

Call for Papers: TikTok and Children Symposium (8 May 2023)

The popularity of the short-video social media platform TikTok is prominent across the globe with more than 1 billion monthly active users in over 150 countries (Doyle, 2023). Social media culture is being rapidly reshaped around this relatively new platform through the creative lens of the short-video format. Its creative and playful culture has particularly attracted young demographics of social media users, especially children who are below the age of 18 years. According to a US statistics report, 30% of the users are assumed to be children under 19 years old (Doyle, 2023). A recent UK study reveals that 16% of toddlers in the UK are introduced to TikTok by their parents despite the app users having to be 13 or older to sign up to the platform (Waterson, 2022). TikTok is now the most-used app among children, outranking other social media platforms like YouTube and Instagram (Perez, 2023).

For some young people TikTok serves as a playground where they make connections with their peers (Bresnick, 2019). TikTok's pedagogical potential is also acknowledged for child education, such as language learning (Karimah et al., 2022), and identity development (Sarwatay et al., 2021). Children's political voice is also actively formed and amplified on the platform as children take up the platform space and discuss various issues of social injustice, climate change, and electoral politics (Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2021).

However, children's use of the platform, and how they are represented on TikTok also gives rise to new challenges and concerns. Many parents are concerned about children's exposure to harmful content and potential risks of children's health (Collins, 2022). Data insecurity of the app has been widely criticized, which is more serious for especially younger children who are in need of guidance as to how to protect their digital privacy in the highly surveillant environment of social media (Sawers, 2022). Indeed, several countries fined TikTok for mishandling children's data without parents' consent, such as the UK (Sawers, 2022) and South Korea (BBC, 2020). Countries like India even banned the platform ostensibly to protect children from potential sexual trafficking and graphic content (Bursztynsky, 2020). Being aware of these concerns, TikTok announced a new feature, "Family Safety Mode" that allows parents to manage their children's use of TikTok by linking their accounts to their children's ones (Brown, 2022). Nevertheless, TikTok is still an arena for debate on children's healthy and sound use of social media (Sawers, 2022).

In response to such potentials and pitfalls in children's use of TikTok, we will be holding a one-day online Symposium (on Zoom) to discuss crucial issues to understanding children's rights on TikTok and to examine their wellbeing and safety on the platform. The Symposium will showcase the emergent research on characteristics, climate, concerns, and chances of children growing up with and on TikTok, and discuss these issues with the industry and TikTok studies scholars. We seek to provide a meaningful opportunity to think about balanced and practical

approaches to ensure children's rights and agencies in the popularly emerging platform and cultures, to make the best use of the platform cultures for child development, while protecting children from possible risks of surveillance and harmful content.

We invite submissions on themes that include, but are not limited to:

- Child influencers on TikTok
- Children and play culture on TikTok
- Children and digital wellbeing on TikTok
- Children and education on TikTok
- Children and identity on TikTok
- Children and creator culture on TikTok
- Children and technologies on TikTok
- Parenting and TikTok
- Child policies and regulations and TikTok

HDRs, ECRs, and scholars in/or from the Global South are strongly encouraged to apply. A selection of papers will also be considered for inclusion in a Special Issue tentatively entitled "TikTok and Children" that will be published in a top-ranked peer-reviewed journal in the field of Media and Communication Studies.

For consideration in this Symposium, please submit abstracts (up to 250 words) on previously unpublished papers and a short bio (up to 100 words) to TikTok Cultures Research Network (tiktokcultures@gmail.com).

Key Dates:

- **[Extended, in lieu of Easter break] 11 April 23:** Abstracts & biographies due
- **14 April 2023:** Notifications of acceptance
- **8 May 2023:** TikTok and Children Symposium

We look forward to receiving your submissions! Please contact TikTok Cultures Research Network (tiktokcultures@gmail.com) with any questions about this event.

This Symposium is the seventh event organized by the TikTok Cultures Research Network and its first collaboration with the Australian Research Council of Centre for Excellence of the Digital Child. TCRN is an Asia Pacific-based Network dedicated to understanding and developing qualitative and cultural approaches to studying the impact of TikTok on society, founded by Prof Crystal Abidin and supported by a network of Founding Members in October 2020. This event is supported by the ARC Centre of Excellence for Digital Child, Curtin's Centre for Culture and Technology (CCAT), and the Faculty of Humanities at Curtin University.

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