From Tutors to Influencers: Content Types and Micro-Celebrification of English Teaching TikTok Creators in the Thai Context

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	ABSTRACT This research paper explores the subculture of English language teaching on TikTok among Thai-language content creators who take on the role of English tutors. The study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach through content analysis, examining public data from 75 recent posts across five TikTok profiles collected in December 2022. The study's aim is to understand how these tutors create video content and engage in the micro-celebrification process. The findings reveal four main types of frequently published videos: educational, promotional, experiential, and intimate content. Additionally, the study observes that these tutors adopt micro-celebrification practices to create relatable and credible personas across four dimensions: humor and entertainment, shared linguistic and cultural repertoires, audience interaction, and the absence of teaching credentials. The research contributes to an understanding of how informal English language tutors utilize social media platforms like TikTok to disseminate knowledge, negotiate identities, build teacher-learner relationships, and cultivate fame. These findings provide implications for teacher and professional development in the 21st century.

Introduction

Language learning mediated by internet technologies, known as informal digital learning of English (IDLE), is an emerging subfield in Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL). This form of learning is characterized by its voluntary, incidental, and independence from formal academic structures and assessments (Chik & Ho, 2017). Learners immerse themselves in online content such as social media, language apps, YouTube, and podcasts, driven by leisure and information-seeking rather than traditional language goals (Toffoli & Sockett, 2015).

Recent studies have highlighted IDLE's benefits, including exposure to authentic language, increased engagement and motivation, vocabulary growth, intercultural awareness, autonomous learning, and user identity (Dizon, 2023; Reinhardt, 2019; Rosell-Aguilar, 2018; Soyoof et al., 2023). Despite these positive outcomes, teachers often struggle to integrate learners' digital language exposure into their pedagogical approaches (Toffoli & Sockett, 2015). Given the importance of informal language learning in young people's lives, it is crucial for language educators to embrace these practices. Emerging trends in IDLE emphasize langua-technocultural competence and digital literacies as essential soft skills alongside linguistic and communicative competence (Soyoof et al., 2023). Implementing IDLE effectively, therefore, will reinforce these competencies in language learners and help them become successful language learners and users outside the classroom.

Interest is growing in exploring the potential of informal learning on various social media platforms, including Twitter (Rosell-Aguilar, 2018), Instagram (Gomez Junior, 2020), and TikTok (Lee, 2022). While informal language learning has been extensively studied to understand learners' behaviors and preferences, there is a notable gap in research regarding content creators' strategies. Many social media users now gain substantial followers and achieve influencer status by sharing diverse forms of educational content. The study is grounded in the concept of micro-celebrity, referring to individuals who cultivate a public persona and accumulate followers on social media platforms. It also examines the process of their micro-celebrification—the strategic performance and self-presentation aimed at achieving and maintaining this online visibility and influence.

The present study focuses on the emergence of micro-celebrities in the field of English language teaching on TikTok. Understanding the micro-celebrification of these informal language tutors is crucial as it sheds light on

their nature of content and practices. This understanding offers valuable insights for traditional English language educators, fostering their professional growth and connecting language teachers with opportunities for learning and advancement that integrate both formal and informal language pedagogies (Carpenter et al., 2022).

TikTok, a globally popular video-sharing social network platform, has become a global phenomenon since its launch in China in 2016 and worldwide in 2018. In 2021, TikTok was the most downloaded app, boasting over one billion monthly active users (Cyca, 2022). In Southeast Asia alone, TikTok has generated more than 800 million video creations, with education content experiencing exponential growth at 148% (Leesa-Nguansuk, 2022). There is a pressing need for further research on informal language teaching within this video-based social media platform. While some studies (Lee, 2022; Zhang et al., 2022) have examined TikTok's technological features for language learning, little is known about how content creators manage their material and audience using various micro-celebrity strategies.

This study, employing a qualitative descriptive approach of content analysis, investigates five English language-related TikTok profiles in Thailand, exploring how they utilize the site's technological resources for language teaching and learning through the micro-celebrification process. Thailand's unique cultural and linguistic context amplifies the importance of this focus. As a nation where English is a foreign language, Thai learners face particular challenges in acquiring proficiency, influenced by educational policies, social attitudes, and limited opportunities for immersive language use (Baker, 2012; Kirkpatrick, 2010).

At the same time, the platform's growing popularity among Thai users offers an avenue for content creators to be innovative in language teaching by integrating cultural relevance and local context. By situating this study within Thailand, the research aims to highlight how these influencers navigate these dynamics to transform into creative educators and achieve micro-celebrity status. The findings demonstrate the potential of TikTok as a platform for informal learning, offering valuable insights into its implications for language education, L2 pedagogy, and teacher professional development.

Tiktok as a New Landscape of an Informal English Language Teaching and Learning

In response to today's casual learning lifestyles, there are a growing number of L2 educational content published on diverse social media platforms, including the latest social media sensation, TikTok. TikTok is an application that allows people to create, share, and consume short-video content of up to 10 minutes. While comedy videos and musical performances

are the most popular content on the app, education-related videos also receive much attention (Leesa-Nguansuk, 2022). TikTok's communication, which is mainly based on sharing short videos rather than lengthy written texts, appeals to modern learners who prefer accessing and consuming content intermittently (Lee, 2022). Its technological features are also favored by content creators. The user-friendliness of the application, together with various in-app video editing features, allows anyone to easily become a video content creator in a few simple steps (Lee, 2022).

Within academic discourses, a small but growing body of research (Lee, 2022; Vizcaíno-Verdú & Abidin, 2023; Zhang et al., 2022) has started to explore TikTok's technological affordances—features of the platform that shape what users can and cannot do—for language teaching and learning. Zhang et al. (2022) describe the commonly found design of language learning videos on TikTok as being in a vertical shot with an above-the-shoulder presenter. Text is also frequently present, most often placed below the middle of the screen or close to the presenter's action to create visual interest. Audio, in the form of sound effects and background music, is almost always utilized to add emotional effects or humorous elements.

TikTok's technological innovation also supports collaboration and interactivity among creators through "duet", "react", and "stitch" features (Vizcaíno-Verdú & Abidin, 2023). While these resources are not specifically designed for language teaching and learning, Lee (2022) finds that users are able to exercise their creativity and utilize these features to achieve various informal teaching and learning purposes.

Beyond user creativity, studies have started to evaluate TikTok's effectiveness in supporting language learning outcomes. The platform's brief videos are particularly well-suited for learners with short attention spans, allowing them to quickly absorb key points and language concepts (Xiuwen & Razali, 2021). Recent research suggests that TikTok can enhance students' speaking skill, as well as boost their confidence in speaking English by offering authentic examples and allowing learners to express themselves freely in the target language (Tan et al., 2022; Xiuwen & Razali, 2021; Zaitun et al., 2021). Additionally, learners have shown positive attitudes and increased motivation when using TikTok for language learning due to its interactive environment (Xiuwen & Razali, 2021; Yang, 2020; Zaitun et al., 2021). Despite a limited number of studies to date, TikTok's ability to engage learners and facilitate rapid content consumption makes it a promising tool for formal language education.

