

# Libraries breaking barriers through TikTok: enhancing access and visibility

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## Introduction

Information literacy (IL) is an integral part of an information society. Information and communication technologies (ICT) advancements have created opportunities for library and information science professionals to embed and equip users with IL skills beyond the library walls. In addition to this, social media platforms have also been embraced and incorporated into teaching and learning practices. The new generation of library users are fascinated by social media and find themselves at wit ends with a lack of navigating, accessing and using information for academic and everyday life information needs. Literature has indicated the potential of social media in engaging and enticing this generation in enhancing learning endeavours. As the saying goes, if Mohammad will not go to the mountain, the mountain will go to Muhammad. There is a dire need to embrace innovative ways to reach out to the users to continue sharing information, marketing library facilities and services and equipping them with IL skills through virtual training. Of recent, there has been a rise in the usage and popularity of TikTok as a platform for sharing video content globally, where various individuals, regardless of age, geographic parameter or profession, have engaged and participated on this platform. Librarians

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must embed themselves on platforms where their users are. [Ortega-Martínez et al. \(2021\)](#) concur as they argue that the time has come for libraries to transform IL practices to incorporate social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Telegram, Twitter, Instagram or TikTok for digital creations. Professionals from various fields and walks of life use TikTok to share informative content with those who are a part of this community. “*TikTok is where your next generation of students is today, so why not meet them there?*”. These are the words of a Director of Social Media at the Rochester Institute of Technology ([Pavlik, 2020](#)). However, some academic institutions are reluctant and sceptical of this platform due to several perceived disadvantages, such as privacy issues, which affect libraries associated with such institutions in embracing and adopting the platform ([Jeffrey, 2020](#)).

TikTok is a short video content-based platform developed in China that allows for all forms of creativity and engagement ([Omar and Dequan, 2020](#)). In recent years, the user base has risen at an exponential rate. In January 2018, the platform had 54 million users; by July 2021, it had 689 million monthly active users ([Omnicores, 2021](#)). The platform had 1 billion active monthly users as of January 2022 ([Geysler, 2022](#)).

## *Information literacy and social media*

Changes in the educational landscape have prompted library and information professionals to reinvent the wheel to ensure users are engaged in IL aspects. Though there is no evidence of studies conducted on the usage of Tiktok for IL purposes, studies have reported the utilization of various social media platforms in facilitation and enhancing IL (Trembacha and Deng,

2018; [Fernández-Ramos, 2019](#); [Robinson and Gariepy, 2021](#)). In addition to this, Trembacha and Deng (2018) argue that librarians must understand the millennials learning styles and emerging technologies to design and facilitate effective IL endeavours.

Virginia Commonwealth University embedded an IL campaign on social media for undergraduate students called the *#VetYourSources* campaign to enhance and equip the students with information evaluation skills in the fight against fake news ([Robinson and Gariepy, 2021](#)). This is critical, even more so today, as the world is battling an infodemic in which the distinctions between fact and fiction are becoming increasingly blurred. Interestingly, [Song et al. \(2021\)](#) conducted a study that focused on TikTok as a platform for enhancing and providing access to health information to ensure credibility and accuracy; this supports the need for embedding this platform in teaching IL-related aspects.

## *TikTok for teaching and learning*

There is no doubt that social media platforms have the advantage of enhancing pedagogical practices. This is true of TikTok as it has proven effective in engaging and promoting participation amongst students. Recent studies were conducted to ascertain the usage of this platform amongst university students, the findings reported were positive, highlighting the need for higher educational institutions to embrace TikTok for teaching and learning ([Escamilla-Fajardo, 2021](#); [Essel, 2021](#); [Habibi and Salim, 2021](#); [Zaitun et al., 2021](#)). A study that embedded TikTok in a Sports Science course indicated that this platform enhanced student motivation created an engaging learning environment and encouraged students’ creativity and

curiosity (Escamilla-Fajardo, 2021). In addition to this, a study aimed to compare the engagement of communication science content on Instagram and TikTok found that videos available on TikTok were highly shared, liked, downloaded and commented on than those on Instagram (Habibi and Salim, 2021). Furthermore, to enhance English language skills for international students, TikTok was used where a pre- and post-study was conducted, the results of the post-study where students participated in creating videos of themselves on TikTok yielded positive results, the lowest achievement was 70, and the highest was 90 (Zaitun et al., 2021).

However, the findings from a study conducted on TikTok's usage amongst management students in Pune city indicated that the majority of the students were not aware of EduTok, a learning programme on TikTok, which provides access to educational content shared by TikTok creators and educational institutions and organizations (Vhatkar and Mali, 2021). This presents an opportunity for educational institutions to raise awareness of the educational capabilities and usage on the platform.

#### *TikTok for library marketing and advocacy*

TikTok has acquired traction among a diverse range of professionals, including librarians. Anderson (2020) and West (2021) feel libraries may gain from using TikTok to market their services, facilities, and spaces. Interestingly, this platform is being used to strengthen the relationship between libraries and academic departments, where librarians must devise innovative strategies to encourage students to use the library's resources for academic and recreational purposes. This was demonstrated in a project at Altrincham Grammar School for Girls, where librarians were asked to engage on TikTok to enhance library resources usage. Several librarians collaborated on this initiative by creating TikTok videos recommending their favourite readings, which were then posted on electronic notice boards for easy access during class time (Hodgson, 2021).

Additionally, Merga (2021) believes that libraries can use TikTok to improve

their reader advisory programs, based on a content analysis of BookTok, a TikTok community committed to advocating for and encouraging reading initiatives. Librarians who use TikTok assert that it is a novel medium capable of connecting with a new generation of disenchanted individuals with Facebook, Instagram and Twitter (Jenson, 2020). According to a Library Media Specialist at Great Valley High School in the USA, the TikTok videos she posted went viral, and students responded positively to the information she shared on the site (Bogan, 2020). Additionally, Olympic College Libraries in Kitsap County used this strategy to increase their social media presence; they reported positive interaction and followers on their TikTok channel (Jeffrey, 2020).

#### **Concluding remarks**

This paper highlights the importance of TikTok in teaching, learning and marketing library services and resources as it allows the embeddedness of short video content. It is a significant contribution as both libraries and faculties can use it as a tool to advocate for the implementation and adoption of TikTok within their institutions for enhancing teaching and learning practices now more than ever to align with changing pedagogical practices. In addition, it can also enlighten librarians to change their perspective and embrace this platform for reinventing the wheel as far as IL is concerned. It can also initiate further empirical research to ascertain librarians' or information professionals' and library users' views of TikTok.

Furthermore, librarians need to reskill themselves and change their mindset to take advantage of this platform to reach a larger audience of users as most of the young generation are now using TikTok more than other social media platforms. Librarians have already started using this platform for library marketing and advocacy purposes. Institutions that are parent bodies to libraries should strategize in enhancing their ICT and social media policies and guidelines to embrace emerging platforms so that their libraries can fully engage and embed themselves widely, without limitations.

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#### FURTHER READING

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