⁹ However, rather than directly addressing certain narratives in an attempt to dismantle prejudices, which could inadvertently reinforce them by giving them visibility,⁴⁰ the creators often document the daily activities of their interreligious relationships, providing examples of coexistence between different traditions.

³⁷ Morgan, "The Material Culture of Lived Religions."

³⁸ Civilia et al., "Social Media and Otherness," 114–123

³⁹ Hamm and Hoeting, "#ChristianCheck," 5–25; Miller, "How Modern Witches Enchant TikTok," 1–18.

⁴⁰ Civilia et al., "Social Media and Otherness," 123.

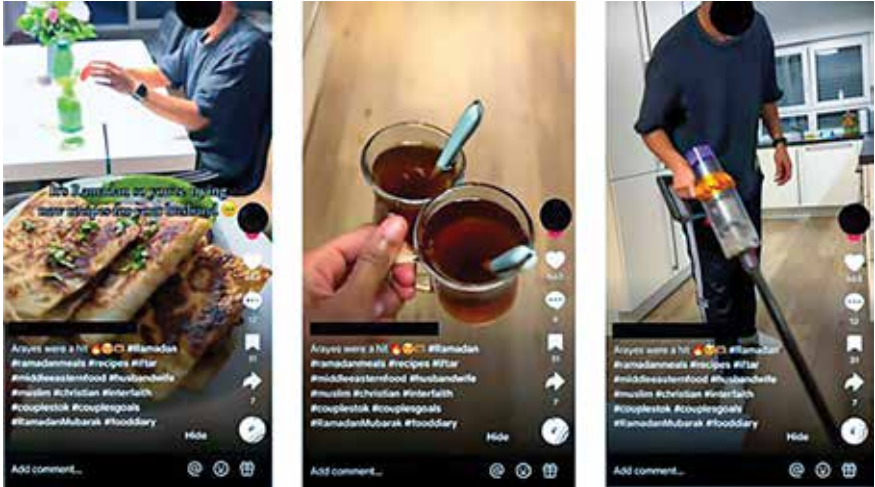


Figure 4. Example of Relationship Visibility.

c) Interreligious Flexibility

The creators ($n = 22$ posts) provided insight into the level of openness towards the other religion and their ability to change or adapt to it. “Interreligious Flexibility” has been developed as a subtheme that addresses how couples manage their religious differences, adapting and showing flexibility in their traditions. This includes the negotiation and adaptation to each other’s holidays and rituals, sharing them, and creating new forms that take both religions into account. In the following example, a creator who self-identified as Christian shows photographs of her wedding (Figure 5) and explains how Jewish and Christian practices were integrated.

“So, Matt and I got married on June 1st. He’s Jewish, and I’m Christian, and this is what we did to merge both of our faiths for our ceremony. (...) we had a neutral officiant, which was my twin brother. We didn’t have a pastor or rabbi to keep things equal and neutral. We had a chuppah⁴¹, obviously, but the florist didn’t put the little draping on it

⁴¹ Jewish wedding canopy formed by a structure of four posts and covered with cloth, flowers, or fabric.

HOW IS TIKTOK #INTERRELIGIOUS?

