

Will TikTok Go Viral in Scholarly Publishing?

Jennifer Regala

Is Jennifer really going to write an article about TikTok and scholarly publishing? Why, yes, I am. I joined TikTok so you don't have to. Unless, of course, you want to. Either way, grab some popcorn and a cold bev, curl up in a comfy spot, and let's get started.

I set out to write this column considering TikTok from a serious point of view. We all know TikTok as the place where catchy songs and fun dances are showcased 24 hours a day. Aside from the fun aspect of TikTok, though, I was truly curious to learn how TikTok is affecting the academic world. I asked this question as I considered what I would write: "Will TikTok go viral in scholarly publishing?" My prediction is YES, TikTok will go viral in scholarly publishing, particularly with researchers. It is a way to make complicated principles accessible to anyone, easy to understand, and entertaining. (And yes, TikTok is a serious time waster.)

CAUTION TO ALL READERS: TikTok is not for the faint of heart. It is beyond fascinating and is guaranteed to suck you in with its boundless resources of... well... everything. Since its launch in 2016, TikTok has been growing exponentially. Make sure you have time to get absorbed (euphemism for hours of distraction) in this labyrinth of information overload. Remember when the World Wide Web used to be called the Information Superhighway? Well, TikTok is the Information Rocket Ship that will take you to worlds you didn't even know existed. Want to see a woman who taught herself to be a professional jump roper during the quarantine? Did you know there are entire haunted towns? Do you want to learn about the complexities of sorority rush in the United States and how their selection algorithm is the same one used for medical residency programs? I bet you thought you were an Excel expert—well, you're not. TikTok will make you better, though. Did you know you can take a PHOTO of a spreadsheet and convert it into an Excel spreadsheet almost instantaneously? Have you any idea of the true power of baking soda? Trying to find people in the same season of life as you? I have spent the last 2 weeks crying as I watch other mamas who are getting

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ready to drop their kids back off at college, too. Maybe you need a smile? Start watching roller skating TikTok.

(Beloved Editor-in-Chief, Jonathan, please consider the above warning to readers as the reason why I might have been a bit late in submitting this article. Ahem... let's get started.)

TikTok offers all and sundry glimpses into every facet of the world, and science, medicine, the humanities, and academic studies are all included. I will share with you my very broad observations about this social media platform with my ideas on how it can be used to disseminate content broadly in a way that maximizes impact and relatability.

I must also be transparent with my own TikTok ineptitude. I do not use it professionally yet, nor does my organization. However, I believe it is a powerful tool, and I am using the guidance below to formulate my own professional TikTok strategy for my personal account and to collaborate with my American Urological Association colleagues on future organizational use of the platform. Even if you're thinking about using this tool for your work, I propose that you reserve your organization's handle on TikTok to ensure you have the real estate you'll need if you choose to move forward with posting content.

I make exploration of the social media world part of the pursuit of not only my organization's relevance but my own. Keeping up with how social media is used to amplify messages is a personal priority of mine and my role in scholarly publishing.

What Could TikTok Possibly Have to Do with Scholarly Publishing?

As it turns out, it has everything to do with scholarly publishing. I state often that the days of the dusty, crusty pile of old journals are behind us. I look at these beautiful old leather-bound copies of *The Journal of Urology*[®] in my office to remind myself about how I can keep important research alive long after the print copy has gone to the binder. How can we continue the conversation about important research long after an article has been published?

TikTok has everything to do with this concept. Anyone can use TikTok, and over a billion people use the app. The potential is huge. A well-done video has the potential to extend your reach further than we could have ever imagined.

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YOU Can Be the Trendsetter!

At this point you may be asking yourself “TikTok sounds exciting and fun, but I don’t know of any journals on TikTok so what would a journal video even look like? What am I getting myself into?!?”

Those are good questions! Here’s what I picture for a journal account, and perhaps I will use this as my own to-do list when I start a TikTok for one of the AUA’s journals. I would take a content combination approach to make the account super fun and addictive and useful. I picture all parties on camera for the most part, which would allow consumers a unique view into the scholarly publishing world.

- Feature the editorial office staff to provide short behind-the-scenes glimpses into the editorial process. What happens after an author hits submit? What happens after an author is accepted? What are social media tips an author can use?
- Feature the editor-in-chief. What makes research novel? What is the editorial team looking for in an accepted manuscript?
- Feature the authors. Quick summaries of their articles, focusing on the visual aspects of their article, would be awesome!

I have to tell you that I haven’t seen a serious peer-reviewed journal using TikTok. Who wants to get started with me?

Where Do I Start? Which Tools Will I Need?

TikTok is easy to use. You will need to register an account and start exploring. I find that TikTok is easiest to navigate on my iPhone, but your device of choice will get you where you need to be.

The biggest tool you will need is intangible. You need a vision of how you will use TikTok. The following list is applicable to the launch of any social media account. Before you get started, consider the following:

1. WHY do I need this tool? How will it provide a different or complementary/adjacent advantage to sharing my message with the world?
2. WHO am I trying to reach? For instance, if you work for a medical society, are you trying to reach patients? Early career professionals? Medical students? Practicing physicians? Perhaps a combination of all of the above?
3. HOW will you launch the account? Will you market this launch to your community, or will you build a content library before you start sharing it? How will you make sure you are keeping updated content flowing to the platform? Will the account represent your entire organization or only your publications?

4. WHERE will the responsibility for content development belong in your organization? Will you be approaching your constituents to contribute to the messaging and content? Will more than one department in your organization be responsible for this account?
5. WHEN will you post? Posting frequently is key to the success of any social media account. It is important to consider how frequent posting fits into your already busy to-do list of regularly scheduled work.
6. WHAT am I doing *this* for? First of all, do you understand what *this* is? Your *this* is not the same as my *this*. Make sure you have a solid direction for next steps and commit to that plan.

