

Digital Activism: How Users have Utilized TikTok Edits to Engage in Trans Rights Activism

With the rise of activism through digital platforms, transgender-rights activism has utilized various digital tools to perform digital activism in the form of TikTok edits. The oppression of transgender people has become a highly visible topic in public and political debate and discourse. In a [2024 report](#) by the Human Rights Campaign Foundation, it was reported that in that past year, the United States saw over 550 anti-LGBTQ+ bills introduced into state houses. A majority of these bills targeted the transgender community with bills that strip transgender people from basic freedom, ban access to gender-affirming medical care, and restrict trans people's access to sports, restrooms, and locker rooms in schools and even in certain governmental buildings. Furthermore, the report stated that in the 2024 U.S. presidential elections, the U.S. Republic party spent over \$82 million on anti-trans political advertisements.

The oppression of transgender people is not only present in American politics, but worldwide. In April of 2025, the UK Supreme Court targeted transgender women specifically by ruling the legal definition of a woman is based on biological sex (Brocklehurst, 2025). With the urgency of the topic, transgender rights activism has become demanding of attention. With the accessibility of digital tools and platforms, trans activists have utilized a creative form of digital activism: TikTok edits.

This article will utilize Medina's (2022) theoretical framework of epistemic agencies and activism to analyze how this sociopolitical issue is being addressed by activists through TikTok, and how TikTok's affordances are utilized in protest. Firstly, the theoretic framework that will be applied to examples of trans activism TikTok edits will be defined, followed by exploring online trans activism and TikTok's affordances.

Digital Activism: the theoretical framework

Digital platforms have the ability to connect people internationally and educate on injustices taking place around the world. Medina (2022) defines a protest act as an expression of public dissent, and where opposition to or resistance against an injustice is performed. He defines epistemic agencies as the capacity to participate in activism and related practices such as knowledge production. He explains that in epistemic agencies, becoming aware of certain injustices and becoming empowered to act on it is key. Additionally, Medina (2022) states that oppressed subjects can sometimes become epistemic activists out of necessity, rather than by choice, to fight against epistemic marginalization and achieve the epistemic agency they are being unjustly denied. This encompasses how trans people often become activists out of necessity in order to defend their rights and to fight against the marginalization of trans people. Medina's concept of epistemic agencies will be applied to analyse how two TikTok edit videos utilize digital tools for engagement and encourage trans rights activism.

The History of Online Trans Activism

Digital trans activism emerged as access to the Internet allowed organizations with limited financial or geographic resources to globally engage in activist opportunities. Erlick (2018) argued that internet activism is essential within the trans community due to *transmedia*, in the "context of trans politics focuses on the radical uses of differing forms of media by and for

trans and ‘gender defiant’ people” (p. 76). Erlick (2018) expanded by stating that the Internet also produced and distributed understandings of anti-transgender violence and that trans people are “disproportionately affected by suicide, physical attacks, and institutional discrimination, and it is necessary to take action against this violence” (p. 78).

Tortajada and colleagues (2020) expanded on relevance of [activism within the trans community](#) through the focus of trans activism on YouTube. They described transition videos as powerful and performative tools that could help support closeted trans people. Most importantly, they noted how young people’s locations, often their bedrooms, become spaces of civic and community engagement due to accessibility through the Internet. These transition videos explored by Tortajada and colleagues is also explored by Vivienne (2011) who explored digital storytelling within the online trans community. She defines digital storytelling as “a workshop-based practice in which ordinary people, mostly unskilled in media production, are guided through the process of creating a short (two to three minute) autobiographical video” (p. 43). Digital storytelling plays an important role in most [coming out videos](#), and generally within trans videos, and these videos can maintain multiple purposes such as personal empowerment, education, and social advocacy. Digital storytelling has presented itself in various digital platforms, including TikTok, and partakes in creating a message in TikTok edits.

Why Use TikTok?

TikTok, a platform that was once used solely for silly dances and lip-sync videos, has become a platform for social justice activism and a medium for discussion of major events topics. TikTok is not only a space for content to be consumed, but is also a space for users to develop emotional connections, make emotional declarations, and create meaning (Haslem, 2022). The platform offers a space for “political and civic engagement in an education, entertaining, and interesting peer-to-peer format” (Castillo-Esparcia et al., 2023, p. 6) and the platform holds cultural value as an impactful tool for social justice activism and entry-level democracy (Haslem, 2022).

