

# Constructing Hope in Hopelessness: Politics of Hope and Playful Resistances of Affective Publics in TikTok's #corecore #pinoycore

John Rovic Catangay

## Abstract

TikTok has been a site for increasing political activities. But what exactly constitutes political activity? I analyzed #corecore, a trend in the social media platform TikTok that portrays hopelessness in our present realities, and its localization through its combination with #pinoycore. I located the affective political performances of the trend's creators. Employing thematic analysis to 37 videos, I firstly identified the themes of playful affordances that allowed for the (re)production of #corecore #pinoycore videos. I argued that sound bites, hashtags, and weaved short clips in a single short-form video allows for the constant production and reproduction of #corecore #pinoycore. Second, I identified three affective themes - (1) affective news, (2) tragic reality of social, political, and economic conditions, and (3) recollecting the past - that allow the trend to carry intense emotions in its political performances. The playful affordances and affective intensities that exist in #corecore #pinoycore allow politics of hope and playful resistances to be performed through the trend. Such is seen through a critique of Philippines' present realities and a reimagination of future possibilities. These affective political performances unearth the role of emotions such as hope and hopelessness in shaping the political, along with its performances and possibilities.

Keywords: affect, playful affordances, politics of hope, TikTok, #corecore #pinoycore

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## Introduction

On January 1, 2021, TikTok user @masonelle posted a video of short clips edited together showing the problems with climate crisis, US army, and media oversaturation (Mendez II, 2023). This trend had the hashtag “#corecore.” Videos curated under the #corecore hashtag follow the same format: multiple short clips accompanied by somber music, combined into one video conveying an emotional message. These messages usually tackle depression, dread, and alienation (Ewens, 2023). #corecore started in Tumblr and Twitter in 2020 to critique the oversaturation of “-cores” as a suffix attached to mundane things to make them a type of aesthetic (Townsend, 2023). Its meaning changed on TikTok because of its anti-capitalist and environmentalist messages (Townsend, 2023). @masonelle, in an interview, argued that #corecore’s strength lies in its inability to be “categorized, commodified,” (para. 11) providing users with freedom as to what messages #corecore can convey (Mendez II, 2023).

#corecore is contextualized locally through its combination with the hashtag #pinoycore, portraying Filipino aesthetic. Being a hashtag, it functions as an aggregating tool that may include or exclude various categories depending on their relevance to the category (Giolo & Berghman, 2023). In this sense, the #corecore trend becomes localized, as exclusions of other contexts is done through its combination with #pinoycore. In the Philippines, social media platforms and Internet memes can be utilized as a form of airing discontents to the government and encouragement for the people to partake in politics (Agojo et. al., 2023; De Leon & Ballesteros-Lintao, 2021). Hashtags may also construct solidarities that exist through affective intensities, providing spaces for critique of existing social structures, such as the hashtag #HijaAko’s critique of misogyny in the country (Sabalza, 2024).

My paper’s interest lies in the political aspect of #corecore and #pinoycore. Using the lens of affective publics, lack of an ideological commitment does not remove the political from the act; the act of resistance itself, despite its reliance on intensity of emotions, can bring the personal to the level of the political, allowing narratives to be networked, circulated, recreated, and maintained (Papacharissi, 2015b). Moreover, the hopeless themes of #corecore may be capable of constructing politics of hope, challenging dominant narratives and discourses in politics, thereby opening “a future that might be otherwise” (Carlson & Frazer, 2020, p. 8). These contents reflect untraditional resistances, reflecting the frustrations and fatalism felt by the users in the current world without necessarily attempting to solve their causes (Hautea et. al., 2021). #corecore’s hopeful potential extends

further from itself. Months after #corecore became a trend, videos with #hopecore started to emerge, centering on hope.

The research's significance lies in unearthing the potential for digital resistances on TikTok. Most research in digital resistances in the Philippines revolve around the use of Facebook and Twitter as platforms for resistances (Agojo et. al., 2023; De Leon & Ballesteros-Lintao, 2021; Sabalza, 2024) while research on TikTok in the Philippines has mainly focused on disinformation (McCargo, 2022; Mendoza, 2022). However, far from being captured by propaganda and disinformation, TikTok has the space for digital resistances. The paper also shows how individuals construct hope through the creation of media content itself and not just their mere interactions with it. Finally, my paper follows Papacharissi's (2015b) criticism of the emotional/rational division in politics, where political acts exist outside the realm of the emotional, deemed irrational. Instead, the paper shows how the political is constructed through intensities of pre-rational emotions, which critique present realities and reimagine political possibilities.

### **TikTok as a site of the political**

TikTok is a social media application featuring short-form video content, usually under three minutes (MacKinnon et. al. 2021; Grandinetti & Bruisma, 2022; Vijay & Gekker, 2021; Vizcaíno-Verdú & Abidin, 2022). Known as "Douyin" in Mainland China, the Chinese company ByteDance merged with Musical.ly, a lip-synching app, and released TikTok globally in 2017 - creating an application rivaling other short-form video-sharing applications like Vine or Dubsmash (Darvin, 2022a; Krutrök, 2021; Vijay & Gekker, 2021; Vizcaíno-Verdú & Abidin, 2022; Zulli & Zulli, 2020). TikTok's growth has been significant during the COVID-19 pandemic, reaching around 800 million registered users last 2021 (MacKinnon et. al., 2021; Southerton, 2021). Part of TikTok's success is its ability to promote the content through the application's "For You" page algorithm which suggests videos to users based on individual engagement (likes, comments, and shares) instead of user following, creating a more personalized algorithm (Darvin, 2022a; MacKinnon et. al., 2021; Mendoza, 2022; Ostrovsjy & Chen, 2020). This allows users to interact and see content created by like-minded people in the app (Şot, 2022). However, Darvin (2022a) notes that the algorithm urges users to prioritize content that can be imitated and replicated for the user's individual growth on the platform instead of incentivizing them to connect with others and share lived experiences. Social media posts may also differ from the real-life event it was based on, distorting reality and fiction (Georgakopoulou, 2021, as cited in Darvin, 2022b). Hence, TikTok

videos may be a combination of what is observed and constructed, allowing users to connect with others without fully sharing their lived experiences.

The creation of short-form content using TikTok's audio-visual features allow for open media creation, bypassing the media gatekeepers (traditional media companies) which had the power to decide which events can be featured in media content (Lerat et. al., 2023). Such creation allows users to create content about their personal experiences and struggles, opening private matters to be articulated in the public sphere (King-O'Riain, 2022). Hence, TikTok opens possibilities for discourses about socio-political issues, allowing counterhegemonic narratives to occur.

Counter hegemonic discourses are further made possible using the application's video editing, music usage, and hashtag creation features (Alcazaren & Labor, 2023; Cervi & Marín-Lladó, 2022; Duguay, 2023; King-O'Riain, 2022). As Arantxa Vizcaíno-Verdú and Ignacio Aguaded (2022) observes, the hashtag #ThisIsMeChallenge—which utilized the soundtrack of the film *The Greatest Showman*—opens the space for discussions of racism, homophobia, ableism, and other social issues. TikTok also allows queer users to challenge heteronormative narratives that occur inside and outside of the application (Alcazaren & Labor, 2023; Duguay, 2023;). The ease of creating content, editing videos and captions, and interaction between creator and viewers have allowed queer spaces to occur on TikTok (Alcazaren & Labor, 2023). TikTok has also provided space for discourses on race, as discussions on Asian-American struggles and visibilities have occurred through hashtags like #WasianCheck and #StopAsianHate, the latter occurring as a response to Asian racism that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic (King-O'Riain, 2022; Lee & Lee 2023). Such also shows the ability of TikTok to respond to ongoing social issues.

However, TikTok is also capable of reproducing preexisting structures of oppression. Various humorous videos in the application have perpetuated racism against Asian users, portraying them as the reason for the COVID-19 pandemic through racist audio elements available in the application (Matamoros-Fernández et. al., 2022). Spaces for Asian-American communities can also be occupied by racism in the comment section (King-O'Riain, 2022). Various #FreePalestine videos have also been observed to perpetuate gendered notions of resistances, where male creators portray themselves as fighters while women focus on counternarratives and emotional portrayal of Palestinian struggles (Cervi & Marín-Lladó, 2022). However, such female performances to be utilized to produce critical knowledge, where seemingly innocent actions—cosmetic videos, for instance—can be used to portray Palestinian identity (Cervi &

Marín-Lladó, 2022). TikTok's ability to critique mainstream media have also been used both in attempts to transform society and reproduce existing structures of oppression, reflected through videos that have justified both the Black Lives Matter movement and the Capitol riots (Literat et. al., 2023).