For a beginning content creator, all you need is the video recording device on your smartphone. Super users of course utilize professional cameras and video cameras, but you don’t need to overcomplicate things as a beginner. Often, the most basic videos are the best and attract the biggest audiences. Remember, TikTok makes concepts accessible. A glitzy production is not necessary to achieve accessibility. Spend some time getting to know what’s on TikTok and how it pertains to your own intended audience.

The beauty of TikTok videos is that you have the capability to download the videos and repurpose them to Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, email, and your Web site. This flexibility makes creation time worth it for repurposing potential alone.

**Learning How to Speak TikTok
What Does It Mean to Go Viral?**

According to Urban Dictionary, the term *going viral* is “used in reference to Internet content which can be passed through electronic mail and social networking sites (Facebook, etc.): an image, video, or link that spreads rapidly through a population by being frequently shared with a number of individuals has ‘gone viral’.”¹

Although going viral is an exciting prospect, it should never be the goal of posting anything on any social media platform. Your goal is to get more eyes on your message than would be possible from the traditional publication of research. It is a win if you get a few hundred more individuals to interact with an article, for instance. Keep your expectations realistic.

What Is a For You Page?

A *For You Page* is the first spot a TikTok user encounters when opening the app. This page uses a complex algorithm to determine the content each individual user might like to see. How do you end up on as many For You Pages as possible? A combination of hashtags, posting relevant content frequently, using popular “sounds,” and growing your followers and likes will increase your likelihood of reaching more For You Pages.

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What Is a Sound?

A sound is the background soundtrack of your video. The sound could be simple—the narration of the video with no music. Or, you could use a “trending” sound that is popular on the app at the moment, which would be the narration and/or music of another creator.

What Is a Hashtag?

Similar to other social media platforms, a hashtag is a short description of the content in a post preceded by the # symbol. Common TikTok hashtags are #fyp (short for “For You Page”) and #viral. It is up to you to come up with additional catchy hashtags for you to reach your target communities!

What about Researchers?

Even if you never dip your big toe into the TikTok waters, you need to be educated about this platform and all of the others so you can discuss the merits of self-promotion with your authors, editors, and beyond. Perhaps there are social media tools you don’t have the professional bandwidth to learn and/or perfect. It still helps to understand how others are using these tools so you can best advise those who look to you to know what’s happening in other fields. With every passing day, our once-ordinary jobs are to help our authors and their research become extraordinary.

In my case, I have had the good fortune to learn a lot of what I know from our “doc stars” themselves. Their videos make challenging ideas easily consumable by the everyday person. I share some of my favorites in my top 5 list at the end of this article.

How to Make TikTok Fun but Professional

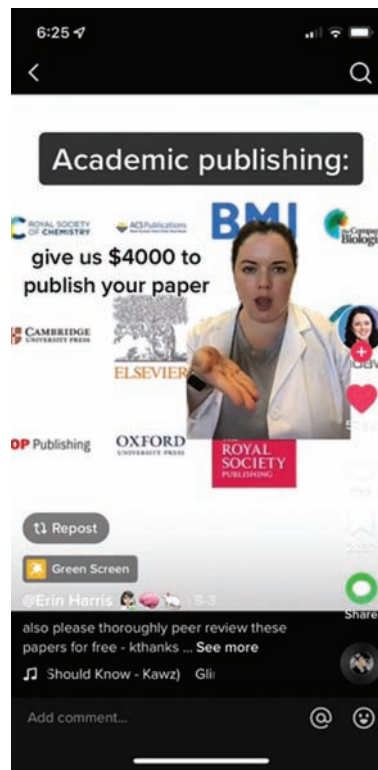
Part of the accessibility of TikTok is that it is often fun. How do you make it fun but keep it professional, though? It is a delicate balance, and I encourage you to read a past column of mine (not trying to self-cite, pinky promise; it’s only that I’ve already covered the basics on this important consideration).²

What Does Success Look Like?

First, define what success looks like for your proposed use case. Is it lots of followers? A certain number of likes and/or views and/or comments? Once you’ve determined what success looks like, the platform makes it very easy to gauge your metrics. And don’t forget that if users aren’t engaging with your content on TikTok itself, your repurposed content on other platforms might be garnering lots of engagement.

Top 5 Accounts to Follow for Academic and/or Scholarly Publishing Inspo

1. @RenaMalikMD, a respected and well-published urologist with a gift for making science accessible, not



only on Twitter but on YouTube, where she has more than 1 million subscribers

2. @Neuroerin, a self-described “neuroscientist making random videos”
3. @hdiangelis, CSE’s very own, who shares her delightful point of view of balancing parenthood, her professional life, and being the best cat mom in the biz
4. @AmericanHeartAssociation, and I love how their bio speaks for itself: “Raise heart rates. Raise awareness. Save lives.”
5. @glutenburgbible, equal parts aspirational, educational, and emotional, I encourage you to join me in cheering on this amazing human and PhD student! And her bio kills me: “Putting the lit in literature phd ha ha”

Keep the conversation going! Let me know your favorite TikTok accounts, how you’re using the platform yourself, and whether you think TikTok is here to stay. Please especially point me in the direction of scholarly, peer-reviewed journals using TikTok to promote their content. I’m also interested in your thoughts on newly emerging platforms. A new favorite of mine is BeReal. As always, you can find me on Twitter (@JenniferARegala) or on email (JRegala@AUANet.org). Happy TikToking!

References and Links

1. <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=go%20viral>
2. <https://www.csescienceeditor.org/article/putting-your-best-voice-forward-considering-voice-and-style-in-your-social-media-posts/>