On the spectrum of educators and social media, an increasing number of studies have explored teachers' motivations for using online platforms like TikTok. Professional educators often turn to these platforms to share materials, improve teaching and learning, participate in affinity spaces, engage

in teacherpreneurship, or even take part in dance challenges (Carpenter et al., 2022; Shelton et al., 2020; Ulla et al., 2024; Vizcaíno-Verdú & Abidin, 2023). However, much of this research centers on credentialed teachers operating within formal educational contexts. In contrast, less attention has been paid to informal educators—especially social media content creators who teach languages without institutional affiliation—despite their growing influence in digital learning spaces. To address this gap, this study investigates how TikTok content creators in Thailand utilize the site's technological affordances for language teaching and how this process reflects their micro-celebrification.

The Rise of Micro-Celebrities on Social Media Landscapes

Micro-celebrity refers to an everyday user who strategically utilizes social media platforms to establish a notable online presence (Marwick & Boyd, 2010; Senft, 2008). In this study, micro-celebrity specifically denotes individuals, while micro-celebrification encompasses the processes they employ to achieve such status within niche digital communities, such as those centered around food, beauty, fashion, travel, or motherhood (Van Norel et al., 2014). In the subgenre of language teaching and learning, content creators are observed to share language-related content and amass significant followings, thereby becoming micro-celebrities.

The success of an online micro-celebrity appears to depend largely on the interaction with and connection to one's audience (Senft, 2008) in a manner that is transparent, open, and authentic (Marwick, 2013). Especially in social media environments, micro-celebrity practices can thrive because the sites' technological features allow users to create their own content at lower costs and higher levels of intimacy than traditional media and celebrities (Lewis, 2020).

A sense of intimacy and authenticity in social media micro-celebrity practices largely involves strategic self-disclosure, such as sharing carefully selected personal information (Marwick, 2013) and displaying emotional vulnerability (Raun, 2018) to create an authentic and relatable persona. Besides authenticity, credibility and trustworthiness are crucial for social media micro-celebrification. If an audience believes that the content generated by the creator is accurate, credible, and adequate, they are more likely to continue engaging with the content and recommending the account to others (Zhang & Choi, 2022).

In the education sector, credibility becomes a vital attribute because accuracy, credentials, expertise, and authoritative knowledge have long been valued in traditional educational contexts (Carpenter et al., 2022). However, on contemporary digital platforms, the hierarchical authority typical of

traditional education is less significant. Instead, learners are drawn to teachers who adopt a casual, entertaining approach, creating fun and open learning experiences while presenting their authentic selves and fostering relatability (Verdú & Abidin, 2023).

With the growing trend of English language teaching and learning on social media, studying content creators' micro-celebrification highlights the non-linguistic qualities exhibited by today's language teachers, which challenge existing paradigms. The findings can provide educators with innovative methods to engage learners through dynamic and relevant language learning experiences. Furthermore, these insights can inform teacher education and professional development, helping aspiring educators leverage social media to create content that aligns with learners' interests and goals.

In response to the need for understanding and classifying sub-genres of social media micro-celebrities (Abidin, 2021), the present study specifically analyzes the micro-celebrification and content creation of TikTok users who use Thai in the English language teaching subculture. The questions addressed in this article are:

(1) What are the types of video content posted by Thai-language creators in the English language teaching subculture on TikTok?

(2) In what way does their video content reflect their micro-celebrification?

Answers to these questions contribute to a broader understanding of digital literacy practices in informal language teaching and learning on the social media landscape, which has important implications for teacher and professional development in the 21st century.

Conceptual Model of Informal Language Learning on TikTok

The conceptual model (Figure 1) illustrates the dynamic interplay that shapes informal language learning on TikTok, connecting four key components reviewed in the previous sections: informal language learning, educational content creation, micro-celebrity strategies, and TikTok's technological affordances. These elements influence one another, forming a unique ecosystem for language learning and teaching.

Educational content creation and informal language learning share a reciprocal relationship; educational content provides opportunities for informal learning by offering accessible language-focused material, such as vocabulary explanations or cultural insights, while learners' engagement with such content drives further content creation based on their evolving needs. TikTok's technological affordances are foundational to both content creation and learning: the platform's short video format and intuitive editing tools encourage the production of concise educational content, while its

algorithmically driven "For You Page" enhances discoverability, expanding learning opportunities. Additionally, interactive features enable direct engagement between creators and audiences, supporting both content creation, identity performance, and network building.

Micro-celebrity strategies further shape the dynamics of educational content creation and learner motivation. Creators employ tactics such as authenticity, relatability, and entertainment to enhance the reach and appeal of their content, making it more engaging and shareable. These strategies not only increase the visibility of educational content but also foster a sense of community and connection that motivates sustained informal learning. The perceived authenticity of micro-celebrity educators contributes to audience trust and enjoyment, encouraging learners to continue consuming and interacting with their content.

In sum, informal language learning on TikTok is an emergent, socially mediated process shaped by the interaction of platform affordances, content creation, and strategic self-presentation. This holistic perspective reveals how digital environments like TikTok are reshaping the landscape of informal language learning and teaching.

Figure 1

Conceptual Model of Informal Language Learning on TikTok
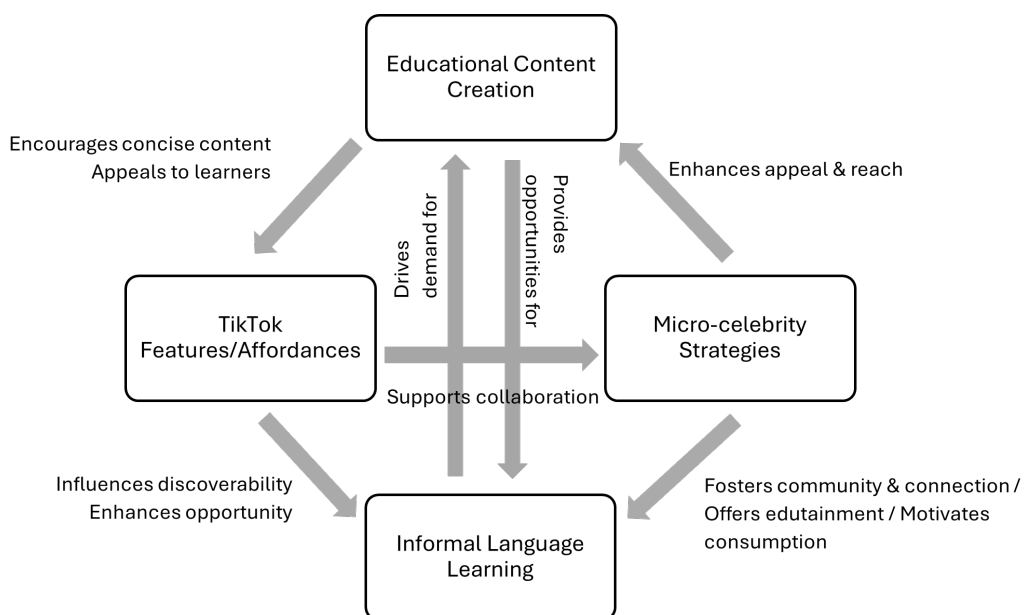
Methods

This study is designed to address the research questions using public data from TikTok profiles, video posts, and written captions. Data was collected during December 2022 through sampling by individual or group technique (Androutsopoulos, 2013) to gather TikTok profiles of Thai-language content creators in the field of English language teaching and learning. The initial purpose of data collection was to gather as many TikTok profiles as possible at the first stage before narrowing them down to profiles that represent the notion of micro-celebrity.

