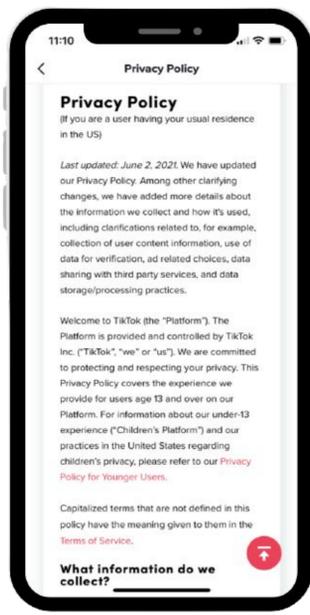


User Perception of Privacy on TikTok

Maya De Los Santos | delossantos.m@northeastern.edu | [in maya-kaхло](https://www.linkedin.com/in/maya-kaхло)

Advisor: Dr. Daniel Klug | Project: User Awareness of Social Media Algorithms



Introduction

Over the course of this summer I conducted qualitative interviews with TikTok users investigating their perception of privacy in relation to the popular social entertainment app TikTok. TikTok is a platform where users can create and consume short videos in addition to the typical commenting, sharing, liking, and messaging features of other social media apps (1). TikTok also shares in common an unnecessarily complicated privacy policy (2) which participants agreed to be very long, with small prints, and technical language as you can see here.

Background

Digital Resignation (3)

- when a person may genuinely care about protecting the digital data online marketers have on them but feel powerless in terms of exercising control over it

Horizontal Privacy (4)

- the privacy relationship amongst peers (e.g. family/friends/strangers) in relation to the user

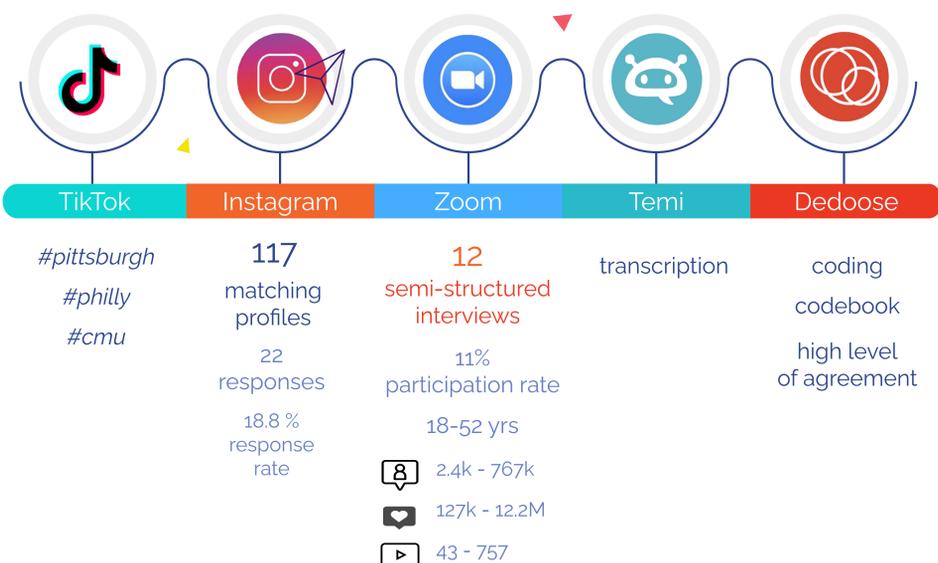
Vertical Privacy (4)

- the privacy relationship amongst institutions (e.g. sponsors/advertisers/companies) in relation to the user

Research Questions

- **RQ1:** How do users behave to protect their privacy on TikTok?
- **RQ2:** To what extent do users understand TikTok's privacy policy?
- **RQ3:** Why might users feel the benefits of TikTok do/do not outweigh the privacy terms they must consent to?

Data Collection & Data Analysis (5) (6)



Results & Interpretations

coded as: personal info already available

"It's like when I was growing up, my mom was like don't put your name in your username for Instagram or don't put all this personal information. But nowadays, everyone just throws it out there. It doesn't mean anything, I mean, it means something, but it's not like a big deal." (P07)

"Again, I'm so used to, I've put myself, I'm a millennial, so I've been so on the internet that they just have a whole 15 years of data, information of me." (P08)

- Shift in Importance of Personal Information
- Personal Info Already Online
- Skipping Privacy Policies = Habit
- Example of Digital Resignation

coded as: habit to ignore

"I feel like, you know, data privacy is super impersonal and it feels like I have a lot to gain from using a free service and it doesn't have very physical, negative impacts. So I don't think about it much." (P12)

"So at this point it's sort of just instinct to scroll the bottom, press accept. I don't think I've ever even read one, but I think it's just cause since everybody does it and it seems to not have been a problem." (P12)

- Data Privacy = Impersonal
- Free Content Incentivizes Content
- Lacks Obvious/Immediate Impact
- Obscured Awareness Online

coded as: restrict settings

"I had my account private for a little bit at first. So then I would know who's following me and who can see the friends only videos or sometimes if there's videos that I don't want everybody to see I'll put it on friends only. So then I know who's seeing it more so than the whole public." (P11)

- Mentality Exemplifies Horizontal Privacy
- Little Concern with Companies Seeing Personal Content
- Same Restrictions Do Not Protect Against Advertisers
- ◆ Minimal Knowledge/Care of Such Settings

coded as: content accuracy

"Even things I hadn't even talked to people about as far as gender identity or sexual expression. Even before I came out about things, it was like TikTok knew that's what I was interested in." (P05)

"Just because it's so specific. I don't want to be one of those people. That's like, oh my phone's listening to me. But sometimes I'm like maybe it is." (P05)

- Suspicions Toward Accurate Content
- Perceived Stigma Around Sounding Overly Paranoid
- ◆ Turns Privacy Concerns Into Taboo Topic

References

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