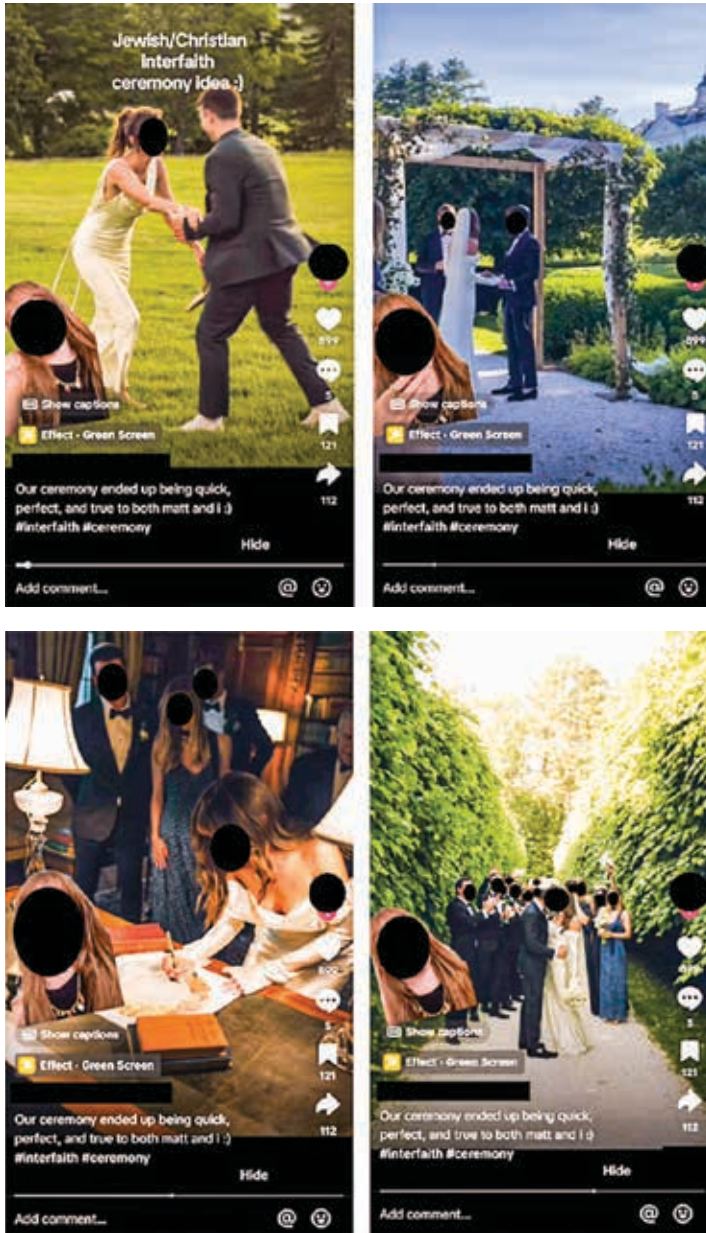


Figure 5. Example of Interreligious Flexibility.

correctly. Honestly, by the time I got down the aisle and saw it, Matt didn't care at that point. We also signed a ketubah⁴², which was cute, but we didn't have it displayed under the chuppah. We just didn't feel like that was necessary. We also didn't have the table with the Kiddush cups⁴³ or anything, but Matt did want to smash the glass⁴⁴, so we did that. I also want to mention that our ketubah had interfaith wording, which was pretty cool. Matt wore a yarmulke⁴⁵, and my brother talked about the seven blessings⁴⁶, but in a more modern form and with some Christian elements. However, we didn't do the seven circles⁴⁷ or anything like that. These were just our merging of non-negotiables, and I thought it turned out really well for us (...)."

Another creator, who self-identified as a Protestant Christian, explains in a TikTok how to dress more modestly for Muslim celebrations, which she usually attends with her partner, a Muslim man from the Sunni tradition.

"Hi! A lot of non-Muslim girls who are entering into interfaith relationships with Muslim men have been asking me for advice on what they can wear to the mosque for the first time. I remember the first time I went to the mosque—I was so nervous because it was segregated,⁴⁸ so I couldn't even go with [name] (...). In my videos, I wear a lot of abayas⁴⁹ now, but at that time, I didn't own a single abaya. So here are some respectful outfit ideas that aren't abayas. My first piece of advice is to invest in a lot of turtlenecks, and then just throw an oversized crew-neck or hoodie on top. If you have any pants with holes in them, just wear leggings underneath to make sure no skin is showing. Mom jeans or boyfriend-fit jeans work well because they're not too tight. If you

⁴² Jewish marriage contract that is signed and presented during the wedding ceremony.

⁴³ Special cups used in Jewish tradition for the Kiddush ritual, which is the blessing of the wine.