The data set consists of 75 videos from five content creators who are addressed in this study as "TikTok language tutors," emphasizing the informal aspect of their practices and differentiating them from professional educators regarded in previous studies (e.g., Carpenter et al., 2022; Shelton et al., 2020; Ulla et al., 2024; Vizcaíno-Verdú & Abidin, 2023). To extract comprehensive insights from the data, a qualitative descriptive approach of content analysis was employed. This approach considered all audio-visually observable aspects, encompassing verbal resources like written and spoken words, as well as visual and audio elements present in the videos—such as gestures, facial expressions, background music, and implicit cultural references.

Sample

The study employed purposive sampling to select the accounts for the sample. As an entry point, the author searched for the hashtags in Thai language, #เรียนภาษาอังกฤษ (learning English language) and #สอนภาษาอังกฤษ (teaching English language) on the TikTok application search tool and further explored TikTok profiles using these hashtags. From here, the author compiled a list of TikTok profiles that fit the following two criteria: (1) whether the majority of the content published on the profile, namely eight out of every ten of the latest fifty posts, is oriented towards English language teaching and learning; and (2) whether the accounts are currently active.

The author then narrowed down the list further by considering its audience engagement rate. Here, it is to be noted that TikTok public profiles only show information regarding who the profile is following, the number of followers, and the total likes across all videos. Therefore, the author calculated an audience engagement rate using the simplest method by dividing the number of likes by the number of followers. This rough calculation hints at the popularity of these accounts and was thus helpful in the process of selecting the profiles that represent the concept of micro-celebrification.

Eventually, five TikTok profiles were chosen for the sample as they met the initial criteria and contained the highest audience engagement rates. However, it is essential to note that these profiles are not intended to be representative of the whole population of English language tutors on TikTok, as the author excluded less active and low engagement accounts from the selection. Additionally, the author acknowledges the potential impact of TikTok's algorithmic discovery, which tends to amplify already popular content and users. Nonetheless, this selection criterion aligned with the study's conceptualization of micro-celebrity as linked to visibility and audience reach on digital platforms.

Table 1

Data on Profiles of TikTok Users Selected for the Study, Sorted by Numbers of Followers

TikTok profile	Nationality	Followers	Likes (across all videos)
T1	Thai	1.9M	29.2M
T2	Thai	1.2M	20.3M
T3	Thai	994.0K	34.9M
T4	American	915.9K	6.7M
T5	Thai	863.0K	15.3M

The characteristics of the five TikTok profiles used as a sample in this study are shown in Table 1. The Thammasat University Research Ethics Board determined that ethical clearance was not required, as the study involved only passive data collection from publicly available video posts without any direct interaction with the content creators.

Nevertheless, the author recognizes that ethical considerations remain important when working with publicly accessible social media content. Even when consent is not formally required and data are anonymized, users may not anticipate that their content will be analyzed or repurposed for academic research. To address this ethical complexity, each TikTok account was assigned a code (T1–T5) based on follower count, and all figures presented in this paper have been blurred to protect user identity.

Data Collection

Building upon Kerr et al.'s (2020) prior content analysis of Instagram, this study collected data from the 15 most recent posts (videos and captions) of five TikTok profiles. The decision to limit the sample to five accounts

arose from a scarcity of profiles meeting the author's initial criteria, as outlined in the previous section. Despite the smaller sample size, it facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon within this specific group of content creators. The quantity of data, comprising 15 posts per individual from this microcelebrity sample, was considered sufficient and aligned with methodologies used in other studies employing purposeful social media samples (Kerr et al., 2020). Data collection took place on December 5th, 2022 resulting in the gathering of 75 video posts, manually downloaded and stored on the author's personal computer. Subsequently, these videos and screenshots were imported into NVivo, a data analysis software, for further examination, including a data transcription process to ensure accurate analysis.

Data Analysis

The unit of analysis for this study is a publicly available TikTok video posted by the content creator. The analysis focuses on (1) the content of the video; (2) the written text, emojis, and symbols inserted in the video; (3) the hashtags and descriptive texts used in the caption; and (4) the profiles of the content creators, including their profile pictures and bio sections. The coding was conducted using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo, using codes relevant to the two research questions.

The analysis for RQ1 aims to identify the nature of the content published by the TikTok tutors. The themes proposed by Vizcaíno-Verdú and Abidin (2023), such as educational (knowledge sharing) and promotional (promoting products and services), were used to guide the analysis, which reveal not only linguistic and socio-cultural aspects of the English language but also other non-language-related content.

In cases where a video served multiple purposes, classification was based on the most prominent communicative intention. Prominence was determined by the relative length of time devoted to each theme. For instance, if a creator gave a vocabulary lesson for the majority of the video and only briefly promoted a product at the end, the video was classified as educational. This timestamp-based approach helped ensure consistency across the dataset.

The analysis for RQ2 aims to identify the strategies that TikTok tutors use to gain fame and attain micro-celebrity status. Previous research on social media micro-celebrities and language learning on TikTok (Barta & Andalibi, 2021; Lewis, 2020; Raun, 2018; Vizcaíno-Verdú & Abidin, 2023) informs this analysis. The author implemented coding analysis by paying particular attention to the presence and absence of authenticity, intimacy, and credibility performed by the participants.

To address potential researcher subjectivity, the researcher engaged in informal peer debriefing with a colleague familiar with digital discourse and language learning. These discussions supported interpretive clarity and helped challenge initial assumptions throughout the coding and analysis process.

Findings

The following section presents the results of the study, addressing the two research questions posed earlier. RQ1 examines the types of videos that Thai-language content creators in the English language teaching subculture on TikTok publish. The first subsection outlines the four main categories of videos that emerged from the data analysis. The second subsection explores how these videos provide insights into the micro-celebrity practices of the content creators (RQ2).

