

## **TikTok is giving platform for a new wave of activism**

### ABSTRACT:

Online or digital communities refer to groups of people who meet and community via the internet that share common interests or values with one another (Burns-Stanning, 2020). These loosely connected communities have their own sets of rules and regulations and can be monitored and managed online within the community. Online communities' benefit from sharing experiences and knowledge to create open conversations and learn from others on topics of interest. These communities are safe, happy places to provide confidence to users to be successful communities. Activists use communities to bond, show support and educate themselves on serious political issues. These political, social issues are consistent with many things and work towards bettering society for future generations. This paper will explore the ways activism communities are employing the affordances of TikTok to educate consumers and promote positive social change.

**With the introduction of the latest social media wave, TikTok, consumers have embraced the video-sharing platform as an online community where users can engage and support important political issues and promote debates.**

Online communities are loosely connected groups of individuals sharing common interests and values. These communities do not necessarily have any online groups, instead work with ego networks. This is evident in the popular social media platform TikTok as users have individually designed algorithms but relate to other users with common content based on users' likes and interests. TikTok has strategically created an algorithm that can be seen as a "Third Space" for many users to interact with others on an equal level.

For some new users, TikTok can look like a platform for comedy and dancing, however, many activists are utilizing this Third space for interacting and articulating social values and subvert from many homophobic, racist, sexist issues within society. By "liking" and "following" videos that promote political values and attitudes in the video, users can hope these videos will be advertising on other pages to reach a wider audience and strength these values in society.

Many social media platforms have given their users a place to publish their opinions, but TikTok is one of a kind as the algorithm puts users in an online community whereby similar interests and values are promoted and other content is not suggested. TikTok has seen to impact conversations surrounding many social issues, such as LGBTQ+ equality and the Black Lives Matter Movement, for example, allowing users to openly discuss their beliefs and values, as well as connecting content creators with content consumers that have similar ideas and opinions, therefore, creating digital communities.

**TikTok has seen several users employ comedy and other creative means to draw satire to dominant ideologies that exacerbate stereotypes and comment on political issues such as racism, homophobia, and sexism (Burns-Stanning, 2020).**

Activists that are choosing TikTok to promote their values are quickly gaining support from large and diverse groups of fellow users as the algorithm filters those with a common interest and those who interact (like or follow) with similar content (Burns-Stanning, 2020). TikTok has employed “socio-technical features” that enable teens to engage support from other users and build a network of relationships with those empowering and promoting social, political activism on the app (Burns-Stanning, 2020). The connection between users is quite different on TikTok compared to other social media sites, in that communication is more likely to be through the comment section instead of a private messaging system (Burns-Stanning, 2020). While TikTok does have a messaging page, the comment section is open to replies from the video creator and other viewers, therefore opening the conversation to more users. The social structure of TikTok can look weak to a new user, however, the “for you page” algorithm quickly understands users’ values and categorizes users with similar interests to therefore create a digital community. Weaker relationships can see less emotional drive committed to the community; however, the relationships are based on information sharing and discussion around specific topics that are deemed important to users within the community.

**TikTok has become a rising platform for online queer activism, as many people use it in the battle towards ending discrimination and promote the existence of LGBTQ+ identities online.**

TikTok has had many problematic trends flow through the algorithm, one has had several queer women protests. The trend is known as “Girls who like girls”, which was a video of men lip-syncing to a song regarding women who are attracted to other women, which queer women protesting considered to be exacerbating sexual objectification of female, same-sex relationships (Cohen, 2021). This has been a problem for many queer women for many years, as their relationships have often been seen and suggested in the media as objects for heterosexual men’s pleasure and attraction. To understand the sexual objectification of queer women, there must be knowledge of the sexual objectification of women in general. This can be understood as separating sexual functions of the female body from the rest of a woman’s personality and regarding her merely as an instrument for pleasure. These issues are seen on TikTok through many dance trends in which men are sexualized dance moves of women who simply want to be seen as dancers. Lesbians have been represented in the media as very sexual relationships and are designed to desire heterosexual men (Cohen, 2021). This idea that queer women are objects of male desire also applies to bisexual women as they are represented as “hot” or “kinky” as the media presents bisexual women as a fantasy, fulfilling sexual desires such as threesomes and other sexual acts (Cohen, 2021). Many activists are asking for women to be seen as women, not sexual objects. There are increasingly more queer women that are actively speaking up and using their online platforms to speak out against sexual objectification (Cohen, 2021). Online activists that are using TikTok’s affordances to speak openly on LGBTQ issues have found hashtags and the ability to reshare content have not only created a community but also building a good fight towards social change. While the “Girls who like girls” trend was covering