The "For You" page allows users to disseminate information to other people in TikTok, allowing for faster and wider reach of socio-political content. Literature on the politics of TikTok is seen in the lens of either state actors or civic engagement. According to Aries Arugay (2022), social media algorithms and electoral campaigning make a perfect fit. The ability of social media algorithms to "micro-target" users and easily circulate disinformation allows for voters "to campaign for/against a specific candidate..." (Arugay, 2022. p. 7), further polarizing electoral politics. Hence, TikTok may become a "political outrage machine" (Grandinetti & Bruisma, 2022, p. 282) that facilitates political polarization. Political candidates also utilize TikTok to create "short political spectacles" (Serrano et. al., 2020, p. 264) through personalized political advertisements. In the Philippines, Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr.'s presidential candidacy was characterized by its utilization of social media for political polarization and disinformation. On TikTok, his campaign was further amplified through the content created by his supporters. According to Maria Elize Mendoza (2022), the popularity of TikTok, rooted in its short-form content and its "For You" page, allowed Bongbong's supporters to produce independent content that glorifies the Marcos family and Marcos Sr.'s regime, effectively painting them into a "good family" and further campaigning Marcos Jr. by simultaneously connecting him to his father's legacy while distancing him from Marcos Sr.'s mistakes. However, Jonathan Corpus Ong (2022) critiques the hyperfixation of scholars on the problem of disinformation, arguing that such an analysis inadvertently places the blame of political polarization and instability on less educated, poor, and young audiences deemed illiterate on handling information in media. Regardless, TikTok undoubtedly provides space for disinformation and polarization to occur in Philippine politics.

TikTok can also be used to promote civic engagement. Social media opens the space for digital activism, with TikTok providing elements for newer forms of resistance (Cervi & Divon, 2023). Hashtags, combined with an algorithm that allows users to expand the reach of their content, provide more possibilities in "civic engagement and participation," where users "challenge dominant discourses through video production" (Zhao & Abidin, 2021, p. 1). This gives ordinary citizens the ability to enter political discourses, creating a more democratized digital space. This democratization of TikTok's digital space occurs despite the application's seemingly hands-off approach to "ensuring healthy or civil exchange" (Vijay

& Gekker, 2021, p. 727). Civic participation on TikTok has allowed users to engage in various political topics like elections (Vijay & Gekker, 2021), health information (Southerton, 2021), and climate change (Hautea et. al., 2021). Young activists have also increased their digital civic engagement, as their adocacies become more visible online (Hautea et. al., 2021).

In essence, the emergence of TikTok and its unique functions have allowed the users of the application to create short-form content that produces discourses about various socio-political issues. The application can be used both to perpetuate disinformation for political gain and to promote social justice and democratization. However, politics is not always as explicit as most literature suggests. Nor is its grassroots political participation organized and homogenous. Hence, the interactions of videos in TikTok to various segments of society is riddled with complexities and multitudes of possibilities.

### **Affect and affordances**

Zizi Papacharissi (2015b) defines affect as “the sum of—often discordant—feelings about affairs, public and private...that drives, neutralizes, or entraps networked publics” (p. 7). Such a definition puts an emphasis on the role of emotional intensities in digital civic participation. Hence, affect is characterized by intensity; it “precedes emotions and drives the intensity with which emotions are felt” (Papacharissi, 2015b, p. 15). As Carlson and Frazer (2020) put it, “[a]ffect is what binds us together, what moves us, and what makes us capable of feeling and acting upon the world” (p. 5). Affect, then, disrupts the emotional/rational dichotomy of the political, where politics is claimed to be seen only in rational actors who can dismiss emotions to create decisions that affect the public (Papacharissi, 2015a).

The intersection of affect and technology constructs affective publics: “networked public formations that are mobilized and connected or disconnected through expressions of public sentiment” (Papacharissi, 2015b, p. 125). The author further claims that these publics interact with technology and each other, constructing collective identities or communities from such interactions. These affective publics see “politics as potentiality” (Carlson & Frazer, 2020, p. 3), where they push the possibilities of what constitutes as political on social media. In other words, “agency is semantically and affectively accessed, and claims to power are performed” (Papacharissi, 2015b, p. 114). Hence, through the politics experienced and performed by affective publics, they can use social media to negotiate their place in the world and resist existing structures of oppression. These subjectivities create a sense of connective actions that enable “democracy

of emotions,” where what is felt can constitute acts that connect us with other people (liking, commenting, or sharing a video) and relay the feeling of sameness, thereby allowing civic participation (Giddens, 1999, as cited in Papacharissi, 2015b, p. 25). As Vijay and Gekker (2021) note, these affective acts have become a part of political participation, allowing users to shape the results of major political events like elections.

The structure and functions of TikTok shape how the users create affective content. The interaction between TikTok’s properties and its users is termed as affordance (Norman, 1999, as cited in Vizcaíno-Verdú & Abidin, 2022). Another definition of affordances is “the perceived actual or imagined properties of social media, emerging through the relation of technological, social, and contextual, that enable and constrain specific uses of the platforms” (Ronzhyn et. al., 2022, p. 3178). For Jenny Davis (2020), “affordances mediate between a technology’s features and its outcomes” (p. 6). In other words, affordances reflect the interaction between the given functions and structures of a social media platform and the possible uses of an individual of such functions and structures. According to İrem Şot (2022), users utilize such affordances, reflected through a social media’s “various combinations of media, including text, image, audio, video, but also in terms of algorithmic systems they offer” (p. 1496), to generate intimacies and become connected with each other. Features like the “For You” algorithm, caption creation, hashtag function, and video editing with templates and soundbites allow for content to become more visible to outside networks and enable users to increase their videos’ traction (Hautea et. al., 2021). This creates a far-reaching affective public, further maintaining the intensity of emotions that can be circulated in the application through constant recreation.

To conclude, social media has created an avenue for the so-called affective publics to exist, giving them space for a more accessible and intensely emotional civic participation. This participation may be political in the sense that it shapes conventional political phenomena that is observed in the world. The public’s ability to publicize their private experiences and thoughts also provide space for identity politics (Papacharissi, 2015b). Moreover, social media can also be a site for negotiating and resisting political structures, done in a way that elucidates the intensity of emotions that comes with negotiations and resistances. Through the “For You” page, users can engage with content from creators that they may not be following. The ease of interaction that TikTok’s structures provide allows for active engagements, connecting users together, even if the content may be personal to the creator. Such ease of interaction also allows for the maintenance of an otherwise quickly-fleeting intensity of emotions, brought by digital

footprints and constant reproductions (Papacharissi, 2015b). Furthermore, these TikTok videos may allow for both an articulation of identity and a negotiation of the identity's place in various social, political, and economic conditions.

### **Hope and playful resistance**

Hope mainly concerns itself with the possibilities of the future that is deemed better than the present (Bayramoğlu, 2021; Berlant, 2011; Carlson & Frazer, 2020; Duggan & Muñoz, 2009; Savaş, 2019). Hope may challenge current hegemonic narratives, opening “a future that might be otherwise” (Carlson & Frazer, 2020, p. 8). Lauren Berlant (2011) argues that hope, manifested in optimism for a future “good life,” becomes cruel when it prevents itself from being realized. However, Ben Anderson (2006) differentiates hope and optimism, the former coming from a possibility of a better “not-yet” that deviates from the normalcy of everyday life. Indeed, some have argued that hope may result in disappointment in slow changes (Savaş, 2019), maintain inequalities and status quo (Lindroth & Sinevaara-Niskanen, 2019), or reproduce conditions of oppression (Warren, 2015). Emotions such as despair may also be seen as loss of hope or “a sense of futility or defeat” (Govier, 2011, p. 247).

However, various thinkers have also argued that hope may not be a contradiction to negative emotions or mere enabler of current conditions. Hope can be seen as dialectical and not contradicting with hopelessness; its contradiction is complacency, the happiness of settling with the present conditions (Duggan & Muñoz, 2009). Hence, hope is not a solution to grief but a co-constitutive feeling, which allows the individual to move past the grief and into working for a better tomorrow (Duggan & Muñoz, 2009). Indeed, hopelessness may open hopes for a better future through the belief that the present conditions tramples over one's rights or identity (Bayramoğlu, 2021). Hope, different from “fanciful daydreaming,” opens possibilities for criticisms of the present life (Carlson & Frazer, 2020). Hope, in this sense, “is an opening to the future-in-the-present” that asserts the desires of those in struggle, allowing hope to be “part of this reality: the very knowledge that odds stacked against change propels the holding on, the carrying on” (Wright, 2019, p. 14).