Haslem (2022) delves into the platform itself and its multiple affordances, or digital tools, that make digital activism accessible and plausible. Firstly, TikTok allows users to browse as guests, meaning that a user does not necessarily need an account to view the content. However, with this feature, the user forfeits the ability to interact with videos and other users. Secondly, the platform thrives on participatory culture which creates low barriers to artistic expression. This is particularly useful for activism through TikTok edits which will be focused on. Moreover, its participatory culture, and the ability to download TikTok videos, makes it easy to spread content to other platforms such as Instagram reels and YouTube shorts. Other affordances include hashtags that create engagement by flagging content as something that may already be trending. The ability to hashtag also disregards the video’s actual content, meaning a video can have a hashtag that doesn’t describe its content. Captions and closed captions are also a TikTok affordance, and allow users to extend upon the message being conveyed in the video. Other affordances described by Cohen (2021) include direct interactions between users: the duet feature, the stitch feature, and comments/direct messages. Lastly, the ability to ‘repost’ videos increases visibility as people who follow you are likely to see the video on their For You Page as well, and the ability to share and send these videos also increases engagement.

How are TikTok edits powerful forms of activism?

TikTok edits can be quite powerful in taking an activist stance. [TikTok edits](#) are defined as “compilation videos, typically set to music, that convey a narrative about a person, place, thing, or topic” (Terpak, 2024). Edits can play a very valuable role in introducing people to (trending) topics and are spectacles that make information more immersive through music, visuals, and transitions (Terpak, 2024). Due to the popularity of edits and the wide range of different types of edit content (such as political, cultural, education), this type of content can avoid TikTok’s ability to reduce visibility of activist content, known as shadow banning, and can hence get more visibility. This visibility in opposition against an injustice allows for a bigger audience to become aware of these injustices and also become empowered to act on it due to the immersivity and high level of emotion related to entertainment gained from these TikTok edits. With all of these factors involved in TikTok edits, with the combination of TikTok’s affordances, digital activism through TikTok edits can not only bypass algorithmic invisibility, but also fulfill Medina’s (2022) act as epistemic agencies as they educate and empower a large audience.

The First Pride was a Riot

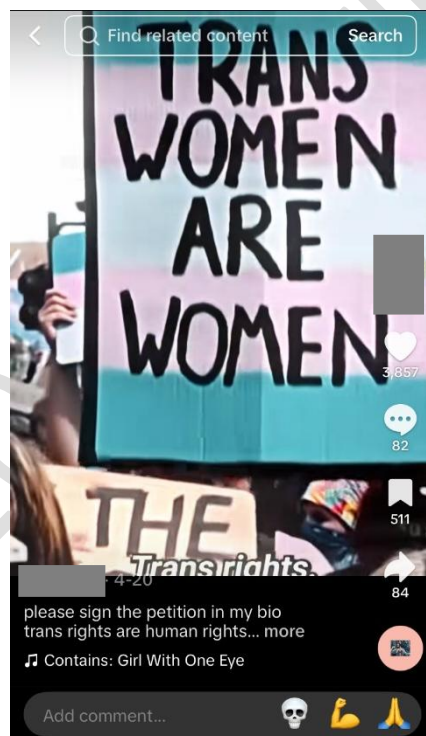


Figure 1 Edit Example #1 of Trans Rights Activism

The [TikTok edit above](#) synthesizes multiple clips of trans rights protests in the UK. The video was posted on the 20th of April, 2025, and received over 17 thousand views, with almost 4 thousand likes and around 80 comments.

It firstly utilizes the affordance of being able to include text in the video through its text “The first pride was a riot”, which evokes the powerful emotion that Medina (2022) stands for in epistemic agencies. The edits highlights multiple moments of trans rights protests and uses the song Girl With One Eye by the singer Florence, an audio often associated with what is known on social media as [female rage](#). The combination of the text, audio, and visual supports Terpak’s

(2024) idea that edits create a spectacle that makes information more entertaining. The edits contains political and activist themes to present opposition to the oppression of the trans community.