⁴⁴ Jewish tradition where the groom breaks a glass or cup at the end of the ceremony.

⁴⁵ Small cap worn by Jewish men as a symbol of reverence and respect for God.

⁴⁶ Set of blessings recited during the Jewish wedding ceremony.

⁴⁷ Tradition where the bride (or both) walks in a circle around the groom seven times. These circles are performed under the chuppah.

⁴⁸ The spaces within the mosque are separated by gender; there are areas specifically designated for men and others for women.

⁴⁹ Loose, long outer garment, usually black, that covers the entire body except for the head, hands, and feet, worn by Muslim women as an expression of modesty.

have any oversized jackets or long coats that cover your bottom, these are definitely something you can wear to the mosque. (...) Something that you might not already own but I definitely suggest you invest in is hijab⁵⁰ caps. They're available on Amazon, and I highly recommend them because I really struggled with tying my headscarf when I first started. They keep your hair secure and prevent your headscarf from falling off easily. Another thing I recently invested in is hijab magnets, which are also available on Amazon. These make me feel more secure because they ensure that the headscarf stays in place, and they also allow me to wear the hijab properly, ensuring that my neck is fully covered. This way, I'm being as respectful as I possibly can. I hope this helps! It's totally normal to be nervous, but I promise everything will be okay."

The creator shares tips on how to dress appropriately when attending a mosque, demonstrating how, through a material object like clothing, she manages to adapt to the practices of another religion on a practical level. She emphasizes her effort to comply with Islamic modesty standards, which allows her to participate in an important aspect of a Muslim's life, such as attending the mosque. In addition to her advice, the creator collaborates as an influencer with women's clothing brands, pointing out garments that respect these standards and offering accessible alternatives for those who, like her, seek to dress respectfully in religious contexts. This example highlights how objects—in this case, clothing—form part of religious practice and facilitate active participation in the religious life of a partner.

2. Interreligious Experiences

This theme is developed from posts ($n = 17$) that document personal experiences, encounters, or interreligious events experienced by the creators in the offline sphere. The theme "Interreligious Experiences" encompasses 21.8% of the data. The subthemes developed include: (a) Interreligious Coexistence and (b) Visibility of Interreligious Initiatives.

⁵⁰ Scarf or veil that covers the head and neck.

a) Interreligious Coexistence

Some creators (n = 9 posts) chose to share offline experiences they identified as interreligious and decided to post them on TikTok using the hashtags #interfaith or #interreligious. In one case, a creator filmed a group of people on a rooftop while the Adhan can be heard in the background. The following embedded text appears in the video: “Yes, that’s a Muslim call to prayer wafting over a gay Jewish wedding here in Tel Aviv-Yaffo. Welcome to Israel 🇮🇱.” This example highlights the juxtaposition of two religious traditions: a Jewish celebration, the wedding, and the auditory presence of the Muslim call to prayer. The coexistence of these elements in the same space underscores the complexity and richness of interreligious interactions, showing how different religious practices can coexist, sometimes in unexpected ways. According to Neumaier and Klinkhammer,⁵¹ from a broader perspective of what is understood as “media,” the place where a dialogue event occurs could itself be considered a medium. Even with a more restricted definition, most spaces where these encounters take place would be influenced by various media, as they often occur in religious settings decorated with images, texts, and devotional objects, which contribute to creating an atmosphere conducive to interreligious dialogue.⁵² The last example illustrates how a physical setting, such as a rooftop in Israel, establishes itself as a medium where the simultaneous presence of two traditions—a Jewish celebration and the Muslim call to prayer—coexist in the same space.

b) Visibility of Interreligious Initiatives

Some creators (n = 8 posts) publish about interreligious events organized offline: concerts, cooperation programs, interreligious dialogue programs, etc. This type of post reflects interreligious meetings or dialogue activities that take place primarily in physical spaces, outside the platform. In these cases, TikTok is used as a tool to announce upcoming events or to give visibility to events that have already taken place,

⁵¹ Anna Neumaier and Gritt Klinkhammer, “Interreligious contact and media: introduction,” *Religions* 50, no. 3 (2020): 321–335.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 328.

promoting them and sharing their outcomes. In one specific post, for example, two people perceived as a young Caucasian man and a young Caucasian woman explain the interreligious initiative being carried out at their university:

He: Hi guys. In the first table, we discuss different points of view on various topics around the world. You can come here to hear perspectives from different traditions.