Affective capacities open possibilities for hope that manifests in political action. Collectives connected by affect become grounds for hope, creating space for collective imagination of a better future and movements which may result in the future's attainment (Savaş, 2019). Affective everyday politics may also exist from a politics of hope, performing politics through intensity of emotions to resist present oppressive structures and reimagine

a better alternative (Carlson & Frazer, 2020). These resistances are done in many ways. Digital activism provides space for telling stories that when projected and echoed, may make individual concerns global (Cervi & Divon 2023). Social media also provides spaces for decentralized activism, where networked individuals may share advocacies without official memberships to traditional activist organizations (Hautea et. al., 2021). These individuals can articulate their advocacies to the broader public and shape social discourses without the usual gatekeepers of media like news outlets (Hautea et. al., 2021). Hashtag activism is a good example of such decentralization, having “the capacity to create stories on social media by using hashtags in a way that is collective and recognized by the public” (Yang, 2016, as cited in Zhao & Abidin, 2021, p. 2). Feminist activist movements have utilized this method successfully both by further pushing the personal as political through networked interactions of collective experiences and by opening the movement to people outside formal organizations (Clark, 2016; Sabalza, 2024). Hence, affective publics maintain the intensity of their advocacies through a grassroots, decentralized, and recreated moments of emotional civic engagement.

Political actors may also resist or be critical of political actions from usual political discourses and structures without proposing alternative systems and policies. Such political actions may be seen as resistant acts that challenge accepted social orders and narratives (McFarland, 2004, as cited in Clark, 2016). In TikTok’s specific context, political participation may be seen as “casual politicking,” seen in a “lack of ideological commitment and short-cycle repetitive patterns of use” (Gekker, 2019, as cited in Vijay & Gekker, 2021, p. 718). As such, TikTok’s affordances allow for affective publics to resist established political systems playfully, a manner that is different from usual forms of resistances. As Cervi and Divon (2023) note, TikTok allows users to perform “playful activism” (p. 2) using its affordances to create short-form video content to achieve political goals by normalizing political engagement as an everyday playful activity in what anyone can participate in. This “playful political engagement” (Vijay & Gekker, 2021, p. 714) can democratize the political arena and allow for easy-to-reach political participation. As Songer and Miyata (2014) puts it, “play begets play without a need for an outside stimulus and fuels its own engagement as an autotelic activity” (p. 4). Moreover, play challenges the usual notions of citizen participation, as the former infects the latter, allowing strangers to self-organize and open possibilities for playful civic engagement (Hartley, 2010). On TikTok, this possibility is evaluated through engagement, where “modes of play” (Vijay & Gekker, 2021, p. 729) that get more traction are

more likely to be utilized through interaction and replication of more famous short-form content. In using playful expressions to converge “private fantasy and public discourse” (Papacharissi, 2015b, p. 107), individuals may act humorous, provocative, and nostalgic, expressing affectively intense messages through a creative manner (Papacharissi, 2015b, p. 107).

Overall, political action on TikTok can give space not only for conventional politics but also in everyday forms of resistances, done in a playful manner. Such playful resistances are done with intensity of affect, capable of bringing hope into future possibilities. These resistances also exist in accordance with the possibilities set by TikTok’s affordances. In attempting to locate hope and playful resistances, we may be able to better understand the capabilities of TikTok as a space for political articulation by those that are usually left out in the study of politics.

## **Research Problem**

Literature on TikTok’s political capabilities focus on either the state actors’ ability to utilize the application for propaganda and disinformation (Arugay, 2022; McCargo, 2022; Mendoza, 2022;) or the ability of civic participation for advocacies (Cervi & Divon, 2023; Hautea et. al., 2021; Karizat et. al., 2021; MacKinnon et. al., 2021; Southerton, 2021; Vijay & Gekker, 2021). However, these do not articulate possibilities of everyday forms of resistance that exist outside of such conventional politics (Tria Kerkvliet, 2009). My paper fills this gap, focusing on resistances that rely on affective publics, connected not through similarities of advocacies but through intensities of emotions (Papacharissi, 2015b; Hautea et. al., 2021). Moreover, few have articulated how social media allows for affective publics to construct notions of hope for a better future. My paper articulates this, showing how the affordances of TikTok and its users allow for affective publics to perform politics of hope and reimagine a hopeful future from the seemingly hopeless present.

The paper unearths the underlying politics of hope that exists in #corecore’s short-form content. These trends utilize TikTok’s affordances to convey affective messages centered around counternarratives to existing social and political order, done so through the show of intense emotions instead of ideological underpinnings. Moreover, I uncover the themes of playful resistance that the trend contains. In accordance with Papacharissi’s (2015a) argument that locality “further shapes the tone and tenor of flows organized by hashtags” (p. 4) and Rachael Shapiro’s (2015) argument that global forces face national specificities that allow for variations of national movements, I locate the politics of hope for #corecore and #hopecore in the Philippine context. This allows for both a reflection on #corecore and

#hopecore's political potential and a better understanding of how TikTok can shape political discourse in the Philippines. My research problems are as follows:

1. How did TikTok's affordances allow for the (re)production of #corecore #pinoycore?
2. What were the affective themes of #corecore #pinoycore?
3. How did #corecore #pinoycore manifest hope and playful resistances?

## Methodology

I utilized hashtag methodology in gathering the data needed for the study. Data collection started by manual searches of the combined hashtags #corecore and #pinoycore on TikTok. The logic of which is to emulate the experience of users when they search for hashtags on TikTok. Since TikTok shows search results based on relevance, videos that contained the hashtags are likely to appear first compared to those that did not. Moreover, despite the search results being ordered by the number of likes, the search was able to gather videos with a variety of likes, since low-liked videos are still shown if they had the hashtags. Manual watching of videos that contained the hashtags were done to all the search results. This continued until the search had gone deep enough that most of the videos contained neither hashtag anymore. Purposive sampling methodology is then used to decide upon which videos are representative of the study. Initially, only videos with #corecore #pinoycore and #hopecore #pinoycore combinations were included in the sample. However, upon further immersion with the data, other hashtags such as #pinoycorecore, #filipinocore, and #corecore with no #pinoycore but is situated in the Philippine context were added to the sample, so long as it had the same themes as the initial samples. Data was cleaned through the removal of duplicates.

The data was analyzed using thematic analysis. The initial sample is repeatedly and manually watched, as I take notes on the general themes that emerge. As more themes emerged in the data, videos with no #corecore but had #pinoycore were also added, if they fit the general themes constructed. After constructing the general themes of the sample, "playful affordance" (Cervi & Divon 2023) themes and affective themes—using Papacharissi's (2015b) affective publics as a lens—were analyzed. Finally, both findings are synthesized to reconstruct the affective playful resistances that occur on the sample data.

These data were gathered in April 2023. Upon such time, there were only a limited number of samples from the research, given the particularity of the data. The total number of #corecore sample was thirty-seven (37) while

#hopecore was five. There were three videos that had #corecore, #hopecore, and #pinoycore on their videos. At the time of the data gathering, the

**Table 1.**  
*Metrics of #corecore #pinoycore and #hopecore #pinoycore*

| Videos                  | Mean Views | Mean Likes | Highest Vies | Lowest Views | Highest Likes | Lowest Likes |
|-------------------------|------------|------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|
| #corecore<br>#pinoycore | 293,133.52 | 48,584.78  | 2,100,000    | 447          | 289,100       | 28           |
| #hopecore<br>#pinoycore | 207,870.50 | 53,246     | 826,360      | 769          | 212,486       | 20           |

*Note:* The data was acquired from the publicly available data on the TikTok application. Each video’s likes and views reflected from the application were manually collated and tabulated to extrapolate the data presented in the table by the author.

sample was quite low. Moreover, official metrics of #corecore, #hopecore, and #pinoycore’s reach is currently unavailable to the public. Table 1 reflects the traction that the videos have acquired.

This shows that, despite the small sample size, various examples captured in the sample have indeed become viral. Moreover, the low sample size means that the study is not generalizable to all TikTok users in the country. Instead, the study shows a particular phenomenon that various users have experienced in the application. It is this phenomenon that the study further unearths and analyzes.

**General themes**

General themes were constructed from the samples of #corecore #pinoycore. These videos follow a general overarching theme of sadness and hopelessness, further analyzed on the latter parts of the paper. However, three main themes can be categorized between various #corecore #pinoycore samples: mental health and depression, nostalgia, and political and economic discontent. These themes are seen in Figure 1.

The main themes are not independent of each other. Instead, two or three themes can be reflected on the samples. Figure 2 shows how such can occur.

Figure 2 shows various scenes in a single #corecore #pinoycore video, starting with a short video clip of a Department of Education official laughing at the alleged suicide of a student due to schoolwork. This is followed by a timelapse that shows the mundanity of night traffic in the Philippines. Following this is a clip of an old Filipino movie, showing two old couples fighting, with the man saying that he is a worthless person.