TikTok screens, activists used affordances such as easy creation, audio choices, and hashtags to stage online protests (Cohen, 2021). By using these affordances, the queer women community was able to address users perpetuating queer women stereotypes explicitly and directly and educate users on queer-related issues. LGBTQ people have suffered many decades of hate, stereotyping, and discrimination, and social media platforms such as TikTok are proving useful in the progression of dismantling the negative connotations towards these communities (Cohen, 2021). TikTok has given platforms for a community of activists to promote contemporary social values towards many misunderstand communities such as LGBTQ, for this example.

**TikTok has produced an excellent platform for information to be spread on many social issues and the formation of climate change activism communities.**

TikTok has not only formed communities of like-minded people but has formed well-informed groups that are educating and influencing individuals on topics that are impacting our world. These online activist communities have the potential to deconstruct outdated ideologies and promote contemporary thinking towards social issues. By creating content, using TikTok affordances, and communicating with other user's climate change activists have been presenting new information to educate others on the rising concern of our world environmental issues (Wilson, 2020). TikTok has one of the largest, most active communication platforms, with climate change being a rapidly growing topic of discussion. A hashtag popularly used by the activist community, #ForClimate has over 533 million views, with videos including a song that sings "We're killing the earth and that's fun, nobody believes us because we are young" leading the audio charts of TikTok with over 6.4 million likes (Wilson, 2020). Many Millennials and Gen Z are engaging in more content and sharing content concerning environmental issues on TikTok (Wilson, 2020). The platform has approximately 800 million active users with the majority being generation Z: an estimated 60% of users being born after the mid-90s (Wilson, 2020). much of the content created by this generation shares a common fear towards the future, therefore communities have been formed to acknowledge these fears and communicate ways in which people can work towards bettering the world. Social media, TikTok most significantly, have brought together online communities, creating activism communities to influence individuals to make positive social change and promote positive actions for our world. Users can discover others with similar values as well as spread their knowledge to individuals that may have similar concerns. Climate change activist communities have proven the power TikTok can have to promote important social issues and the support of online communities can have to promote these messages.

**TikTok users are politically engaged and raising awareness of systematic racism by sharing views on diversity, tolerance, and social responsibility.**

A generation as diverse as Gen Z is continuing to show support for social justice through movements such as Black Lives Matter. Often, content creators are promoting issues that are not impacting them directly, however, they are promoting messages for the

greater good of society, giving support to communities that need help. While working through one of the greatest civil movements in history while coping with a global pandemic, Generation Z has taken the affordances of TikTok and employed them as a political tool to create activism communities for positive social change. The very public murder of a Black man, George Floyd, caused a renaissance in the #BlackLivesMatter activism across the world (Wilson, 2020). American news outlets are calling TikTok a platform for Black Lives Matter activism as users are employing the application to raise awareness of systematic racism and police brutality for social equality through their content (Janfaza, 2020). Content includes peaceful protests from around the world, educational videos explaining allyship, and information behind the history of the Black Lives Matter movement (Janfaza, 2020). TikTok has had an extremely large impact on promoting the Black Lives Matter movement, with the hashtag (#BlackLivesMatter/#BLM) gaining over 16 billion views worldwide (Wilson, 2020). Through many trends and protests, TikTok has continued to be an extremely supportive and active community typically providing advice, stories, and knowledge on issues being addressed. TikTok general manager spoke to CNN to show support for the Black community, “We stand with the Black community”, showing that not only users are showing support, however the platform itself is standing in support for the Black Lives Matter movement and the Black communities. The activist communities have made a big impact in promoting Black content and other content showing support for the movement with many big TikTok stars showing support. For example, the number one top followed star, Charli D’amelio’s profile picture on the application is a #BLM sign. Her 100 million followers see this image every time they view her videos (Janfaza, 2020). The continuous support from activist communities sees this movement be one of the largest civil rights movements to date (Janfaza, 2020). Communities have come together to show support for a struggling community that needs to be protected and supported, and TikTok has provided a platform to do so.

