

A Critical Dialogue About Emergent Research on TikTok-Based Information Practices around Femme/Feminine and Gender Diverse Youth

SIG Sponsor(s):

Gender Issues SIG (Travis L. Wagner, University of Maryland, United States)

Presenters:

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ABSTRACT

Each new emergent technology within the larger landscape of information and communication technologies (ICTs) innovation is met with a combination of awe and paranoia, imagining the advances as simultaneously being liberating and threatening user privacy. While it is easy to hold both concepts as true within most ICT-based contexts, what is overlooked are the inherent presumptions of who uses ICTs and how such practices define social perceptions of any ICT's particular value. TikTok is currently one of the most discussed ICTs. Given a popular imagining of TikTok as having an algorithmic that is hyper-adaptive to any user, the theorizing and studying how one might use the platform in cross-group information practices remains chronically underexplored. Further, given the application's abundance of youth users, such practices become discursively marked as dangerous and inherently negative. Such presumptions belie the actual practices of this particular subset of users. For example, the linguistic practices of queer-identified youth popularized tagging practices microblogging sites like Tumblr (Oakley, 2016) and femme/female teenagers utilize platforms such as YouTube to explore complex narratives around self-esteem related to topics ranging from eating disorders to transitioning (Holmes, 2017; Tortajada et al., 2021). Important in these studies is the inherent counter-discursive practices wielded by femme/feminine and gender diverse youth whose occupation of the online spaces affords them an ability to explore topics in affirmative and communally protective ways. This proposed panel builds on this understanding by highlighting the work of two scholars studying TikTok while simultaneously framing their work in a more extensive consideration of scholarship on the intersections of gender identity, information practices, and ICTs. SIG convenor Dr. Travis Wagner will moderate the panel and contextualize the emergence of TikTok within a more extensive history of ICTs and identify how gender-based identity

making in such spaces is imagined to date. This setup will then introduce the research of two doctoral students studying the information practices of gender-diverse youth within ICTs like TikTok. First, Dan Delmonaco will discuss their research on healthcare provider use of TikTok to create and share sexual and reproductive health information amongst gender diverse youth populations. Second, Valerie Lookingbill will explore sociocultural factors shaping users' interactions with stigmatized mental health information on social media platforms. She will specifically examine how femme/female youth navigate TikTok to discuss non-suicidal self-injury in response to algorithmic exclusion. Cognizant that the exploration of counter discursive uses of TikTok cannot ignore the more significant issues of privacy, data ethics, and the intersectional components of identity as shaped by technology, the panel will conclude with a response to the presentations by Dr. Miriam Sweeney. Her work explores identity-making across the landscape of data and technology and centers the role of interface design in identity-making. Sweeney will respond to the themes between Delmonaco and Lookingbill's work and offer insight into broader trends on the horizon of ICT-based information practices research and how it might inform LIS pedagogy and questions of inclusive ICT design.

ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

Information use; Specific populations; Social media; Sociology of information; User interfaces.

AUTHOR KEYWORDS

TikTok; Information practices; Youth populations; Digital identity; Information and communication technologies.