



The “Tik Tok Issue,” Part 2: The Rhetorical Dimensions of a Tik Tok Ban



"Tiktok" by [TheBetterDay](#) is licensed under [CC BY-ND 2.0](#).

Continuing the discussion from the first part of this newsletter, this second part hopes to provide more context and entry points for examining the rhetorical dimensions of the Tik Tok ban. Provided Tik Tok has more recently become the social media platform of choice in the United States (and serious talks about a ban are even more recent), there is not *yet* a lot of academic research on the ban itself. There is, however, a lot of discussion across news media. To help us map out the legal dimensions of a Tik Tok ban, the *Electronic Frontier Foundation* offers a very digestible explainer that works through how we got here and where we might go from here. This is paired with a thought provoking *Slate* essay from a journalism professor about how a Tik Tok ban could affect academic research and teaching. The academic article provides a very different perspective on how Tik Tok operates in China that should raise interesting questions concerning our relationship with all social media platforms in the U.S. As for an activity to explore this topic with students, we think these three sources present fruitful ideas and unpacking their various arguments should make for a lively classroom discussion concerning a Tik Tok ban.

Popular Media

Schwartz, Adam and David Greene. “Government Hasn’t Justified a TikTok Ban.” *Electronic Frontier Foundation*, 16 Mar 2023, <https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2023/03/government-hasnt-justified-tiktok-ban>.

In “Government Hasn’t Justified a TikTok Ban,” Adam Schwartz and David Greene from the *Electronic Frontier Foundation* provide a thorough first amendment argument against the U.S. government’s proposed TikTok Ban. In addition to helpful hyperlinks to a few polls about TikTok users themselves, Schwartz and Greene also provide context on the 2020 proposed ban and explain the underlying premises of the currently proposed DATA Act and Restrict Act. Both acts set the stage for a TikTok ban along with singling out specific foreign “adversaries,” but neither actually proposes anything that would protect users from the rampant harvesting and monetization of data we are all subjected to on a daily basis. Schwartz and Greene ultimately call for substantive consumer privacy legislation.

Schroeder, Jared. “The Lunacy of Banning TikTok From University Networks.” *Slate*, 20 Jan 2023, <https://slate.com/technology/2023/01/tiktok-bans-public-universities.html>

In “The Lunacy of Banning TikTok from University Networks,” *Slate* contributor and journalism professor Jared Schroeder argues that bans like those proposed for TikTok limit researchers’ ability to study platforms and to educate students about necessary digital privacy literacies. Government regulation of this kind demonstrates how “privacy” is both rhetorically situated and politically-motivated. In addition to limiting TikTok’s potential as a platform for activism and community discourse, instilling a ban under the auspices of “national security” distracts from larger conversations about the ways all social media platforms (not just those under Chinese ownership) already encroach on our personal, digital privacy and “distort the flow of information in ways that endanger democracy—just like TikTok.” Like the *Electronic Frontier Foundation*, Schroeder also calls for “More nuanced solutions” to our concerns “without undermining public universities’ mission and free-expression protections.”

Academic Article

Zhang, Zongyi. “Infrastructuralization of Tik Tok: Transformation, Power Relationships, and Platformization of Video Entertainment in China.” *Media, Culture & Society*, vol. 43, no. 2, Mar. 2021, pp. 219–36.

In “Infrastructuralization of Tik Tok,” Zongyi Zhang offers helpful context on how Tik Tok operates in China. Through a digital interface analysis of the Tik Tok platform, Zhang reveals how, in China, Tik Tok has become further entangled with e-commerce and has forged a cooperative relationship with the Chinese government and its social, economic, cultural, and political interests. Not quite a propaganda megaphone under the direct control of the Chinese government, Zhang explains that this “infrastructuralization” of Tik Tok instead reveals how much “government or public institutions has been gradually dependent on social media platforms” (231). And in turn, the relationship between the two becomes much more complicated as Tik Tok is allowed to operate differently than expected: “[The] Chinese government on one hand forces the digital platform to take up the social responsibility and serve [the] state’s development goals; on the other hand, it deregulates data acquisition of platform and ignores

the social norms of knowledge, culture, and information exchange...” (233). Zhang ultimately raises an interesting alternate trajectory for social media platforms from what we are used to in the U.S., one where data and privacy are utilized for similar social, political, cultural, and economic interests but with different power configurations between governmental and private entities.

(Lack of) Classroom Activity

While the DRPC Advisory Board is an interinstitutional group of scholars working across America, much of the dialogue concerning banning Tik Tok centers on Texas Governor Greg Abbott’s decision to ban access to the platform from state-funded entities, including via wifi at public universities and apps on state-issued devices. You can read more about Governor Abbot’s Tik Tok ban [here](#). While other states have followed Texas’ lead banning Tik Tok from public-funded wifi and devices, not all states have followed suit. A comparative analysis of access to the platform based on geo-location with students in the classroom has the potential to be beneficial. But, students need access to Tik Tok to do this work.

We encourage instructors to engage students with conversations about banning Tik Tok, but we also think that having access to Tik Tok is imperative to perform a critical analysis. Instructors might begin with a rhetorical analysis of the legislative policies and declarations banning Tik Tok, like Governor Abbott's declaration linked above.

Upcoming for the DRPC

Association of Teachers of Technical Writing

Don’t miss Dr. Cecilia Shelton as one of the speakers at the Keynote Session: What Excites You About Technical Communication Right Now? at ATTW Conference on Friday, June 9, 2023, from 12:15pm-1:45pm. Other DRPC Advisory Board members presenting at ATTW include:

- Morgan Banville. (Re)productive Rights: Compliance and Emerging Technologies. Thursday, June 8. Concurrent Session A (11:00am-12:00pm).
- Chen Chen. Constructing Compliance: The Politics of China’s “Dynamic Zero-COVID” Policy. Friday, June 9. Concurrent Session G (2:00pm-3:00pm).
- Cecilia Shelton: Toward Codifying Social Justice Approaches to Teaching Technical Editing. Friday, June 9. Workshop (3:15pm-4:30pm).

Computers & Writing Conference

Look for our virtual, synchronous panel, “A Hybrid Resource for Teaching and Learning about Privacy and Surveillance: The Digital Rhetorical Privacy Collective” featuring Advisory Board members Cecilia Shelton, Charles Woods, Gavin Johnson, and Noah Wason at the upcoming Computers and Writing 2023 conference at University of California, Davis (Session A.03 Friday, June 23, 10:15-11:30am)