**Figure 1.**  
*General Themes of #corecore #pinoycore*

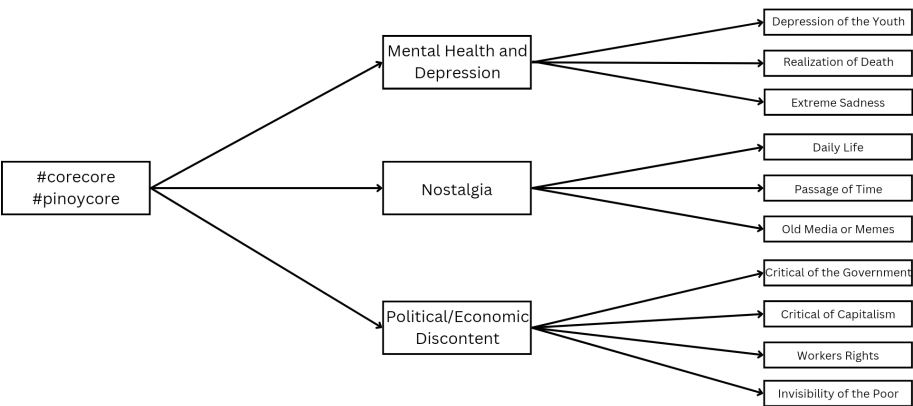


Figure 2 provides us with a vivid visualization of the three themes found in #corecore #pinoycore videos. The theme of depression is linked with political discontent, as the mention of death is intertwined with the state looking down on mental health struggles of ordinary people. Extreme sadness is also shown using old media, highlighting the seemingly persistent feeling of sadness and hopelessness.

These general themes are pivotal to the understanding of #corecore #pinoycore. The playful affordances of such a trend allows for further replication, reproduction, and reach of such videos through the structural norms that it creates. This allows for further participation of TikTok users. Affect shapes the ways in which these users can become affective publics through #corecore #pinoycore’s affective use of the trend’s audiovisual structure. As seen in Figure 2, spliced short videos carry an affective narrative that allows for the construction of certain emotions that rationalize the existence of different videos and audios into a single video. Affect, in this sense, is important in constructing the coherence and meaning of #corecore #pinoycore videos.

**Playing with structure: The playful affordances of #corecore #pinoycore**

TikTok’s structure—seen through the various features that it offers along with the “For You” targeted algorithm that it uses—plays a significant role in shaping the type of content that exists within the application. These structures may be seen as rules that users must abide by, enabling them to create videos only within the realm of possibilities offered by the application itself. These rules may be formal, seen in TikTok contents’ ability to use

music or audio files, or informal, seen in various characteristics of trends that occur in the platform that creators have to follow to gain traction.

TikTok can also be seen as a game, where the goal of users creating videos is to gather enough traction to be a part of the “For You” page of multiple other users. Moreover, while TikTok has some structures that allow certain types of videos to be made, the content of these videos remain in the hands of the creators. Hence, while the game’s design shapes its rules, playful resistances can occur when such games encourage their players to play out real life scenarios and commit such resistances within the game itself (Huang & Liu, 2022). These structures seen in functions and designs can therefore encourage or discourage users to do specific acts that involve such technology (Davis, 2020). In the context of TikTok, however, the game to be played is whoever gets more traction in their videos. As a result, activism on TikTok utilizes memes and challenges, blurring “the tensions between play and political participation” (Cervi & Divon, 2023, p. 3) that utilize trends to discuss socio-political issues in the real world. In the context of #corecore #pinoycore, the political can emerge from (or even be the center of) the trend itself. The addition of #pinoycore further localizes the emergence of the political to the Philippine context. This playful nature of politics exists precisely because of the features of TikTok. Hence, TikTok allows for playful affordances that mediate Tiktok’s structure with the political actions of its users (Cervi & Divon, 2023).

**Figure 2.**

*A #corecore #pinoycore video containing all the main themes*



*Note:* Figure 2a’s subtitle translates as “[they] allegedly committed suicide”. Figure 2c’s subtitle translates as “I am a worthless person.” From #pinoycore #corecore #nichetok (@rikasosa, 2023b)

In understanding the playful affordances that exist within the videos of #corecore #pinoycore, I utilize Robert Songer and Kazuroni Miyata’s (2014) four categories of playful affordances: contest-and-challenge, exploration-and-discover, imagination-and-creativity, and sensation-and-arousal.

According to Songer and Miyata (2014), “contest, exploration, imagination and sensation, when following a playful disposition, afford the expansion of playful experiences within the context of these activities” (p. 6). My analysis’ approach is inspired by Cervi and Divon’s (2023) article on the playful activism that existed in Palestinian resistances that utilized #challenges in TikTok. As such, I adopt their operationalization of Songer and Miyata’s (2014) categories of playful affordances. Cervi and Divon operationalized contest-and-challenge as the “performative rules” that users follow to interact with existing trending videos that become “viral performances” (2023, p. 3). Further borrowing from the authors, exploration-and-discovery will be observed through the use of hashtags that allow for a video to be discovered and added into the “For You” page of other users and be connected to. Imagination-and-creativity focuses on the trend’s “template” which serve as the framework for its creation (Cervi & Divon 2023). Finally, the authors operationalized sensation-and-arousal is the emotional performance that the users employ to generate the virality of their work, done through the modulation and amplification of affect and “elicited through... how users recruit and mobilize their visual and discursive sentiments and feelings” (p. 4) to portray certain social realities. In the context of my study, contest and challenge, along with exploration and discovery, point to the basic characteristics that #corecore #pinoycore videos must have in order to follow the said trend. Imagination and creativity correspond to how these basic characteristics are put together to create a coherent and cohesive trend in itself. Finally, sensation and arousal correspond to how such trend portray affect, making those that support and participate to it a part of an “affective public” that carries the same affective feelings.

### ***Contest-and-challenge***

The performative rules of #corecore #pinoycore that exist in the contest-and-challenge category can be manifested in both the music and video clips and images used in video creation. Majority of the music used in reproducing #corecore #pinoycore videos are instrumental. The use of instrumental music by the samples amounted to 33 times, while non-instrumental music amounted to seven. The usage of music exceeded the total sample size as some videos used more than one music. The most used music was “QKThr” by Aphex Twin, used 20 times. Second to it was “i broke a string making this part, you gotta leave a like” by TikTok user @jake25.17, amounting to eight times. The two music clips, along with most of the instrumental music used, featured slow piano music. Visual themes, on the other hand, have more data. This is due to the structure of #corecore videos, which ties shorter video clips and images into a single, longer, short-form

video. Moreover, these videos and images may overlap, where the audio clip from one video may keep playing while another video or image is on screen. The visual themes are as seen in Table 2.

**Table 2.**  
Visual Themes for #corecore #pinoycore

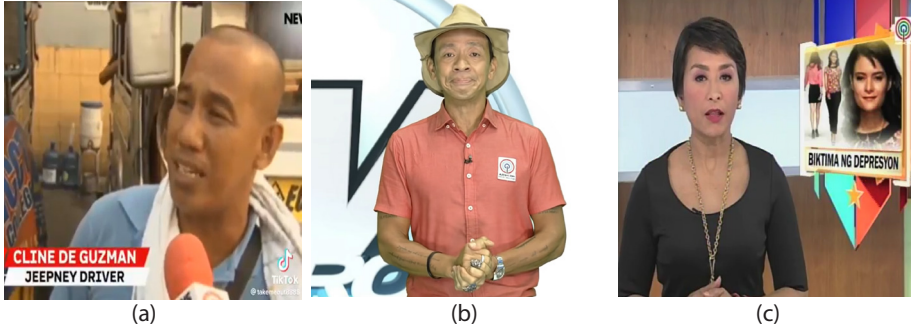
| Rank | Visual Themes                                                                   | Frequency |
|------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| 1    | News                                                                            | 18        |
| 2    | Everyday Mundanity                                                              | 14        |
| 3    | People in Tears                                                                 | 13        |
| 4    | Critical of the Governemnt<br>Related to Death                                  | 12        |
| 5    | Interviews                                                                      | 11        |
| 6    | Images of Politicians                                                           | 10        |
| 7    | Memes<br>Old Media<br>Passing of Time                                           | 9         |
| 8    | Critique of Capitalism<br>Eat Bulaga<br>Images and Videos of Protests<br>Nature | 8         |
| 9    | Creator Present in the Video                                                    | 7         |
| 10   | Celebration<br>Images and Videos of People in Factory or at Work<br>Timelapse   | 5         |
| 11   | Political Advertisements<br>Suicide and Mental Health Statistics                | 4         |
| 12   | Family                                                                          | 2         |

The news was most used by the samples. These videos can be seen in all three general themes presented earlier in the paper. Figure 3 shows some examples.