Content Types Produced by TikTok English Tutors

Table 2 presents an overview of the predominant types of content identified in the dataset, alongside the frequency of each type created by individual creators (T1–T5). The findings suggest that each TikToker has a unique posting style, with a focus on one category more frequently than others. Overall, the observed content leans heavily towards an educational theme, emphasizing various linguistic aspects of the English language.

Table 2

Frequency of Predominant Content Types by Creator

Content Type	Description	Example	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	Total
Educational	Sharing knowledge related to the English language explicitly	*Explaining grammatical rules; providing alternatives to vocabulary*	15	5	12	14	4	50
Promotional	Sharing products, services, and offers	*Promoting books or tutoring services*	0	5	1	1	0	8
Experiential	Sharing stories about life events	*Sharing cross-cultural experiences; snippets of life abroad*	0	1	0	0	10	11
Intimate	Sharing personal stories outside of teaching role	*Everyday problems; seeking feedback or advice*	0	4	2	0	0	6

Educational Content

The dataset analysis reveals that educational content is the most prolific theme of video content, particularly linguistic-related videos. These videos contain explicit information about the English language, encompassing diverse aspects such as vocabulary, useful phrases, grammar, pronunciation, and culture. Among the linguistic-related videos, English vocabulary and phrases are the most common types of content. The TikTok tutors generally provide definitions of English words in Thai, followed by their usage in sentences. For example, in Figure 2, T1 shares a list of weather-related vocabulary and five useful phrases to use when lost, while T2 teaches several synonyms for "very big". Additionally, T4 explains the difference between the words "official" and "formal," which are often confused by Thai learners due to their similar translation in Thai.

Figure 2

Examples of Videos Teaching Vocabulary and Expressions

Note. From left to right: 2.1: What's the weather like? (T1); 2.2: five expressions when getting lost (T1); 2.3: Don't use "very big" (T2); 2.4: official and formal (T4)

Another teaching approach frequently observed is to provide alternatives to commonly used words and phrases. As word choices depend on various factors such as context, audience, and level of formality, T3 suggests more polite alternatives to the phrase "shut up." Similarly, T1 discourages the use of the term "fighting" when cheering for a sports team, and T2 recommends alternative phrases to "May I" and "Can I" when seeking permission (Figure 3).

Interestingly, many vocabulary teaching videos feature trendy slang and abbreviations used in texting and social media. Shown in Figure 4, T3 and T4 discussed the meanings and uses of slang terms such as "shawty,"

"G9," "bby" (T3), and "hafta," "bummer," "ghosted," and "Karen" (T4). This posting behavior indicates that TikTok content creators are leveraging the platform to share current and relevant information with their audience. The high frequency of vocabulary-related videos also suggests that such content may be cost-effective for creators to produce as well as easily consumable and digestible for viewers.
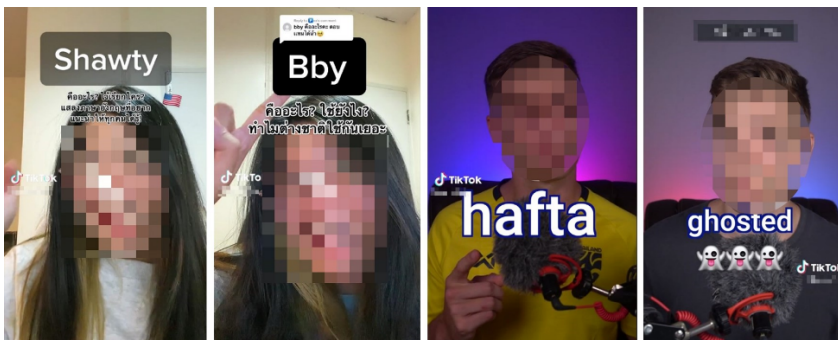
Figure 3

Examples of Videos Providing Alternatives
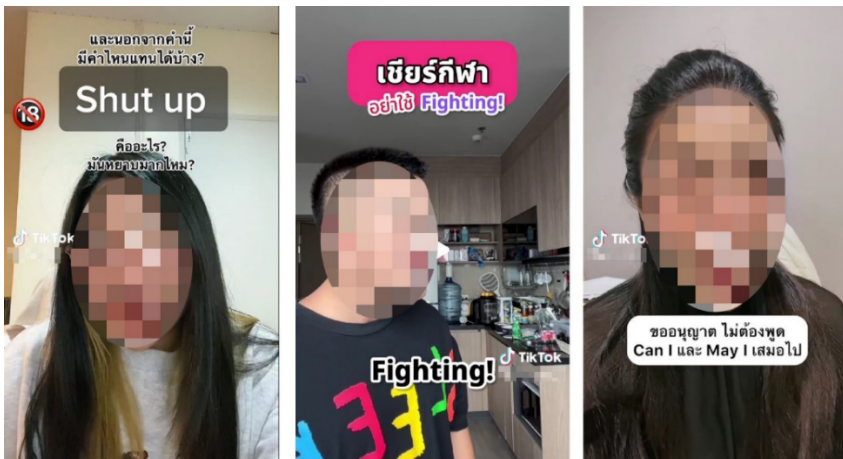
Note. From left to right: 3.1: What does shut up mean? Is it rude? What are the alternatives? (T3); 3.2: When cheering for a sports team, don't say "fighting" (T1); 3.3: You don't have to always say "Can I" and "May I" when asking for permission (T2)

Figure 4

Examples of Videos Teaching Trendy Internet Terms

Note. From left to right: 4.1: What does shawty mean? (T3); 4.2: What does "bby" mean and how to use it (T3); 4.3: Hafta (T4); 4.4: ghosted (T4)

The educational videos produced by TikTok tutors cover various aspects of English language learning. In addition to vocabulary and useful expressions, a good proportion of the videos are focused on basic grammar, such as countable and uncountable nouns, definite and indefinite articles, and conditional sentences (Figure 5). T1 produces videos that specifically address common grammatical errors made by Thai speakers of English and offer better alternatives. Pronunciation is another category of educational content, although it is less frequent. In Figure 6, the content creators address challenging sounds for Thai speakers, such as voiced and voiceless /TH/, as well as a silent D in words like "Wednesday" and "bridge". T1 and T5 are particularly informative in this category

Figure 5

Examples of Videos Teaching Grammar

Note. From left to right: 5.1: How to use "not many" and "not much" (T4); 5.2: "You are a good company" is incorrect. (T4); 5.3: How to say you don't have something. (T1); 5.4: "Where are you come from?" is wrong (T1)