It also utilizes hashtags, although only five: #protest, #Pride, #transgender, #trans, and #transrights. Finally, the caption is also utilized to present activist themes as it urges users to sign a petition in response to the transphobic ruling passed by the UK Supreme Parliament, and concludes the caption by stating “trans rights are human rights”, a sentence often heard and repeated in trans rights activism.

Supporting Trans Women

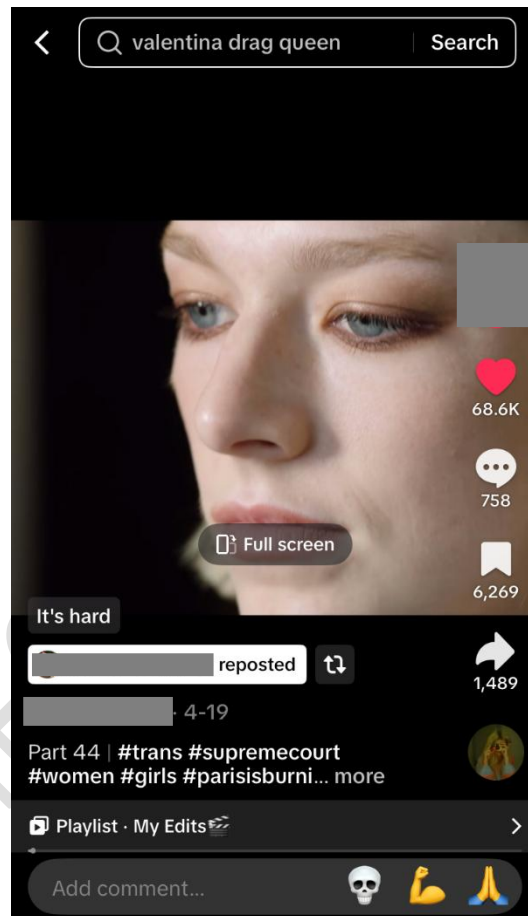


Figure 2 Edit Example #2 of Trans Rights Activism

This [TikTok edit](#), that was viewed over 250 thousand times and gained over 65 thousand likes, highlights multiple trans women public figures and celebrities mixed with visuals of trans rights protests. The audio of the edit combines various speeches and messages regarding the oppression and attacks against the transgender community, specifically against trans women. The audio intended to highlight the heartbreaking and frustrating emotions many trans women feel when navigating today’s society. This use of such an audio is educational in demonstrating to the audience how trans women are marginalized and impacted by oppression. It also combines multiple instances of digital storytelling from different trans women to create one large story. This also displays Medina’s (2022) statement on how oppressed subjects can

become epistemic activists out of necessity rather than by choice. Trans women, and trans people in general, have to become epistemic activists simply to be able to live in society.

This TikTok edit also highlights similar political themes as the first edit, yet takes a softer and more sentimental approach in evoking emotion from the audience. The edit encompasses mostly the first aspect of Medina's (2022) epistemic agencies: becoming aware of injustices. Between the educational audio and sentimental visuals, this edit focuses mostly on making users aware of the oppression of trans people rather than empowering users to take action.

The user of this edit utilized hashtags, and used 24 hashtags. A majority were names of trans women who were included in the edit, but other hashtags included #trans, #transandproud, #edit and #lgbtqia. The user also used hashtags unrelated to the video, such as #nyc and #voguechallenge, to boost visibility and engage with trending topics.