She: It has been a great place for me to grow in my personal faith and reflect on other faiths from the diverse traditions that exist around us and on campus.

This content not only informs but also seeks to attract a broad audience interested in interreligious dialogue, inviting them to participate or learn about the results of these encounters. While an event occurring in a specific geographic location may not be accessible to someone living far away, its visibility on TikTok holds value because it raises awareness and maybe inspires similar initiatives in other regions.

3. Interreligious Facts and Information

Lastly, the theme ‘Interreligious Facts and Information’ emerged in 10.3% of the global sample (n = 8 posts), with a significant contribution from the hashtag #interreligious, which represented 87.5% of the videos on this topic.

This theme encompasses content where creators provide facts and information about different religions and their interactions. This theme consists of posts that aim to share information or offer comparative perspectives on religions in a more analytical and less experiential tone. The information presented usually has an educational focus. A recurring element in 37.5% of the posts was the use of the figure of Jesus as a point of convergence between different religious traditions. For example, the following explanation is provided:

In Islam, he is revered not only as a prophet endowed with miraculous powers but also as a figure destined to return during the final judgment, emphasizing his enduring significance in Islamic eschatology. Conversely, in

Judaism, Jesus is not recognized as the Messiah but is regarded as a pivotal historical figure whose teachings have left an indelible impact on many lives, highlighting his moral and philosophical influence rather than a divine status. New Age philosophy elevates Jesus as the epitome of Christ consciousness, a state of heightened spiritual awareness where love and divine insight transcend the mundane aspects of human existence, presenting him as a model for achieving enlightenment. Meanwhile, Unitarian Universalism and similar belief systems honor Jesus primarily as a moral guide, celebrating his life lessons that inspire.

Overall Discussion: How is TikTok #Interreligious?

In the thematic analysis of the #interreligious and #interfaith tags, the main theme, representing 67.9% of the total, was Interreligious Sentimental Relationships, in which couples document their coexistence, make their identities visible, and reflect mutual adaptation to each other's traditions. This is followed by the theme of Interreligious Experiences, accounting for 21.8% of the data, which focuses on the coexistence and promotion of interfaith initiatives, demonstrating how different religious traditions can share the same space. Finally, Interreligious Facts and Information, representing 10.3% of the content, provides educational data and comparisons about religions, highlighting points of convergence (Figure 2 and Figure 6).

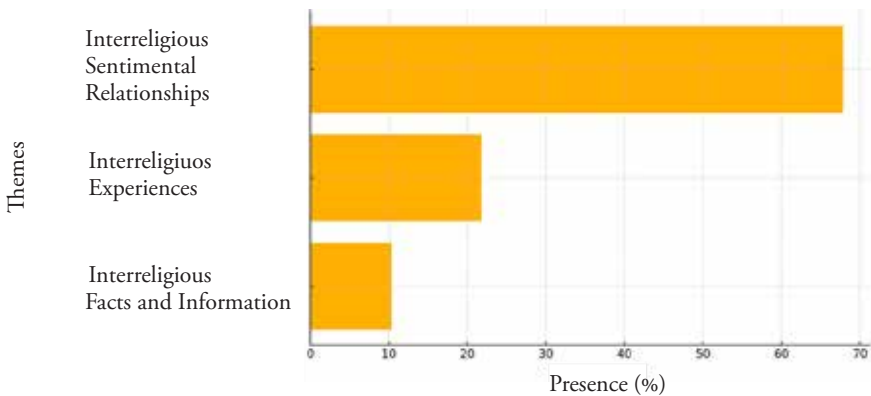


Figure 6. Presence of each theme for analysed hashtags (OpenAI 2024).