Finally, cultural knowledge is a crucial component of many TikTok video lessons. When teaching English synonyms, the content creators highlight the contextual nature of words and expressions while simultaneously urging their audiences to consider the nuances of language use and potential meanings in different situations. For instance, T4 cautions against using the slang term "bummer" in serious contexts and recommends formal language. Similarly, T3 discourages the use of "shut up" due to its impolite connotations and suggests alternative phrases like "Please be quiet" or "Please lower your voice" (Figure 3.1). T3 also discusses the potential R-rated implications of the phrase "picture trade" (Figure 7) and advises her audience to be careful when chatting with someone online. These examples highlight the value of cultural competence in language learning and

underscore TikTok's potential as a platform for promoting cross-cultural communication.
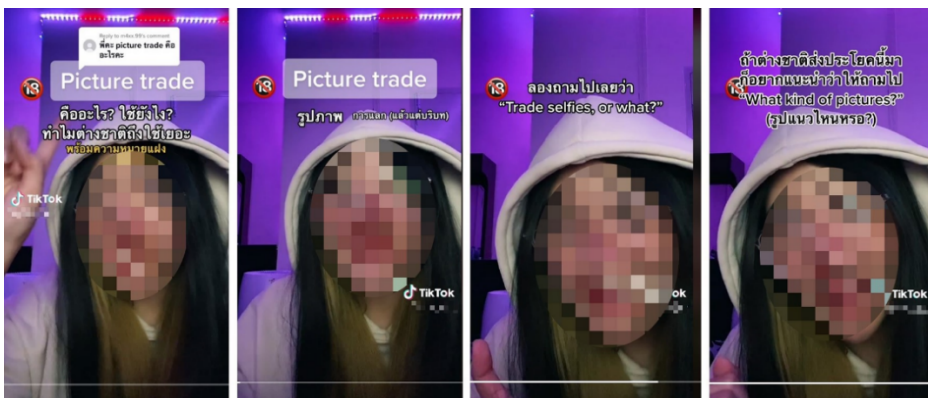
Figure 6

Examples of Videos Teaching Pronunciation

Note. From left to right: 6.1: How do you say "method"? (T5); 6.2: How to pronounce the TH sounds (T1); 6.3: Silent D (T1).

Figure 7

An example of a Culture-Related Video from T3

Promotional Content

While the frequency count for dedicated promotional videos shown in Table 2 appears low, it is crucial to note that promotional content is, in fact, quite common but frequently disguised as educational content, often appearing at the end of regular video lessons. The study's classification method, based on the most prominent communicative intention determined by relative time devoted to each theme, led to these videos being primarily categorized as educational.

In the present study, four out of five TikTok content creators (i.e., T1, T2, T4, and T5) can be identified as entrepreneurial, as they advertise their English language learning books or tutoring services explicitly in their bio data sections as well as embedded in some of their videos. These promotional videos often take the form of regular English language lessons but conclude with promotional content. One content creator, T2, is a frequent user of this strategy, as demonstrated in her video on alternative phrases for "can I" and "may I" (Figure 3.3). At the end of the video, she promotes her book, "Polite English," and encourages viewers to purchase it with the added benefit of free shipping.

Another TikTok tutor who frequently posts promotional videos is T5. In Figure 4.4, where he talks about an English slang, "ghosted", he mentions his book called "555+ Slang,", which he promotes as a book that contains English slang and idioms that native speakers of English use. Additionally, T5 offers tutoring services off the platform. In Figure 5.1, where he talks about the use of "not many" and "not much" with countable and uncountable nouns, he promotes one of his tutoring courses in English grammar. In all his promotional videos, he provides contact information, both on his website and in his messaging application, for those who are interested in reaching him. These findings suggest that TikTok tutors are aware of the marketing potential of the platform or their own fame, and they can fully utilize the site's affordances for their own businesses.

Experiential Content

Experiential content refers to the sharing of stories about life events (Vizcaíno-Verdú & Abidin, 2023). In the present study, one TikTok user, T4, has a unique approach to sharing cultural knowledge with her audience. In contrast to the other four TikTok tutors, who primarily focus on the linguistic aspects of the language, T4's content centers on sharing her personal experiences while living and working in a foreign country, often in a humorous tone. As depicted in Figure 7, T4's videos cover a diverse range of cross-cultural topics, such as the challenge of understanding the British

accent, English etiquette and good manners, the art of flirting in English culture, negative experiences when living in Scotland, and cultural differences that can be confusing for foreigners.

Figure 8

Examples of Experiential Videos from T5

Note. From left to right: 8.1: British accent is difficult to understand; 8.2: English people's etiquette; 8.3: the art of flirting in English culture; 8.4: negative experience when newly moved to Scotland

T4's videos showcase a new form of language learning and teaching that challenges the traditional teaching authority found in classrooms (Vizcaíno-Verdú & Abidin, 2023). Instead, they center on cross-cultural communication and intercultural understanding derived from personal experience and present them in a lighthearted, entertaining manner.

Intimate Content

The concept of intimate content refers to the sharing of personal stories by content creators, regardless of their role as teachers (Vizcaíno-Verdú & Abidin, 2023). T2 and T3's videos exemplify this, as they share personal stories using unique formats (Figure 8). In one of T2's videos, she appears exhausted and says nothing, with text appearing on the screen asking for advice on dealing with burnout. Another video shows T2 looking panicked, with text on the screen saying, "When I get asked if I want to have children, and I can't even take care of myself".

Similarly, in the case of T3, she uses a TikTok filter called "the best of the year," which randomly asks for TikTokers' opinions on various topics. She shares health tips, a trendy word, and her favorite book in this video, allowing the audience to learn more about her personal life. Through the use

of intimate content, T2 and T3 convey their thoughts and personal experiences in a creative and engaging way, which may help establish a deeper connection with their audience.

Figure 9

Examples of Intimate Videos
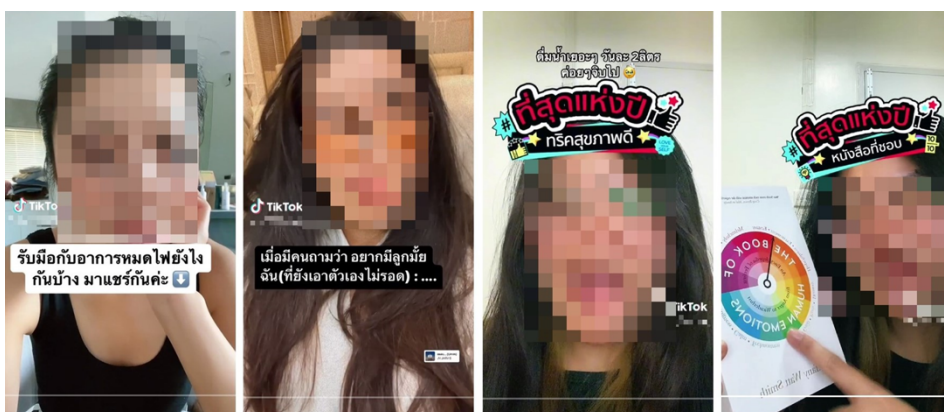
Note. From left to right: 9.1: How do you deal with burnout? (T2); 9.2: When I get asked if I want to have children (T2); 9.3–9.4: Best of the year (T3)

Micro-Celebrification as Reflected in the TikTok Videos in the English Language Teaching Subculture

The current research explores the strategies TikTok users, who do not identify as professional educators outside the platform, employ to present and promote themselves as micro-celebrities. As summarized in Table 3, the analysis highlights four recurring themes commonly found in their posts, reflecting the performance strategies frequently used by these micro-celebrity tutors on TikTok.

