"I've Become More Myself": Challenges and Benefits of Engaging with ADHD Short-Form Video Content and Communities

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View Zine online*
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*The zine references match the paper references

- **ADHD is a neurodevelopmental disorder** under the **neurodivergent** umbrella affecting attention regulation, executive functioning, emotional regulation, and impulsivity (etc..) in at least 3-7% of the population
- **#ADHD was the 7th most popular public health hashtag on TikTok with 7.1 billion video views** in October 2021: these **online communities can be a lifeline** for people recoiling with this part of their identity
- However, much of the existing ADHD SFVC HCI work is focused on its **impacts on attention span** [69,72], or focused on **diagnostic aspects** [69,94,105] or **content quality** [186]
- Thus, we ask: **How do interactions and information on SFVC platforms shape the habits, self-perception, and relationships of people with ADHD?**

- **We interviewed 32 ADHD SFVC consumers** about their experiences on SFVC platforms with ADHD content, and how it impacted them both online and offline. We analysed the transcripts using reflexive thematic analysis according to Braun & Clarke [30].

- Participants were recruited via boosted posts on the platforms of interest: **TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube Shorts**. They had to be above 18, have ADHD (either diagnosed or reasonably certain), they needed to interact with SFVC in general at least once a week and ADHD-specific SFVC at least once a month. They could choose to be interviewed via a Teams video call or a scheduled chat session on the SFVC platform of their choice.

- We chose to disclose researcher positionality (despite diverse views on the topic [156,122]) to both participants and readers as it provided a basis of trust, shared experiences, and vocabulary. **I (Alex) have ADHD.**

- Our interview script included five phases:
  (1) Diagnosis and ADHD
  (2) Online Communities
  (3) General App Usage
  (4) Impact Inside Usage
  (5) Impact Outside Usage

Framing the Feed

- When discussing ADHD and the context in which they came to find these SFVC communities, many participants brought up cultural and gender-based ADHD stigma, the **impacts of late diagnoses, access to care, medical gaslighting, disbelief from loved ones, and internalised ableism in their self-perception** of their ADHD.

> "Being part of these communities and going through this content, it's normalised being neurodivergent and having ADHD to me because I come from a cultural background where talking about mental health or being neurodivergent was a taboo" - PU7

> "I thought I was **less good** or **lazy** or that it was a choice" - PU2

> "My mum was telling me 'no, your brother's got ADHD, you haven't'" - PU24

Scrolling, Sharing, and Shaping Narratives

Behaviour: Scrolling, Saving, and Sharing

- "I got rid of TikTok, I deleted it consciously for my mental sanity" - PU12
- Active/Passive Use
- Boundaries and Closing Back Agency
- Information as means of information gathering and to be ignorant and aware" - PU25
- Positive Feeling, Concerns and Frustrations, Emotional Complexity, and Perspectives on Moral Panic
- "Oh my God, I use it to stalk" - PU13

Intent and Experience Management

- "I think people who discount the platform as a means of information gathering and to be ignorant and aware" - PU25

SFVC as a tool

- Information as access, and functional interactions.

Feelings and Immediate Impacts

"Generally, I do believe that that is a positive thing [...] I get why the medical establishment and [...] like parents and stuff, they are sceptical of these kinds of things because they think that it's kind of a trend or a fad. **The thing I always go by is that up until the mid 20th century people used to punish people for being left-handed and then once people stop being punished for being left-handed, they thought that 'oh everyone's gonna be left-handed now'. Turns out no, like 10% of the population then ended up being left-handed and then just stayed the same.** So none of this rising awareness is just going to make people decide 'Oh, I'm gonna have ADHD today'. [...] I have that some feeling because I've heard this social contagion thing used against trans people [...] That's not how things work. **We're not all irrational people who just decide to do things on a whim.**" - PU14

RQ:

How do interactions and information on SFVC platforms shape the habits, self-perception, and relationships of people with ADHD?

- (1) There are Costs and Benefits to Engaging with ADHD Communities on SFVC Platforms, including Impacts on Self-Regulation and Emotional Well-Being
- (2) SFVC Platforms Integrate into ADHD Users' Lives through Curation, Learning, and Boundaries
- (3) Online Interactions Connect with Offline Relationships and Experiences

Interactions on short-form video content platforms significantly shape the habits, self-perception, and relationships of individuals with ADHD. While users faced **challenges** such as **doom-scrolling**, strong feelings regarding **misinformation**, and feelings of **imposter syndrome**, they also experienced substantial **benefits**, including **validation**, emotional support, and **enhanced self-awareness**. Shared community knowledge on SFVC helps individuals with ADHD reframe past experiences, develop self-compassion, and find practical ADHD coping strategies.

These platforms **foster stronger relationships** by facilitating **better communication** and understanding with friends and family, often **challenging cultural stigmas** and creating a more accepting social environment. Although ADHD-SFVC can trigger new stereotypes (like the idea that ADHD is a "trend" perpetuated by SFVC), it predominantly helps reduce stigma by **providing shared experiences and vocabulary**, bridging the gap between neurodivergent individuals and their support networks.

Beyond the Scroll

Path to Diagnosis

"I think if I didn't have access to this content, I wouldn't have worked out that either me or my son are probably ADHD" - PU5

Behaviour and Tools

"There's so much SFVC on little things you can do to make your home/work ADHD friendly. I have incorporated a lot into my life and I think there's been a positive impact. Simple things like open shelves instead of cabinets, labels, plants, etc" - PU9

Relationships and Stigma

"It has changed my relationship with my friends who have ADHD around how easy we make life to each other [...] I have definitely more peaceful relationships with people around me." - PU18

Self-Perception and Knowledge

"I've become more myself" - PU1