Although previous studies have pointed out that TikTok is often the main—and sometimes only—medium used by young people to consume information and news,⁵³ our analysis found that personal interreligious relationships and experiences dominate the content identified as interreligious under the hashtags #interreligious and #interfaith, accounting for nearly 90% of the total. This could be because behaviors exhibited on social media can influence the perception of social norms that guide behavior on that platform. Even a few posts can establish perceived norms that impact behavior and influence how people choose to share information on a given platform.⁵⁴ In other words, users are likely to follow previously established content patterns, as repeated actions create a “social norm” or an expectation of what is common or acceptable on that social network.

On the other hand, there is the topic of Interreligious Facts and Information, which consists of content that seeks to educate and offer general information or comparative perspectives on religions. This content has been mainly tagged with the hashtag #interreligious (87.5%), suggesting that the concept of “interreligious” may be popularly associated with a more academic or literary approach on this social network. In contrast, the hashtag #interfaith has been more frequently linked to personal experiences and everyday life events (63.9%), indicating the possible formation of a differentiated usage pattern between the two on this social network.

Creators talk about their interreligious relationships or experiences and present images and videos of daily coexistence. The themes of Interreligious Relationships and Interreligious Experiences both include subthemes of Visibility: Visibility of the Relationship and Visibility of Interreligious Initiatives, respectively. In these, the main perceived goal is to share and give visibility to their interreligious reality in the

⁵³ Kirsten Eddy, “How Young People Consume News and the Implications for Mainstream Media,” *Reuters Institute*, 2022, <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/our-research/how-young-people-consume-news-and-implications-mainstream-media>.

⁵⁴ Philipp K. Masur, Dominic DiFranzo, and Natalya N. Bazarova, “Behavioral Contagion on Social Media: Effects of Social Norms, Design Interventions, and Critical Media Literacy on Self-Disclosure,” *PLoS ONE* 16, no. 7 (2021): e0254670, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0254670>.

private sphere (their relationships), as well as to public events or programs related to interreligiosity. If observed behaviors on social media can spread and form new social norms,⁵⁵ this type of content could be facilitating the normalization of interreligious relationships on TikTok, the most common type of content associated with #interfaith and #interreligious.

Experiences of rejection and criticism towards interreligious behaviors are also documented. The decision to share such challenges on TikTok can be interpreted as an attempt to defend an important part of one's identity while facing discrimination, aligning with the idea that TikTok is a way to challenge social and religious stereotypes.⁵⁶

The subthemes of Visibility include content that shows moments of coexistence without necessarily requiring modifications or adaptations in the traditions or customs of the participants. However, in Interreligious Flexibility, creators actively adjust their practices to incorporate aspects of the other's religion. The subtheme of Interreligious Flexibility has highlighted the relevance of material means, such as religious clothing and shared rituals, in the negotiation and adaptation of practices and festivities between couples. This flexibility was manifested through practice: participating in each other's celebrations, mixing symbolic elements in joint celebrations, making adaptations in clothing, and negotiating the norms or elements of each tradition.

Conclusions

The results indicate that TikTok functions as a platform for self-representation, aligning with the idea that social media is used to share (and reinforce) personal identity and individual ideas. However, this study also reveals that connections between different religious groups are established through the hashtags #interreligious and #interfaith. These hashtags, by leveraging the platform's algorithmic dynamics, manage to bypass the already noted tendency towards echo chambers, instead broadening the visibility and reach of interreligious content.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Civila et al., "Social Media and Otherness."

Users showcase the contrast and coexistence between different religious traditions and practices, making visible scenes of daily coexistence, organized or spontaneous interfaith events, mixed ceremonies adapted to the aesthetics and rituals of different traditions, or objects from both religions placed in common spaces. Additionally, they use TikTok to denounce disapproval and discrimination, both online and offline.