Table 3

Micro-Celebrification Components and Associated Strategies on TikTok

Micro-Celebrification Component/Theme	Associated Strategies Employed by Creators

1. Being Relatable through Humor and Entertainment	**1.1 Varied Formats & Personas:** Using dynamic movements, diverse camera angles, and enactments. Adopting distinct personas via costumes, wigs, multiple characters, and role-play. **1.2 Humorous Storytelling:** Crafting funny, lighthearted storylines with comedic timing and relatable scenarios. **1.3 Creative Expression:** Leveraging TikTok as a platform for creative identity expression.
2. Building Rapport through Shared Linguistic & Cultural Repertoires	**2.1 Local/Familiar Language Use:** Employing local dialects (e.g., Isan) or adapting Standard Thai for Thai audience. **2.2 Topical Linguistic Content:** Sharing current and trending linguistic features (e.g., internet slang, acronyms, idioms). **2.3 Modern Identity Portrayal:** Making linguistic and content choices to portray a young, modern, and culturally aware persona.
3. Promoting Audience Interaction	**3.1 Responsive Engagement:** Creating videos in direct response to audience questions; visually incorporating and acknowledging audience input within the content (e.g., displaying questions on screen, labeling replies) **3.2 Direct Calls to Action:** Explicitly asking for comments, likes, and feedback within videos. **3.3 Interactive Video Formats:** Utilizing "duet" (for simulated conversations) and "stitch," or designing virtual quizzes.
4. Portraying Credibility and Expertise	**4.1 Performance-Based Credibility:** Demonstrating teaching abilities and pedagogical effectiveness through clear, accurate, and practically applicable content. **4.2 Subtle Qualities:** Conveying trustworthiness and expertise implicitly via engaging edutainment, bite-sized content, and consistent positive personalities. **4.3 Minimized Explicit Credentials**: Generally not advertising formal educational degrees or teaching experience, emphasizing performance over traditional qualifications.

### *Being Relatable through Humor and Entertainment*

The first recurring theme of micro-celebrification observed across several TikTok profiles is the use of humor to create fun, informal, and entertaining learning experiences. Two TikTok profiles, T1 and T4, use unconventional and innovative ways to share knowledge through entertaining and humorous techniques.

As shown in Figure 10, T1's videos do not always follow the TikTok standard format of a vertical shot with an above-the-shoulder presenter (Zhang et al., 2022). Instead, his content features a variety of formats, utilizing movements, different camera angles, and enactments to create an entertaining

storytelling effect. He adopts different personas by wearing costumes and colorful wigs to engage with the audience. Some of his videos feature him playing multiple characters or engaging in conversational role-play with other presenters. His storylines are also usually funny and lighthearted to appeal to audiences who love creativity and humor.

Figure 10

Examples of Videos Incorporating Humor by T1
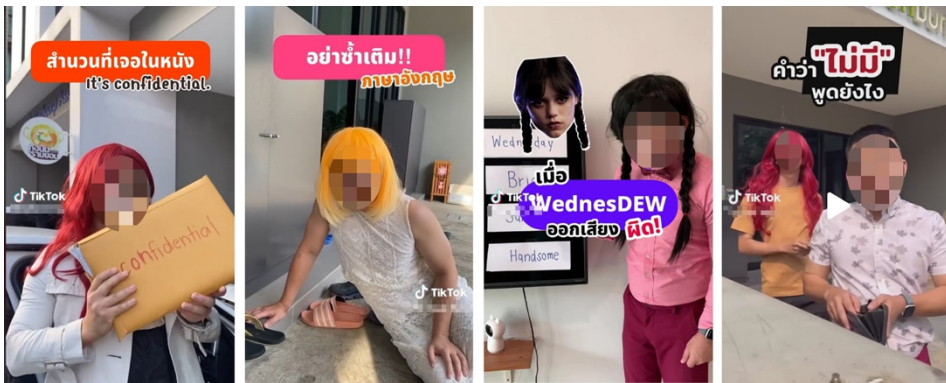
Note. From left to right: 10.1: It's confidential; 10.2: Don't add salt to the wound; 10.3: Silent D pronunciation; 10.4: How to say you don't have something

Similarly, T5 incorporates humor into her videos through her storytelling techniques and character embodiment. She mostly sits alone in front of the camera, without other camera angles or movements, but is able to build a strong and memorable persona for her audience through makeup and accessories. T5 consistently appears with bright red lips, straight dark long hair, and a big bow on her head, usually in the colors of the English flag (see Figure 8).

Her content is mainly cultural, focusing on sharing personal experiences from living abroad. Her humor is reflected through lighthearted, relatable stories with funny endings, using the hashtags #ภาษาอังกฤษฮาๆ (hilarious English language) and #พีคตอนจบ (twist ending). T5 shares these stories with a passionate voice, over-the-top facial expressions, and laughing sound effects to accompany her playful storytelling performance.

Micro-celebrity strategies employed by both profiles indicate that TikTok is viewed not just as a platform for content sharing but also as a means to exercise their creativity and express their identities and self-presentation. Humor in sharing knowledge has become a successful tactic for

gaining fame and followers, as both T1 and T5 combine entertaining content with their humor to connect with wider audiences.

### Building Rapport through Shared Linguistic and Cultural Repertoires

Through analysis, it is found that TikTok content creators develop specific and cultural linguistic repertoires that resonate with their followers to form a close-knit network and cultivate specific identities. For example, T5 speaks in the Isan ("อิสาน") dialect, which is widely spoken in the Northeastern region of Thailand. By speaking in a local dialect, she appears more friendly, relatable, and down-to-earth, which in turn builds a more intimate relationship with her specific audience.

A similar strategy is observed by T4, who is a native English speaker but shares content in Standard Thai to make him more approachable to Thai audiences. Apart from linguistic codes, T3 and T4 also choose to share knowledge on specific linguistic features that are current and trendy, such as internet slang, acronyms, and idioms used in online chats. As discussed previously, they appeal to their younger generation followers by exploring emerging terms like "shawty," "bby," "G9," "picture trade," "hafta," "ghosted," and "Karen". These topical choices help portray their identities as young and modern, while their linguistic choices contribute to relatable and friendly personalities.

Promoting Audience Interaction

Social media offers a unique opportunity for users to participate, collaborate, and distribute content across distances, cultures, and languages (Knobel & Lankshear, 2014). The ongoing feedback and support from other users in the community also play a crucial role in shaping users' content creation and social media practices (Black, 2008). Although the comment section's data is beyond the scope of this study, the TikTok tutors' videos shed light on how they interact with and acknowledge their followers. They often create videos in response to audience questions and directly ask for feedback in the form of comments and likes within their videos.