Videos under the visual theme are clips taken out from news shows either in the Philippines or depict the Philippine context. They do not necessarily report the news. Some of them are instead intersecting with other visual themes. Figure 3a intersects with the “interview” theme, figure 3b intersect with “people in tears” theme as it shows “Kuya Kim”, a renowned journalist, crying as he says goodbye to the camera, and figure 3c intersects with the mental health theme as the journalist reports the risks of death from depression.

**Figure 3.**

*Use of News Clips in #corecore*



*Note:* The news clips commonly intersect with other themes. This is usually due to the topic of the news being reported or the way the news is presented (either through reports or interviews). Figure 3a from @takemeout8888 (personal communication, 2023). Figure 3b from @notbad1\_1 (personal communication, 2023). Figure 3c from real #pinoycore (@trikk.sixt, 2023).

### **Exploration-and-discovery**

Exploration-and-discovery is analyzed through the use of hashtags of the samples gathered. Initial number of #corecore #pinoycore videos were 33. A minimal number of samples variations of the #pinoycore hashtag, such as #pinoycorecore and #filipinocore. Other videos that used #corecore but did not have #pinoycore or any of its variations were also included, provided that the videos were situated in the Philippine context. After gathering the themes for the contest-and-challenge quality, I decided to go back to TikTok and afterwards included two (2) more videos that had #pinoycore but no #corecore but nonetheless reflected the themes of the contest-and-challenge quality. The almost homogenous use of #corecore #pinoycore is important to the interaction between users and the platforms. According to Southerton (2021), “scrolling through a hashtag can elicit realization, curiosity, understanding, clarity, confusion, laughter, fear, shock, and more.” (p. 3260) These responses lead to more traction to the trend, as people are more incentivized to interact with various #corecore #pinoycore videos.

### **Imagination-and-creativity**

The imagination and creativity category is observed through the way in which #corecore #pinoycore combines both its performative rules and hashtag usage to create a template for the video creators. According to Diana Zulli and David James Zulli (2020), features of TikTok have potential to imitate or be imitated. This imitation, therefore, finds itself in an informal rule of following the trend’s template. The template is constructed by a combination of the two hashtags, the former being a global trend while the

latter imparting to it a local character. The global template of #corecore is maintained in the combination. Important to note is that none of the music used by the sample were local, becoming the strongest link between the #corecore and the #corecore #pinoycore videos. As Chance Townsend (2023) observes, “in a corecore post, individually the snippets don’t make sense, but when connected the video gives them a shared context, and therefore a certain power” (para. 14). In this sense, the combination of multiple shorter videos, along with somber music, became a fundamental part of templating the #corecore #pinoycore trend, providing #corecore #pinoycore videos with coherence and allows for the trend’s meaning-making. Moreover, #corecore videos are also combinations of videos that tackle social realities (Mendez II, 2023) and themes of “disconnection and alienation” (Ewens, 2023, para. 1). This is reflected by the samples through the general themes. In this sense, these general themes are a product of the template that is mostly adopted by the #corecore trend that exists transnationally. However, what makes #corecore #pinoycore unique is its local context. Indeed, globalization’s effects must be understood with “national specificity” (Sassen, 2008, as cited in Shapiro, 2015, p. 171). #Pinoycore achieves this, as it puts the global trend of #corecore’s structure on the local context. Moreover, users expect the algorithm to cater to their interests and identities (Bucher, 2017, as cited in Şot, 2022). The six most frequent visual themes from the sample all come from short videos that are situated in the Philippines. Significantly, all news clips either show news programs in the Philippines or international news programs that report about the Philippines. Uniquely Filipino themes have also showed frequently. Eat Bulaga, for instance, is a famous noontime show in the Philippines. Their inclusion into #corecore #pinoycore exists due to one of the hosts claiming that depression is “gawa-gawa lang” [only made-up] and that young people who have it, “huwag ninyong suportahan” [must not be supported]. When taken into the template of #corecore #pinoycore, such clips are used to show the realities of how depression and mental health are understood and treated in the Philippines. Hence, imitation and challenge includes both the imitation of local users to #corecore’s global template while challenging it through #pinoycore by contextualizing it to the lived experiences of those that they share a citizenship with.

In essence, users partaking in #corecore #pinoycore create a type of silly citizenship, where citizens engage in “Do-It-Yourself/Do-It-With-Others” (DIY/DIWO) citizenship that combines “population-wide participation with technological productivity” (Hartley, 2010, p. 240). This allows for purposive play, which incorporates comedy, competition, and emotions to the performance of politics (Hartley, 2010). In TikTok, play is incorporated into participation through the use of its functions. As trends create

performative rules, its affordances itself become playful. These playful affordances of #corecore #pinoycore open spaces for the user to mediate between the application's functions and their own silliness, resulting in playful ways of discussing serious social, political, and economic problems in the Philippines.

### **Affective publics in #corecore #pinoycore**

The trend #corecore #pinoycore is affective, being a product of intense feelings of emotions that push creators to express such intensity in videos and allow viewers to be emotionally connected with the creator's vulnerability and allow for more traction and reproduction of the trend.

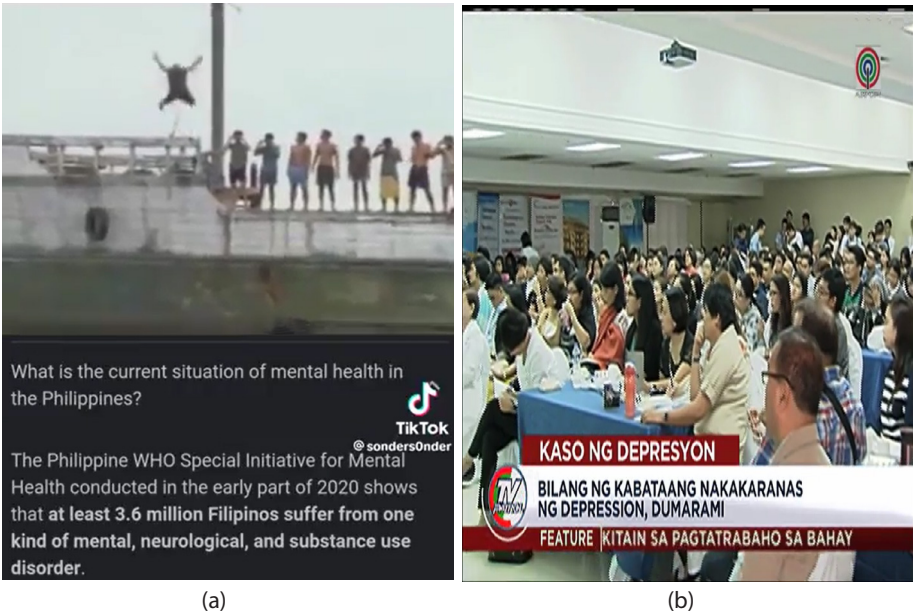
The general themes of #corecore #pinoycore initially reveals the intensity of emotions that exist within the trend. Symbols of depression are inherently intense, seen in the themes of sadness and death. TikTok also opens up "digital grieving communities" that result in "algorithmic closeness" constructed through the intense grief shared among creators and viewers (Krutrök, 2021, p. 9). Political and economic discontent is seen as a form of an everyday politics of affect, where people utilize social media to construct counterhegemonic narratives that go against those that they deem as oppressors (Carlson & Frazer, 2020). Finally, nostalgia recollects the past and connects it to the present through blends of fact and opinion, with such a combination creating an intensity of emotion in the process of recollection (Papacharissi, 2015a). The past, in this context, is not merely objectively portrayed but is used as symbols that carry with them intense feelings of nostalgia. Connections constructed through this affective trend may be understood through the author's concept of affective publics: people in social media that are "connected, identified, and potentially disconnected through expressions of sentiment" (p. 5). Further referring to Papacharissi, all main themes of #corecore #pinoycore show "connective action" (2015b, p. 71) reflected through the sharing of intense sentiments about how the current conditions of society slowly becomes unacceptable. Such show of affect can be seen in #corecore #pinoycore trend through three themes: utilization of news as an avenue for sentiment, showing of the tragic reality of the present social, political, and economic conditions, and recollecting the past. All these themes are affective and connect users and creators into a public that shares the same sentiments about the current social conditions.

### **Affective news**

In #corecore #pinoycore, news is delivered not as a purely objective fact but as a tool to convey the intensity of emotions felt by the video creators. The trend utilizes what Papacharissi (2015b) terms as "affective news", news reporting that mixes opinion and fact, making the sharing of information

more emotional and personal. However, while Papacharissi’s (2015b) affective news involves how news is delivered by the “reporter”, may it be in mainstream media or in social media, #corecore #pinoycore’s affective news functions as a repurposing of the already existing news. Moreover, delivering information does not always become the pivotal point of the trend’s affective news. Instead, affective news involves statistics, interviews, and even news clips that do not report any information, creating a mix of information-centric news and emotion-centric news. Both, however, help flesh out the affective emotions felt by the creator. News, in this sense, becomes a way for the video creators to further intensify the already intense emotions that their content carries. Figure 3 already shows the various ways in which news is utilized. Figure 4 further illustrates the use of news in an affective manner.