It is noteworthy that most of the content described under these hashtags focuses on interreligious sentimental relationships. Couples share their experiences, challenges and daily moments. Through their posts, they show how they approach, celebrate, or negotiate their differences. The willingness to adopt each other's traditions and rituals reflects a fluid and adaptable identity. Users do not only present a version of themselves as believers of their own religion but as people willing to transcend the boundaries of that identity in relation to the other. This raises the one question: is this flexible conception of religion necessary for interreligious coexistence?

Religion is not only a system of beliefs but is also manifested through material practices.⁵⁷ Creating TikToks on religious topics allows faith to materialize in an audiovisual sense. Thus, religious content represents a material expression of lived religion and each video can be interpreted as a "piece" of religious material culture, which becomes a tool to bring users closer to a visual and tangible understanding of "other's" religious life. In this digital public space, users allow a global audience to observe and learn about aspects of their religious practices, as if all of them were part of a shared digital experience (some actively, others as spectators).

In the context of material religion, religious experience encompasses not only personal beliefs but also how these are expressed and lived through a dynamic interaction between the individual, the group, and the Sacred.⁵⁸ In this framework, religious practices transcend the individuality: they are integrated and validated within a social context, acquiring a shared meaning within the group. When these practices move to the digital realm, such as TikTok, the individual-group-Sacred

⁵⁷ Morgan, "The Material Culture of Lived Religions."

⁵⁸ Ibid.

triangulation expands and transforms. The individual no longer interacts solely with their group and the Sacred in a tangible environment but does so in a global public space. Although content creation might seem like a solitary activity—such as recording a video alone at home or checking your feed while commuting on the subway—this interaction takes place before and among a wide and diverse audience. The accessibility of this digital space expands the boundaries between the individual, the group, and the Sacred, making religious experiences observable and reinterpreted by people from different traditions and contexts. This implies that what was once experienced in a more closed environment, in an I-we-Sacred triangulation, now unfolds in a space where anyone can interact, comment, and participate in its reconfiguration: I, *we and they*, Sacred.

Religion, when manifested on digital platforms like TikTok, transcends the boundaries of traditional faith communities and becomes an expression subject to constant negotiation and reconfiguration. Rather than being solely a private or communal practice, religion adapts and evolves within a space of global exchange, where people from diverse religious traditions can observe and interact with both their own and others' religious expressions. Morgan's⁵⁹ concept of "social body" becomes especially relevant in this context. This term refers to how religious and cultural practices help build a shared identity among members of a community. On TikTok, the hashtags #interreligious and #interfaith seem to offer an opportunity for interreligious encounters. However, this openness to the global also implies a call to individual responsibility and a greater awareness of how certain content, especially content related to religious identity, can be perceived by other cultures or religious communities.

The individual is no longer limited to interacting only with their religious group and the sacred of their tradition but also comes into contact with groups and representations of the sacred from other religions. This implies that the symbolic and material boundaries between religions can be crossed, or blurred, or both. The religious practices of different traditions continue to meet and coexist. The use of the

⁵⁹ Ibid.

hashtags #interreligious and #interfaith reinforces the idea that social media allows users to connect around common interests. In this case, interreligiosity becomes a shared point of convergence, and peaceful interreligious coexistence emerges as a possible consequence of these interactions.

B i b l i o g r a p h y

Abidin, Crystal. "Mapping Internet Celebrity on TikTok: Exploring Attention Economies and Visibility Labours." *Cultural Science Journal* 12, no. 1 (2021): 77–103. <https://doi.org/10.5334/csci.140>.

Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke. "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology." *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3 (2006): 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a>.

Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke. "One Size Fits All? What Counts as Quality Practice in (Reflexive) Thematic Analysis?" *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 18, no. 3 (2020): 328–52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2020.1769238>.

