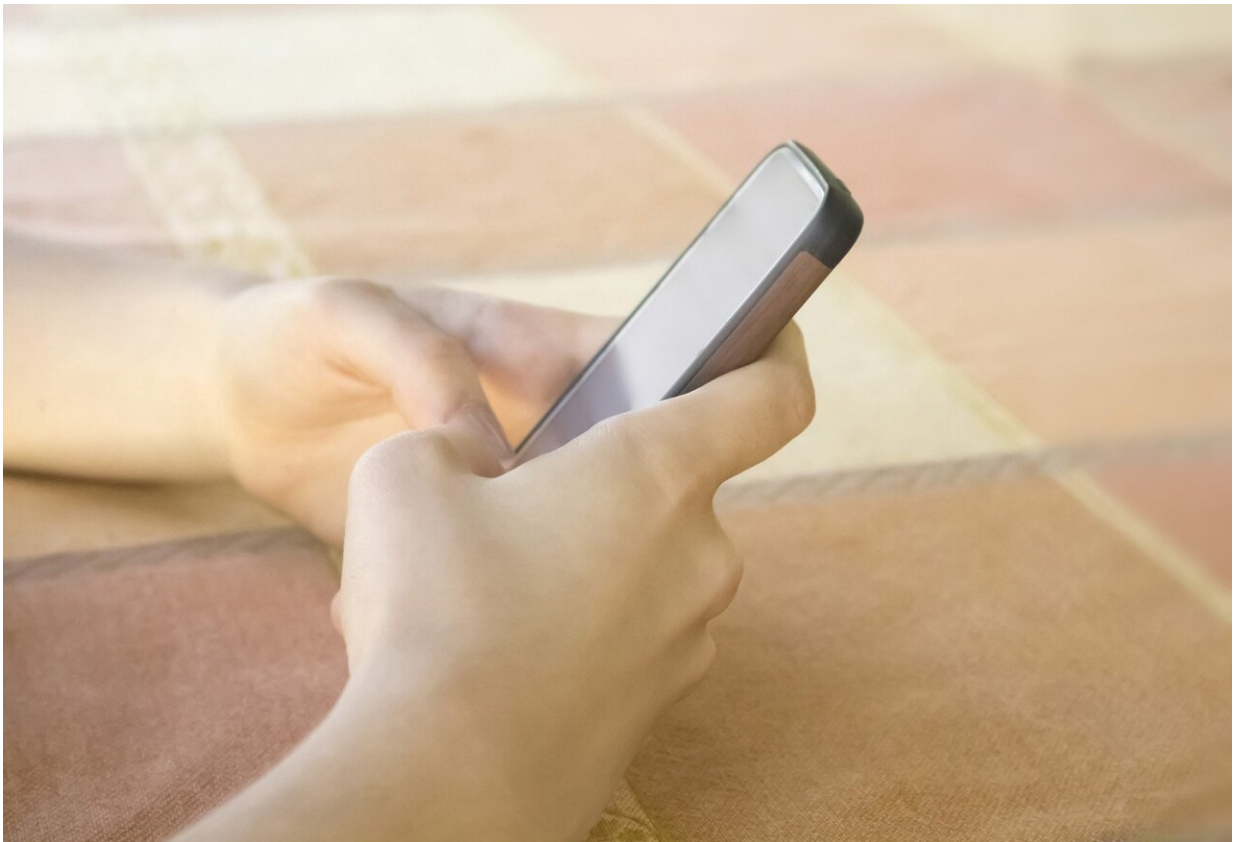


# Untapped potential for TikTok to convey COVID-19 guidance

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Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Research published in DeGruyter's *International Journal of Adolescent Medicine and Health* suggests TikTok is rich with untapped educational potential. The platform could play a vital role in conveying important

health information alongside lip-syncing videos and viral dance challenges, the paper's authors say.

Led by researchers at William Paterson University and Columbia University, the new study, "COVID-19 on TikTok: Harnessing an emerging social media platform to convey important public [health](#) messages" explores how coronavirus information is being communicated on the platform. This has been a largely unexplored area—until now.

TikTok is a social media platform on which users share short videos. Since its worldwide release in 2018, it has soared in popularity—especially with teenagers and young people. It now has 800 million users worldwide and 37 billion monthly views in the United States alone.

Using a #Coronavirus hashtag, researchers examined and analyzed 117 TikTok videos, 17 of which were created by the World Health Organization (WHO). Altogether, the videos analyzed in the study received more than a billion views.

Fewer than 10% of the videos mentioned how the virus is transmitted, symptoms of COVID-19 and prevention of viral spread. None of the videos—including those uploaded by the WHO—discussed death and [death rates](#), viral incubation time, wearing a [face mask](#) or [travel restrictions](#).

The most commonly portrayed topics were anxiety and quarantine, with little focus on transmission and preventing infection. This may stem from the fact that teenagers are facing many social and emotional challenges as a result of lockdown measures—ranging from coping with school closures to the requirement to minimize contact with others.

The researchers behind the study think this indicates a missed

opportunity to engage [young people](#) with vital health information related to the global pandemic. TikTok could potentially be used to convey messages about controlling the spread of coronavirus by the strict enforcement of social distancing. It is particularly important to impress this information upon the main TikTok audience of teenagers and young adults who can easily pass on the virus to more vulnerable and older family members.

"It's paramount for public health professionals to tailor messaging in ways that make it most accessible," says the study's lead researcher Dr. Corey Basch. "It's also essential to note that the credibility of TikTok as a source of information is threatened by those whose intentions are to undermine the health and safety of viewers. Identifying the types of barriers to using [social media platforms](#) for the benefit of health and safety is a crucial next step," concludes Basch.

**More information:** Corey H. Basch et al. COVID-19 on TikTok: harnessing an emerging social media platform to convey important public health messages, *International Journal of Adolescent Medicine and Health* (2020). [DOI: 10.1515/ijamh-2020-0111](https://doi.org/10.1515/ijamh-2020-0111)

Provided by De Gruyter

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