“According to the CDC…” vs. “Someone just said…”:

Identifying Scholarly and Popular Conversations on TikTok

**Introduction**

This learning session, led by a librarian, is for first-year community college students in an academic library setting. The intention of this session is to scaffold onto existing research writing skills acquired in previous education, as well as use of popular video sharing platforms to obtain information, like TikTok. Informative videos produced by everyday people are a growing form of intellectual connection between all audiences and scholarly sources based on relatability, as well as visibility of marginalized issues larger news organizations do not address. When the information messenger is familiar yet dynamic in their presentation and provides information that the public is not informed on, viewers are more inclined to listen than if it were just a research paper or a scholarly representative of a research community. There are, however, citation issues and basic research principles missing in several of these videos, based solely on most video sharing platform’s intention to obtain engagement, not to responsibly inform/educate its users. As researchers, it is crucial to discern engagement-intended, incendiary content with informative, well-researched content that our neighbors are making, even if their intentions are good.

* Pen/pencil
* Smart phone, laptop, or tablet that can connect to Internet
* Guided activity worksheet (to be distributed)

**Learning outcomes**

By the end of this session, students will be able to:

* Identify research as an ongoing conversation between several scaffolding and outside research and popular community voices.
* Recognize the importance and necessity of crediting other voices inside and outside of the research and popular communities you are entering.
* Respect your own contributions to scholarship by following citation guidelines in your own information creation.

**Standard/Framework**

This lesson plan focuses on Scholarship as Conversation, frame 5 of 6 of the ACRL frameworks ([Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education | Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL)](https://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework#conversation)). Videos shared online, for all people to view, certainly qualify as participants in both scholarly and popular discussions, but the ability to discern between the two is crucial in credible research in the sea of information/perspectives we live in today.

**Outline (1 hour session)**

1. Welcome! (5 min)
2. Go through PowerPoint to prime students with what scholarly conversation is, what it looks like, and the disposition of those engaged in scholarly conversation intended to inform vs. popular conversation intended to obtain engagement. (5-7 min.)
   * 1. Connect to the growing popularity of polarizing video essays and programs in shared online communities made for the sake of engagement, not information (while dually verifying the validity of online sharing communities since most creators come from less privileged avenues and provide more diverse perspectives than the “status quo”.)
3. Explain activity and distribute guided activity worksheets (5 min.)
4. Conduct activity (30 min.) *Guided activity worksheet attached.*

a. X number of groups (based on class size, max 5 members per group) will be assigned one TikTok with a relevant, polarizing topic (i.e., Israel-Hamas conflict, self-diagnosing psychological disorders, anti-feminist podcasts, Dating Do's and Don'ts, AI/ChatGPT, school shootings, etc.) per group to watch, will answer questions together, and will ultimately decide if the creator of the TikTok is engaging in scholarly conversation or popular conversation (relevant topics to the zeitgeist at that moment in time).

1. Groups will all come together and review their findings with the class, having designated one representative to speak for the group. Instructor will monitor discussion appropriately, with an overall time frame of 1 hour in mind.
2. Come back together as a full group to go over results of which TikToks participated in scholarly conversation or popular conversation (15 min).
3. Collect activity worksheets.

**Best Practices**

* This session includes both passive and active activities. The librarian begins the session by priming students in standard lecture format with what scholarly conversation is, what it looks like, and how to participate in it responsibly and respectfully. The students then engage in verbal and written group analysis of a TikTok and determine if it is a scholarly or popular information source. The students produce their learning onto the worksheet, which the librarian will collect at the end of the session to assess learning.
* The librarian builds on prior knowledge of students’ engagement with TikTok (as viewers and creators) or other video sharing platforms of the same format, as well as student learning of proper citation use from previous education, no matter how long ago.
* Popular conversation should not be taught as “lesser” than scholarly conversation, but as diversified intellectual support to scholarly conversation when used properly. The crucial factor in discerning the two is that the information provided is factually correct, well-researched, and most importantly, addresses other voices in the ongoing conversation that the creator is entering instead of operating within a vacuum.

I had a lot of fun creating this assignment with my background as an adult learner in community college, as well as a consumer of video essays and TikTok opinions in my ongoing, daily intake of creator content and data. I want to give back to the students who are facing the same challenges in information intake and use that I faced as an adult learner and make it as approachable and fun as possible.