Byrne, David. "A Worked Example of Braun and Clarke's Approach to Reflexive Thematic Analysis." *Quality & Quantity* 56 (2022): 1391–1412. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-021-01182-y>.

Campbell, Heidi A. "Religion and the Internet: A Microcosm for Studying Internet Trends and Implications." *New Media & Society* 15, no. 5 (2013): 680–694. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444812462848>.

Civila, Sabina, Mónica Bonilla-del-Río, and Ignacio Aguaded. "Social Media and Otherness: The Case of #Islamterrorism on TikTok." *Politics and Governance* 11, no. 2 (2023): 114–126. <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v11i2.6299>.

Datareportal. "Global Digital Insights." Accessed April 5, 2024. <https://datareportal.com/>.

Dicks, Bella. "Multimodal Analysis." In *Sage Research Methods Foundations*, edited by Paul Atkinson, Sara Delamont, Alexandru Cernat, Joseph W. Sakshaug, and Richard A. Williams. London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2019. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526421036831970>.

Eddy, Kirsten. "How Young People Consume News and the Implications for Mainstream Media." *Reuters Institute*. 2022. <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/our-research/how-young-people-consume-news-and-implications-mainstream-media>.

Eysenbach, Gunther, and James E. Till. "Ethical Issues in Qualitative Research on Internet Communities." *BMJ: British Medical Journal* 323 (2001): 1103–1105.

Fannin, Rebecca. "The Strategy Behind TikTok's Global Rise." *Harvard Business Review*, September 11, 2019. <https://hbr.org/2019/09/the-strategy-behind-tiktoks-global-rise>.

Hamm, Margaret, and Kate Hoeting. "#ChristianCheck: TikTok and the Construction of Generation Z Faith." *Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture* 12, no. 1 (2023): 5–29.

Herrick, Shannon S. C., Laura Hallward, and Lindsay R. Duncan. "This Is Just How I Cope: An Inductive Thematic Analysis of Eating Disorder Recovery Content Created and Shared on TikTok Using #EDrecovery." *International Journal of Eating Disorders* 54, no. 4 (2020): 516–526. <https://doi.org/10.1002/eat.23463>.

Hollenbaugh, Erin E. "Self-Presentation in Social Media: Review and Research Opportunities." *Review of Communication Research* 9 (2021): 80–98.

Marynak, Kristy L., Meagan O. Robichaud, Tyler Puryear, Ryan D. Kennedy, and Meghan B. Moran. "#Nicotineaddiction on TikTok: A Quantitative Content Analysis of Top-Viewed Posts." *Tobacco Induced Diseases* 20, no. 69 (2022): 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.18332/tid/151868>.

Masur, Philipp K., DiFranzo, Dominic, and Natalya N. Bazarova. "Behavioral Contagion on Social Media: Effects of Social Norms, Design Interventions, and Critical Media Literacy on Self-Disclosure." *PLoS ONE* 16, no. 7 (2021): e0254670. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0254670>.

Miller, Chris. "How Modern Witches Enchant TikTok: Intersections of Digital, Consumer, and Material Culture(s) on #WitchTok." *Religions* 13, no. 2 (2022): 118. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13020118>.

Morgan, David. "The Material Culture of Lived Religions: Visuality and Embodiment." Originally published in *Mind and Matter: Selected Papers of Nordic Conference 2009. Studies in Art History*, vol. 41. Helsinki: Society of Art History, 2010. Republished in *The Jugaad Project*, July 7, 2019. <https://www.thejugaadproject.pub/home/the-material-culture-of-lived-religions-visuality-and-embodiment>.

Neumaier, Anna, and Gritt Klinkhammer. Interreligious contact and media: introduction, *Religions* 50, no. 3 (2020): 321–335.

Statista. "Most popular social networks worldwide as of April 2024, by number of monthly active users." Accessed May 1, 2024. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/>.