**Figure 4.**  
*Affective News in #corecore #pinoycore*



Note: Figure 4a from @sondersOnder (personal communication, 2023). Figure 4b from @renren\_\_\_ (personal communication, 2023).

In Figure 4b, a news report citing cases of depression in the Philippines is shown only in the background. In the foreground is a video of a man in the dark, just listening to the news. This seemingly suggests that the person in the video is suffering from themselves. This act mirrors Papacharissi’s

(2019) argument that affective news blends fact and opinion. However, the news itself does not carry this blend. Instead, the news can act as the fact while the creator themselves acts as the one giving the opinion, all meshed into one video that combines both in one shot. In this sense, #corecore #pinoycore is able to further intensify the feelings conveyed by the actor through the use of news. The same is true for Figure 4a. In it, Joey De Leon's audio clip mentioned before is playing in the background with the song QKThr as a video of a diver drowning in the end is playing while various statistics of suicide and depression rates in the country is shown.

### ***Tragic reality of social, political, and economic conditions***

The trend also shows the tragic reality of the social, political, and economic conditions of Philippine society. Key here is the emphasis of tragedy. The reflection of Philippine society's conditions is shown in a manner that reflects intense feelings of despair, anger, and hopelessness. Figure 5 shows some instances of this.

Figures 5a and 5b show discontent on the political conditions of the Philippines. Figure 5a expresses despair through the video of a jeepney driver crying because of the government's jeepney modernization program. Figure 5b shows a video of a vlogger expressing his anger towards the government's high confidential funds. This is preceded by various video clips that show the political realities that seem to suggest the existence of corruption in the government. He ends his angry monologue by claiming that such corruption exists because many voters are ignorant enough to vote these people in power. These videos all show the tragedy of the Philippines' political system, reflected through affect. The traction that the videos get allows people to be connected, creating an affective public for #corecore #pinoycore. These affective publics support the trend through "connective action," which allows people to connect into one topic but not necessarily into one identity or advocacy (Papacharissi 2015b, p. 71). This is seen through the lack of ideological rigidity of the trend, as videos clash, ranging from empathy to everyday citizens to blaming ignorant voters. However, these videos still uphold the same counterhegemonic action of resisting the political system, following Papacharissi's (2015b) argument that affective publics disrupt "dominant political narratives" (p. 131). These observations stay true for Figure 5c, showing farmers talking about low wages and their lack of land ownership. In one clip, a farmer's interview got its audio cut off by a vlogger talking about the prospect of getting rich through hard work, implying an economic system that privileges getting rich individually rather than helping the poor. Figure 5d juxtaposes the video creator, who is alone in his dark room with no one seeing him, to the video of Joey De Leon

**Figure 5.**  
*Showing the Tragic Conditions of Philippine Society in #corecore #pinoycore*



(a)

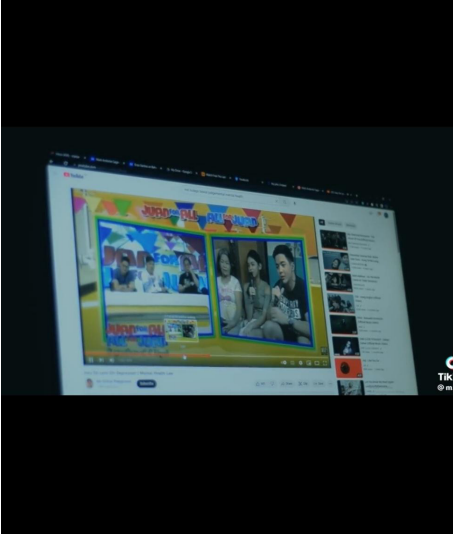


(b)



At first, we just earn P15.00 a day.

(c)



(d)

*Note.* Figure 5a from @wowtalagahaha (personal communication, 2023). Figure 5b from pinoycore #fyp #corecore #pinoycore (@tomatoketchup257, 2023b). Figure 5c from The grindset mindset needs to stop giving unsolicited advice on being rich without checking their privilege, why not question the system that hinders the progress of these community #corecore #pinoycore #nichetok #fyp #fyp #fyp ♪ (@user8840749661759, 2023d). Figure 5d from #fyp #corecore #nichetok #foryoupage #memtalhealthawareness (@m.a.c\_x, 2023)

dismissing depression on national television. This is seen when he sits down and watches the video clip of Eat Bulaga, preceded by video clips showing the passage of time and daily life of the video creator while only the audio clip of the noontime show plays.

### ***Recollecting the past***

#Corecore #pinoycore also carries affective sentiments in the recollection of the past. This recollection has an ambivalent nature. Ambivalence can be seen as a simultaneous saying of yes and no (Webb, 2022). Social media allows creators to utilize this ambivalence by blending different styles of expression, resulting in multitudes of meaning that cannot be fully understood by the viewer (Hautea et. al., 2021). In the context of the trend's nostalgic theme, it allows for both a longing back and a despair for the repetition of the past. Figure 6 shows such instances.

Figure 6a and 6b are the final two scenes in a #corecore #pinoycore video. It shows a person falling asleep while in their graduation and waking up, realizing that they already have a job. These scenes are preceded by video clips that showed old shows and advertisements in the Philippines, from around 1990s to 2010s. Papacharissi (2015b) argues that affect contains a liminal nature, offering individuals to feel “powerful and potentially powerless at the same time” (p. 16). Nostalgia itself may offer this liminal state through constructing a frame of orientation for different individuals, giving them the potential to act upon this orientation (McMorrow, 2018). In the context of the video, the creator orients the viewers to see the past as more fun compared to the dullness of the present. This is done affectively, as the creator shows a level of intensity with the joy of the past before juxtaposing it with the present. Figure 6c and 6d, both found in one video, also compare the past in the present, but shows it in terms of continuity. The video likens the Marcos Sr. regime to a caterpillar that sheds its skin multiple times, showing that the past presidents are nothing more than a continuation of the Marcos regime. This is further shown through short clips of Sisyphus—punished by the gods to repeatedly push a boulder up a hill for all eternity—spread throughout the video. Combined with somber music, it shows intense despair and hopelessness to the repetitive nature of the past. The video stands in contrast to the first video that juxtaposes the past as good. This shows the ambivalence of #corecore #pinoycore's nostalgic themes, where the videos have different potential meanings. What is important, however, is the constant use of affective sentiments that allow the videos to gain traction through affective publics' connectedness.

**Figure 6.**  
*Nostalgic Scenes from #corecore #pinoycore*



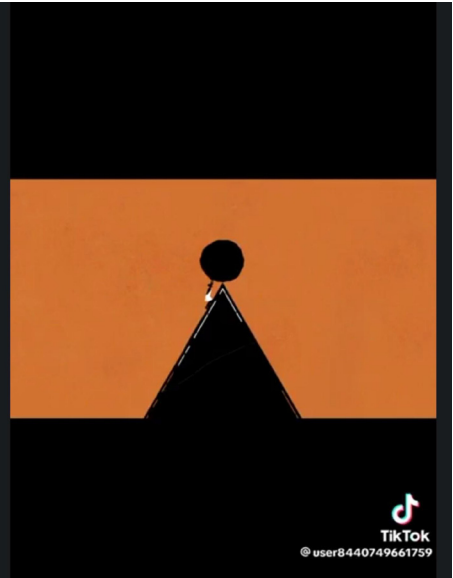
(a)



(b)



(c)



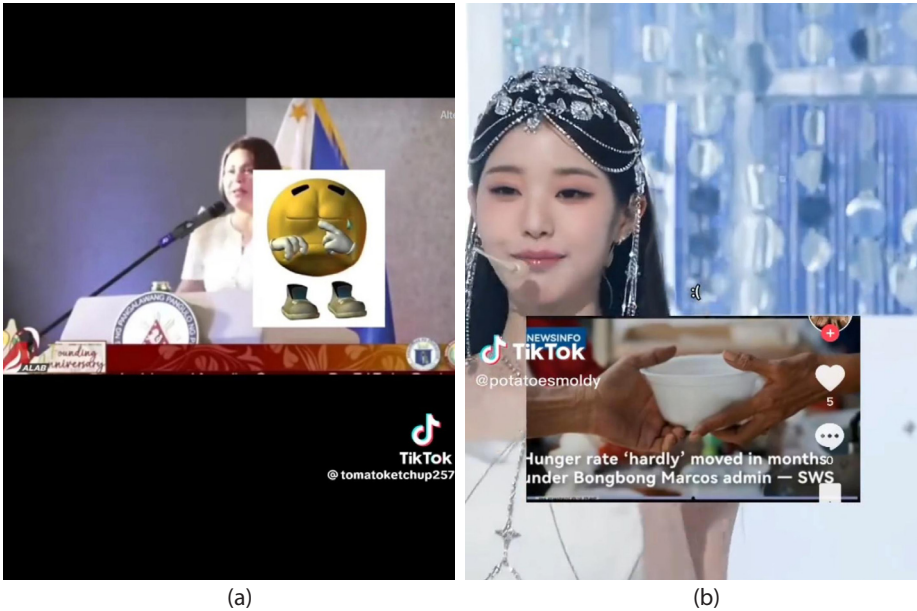
(d)

*Note:* Figures 6a and 6b from pinoycore #corecore #nicetok #core #90stthrowback #fyp #90spinoymovie (@user8840749661759, 2023b). Figures 6c and 6d from pinoycore #pinoypolitics #corecore #nicetok #pinoycore #nichecore (@user8840749661759, 2023c)

**Intersections of affective themes**

The affective themes are intersecting, with most videos utilizing more than one theme at the same time. Figure 7 shows some of these intersections.