T3, in particular, frequently addresses her followers' questions in her videos, as shown in Figure 11. She includes a follower's question in the video, displaying it above her head and pointing to it before explaining its uses and connotations. Additionally, she labels these videos as responses to specific users by including "replying to @username" in the video description. T5 also encourages audience interaction in his videos, often by requesting comments and feedback. He concludes his videos by inviting viewers to create sentences using the lesson he taught and share them in the comment section.

Figure 11

Examples of Audience Interactions from T3
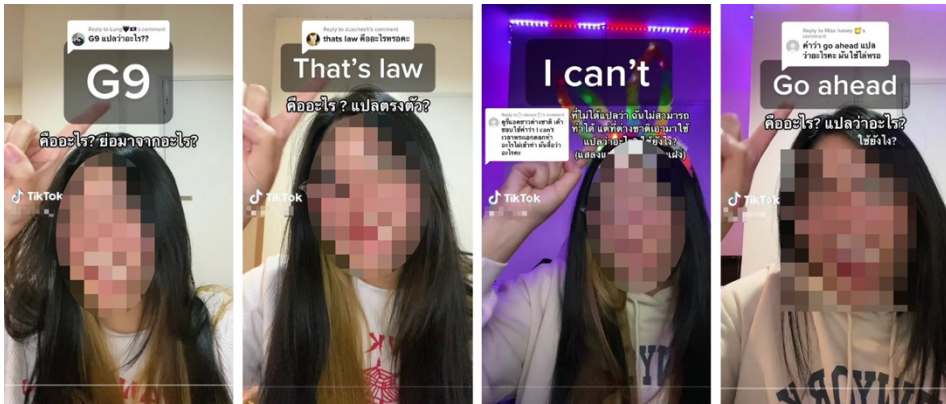
Note. From left to right: 11.1: What does G9 mean?; 11.2: What does "That's law" mean? Is the meaning literal?; 11.3: Hidden meanings of "I can't"; 11.4: What does "go ahead" mean and how to use it?

Figure 12

Examples of Audience Interactions from T1 and T2

Note. From left to right: 12.1–12.2: Practice introducing yourself with me in this duet (T2); 12.3–12.4: Let's do the quiz (T1).

In contrast, T2 promotes engagement by creating a duet self-introduction video. She speaks first, leaving a pause for her audience to respond, with blue and red boxes on the screen to simulate a conversation (Figure 12). T1 engages his audience by conducting a virtual English-language quiz with his followers and asking them to share their answers in the video

description (Figure 12). Through these virtual interactions afforded by the platform, TikTok content creators can address and interact with their audience in numerous ways, creating a more participatory atmosphere.

Portraying credibility and expertise in the English language

Credibility is highly valued in traditional education for its emphasis on accuracy, qualifications, expertise, and authoritative knowledge (Carpenter et al., 2022). However, on TikTok, the analysis reveals that such qualities are irrelevant and insignificant. The profiles of content creators do not explicitly mention teacher qualifications or credentials, with only one participant, T2, including her educational degree in the bio section. Despite the fact that four of them offer tutoring courses as a business, they do not advertise their credentials through official educational degrees or teaching experience. Rather, they let their teaching abilities, as shown in their published content, speak for themselves.

In other words, it seems that social media micro-celebrification, at least in the language teaching subculture of TikTok, requires a more subtle performance of credibility, trustworthiness, and expertise via implicit qualities such as edutainment, bite-sized content, and reliable, positive personalities. This finding, therefore, highlights the fact that becoming a micro-celebrity in social media landscapes takes more than offline qualifications and taken-for-granted teacher authority.

Discussion

Addressing RQ1, this study explores the types of videos published by TikTok content creators in the English language teaching subculture. The findings reveal that TikTok tutors primarily share educational content focusing on various aspects of the English language. This reflects distinct literacy practices that set these tutors apart from professional educators on other platforms. Unlike professional educators in prior studies, who engage in diverse activities beyond lectures (Carpenter et al., 2020; Shelton et al., 2020; Vizcaíno-Verdú & Abidin, 2023), TikTok tutors construct their teaching personas through providing demos of their teaching via bite-sized and entertaining content.

Their posting behaviors also differ significantly from those of Facebook-based English tutors, as observed in Koowuttayakorn's (2017) study, where content largely consisted of inspirational messages and English quotes that attracted high engagement. This contrast highlights how different platforms encourage distinct pedagogical and engagement strategies. While prior research has explored TikTok's general affordances for language

learning (e.g., Lee, 2022) or educational content more broadly, the present study focuses specifically on the English language teaching subculture and its entanglement with micro-celebrification.

These findings underscore the evolving nature of digitally mediated language teaching, where platform-specific norms and audience expectations shape content choices. For TikTok tutors, staying adaptive—by responding to trends, harnessing viral content, and experimenting with creative styles—is crucial for maintaining visibility and influence (Adibin, 2021; Ulla et al., 2014).

Additionally, this study found that TikTok users utilize the platform's features to transform purely educational content into posts that are simultaneously self-promotional, experiential, and personal. By blending explicit and implicit promotional strategies, TikTok tutors effectively utilize the platform to market their products and services while building their personal brand. This also contrasts with the primary purpose of TikTok use found in some other studies; for instance, Ulla et al. (2024) found that professional Thai university teachers often use TikTok for creativity and enjoyment without pursuing micro-celebrity status, whereas the tutors in this study directly link their micro-celebrity efforts to career success and income.

Regarding RQ2, the author identifies four interconnected aspects that characterize TikTokers' micro-celebrification: humor and entertainment, shared linguistic and cultural repertoires, audience interaction, and the absence of teaching credentials. Firstly, the data highlights that the use of positivity, humor, and entertainment is a fundamental value for authentic self-expression on TikTok. This finding aligns with previous studies (Barta & Andalibi, 2021; Kerr et al., 2020; Vizcaíno-Verdú & Abidin, 2023) that emphasize the importance of these values in creating engaging content and building strong relationships with social media audiences.

Given that users often engage with social media primarily for recreational purposes, delivering content that caters to entertainment needs while evoking positive emotional states (Zhang et al., 2019) makes it more likely to capture their attention. The strategic use of these positive self-expression techniques is therefore essential for building a loyal following and establishing support from the audience on TikTok.

Secondly, the vernaculars of the language teaching subculture on TikTok highlight the importance of building rapport and developing close relationships through a shared linguistic and cultural repertoire with their audiences. For example, Thai TikTok content creators use humor that is specifically tailored to resonate with their audience, incorporating cultural references rooted in Thai traditions, values, and contemporary trends. This localized approach not only strengthens relatability but also represents a

culturally unique method of audience engagement within the language teaching subculture.