Zhao, Hongying, and Christian Wagner. "How TikTok leads users to flow experience: Investigating the effects of technology affordances with user experi-

ence level and video length as moderators.” *Internet Research* 33, no. 2 (2022): 820-849. <https://doi.org/10.1108/INTR-08-2021-0595>.

Zhao, Zhengwei. “Analysis on the ‘Douyin (TikTok) Mania Phenomenon Based on Recommendation Algorithms.” *E3S Web of Conferences*, February 3, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1051/e3sconf/202123503029>.

Annex 1

How Is TikTok #Interreligious? An Inductive Thematic Analysis

	Description	Organization and quality tools
Step 1: Becoming familiar with the data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each TikTok was viewed a minimum of three times. • Transcription of the data. • Reading and re-reading the data. • Noting down initial ideas. • The prominent themes identified in the posts were noted. Additionally, the number of “likes,” “shares,” and “comments” systematically logged in a database. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot testing was initially employed to facilitate familiarity with the thematic analysis of TikTok video content and to develop a preliminary codebook. • Using Tikget to download the videos. • Utilizing Otter.ai for transcriptions followed by a manual review to ensure accuracy and make necessary corrections.
Step 2: Generating preliminary codes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systematic and independent coding of each TikTok post to seek relevant features across the dataset. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defining each code. • Organizing the data into meaningful groups. • Refining and adjusting the analysis plan. • Generating a comprehensive list of initial codes that represent the significant features of the dataset 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilizing Saturate for data encoding and organization. • A hybrid thematic approach was employed to ensure that the generated codes and themes accurately reflected the data. The process involved inductive coding of the dataset, followed by deductive analysis to compare the original data with the interpreted themes

<p>Step 3: Identifying themes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preliminary codes were evaluated in the context of the research questions. • Similarities and discrepancies between codes were identified to guide the organization of themes. • Themes were developed based on the prevalence and coherence between identified codes. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subthemes were identified when different categories of posts fell under the same theme but were distinct enough from each other to require separate categorization. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilizing Saturate to iteratively group and reflect on the data, while reviewing the original dataset to validate the proposed themes. • The memoing tool in Saturate was used. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A detailed record of the thought process and analytical decisions was maintained, including notes on the rationale behind grouping certain codes together and how each theme contributes to addressing the research questions.
<p>Step 4: Revision or refinement of themes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verifying that the themes align with the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire dataset (Level 2), generating a thematic ‘map’ of the analysis, followed by additional iterations, leading to a simplified version (Figure 1).⁶⁰ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-examining the original data to ensure the accuracy of the proposed themes, using specific and representative examples from the data to illustrate and validate each theme. • Conducting five rounds of review to ensure internal consistency within each theme. <p style="text-align: center;">Description</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A detailed record (diary) was maintained, including justifications for the grouping of certain codes and the distinctions between each theme. • Thematic map was developed. <p style="text-align: center;">Organization and quality tools</p>

⁶⁰ Shannon S. C. Herrick, Laura Hallward, and Lindsay R. Duncan, “This Is Just How I Cope: An Inductive Thematic Analysis of Eating Disorder Recovery Content Created and Shared on TikTok Using #EDrecovery,” *International Journal of Eating Disorders* 54, no. 4 (2020): 516-526, <https://doi.org/10.1002/eat.23463>.

<p>Step 5: Theme conceptua- li-zation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An ongoing analysis was conducted to refine the specifics of each theme and the overall narrative conveyed by the analysis, leading to the generation of clear definitions and names for each theme. • Revisiting and visualizing the entire dataset to aid in this review process. • Themes were more explicitly defined, named, and associated with specific TikToks and captions chosen to represent each theme. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thematic map and research diary were continuously contrasted.
<p>Step 6: Writing the results</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extracts were selected that are impactful and representative of the data. • A detailed analysis and description were conducted on the selected extracts. • The analysis was connected to the research question and existing literature. • An academic report was produced to coherently present the analysis. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An academic report was produced to coherently present the analysis adhering to ethical guidelines by excluding any identifiable information from the dataset.