### **TikTok is a platform for positive social change.**

Digital communities are groups of internet users that share common values, beliefs, and interests, and communicate with each other through the digital world. Digital communities are becoming increasingly more predominant with the rising popularity of social media platforms (Boxin, 2015). People within online, digital communities usually share ideas, values, and knowledge to connect with other users and express parts of their self-identity to others. These communities can be used as support networks whereby users can relate to others, speak openly and ask for advice from like-minded people. Activism communities have grown with many young people worry about what their future may hold. Activists have created communities to share and promote support surrounding many social issues and other communities that need support (Boxin 2015). Communities can make users feel supported and part of a group, and a platform that does this amazingly is TikTok. TikTok’s algorithm places users in loosely connected communities whereby users can decide how active they wish to be within the

community. The communities share interests and speak within comments sections to show support towards social change.

#### REFERENCES:

- Banjo, S. (2020, June 17). TikTok embraces political content for Black Lives Matter: Bloomberg. *Aljazeera*. Retrieved from <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2020/6/17/tiktok-embraces-political-content-for-black-lives-matter>
- Boxin, J. (2015). *Study on Social Media Marketing Campaign Strategy – TikTok and Instagram (Masters)*. Retrieved from <https://dspace.mit.edu/handle/1721.1/127010>
- Boyle, A. (2019, September 19). Student are fighting climate change, one TikTok video at a time. *ABC News*. Retrieved from <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-09-19/tiktok-youth-led-climate-activism-school-strike/11520474>
- Burns-Stanning, K. (2020). *Identity in Communities and Networks: TikTok social networking site empowering youth civic engagement*. Retrieved from [http://networkconference.netstudies.org/2020OUA/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Conference\\_paper\\_Kelly.pdf](http://networkconference.netstudies.org/2020OUA/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Conference_paper_Kelly.pdf)
- Cohen, Y. (2021). *“Girls who like girls”: Using affordances for queer activism on TikTok*. Retrieved from <https://dspace.library.uu.nl/handle/1874/401761>
- Janfaza, R. (2020, June 4). TikTok serves as hub for #blacklivesmatter activism. *CNN Politics*. Retrieved from <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/06/04/politics/tik-tok-black-lives-matter/index.html>
- Mersinoglu, Y. (2020, August 28). Green teen memes: how TikTok could save the planet. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/aug/28/green-teen-memes-how-tiktok-could-save-the-planet-aoe>
- Rudings, J. (2020, May 10). *The Web 2.0 has Created Online Influencers as well as Activist Communities through Social Media Platforms*. Paper presented at the Debating Communities and Networks Conference XI: Curtin University. Retrieved from <http://networkconference.netstudies.org/2020Curtin/2020/05/10/the-web-2-0-has-created-online-influencers-as-well-as-activist-communities-through-social-media-platforms/>
- TikTok Politics and Activism: How Gen-Z and TikTok are Shaping Politics. (2021). Retrieved from <https://fanbytes.co.uk/tiktok-politics/>

Wilson, S. (2020). Representing Climate Activism through Digital Media before and during COVID-19 lockdowns. *International Journal of Contemporary Humanities*, 1 (4).

Retrieved from

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343441631\\_Representing\\_Climate\\_Activism\\_through\\_Digital\\_Media\\_before\\_and\\_during\\_COVID-19\\_lockdowns](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343441631_Representing_Climate_Activism_through_Digital_Media_before_and_during_COVID-19_lockdowns)