**Figure 7.**  
*Intersections of Affective Themes*



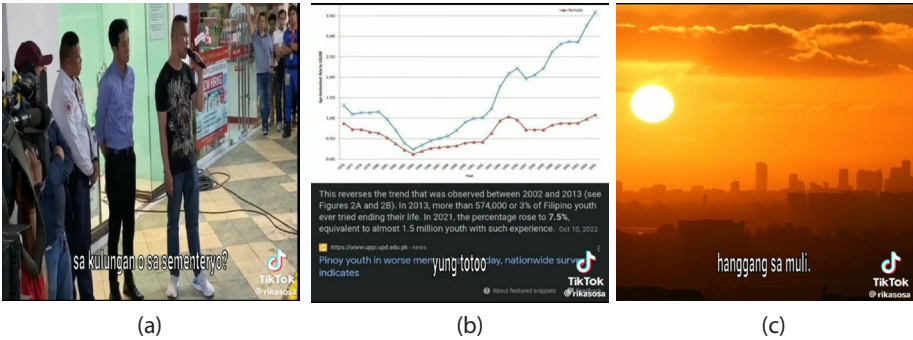
*Note:* The two videos also reflect the differences that occur in #corecore #pinoycore videos. In Figure 7a, emojis are consistently appearing and disappearing, resulting in constant changes throughout the video. In comparison, 7b is unchanging, just showing a picture of a headline with a looping video of a KPOP dancer in the background. Figure 7a from pinoycore #fyp #corecore #pinoycore (@tomatoketchup257, 2023b). Figure 7b from #fyp #foryoupage #coquette #nichetok #pinoycore #corecore #saijiisoverparty (@potatoesmoldy, 2023)

Figure 7a shows a critique of the vice president’s speech that was cut-off so she could put sunblock through the news, blurring fact and opinion and thus making it a form of affective news. Overlaid on top of the clip is a meme showing a distorted image of an emoji crying. The act shows an affective provocation, where the user conveys their emotion through the use of the emoji that both pokes fun at the government’s actions while simultaneously conveying their feelings towards the act, making the video seem more authentic (Papacharissi 2015b). The video also serves as a playful expression of intense emotions, as the video utilizes humor to critique existing government structures before transitioning into a more angry and blatant criticism at the end of the video (Papacharissi 2015b). This further espouses the playful nature of the trend, seen in its playful affordances. The

use of provocation and play is also seen in Figure 7b, which uses a video clip of a K-Pop performance in the background while showing a screenshot of the continuing hunger and poverty experienced by the country. On top of the screenshot is a small sad face, once again allowing the blend of fact and opinion in one video, while poking fun at the administration at the same time. Both videos also underscore Hartley’s (2010) silly citizenship, where comedy and intensity of emotions are heavily intertwined with political performances.

Figure 8 shows how all affective themes can intersect in a single video. The video starts in Figure 8a with a man asking if he will go to jail or to the cemetery, showing political discontent by interrogating the penal system and the possibility of being killed or dying while detained. As the speech’s audio continues, various video clips are shown, one of them being a statistic of young Filipinos who have attempted self-harm (Figure 8b). When suicide and self-harm are taken as a sociological phenomenon (Durkheim, 1971), the clip shows discontent in a society that perpetuates such an act. This is intertwined with the affective use of statistics to invoke feelings of despair that comes with the realization of death, either done to the self or coming from others. The video ends with a news anchor saying goodbye to their viewers, accompanied by the sunset, showing the passage of time. It invokes a new day, with ambivalent notions of whether it will be better or worse.

**Figure 8.**  
*Intersections of All Affective Themes*



*Note:* Figure 8a’s subtitle translates as “in jail or in the cemetery?”. Figure 8b’s subtitle translates as “the truth”. Figure 8c translates as “until next time.” From #nichetok #corecore (@rikasosa, 2023a)

**Sensation-and-arousal**

These affective themes fulfill the sensation-and-arousal category of playful affordances. The category argues that “TikTok is designed to modulate and amplify affect” (Cervi & Divon, 2023, p. 4) on a structural

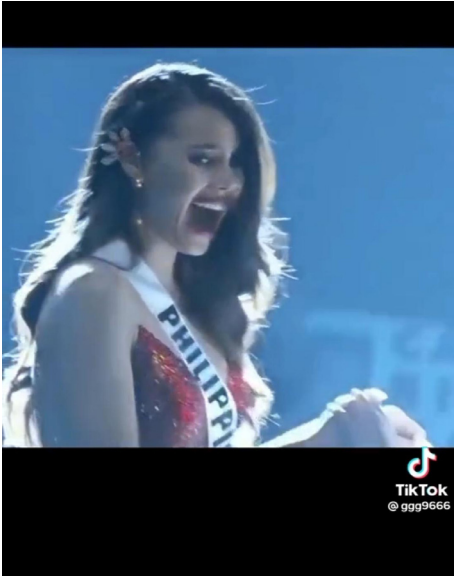
level—through challenges that “reinforce users’ affective attachments” (p. 4)—and using the body—through performances that carry affect and gain “algorithmic attention” (p. 4). As seen in the three themes, the structure of #corecore #pinoycore facilitate affective sentiments, as the trend itself incentivizes users to relay their intense emotions through various short video and audio clips, allowing for the construction of a coherent narrative through initially independent pieces of media. Moreover, bodily performances are done either by the users themselves (see Figure 5a, 7a, and 7b) or through existing pieces of media (see Figure 6b, 6c, and 6d). In this sense, intensity of emotions (affect) provides creators with avenues to connect to individuals (affective publics) and allow for a shared feeling of emotions (connective action). This is further intensified and enabled by social media, which makes affective sentiments leave digital footprints that allow for its preservation (Papacharissi, 2015b). The performance, therefore, is never over once it starts, unless it is deleted and never reposted again. This allows more individuals in the future to become a part of affective publics and further reproduce the affective sentiments seen in #corecore #pinoycore.

### **On hope**

Soon after #corecore became a global trend in TikTok, #hopecore emerged as its byproduct, tying together clips that seem to show an “underdog narrative” (Rodriguez-Garcia, 2023) that ends with the unlikely victors winning, usually “actors, athletes, and political figures of Color” (para. 2). The trend was contextualized locally through the emergence of #hopecore #pinoycore. However, the former stands neither in contrast or independent of the latter. In the five #hopecore #pinoycore videos gathered, three had #corecore as a part of the posts’ hashtags. These videos allow us to understand the hope that exists and underscores the #corecore #pinoycore trend, coexisting with the hopelessness observed in the trend. Earlier discussions on hope’s co-existence with hopelessness is observed in #hopecore #pinoycore.