Edits for Trans Activism

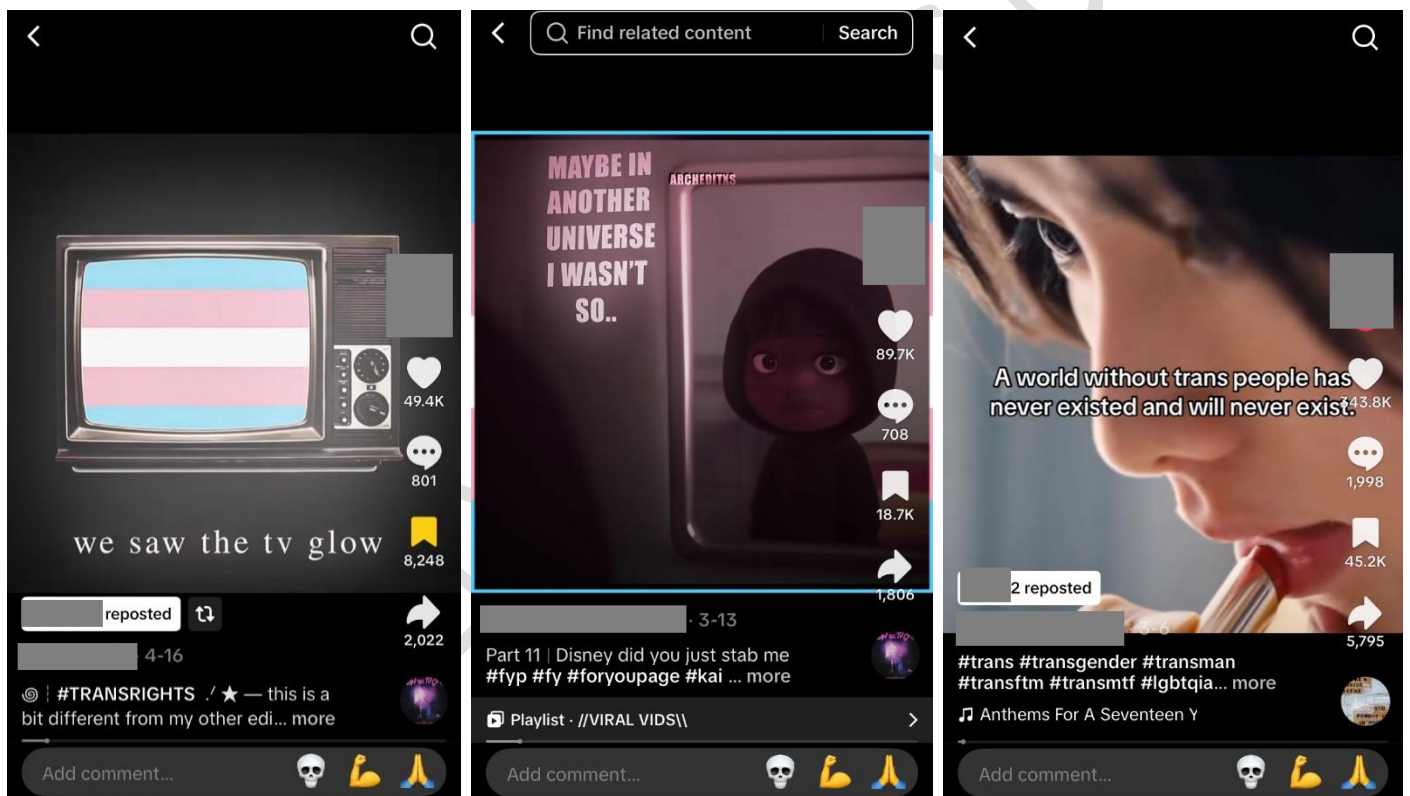


Figure 3 Over Examples of Activist TikTok Edits

Two examples of how TikTok edits are used for trans right activism have been shown, but there are multiple other ways that trans rights activism is represented in edits. Another common way is through edits of film or TV series characters who are trans or utilizing popular trans film phrases such as "[I saw the tv glow](#)". A large majority of trans rights activistic edit videos utilize the affordance of hashtags and include some sort of digital storytelling to create an entertaining and immersive spectacle that combines text, visual, and audio.

TikTok's affordances allow these videos to be highly visible. Other than the use of hashtags, the repost feature and sharing feature is often used, with one of the videos shown above having almost 6 thousand shares. This ability to create an educational and political

activist message in a form that caters to short attention spans that requires visual stimulation is what makes TikTok edits so powerful for digital activism. This creative media combined with TikTok's affordances and the ability for edits to avoid shadow banning has allowed TikTok users to engage as epistemic agents to educate and empower other users to engage in trans rights activism.

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#trans #transgender #transman #transftm #transmtf #lgbtqia #transandproud #transrights  #transrightsarehumanrights #edit #anime #aliceinborderland #aib #firepunch #firepunchmanga #togatafirepunch #hunterxhunter #allukazoldyck #isawthetvglow #isttg [Video]. TikTok.

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