To integrate themselves into their audience's discourse community, content creators adopt a less formal, more playful interaction style compared to conventional classroom discourse. These findings support the paradigm shift in digital literacies research, confirming that online language learning and teaching thrives on shared experiences, common interests, and collaborative interactions (Knobel & Lankshear, 2014).

The third aspect of micro-celebrification involves the content creators' agency and creativity to use the site's affordances (Lee, 2022), including "commenting", "replying to", and "dueting", to promote audience interaction. Currently, the exchange of creative content thrives within a networked and participatory culture (Jenkins et al., 2015), making active interaction between micro-celebrities and their audiences vital (Potavanich, 2019). Moreover, social media teachers and learners are free from the constraints of institutional hierarchy and opt for more equal and friendly relationships (Vizcaíno-Verdú & Abidin, 2023). These horizontal dynamics create a more relatable and closer connection between the content creators and their audience, leading to micro-celebrification.

Finally, this analysis reveals that institutional credentials do not necessarily contribute to micro-celebrification in the language teaching subculture of TikTok. Instead, credibility is built on high-quality information that audiences perceive as accurate, consistent, and adequate. Providing useful and engaging educational content is more effective in earning audience trust and support, enabling content creators to achieve success in micro-celebrification (Zhang & Choi, 2022) without the need to emphasize formal qualifications.

These findings are particularly noteworthy as they directly challenge traditional concepts of teacher authority and credibility within English Language Teaching (ELT). Conventionally, an ELT teacher's authority and credibility have been primarily rooted in institutional recognition and formal training (Carpenter et al., 2022). This paradigm positions the teacher as the primary dispenser of knowledge, legitimized by their institutional backing and academic credentials.

However, the findings suggest a significant departure from this model. On TikTok, the emphasis shifts from who the teacher is—their qualifications or institutional affiliations—to what they provide: high-quality, accurate, and engaging content. Expertise is redefined as the ability to deliver relatable and practically useful linguistic insights to a broad audience, rather than relying solely on formal pedagogical training. Unlike Facebook tutors, who often emphasize their offline credentials to establish legitimacy (Koowuttayakorn, 2017), TikTok creators validate their expertise through the

quality and relatability of their content, effectively reshaping the notion of authority.

This transformation challenges traditional teacher-student power dynamics, as audience engagement and perceived usefulness become central to constructing credibility. It highlights the unique dynamics of TikTok and its impact on reshaping perceptions of authority and credibility in language learning. These findings also raise important questions for ELT professionals and institutions about whether traditional markers of legitimacy remain relevant or sufficient in an evolving digital landscape.

Overall, the findings highlight the distinctive characteristics of micro-celebrification within TikTok's language teaching subculture, offering insights that distinguish this study from previous research. Unlike conventional teaching approaches, these content creators seamlessly integrate linguistic knowledge with cultural and personal elements, creating a more dynamic and contextually relevant learning experience.

In contrast to professional Thai university teachers who use TikTok primarily as a platform for creativity and enjoyment without pursuing micro-celebrity status (Ulla et al., 2024), the TikTok tutors in this study take an opposite approach. For them, achieving micro-celebrity status is integral to their career success and income, making high audience engagement and sustained visibility through educational content essential. By capturing these unique practices, particularly within the context of Thai users, this study adds new insights to the field of digital language education, demonstrating TikTok's potential to redefine how English is taught and learned in culturally specific online spaces.

Conclusion and Implications

The present study focuses on exploring TikTok as a venue for informal language teaching and learning and micro-celebrity attainment among newer generations of language teachers. TikTok tutors have transformed the stereotypical role of a teacher by delivering consumable, entertaining, and interactive content that caters to the emotional and entertainment needs of social media learners. Specifically, TikTok tutors construct social media personas that are relatable and credible by providing useful knowledge, being entertaining, engaging with the audience, and using linguistic and cultural repertoires akin to their audiences.

This study, though not situated within a formal institutional context, offers significant implications for social media-based pedagogical practices. Given that online teaching has gained as much importance as traditional in-person language teaching methods, it is likely that many prospective teachers will explore social media for pedagogical purposes. To employ platforms like

TikTok in more beneficial ways, teachers could learn how to leverage the site's affordances in a manner that is culturally, linguistically, and generationally appropriate for their target audience, by incorporating quality information with positive emotional connections and relatable identity work.

Beyond individual teacher practices, these findings highlight a crucial challenge for language curriculum developers and teacher education programs: the degree to which they acknowledge and incorporate this form of informal learning into their pedagogical design. Therefore, initial teacher education and professional development training are essential to assist aspiring educators in understanding how to strategically utilize available digital resources. Specifically, this training could include modules on content creation for short-form video, strategies for digital self-branding and cultivating an online professional identity, and fostering critical media literacy among both educators and learners regarding online credibility.

However, it is also vital to acknowledge the inherent risks of this edutainment model. The emphasis on entertainment and bite-sized content, particularly in the absence of formal teaching credentials, can foster surface-level engagement and oversimplification of complex linguistic concepts. Crucially, the deemphasis on institutional vetting raises concerns about the potential for misinformation or pedagogically unsound practices. This necessitates robust critical media literacy from both creators and learners to navigate online credibility effectively.

Limitations and Future Research

In the realm of research on social media-mediated communication, a key challenge lies in aligning scholarly traditions with the ever-evolving landscape of internet technologies. One notable limitation the present study encounters pertains to the research approach. While the utilization of holistic and dominantly qualitative methods facilitates an in-depth exploration of participants' micro-celebrification, the analyses heavily rely on the author's interpretative skills, as well as their personal and cultural biases and idiosyncrasies. Moreover, the author acknowledges a limitation associated with the sampling methodology, where sociotechnical design and algorithmic power direct users to specific content and digital spaces. The inherent bias in the platform's recommendation algorithms may impact the representativeness of the sample, introducing potential biases in the findings and in interpreting the results, despite the author's efforts to capture diverse experiences.

A second limitation is linked to the study's sample size. Although the research yields valuable insights into TikTokers' micro-celebrification who use Thai within the English language teaching subculture, generalizing these

findings to broader populations beyond the samples proves challenging due to the dynamic nature of social media landscapes. Additionally, the vast volume of available online data on the TikTok platform posed a significant challenge in selection and focus. To address this, the author chose to concentrate on the 15 most recent posts per account. However, this decision comes with its own set of limitations. Snapshots of the content creators' practices within a fixed timeframe may truncate observations of interactions and hinder a comprehensive understanding of their teaching behaviors and evolving micro-celebrity practices.

Because of these limitations, future research is needed to measure the relative importance of these practices quantitatively. The author also encourages future research to draw on a deeper perspective on the tutors' motivations through case studies and in-depth interviews. Expanding the sample size could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Finally, future research could analyze TikTok profiles from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds for a deeper understanding of global micro-celebrification through multilingual and multicultural perspectives.

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