Figure 9a and 9b show the hope of the underdogs winning, seen in the win of the Philippines in Miss Universe and the win of Ginebra in PBA, reflecting Wright’s (2019) hope in struggle arguments. Riddled with losses, the unlikely victors emerge, suggesting that as long as the struggle continues, there is hope for a future. Figure 9c and 9d show Wright’s argument of hope in despair. Figure 9c shows someone screaming “Ma, abogado na ako!” [Mom, I’m a lawyer now!]. This is followed by an audio clip of a documentary saying that a parent’s love is limitless, combined with videos of mothers taking care of their kids with some of them in

**Figure 9**  
#hopecore #pinoycore



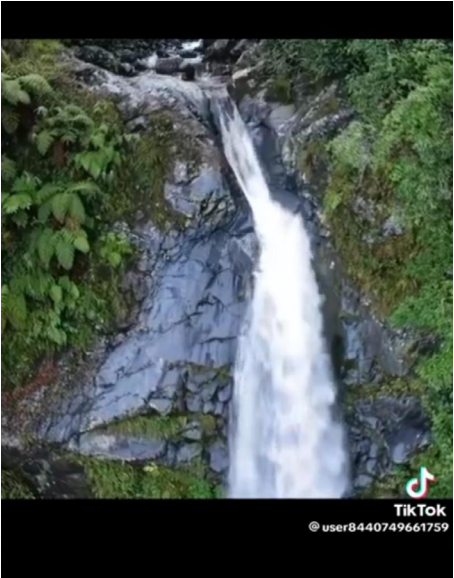
(a)



(b)



(c)

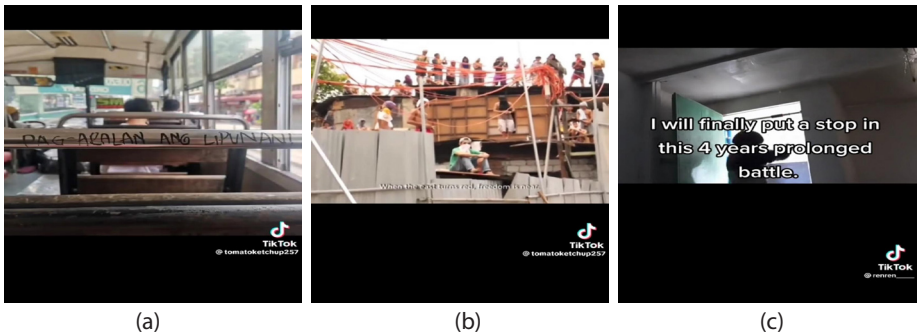


(d)

Note: Figure 9a and 9b from @ggg9666 (personal communication, 2023). Figure 9c and 9d from HAPPY MOTHERS DAY <3 DEDICATED TO GRACE LANSANG <3 #hopecore #pinoy #pinoycore #corecore #nichtetok #pinoycorecore (@user8840749661759, 2023a).

tears. Most people in the videos are poor. It ends with a mother talking to his son, with his son asking her not to leave the country since no one will take care of him. His mother responds by saying that his aunt will and the boy replies “nanay ko ba ‘yon?” [is she my mother?] before the video ends. Figure 9d shows a clean waterfall while the audio plays of a farmer saying that there is no more clean water to drink because of chemicals from mining operations. This is in combination with the video and audio of Gina Lopez criticizing the business interests of mining companies. Along with this, videos of festivals by the indigenous people affected by the mining are shown, together with videos of clean nature. More than despair being a part of hope, these videos also show an “everyday politics of affect” (Carlson & Frazer, 2020, p. 2). The narrative of motherhood is underscored both by the intensity of a mother’s love and a critique of the economic conditions that force them to sacrifice for their children. The despair for clean natural resources is combined with the anger to big businesses and the government that protects them. These are counterhegemonic narratives that allow the participants of #corecore/#hopecore #pinoycore to reimagine a future that is not there yet, done through playful resistances that critique a disliked present by playing the “game” of TikTok’s algorithm. Such hopeful themes are also seen in #corecore, reflected in Figure 10.

**Figure 10**  
 Hopeful Underscoring of #corecore #pinoycore



Note: Figure 10a’s text translates as “STUDY SOCIETY!”. Figure 10b has a small English subtitle that reads “When the east turns red, freedom is near.” Figure 10a from repost kasi flop. #fyp #fyp #corecore #pinoycore #joinndmos (@tomatoketchup257, 2023b). Figure 10b from demolisyon (repost) #fyp #fyp #pinoycore #kurapcore #corecore (@tomatoketchup257, 2023a). Figure 10c from @renren\_\_\_ (personal communication, 2023).

Figure 10a from a video that shows the various exploitation experienced by non-unionized workers, which ends with a picture of a vandalized bus chair, carrying the words “pag-aralan ang lipunan” [study society!]. This call becomes an act of everyday politics of affect as the user calls into the

affective publics to study the social conditions that they are in. In the context of the video, the call comes with the hope of better working conditions in the future. Figure 10b further shows what Papacharissi (2015b) claims to be “disruptions/interruptions of dominant political narratives” (p. 130). The #corecore #pinoycore video shows the struggles of people living in slums as their houses are about to be demolished. In its long, final clip, we see a number of men chanting, showing their support for leftism and armed struggle. Finally, Figure 10c is preceded by Figure 4a. After being in the dark, the creator can be seen doing pull-ups to battle their own depression. This further emphasizes Wright’s (2018) hope-in-despair argument, where the creator can be seen hoping (and struggling) for a better future despite their mental health.

These videos show vivid examples of hope that come from despair and hopelessness. Hope becomes a fundamental factor in the future social, economic, and political conditions imagined by affective publics. Hope is not merely dreaming for the impossible but instead is a challenge to the existing conditions and dominant power structures of the present, allowing for a belief and openness to “a future that might be otherwise” (Carlson & Frazer, 2020, p. 8). The direction of this future is hard to capture, seen in the seemingly ambivalent nature of the #corecore #pinoycore trend. However, the ability of the movement to remain hopeful despite its main themes of hopelessness and despair allows for a reimagination of society. In the end, while there seems to be no one direction for the future, these affective publics seem to connect and agree on one thing: the future must not be the same as the present.

## Conclusion

In this paper, I have unearthed the politics of hope that exists in the trend #corecore #pinoycore. The paper also shows how such is constructed through affective intensities that is (re)produced through the interaction between creators and the functions of TikTok. The application’s affordance allows for politics of hope’s construction, underscoring a DIY citizenship—playful in nature and capable of political participation (Hartley, 2010). These DIY performances—seen in decentralized political resistances and lack of ideological rigidities—allow for a type of hope that does not create utopias or false promises. Instead, DIY performances prevent people from being “worn out” in politics (Berlant, 2011). This is done through political performances that critique political conditions, in effect reimaging the political itself.

TikTok’s affordances also allow trends to create performative rules, which turn content creation into a “game”, where the goal is to attain traction.

This gamified content creation gives space for affective playful resistances. Indeed, the various sound and video types used in the trend, along with different and intersecting affective themes that the trend contains, show the multitudes of ways in which politics is performed. All videos reflect hope instead of complacency, mostly showing criticisms of the present conditions of society. Furthermore, all videos either show a sense of despair in the present or happiness in imagining a what-could-be-the-future.

Affect also enables these performances to resist through hope. Everyday politics of affect (Carlson & Frazer, 2020) exists through the ability of the videos to provide counterhegemonic resistances and narratives through affective intensities channeled through criticisms and reimaginations of the political. The construction of viewers and creators of the trend as affective publics also allow for connective action built on intense emotions, further expanding the reach of such counterhegemonic discourses. These videos allow for a negotiation of the simultaneous existence of hopelessness and hope, where intense emotions about the present allow for a reimagination of the future. Moreover, such affective resistances' existence in social media allow for its digital footprints to maintain its intensity, keeping the possibility of the affective public's imagined future intact as long as TikTok exists. The paper contributes mainly to the studies on Philippine politics' relationship with TikTok and affect. Through the analysis of #corecore #pinoycore, the paper unearths the possibilities of decentralized civic engagement. Furthermore, it opens the discussion on TikTok's ability to critique the status quo of Philippine politics instead of merely sustaining it. It also creates a space for studying the political outside of its conventional forms, showing that everyday performances may articulate the political outside the state and advocacy groups. The paper also contributes to the scarce literature of affect and politics of hope in the Philippines, articulating the possibilities of reimaging the political through emotional intensities and hopeful reimaginations of the future. Such possibilities are often neglected by a more rationalist approach to studying politics.

However, the paper also has its limits. The small sample of the study prevents it from being generalizable to the political performances on TikTok. However, the paper's focus on political imagination and subjectivity puts its interest on the study of particular ways in which politics is performed. Another limit is #corecore #pinoycore's inability to become a fully entrenched political movement, unlike movements like #MeToo and #OccupyWallStreet. However, the paper concerns itself with the possibilities of political imagination and affective politics of hope more than its observable results. In this sense, the paper proves not the existence of a movement to replace everyday realities but the possibility of its criticism

and reimaginings. It is my hope that research on affect and politics of hope in the context of Philippine politics can be further explored. Academic discussions must also provide space for social media's capacity to provide spaces for political reimaginings. In the end, such political performances help shape our construction of the political in ways that conventional politics cannot.

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## About the Author

**JOHN ROVIC CATANGAY** (jlcatangay@up.edu.ph) is an undergraduate student of Political Science at the University of the Philippines – Diliman. He is currently a research assistant intern at the Institute of Philippine Culture

